

BRONZE MEDAL BSPEE 2019. Viktor Braaten Gulbrandsen, Bjørnholt vgs - IB, Norway

3. “*The experience that we have of our lives from within, the story we tell ourselves about ourselves in order to account for what we are doing, is fundamentally a lie—the truth lies outside, in what we do*” – Slavoj Zizek

In modern society, at least in my view of modern society, we like to believe in our inner and personal identity. We like to think of ourselves as, through the choices we make as individuals and as identities, impacting the world around us. After all the world does seem to act as though agency is real: the free-market economy and the notion of inalienable human rights within the politics and juridical realm seem to be based upon this notion. And through this every day, we feel as though this condition—this condition of an isolated subject, is justified. We feel as though we have a self—I think therefore I am, we say to ourselves.

Yet, what Zizek is doing with his statement here is criticising this notion of the isolated subject. He claims that the experience of the internal is fundamentally illusory. And that we can only know ourselves through that which is external, that which is not part of the inner identity. We can only know ourselves through what we manifest. But, is not the observation of our manifestations wholly dependent on the subject? Although Zizek’s statement is the opposite of what I deem as the contemporary view of identity, they’re both arguing within a certain premise. The premise is that there is a duality between the external and the internal. There is duality—there is me, *and* the world. It is not the internality of the self, which is illusory, it is not even the externality of self which is illusory—it is the duality between them which is illusory. I wish to critique the presupposition of duality, of mind and body, through the concepts of *internalization* and *externalization*.

Some might say that this philosophical condition of duality started with Descartes and his mind-body problem, others might say that it is inherited from the religious ideas of a soul. This dualism has been critiqued by thinkers and scientists. One particularly powerful critique is the psychological fact of *internalization*. In Foucault’s discussion of the Panopticon: a prison system designed in such a way where the prison always would be subjected to the gaze of the guard—he eloquently and indirectly critiques dualism. He describes that after the *internalization* of the suppressor, the power structure, the prisoner won’t misbehave even though it could. The suppressing structure has now been taken from the external and into the internal. The prisoners psyche now has a guard inside of him telling him what to do and not to do, and he thinks it is his own demands. This is the proof of the fact of internalization. But, if water can flow down the river, can it not also then theoretically flow up the river?

Through Foucault we have seen how what we deem as external deeply influence the internal.

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But what about *externalization*? We could say that our everyday actions are proof of how the internal influence the external—yet this does not suffice. For, all these things; our biology which we act through, our thought-patterns, our moral could all be a product of the external. They could all be learnt, not an intricate part of the self. This is the demon of the external, this is the demon which Descartes was so afraid of. But, if we do as Descartes—and strip away everything which could be subjected to the manipulation of the externality, we are left with our subjectivity. As we saw earlier, our thought-patterns can be subjected to manipulation, but pure subjectivity cannot. The pure subjectivity which is that which perceives thoughts and sensory experience. The holding space in which through you and I can exist, the observance which gives rise to all perception. If this is the closest we can come to the internal, abiding to Foucault's critique. Could this observance, this radical indifferent subjectivity, act outwards, as the river flowing the opposite direction? It seems does seem so in the observations of quantum physics—specifically in the double slit experiment. In physics, there is this notion of wave-particle duality, where matter either acts as a wave or a particle. In the double slit experiment, they projected electrons through slits and looked at the pattern which the electrons formed after passing the slits. If they were waves, they would've formed an interference pattern by the waves bouncing off each other. When there was an observer present the electrons would act as particles. But, when only the results, the pattern which they formed, were being observed—the electrons would act as waves. In physics, this is called the observer effect. The very act of observance, not doing *anything*, changes the external in such a fundamental way.

So, what then happens with the river when it flows upwards and downwards at the same time? Could we then say that there is no flowing—no momentum? By observing the world, we change it. But, by being in the world, it changes us. There is no within, and there is no without. There is no relation. Maybe this duality snuck into our minds through the nature of language, where words only mean something in relation to other words. Maybe this duality crept into us for us to be consumers—for why would anyone buy things if there were no self? I see this dualism, which sneakily invade our discussions on identity, as deeply fallacious.