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## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Conference: PHENOMENOLOGY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

**Faculty of Arts  
Charles University, Prague  
28–30 November 2018**

#### **Venue:**

AKC, Husova 4a, 110 00 Praha 1  
Czech Republic

#### **Invited speakers:**

David Carr (The New School for Social Research, NY, USA)  
John J. Drummond (Fordham University, NY, USA)  
Mark Wrathall (Oxford University, GB)  
Scott Marratto (Michigan Technological University, USA)  
Claude Romano (Université Paris-Sorbonne, FRA)

The conference “Phenomenology and Personal Identity” addresses the question of a possible relation between recent phenomenological research on selfhood and the question of personal identity. The current discussion on personal identity focuses primarily on the so-called “persistence question”: what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a person at time  $t_1$  to be the same as a person at time  $t_2$ ? Apart from the question of the persistence of a person across time (and his or her “re-identification”), there is also the question of the enduring (or constant) individual characteristics of a person. Both issues can be addressed in terms of a phenomenological inquiry into selfhood, more precisely, into the temporality, spatiality, narrativity, and normativity of selfhood.

The post-Hegelian, German and French philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have entailed remarkably intense debates on the individual, on the self as being unique or “concrete.” Both Kierkegaard and Heidegger devoted considerable effort to questions such as “What is it to be a self” and “How does a self relate to time?” What we encounter here can usefully be labeled a *deep temporalization of the self*, be it in the form of the Heideggerian emphasis on the temporality of *Dasein*, in the Kierkegaardian analysis of the self as a synthesis (of time and eternity), or in the Bergsonian idea of the profound self that precludes any kind of identity across time.

Thinkers such as Heidegger and Sartre categorically refused to associate the concept of identity with the human self. Instead, they opposed identity to ipseity (*Selbstsein*, *ipséité*): human beings are not “identical” (“the same”), they are, or can be, themselves. Paul Ricœur



grasped this idea retrospectively by separating the *idem*-identity and the *ipse*-identity (or the “sameness” and the “selfhood”). Still the question remains: how does this emphasis on the temporalized self transform the traditional question of personal identity? At least one thing is clear: if the time of the self is understood as lived or experienced time, it is no longer the measurable, objective time in which two different points (t1 and t2) are compared and identified as two “slices” of the same person. The time of the self is the time of personal becoming, of finding or losing oneself, the time of a unique life that is co-determined by the individual itself, shaped by others, a time that can be told in a story and so forth.

Since at least the 1980s, several attempts have been made to understand the “Continental” line of thinking about the “self” as a reply to the post-Lockean “personal identity” question. Among these attempts to bring together the two conceptually different traditions of thought, we count works by Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Paul Ricœur and David Carr. MacIntyre does not seek to provide a novel answer to the personal identity question. Instead, he supplies the context without which the very question is meaningless. He claims that no account of personal identity can stand alone. As he puts it, “all attempts to elucidate the notion of personal identity independently of and in isolation from the notions of narrative, intelligibility and accountability are bound to fail”. Paul Ricœur attempts to do something similar to MacIntyre, that is, to reconstruct the conceptual framework within which the personal identity question can be asked. This framework combines some fundamentals of the action theory (the concept of agent and of reasons for an action) with some core distinctions of philosophical ethics.

When focusing on the possible phenomenological contribution to the personal identity question, the conference plans to address the topic of the temporal unity of the self. Among the variety of approaches to this question, the Husserlian analysis of consciousness has to be reconsidered, as well as Heidegger’s idea of the “self-constancy” of *Dasein*, and the hermeneutic idea that the temporal self-understanding (or self-interpreting) is fundamental for who one is (Gadamer, Taylor).

Nevertheless, the concept of “unity” is not to be understood in a strictly temporal meaning only. We can even go as far as to analyze personal being as a unity in space – as a bodily existence that inhabits a certain milieu. Several twentieth century philosophers (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty) emphasize that the temporal (diachronic) unity and the spatial (let us say dia-topic) unity of the self cannot be analyzed separately. The idea that personal identity is “spatial” often draws on the phenomenology of the lived body. By this line of inquiry, we intend to supplement the “temporalization of the self” with a focus on its “spatialization.”

For many of the above-mentioned accounts of the “self” (Ricœur, MacIntyre or Taylor), the unity of a person is not a value-neutral concept. On the contrary, to be “one,” to have a life that has a unity, is often interpreted in the Aristotelian vein as a teleological horizon of all the particular activities and experiences of the person in question. In this sense, the personal unity entails normative aspects. The normative understanding of the identity question can be legitimately criticized, either as confounding the question of identity with the question of personal integrity, or as prioritizing unity over heterogeneity. Thus László Tengelyi, to take but



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one example, resolutely rejects the ethical concern for unity as obfuscating different sorts of alterity—be it alterity of the other, or the alterity in myself, that is, the otherness of my body or my subconscious. Is the identity/unity question normative from the outset? If not, when exactly does it start to be normative (by presupposing, for example, that personal unity is better than personal dispersion)?

Our conference aims to use these multifarious sources of phenomenology in order to address the personal identity question in its different dimensions, i.e. as implying a unity understood in temporal, spatial and (possibly) normative terms.

### **Submission**

Paper proposals should be sent until Monday, September 3, 2018 to the following e-mail address: [jakub.capek@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:jakub.capek@ff.cuni.cz) The conference committee will issue acceptance/refusal notification by Monday, September 17, 2018.

Paper proposals should include a title, an abstract (500 words), affiliation, e-mail address, and phone number. Paper presentations will have a maximum duration of 30 minutes. The conference language will be English. Publication of selected conference papers is planned in a collected volume.

Thanks to the generous funding of the Czech Science Foundation and the European Regional Development Fund-Project, we are able to offer accommodation for all the conference participants.

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### **Conference committee:**

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