"I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself." Thus wrote Jean-Jacques Rousseau as the incipit of his Confessions, a narrative elaboration of his authentic, "true self" as opposed to a hypocritical social identity. Rousseau confessed many weaknesses and failings but the message was clear: his true self, while rich and complex, was better than some of his objectionable actions.

While "true self" is an emerging concept in contemporary psychology, it played an important role in modern philosophy at least since Rousseau. The modern/romantic paradigm of "authenticity", of a deep interiority that should guide our actions and is key to understanding who we really are, is one of the mainstream philosophical constructs of the last two centuries. Notions such as "false consciousness" or "bad faith" are at the core of many theories of twentieth century philosophy that contrast an authentic interiority to a social mask.

Here then is a first question. Social-psychological approaches such as the one developed in this article, ignoring literary, philosophical, and artistic sources of evidence, provide a very clear and simple picture of the true self as good an moral. Could it be, however, that simplicity and unambiguous valence of the true self so described is, to some important extent, an artifact of the approach?

A second question raised but not really answered by this article is whether people develop their sense of their "true self" on the basis of personal inner experience and self-reflection guided by biologically inherited essentialism, or whether it emerges and fulfill its function in social interactions, and in particular in the defense of one's own "character" and reputation?

The evidence invoked by the authors, when taken together with less measurable but richer evidence from literature, history of ideas (or clinical psychology) fails to give clear and strong support to the idea that the "true self" is an essentialist folk concept about the morally good nature of ourselves and people in general. It is quite compatible with the alternative view that the true self is at the core of our *social* self-identity, our public self-image; that it is tailored to defend our reputation – we may look so-so, but deep down, we are so good! – and to contribute to how we would like to see ourselves seen by others. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley called this "the looking-glass self." This second ego is woven over time from multiple strands, incorporating how we think the people around us perceive and judge us (or how they should do so). The centrality of the "true self" in making sense of who we are and why we act depends on the crucial importance for us of preserving a positive image of ourselves not just in our own eyes, but also, and no less importantly, in the eyes of others.