

I was delighted to discover that deep down the authentic me is a happy go lucky sort of guy, and others recognize this too. I am also a little skeptical, to be honest. The authors acknowledge that there may be some individual variation in this tableau—although the choice between psychopath and seriously mentally ill is not what I had hoped for. The authors also place great emphasis on moral qualities; indeed, the inner, authentic, true self is bounded by a sort of moral paradise; falling out of the true self represents a morally “bad case” whereas falling into authentic self is a good moral case. With all this emphasis on self, authentic, and moral, one would imagine that the authors would be moved to interrogate these concepts, but surprisingly they do not. Self, the causal nexus that stops at the skin, is a bit underdrawn. Lots of things stop at the skin which may be relevant to the self but are not in themselves the self; not the least of which is our central nervous system. Few would deny that the self is a function of consciousness which in turn is a function of the central nervous system and its systematic interaction with the world of experience. But this only situates self, it does little to identify it.

Moreover, for many of the world, the self is hardly distinguished by a dermal constraint. Much of the self—much of *who we are and who ourselves see us as*—is contingent on the sort of person we are, defined by the kinds of roles we habitually assume, our place in and commitment to affiliative networks, and our roles in opportunistic collaborative activities in which “self-interest” (almost never defined in terms of the self, but the social universe in which the self is active) motivates us. In short, the self is an actor, a series of roles we assume, contingent on context and driven by need to serve various cross-cutting group interests. Almost nothing in the text suggests this possibility—perhaps because middle-class whites in Northern Europe and the United States pretend to be driven by an independent, authentic *me*. It is imperative that we realize that this is not part of a grand theoretical partitioning of the world’s ways of being *me*, but a highly peculiar, decidedly not authentic cultural convention, ascribed to a small, distinct, but frighteningly wealthy group. Weirid doesn’t even cover how peculiar this is. Everyone else in the world, including these folks’ wives, children, workers, etc. do not subscribe to this distorted and distorting notion of self.

It’s important not to confuse this with traits—crystallized thoughts that we habitually turn to in order to explain (or explain away) how or why we and others behave. Like other versions of theory of mind or mentalizing, these peculiarly gelled beliefs about ourselves and others are no more accurate than other forms of mindreading. Mindreading isn’t a tool for accurately imagining another’s thoughts and using those thoughts to predict or retrodict their behavior; mindreading is a tool for imagining that we can do this. Luckily, we don’t rely on it that much; indeed, it is less precocious than a more important tool: reading successfully the social universe constituted of relations, roles, group membership and affiliative commitments (see Hirschfeld, Bartless, Whited, Frith, 2007; Hirschfeld, 2013). Arguably, it is part of core cognition (Spelke & Kinzler, 2007).

How about morality? Perhaps the least explored notion in the paper. Virtually no definition, or even hint of one, is provided. What is striking is many of the notions of morality that the paper cite are more aptly called norms or often valenced, social expectations which enjoy considerable distributional robustness, quasi-stability, and high degrees of relevance. None of this implies morality—systematic judgements of good (and bad) and the cognitive and cultural mechanisms that support these judgements. One of the striking findings of recent work on morality is a robust willingness to morally parse situations in the same way while explaining these choices in an equally vigorous idiosyncratic manner that belies reduction. Discursive treatments of these images of good and bad often then are not terribly informative beyond the possibility that individual differences in sociocultural contexts may play an important role. What the real self is when an individual is faced with a commitment to the weight of sociocultural commitment versus a powerful sense that this weight constrains a more “honest” (really sought after) *me* is no more obviously about a real versus superficial self than, say, a commitment to seek a professional football career in the face of facts of

the matter that predict a very low hit rate. We live mentally and socially conflicted lives because we have shallowed the cool aid of choice. Most people in the world do not have nor pretend to have such choices. A theory that distinguishes the true versus superficial self, and casts normative commitments to the superficial heap, may not be meant as an affront, but it manages to perform one well. Selves, true or otherwise, are ways of imagining a wealth of options that simply aren't available to most people. They are not cognitive outliers since they include a staggering percentage of the supposedly independent, self-oriented "West."