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Subject as Socio-Cultural Creature

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Introduction*

Being a subject can be defined in a number of different ways. One of the reasons is that different features are acknowledged as constitutive for a subject. For example, we can define a subject as someone according to whom we take an intentional stance, i.e. we interpret his behavior ascribing beliefs and desires to him. Sometimes, such a description is only a starting point for more detailed constitutive features, on the basis of which we can distinguish other conceptions of selfhood: the unitary self-based on individual autonomy guaranteed by self-monitoring and self-control; the social self, which is enculturated and founded on normative rules; the relational self, broadly understood as constituted by

* In this paper dedicated to prof. Urszula M. Żegleń we would like to express our great gratitude for her care over us on our entire academic path. Her involvement, knowledge, and kindness have shaped generations of young scientists. We are proud and happy that we are a part of this group.

interactions with others; the divided self, grounded on psychodynamics and explained in the language of psychoanalysis as a tension between internal desires and external restrictions;[1] the embodied self as an effect of bodily integrity emerging on the basis of sub-personal processes such as proprioception constituting the minimal phenomenal selfhood.[2]

However, if we consider what constitutes a subject as the subject, it turns out that many of the mentioned features are linked to each other and only their connection is really constitutive for being a subject at all. For example, processes such as self-monitoring that constitutes the individual self are needed also in the process of the constitution of the socialized and enculturated, hence relational, self. And vice versa: cultural heritage, which is an effect of plural subjectivity effecting from the relations between selves, shapes individual minds. The mutual influence of external and internal processes shaping the self makes it possible for that relation to be understood in two ways, as:

1. the vertical level of relation: I-me, which means self-reflexivity. However, it seems to be primary to all other relations, it is happening on the meta-level (in reference to 2. level), because its effects (propositional attitudes) are at least partially determined by the me-others relation and are accessible through beliefs forming self-knowledge.
2. the horizontal level of relation: me-others which will be described here as rising on the basis of the human ability to share intentionality and mindreading, allowing to grasp the conflict and incoherence of the subject's own perspective with the perspective of the others. In other words the me-others distinction is given via perspective-taking.

This article presents a kind of picture which emerges from the considerations and investigations result from disciplines dealing with empirical knowledge such as evolutionary psychology, philosophy and cognitive science.[3] This interdisciplinary synthesis of what is social, relational and embodied in the sociocultural account of the subject depicts

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[1] Cf. Diana T. Meyers, *Decentralizing autonomy: Five faces of selfhood*, in: *Autonomy and the challenges to liberalism*, ed. J. Christman, J. Anderson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[2] Olaf Blanke, Thomas Metzinger, "Full-body illusions and minimal phenomenal selfhood", *Trends in cognitive sciences* 13, 2009: 8–13. doi:10.1016/j.tics.2008.10.003.

[3] Cf. Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2014; idem, "Precís of A Natural History of Human Thinking", *Journal of Social Ontology* 2(1) 2016: 59–64; Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit. Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*, Harvard University Press 1994; idem, *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism*, Harvard University Press, 2001; idem, *Between Saying and Doing. Towards an analytic pragmatism*, Oxford University Press, 2008; Shaun Gallagher, Anthony Crisafi, "Mental institutions", *Topoi*

the cognitive niche, without which it is very hard to understand the subject as such.[4]

Relational Subject

In this paper, the relational self is defined not only in a me-you relation,[5] which is narrowed to the closest (or significant) partners,[6] but also as the me-others relation, which extends to a group members. According to the definition, the relational self is constituted by the interaction and cooperation with others, where these relations include emotional, conative and cognitive attachment, responding to the needs of others and cooperation in many forms.[7]

In other words, the relational self is a subject for whom the relation and interactions with the other subjects have a constitutive character for his cognitive and emotional sphere through the internalization of the perspective of others and hence, the reorganization of the self. This way of thinking about the subject is present in Vygotsky's works:

> Human behavior is the product of development of a broader system than just the system or a person's individual functions, specifically, systems of social connections and relations, of collective forms of behavior and social cooperation.[8]

Joint attention, shared intentionality, joint commitment, joint intentionality, collective intentionality, shared intention, we-intention, shared belief, collective acceptance and collective emotion as well as others belong to the interactions and cooperation constituting the relational self.[9]

28(1) (2009): 45–51; Shaun Gallagher, "The socially extended mind", *Cognitive Systems Research* 25–26 (2013): 4–12.

[4] Karola Stotz, "Human nature and cognitive–developmental niche construction", *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 9 (4) (2010): 483–501.

[5] Kay Deaux, Tiffany S. Perkins, "Kaleidoscopic Self", in: *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, ed. C. Sedikides, M.B. Brewer (Philadelphia: Psychology, 2002).

[6] Susan M. Andersen, Serena Chen, "The relational self: An interpersonal social-cognitive theory", *Psychological Review* 109(4) 2002: 619–645.

[7] Diana T. Meyers, "Decentralizing autonomy: Five faces of selfhood", in: *Autonomy and the challenges to liberalism*, ed. J. Christman, J. Anderson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[8] Lev Vygotsky, *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky. Vol. VI: Scientific Legacy*, ed. R. W. Rieber (New York: Plenum Press, 1999), 41.

[9] Michael Tomasello, Hannes Rakoczy, "What Makes Human Cognition Unique? From Individual to Shared to Collective Intentionality", *Mind and Language* 18(2) (2003): 121–147; Michael Tomasello, Melinda Carpenter, Josep Call, Tanya Behne, Henrike Moll, "Understanding and sharing intentions: The origins of cultural cogni-

However, this interaction would not be possible if the subject did not present adequate cognitive abilities. These abilities evolve in the specifically and uniquely human process of ontogeny and phylogeny.[10] As Tomasello claims in his shared intentionality hypothesis, human thinking evolved for the purpose of *cooperation* ("Thinking for *co*-operating").[11] Thus, in the cognitive aspect (i.a. the formation of cognitive representations of a special kind, inferences and self-control) a subject needs to enter into relationships, i.e. interactions, with other subjects. The socialization of selected features of thinking such as representing, inferring, self-monitoring, transforms human cognitive abilities so that individual intentionality is transformed into collective intentionality via joint intentionality, where the last two of them belong to the general form of shared intentionality.[12] Expressing the hypothesis more general, but also more dramatic Tomasello calls human thinking "individual improvisation enmeshed in a sociocultural matrix".[13]

The process of socialization demonstrates then how the relational self evolves on the basis of the transformation and origins of the new forms of intentionality. Therefore, the process of the formation of the intentionality features needs to be considered on different time-scales: evolutionary, ontogenetic and historical-cultural ones.

The same abilities underlying the relational subject also enable the characterization of the subject as capable to form, together with other subjects (individual selves), the plural subject "we" (relational selves). To make it clear, in the cognitive aspect the constitutive feature characterizing a subject is his ability to enter into a relationship with other subject to form a plural subjectivity. Hence, the relational self is the core of being a subject.

In this article, the presented conception of the role and origins of relational self, is based on the cognitive skills and motivation described as shared intentionality which results in unique motivation for altruistic helping and sharing, and the basic and unique cognitive skill which is recursive mindreading ("When employed in certain social interactions, it generates joint goals and joint attention, which provide the common conceptual ground within which human communication most naturally occurs").[14] The activities involving shared intentionality create not only

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tion", *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 28 (2005): 675–691; Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*; idem, "Precís of A Natural History of Human Thinking".

[10] Idem, *The cultural origins of human cognition* (Harvard University Press, 1999); idem, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*; idem, "Precís of A Natural History of Human Thinking".

[11] Ibidem, 125.

[12] Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*.

[13] Ibidem, 1.

[14] Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication*, 321.

the plural subject – "we" – but also the culture as a set of cumulated perspectives. The development of culture was possible owing to the so called "ratchet effect", since it required different forms of learning, including the most important skill of learning by imitation. This form of learning requires an ability to share intentionality – the ability of taking and navigating among others' point of view. Such navigation is possible if one recognizes and acknowledges another as a subject, (as another self), and it happens when one understands that others are intentional and mental creatures, and hence can have goals, intention and beliefs different than the subject's own. In a constant loop of the individual and the social interactions, a subject is constructed as a historical, socio-cultural creature with his essential feature of being the relational self. The question of how and for what purpose the relational self is built will be answered in the next part of this article.

From Individual to Social Mind and Back Again

From the evolutionary and developmental psychology point of view, there are crucial ontogenetic moments specific for humans which enable skills needed in the social cognition. These key moments are generally following: the emergence of individual intentionality which we share with great apes allowing us to understand others as intentional agents and shared intentionality – an ability to share the mental states (e.g. beliefs) with others – containing joint intentionality (emerging in children of nine to twelve years old) and collective intentionality (emerging in four-year-olds) allowing us to understand others as mental agents.[15]

The hypothesis of shared intentionality offers an answer to the question which cognitive skills distinguish *homo sapiens* from other primates and make us capable of creating languages, advanced tools, social institutions – or culture in general.[16] Individual intentionality refers to the vertical level of relation proposed here, which characterizes the self and rests on the conception by Tomasello[17] which describes it as an ability to:

a. have off-line cognitive representations, i.e. to represent an object without staying in direct contact with them, i.e. without actual perception of them;

[15] Idem, *The cultural origins of human cognition*; Tomasello, Rakoczy, "What Makes Human Cognition Unique? From Individual to Shared to Collective Intentionality".

[16] Michael Tomasello, *Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory of Language Acquisition* (Harvard University Press, 2003); idem, *Origins of Human Communication* (MIT Press, 2008).

[17] Idem, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*, 4–9.

b. make inferential simulations enabling the causal transformations of representations and intentional reasoning;
c. carry out cognitive self-monitoring to predict the consequences of the subject's own actions and make the proper decision on the basis of the simulated experiences.

Individual intentionality which (according to Tomasello) is the crucial feature of the cognitive system of great apes is therefore limited to individual selves understood as cognitive self-regulatory, thinking systems. Thinking is an effect of the ability to generate representations, to conduct inferences and the capacity to self-monitor.

The social character of cooperation-oriented thinking transforms the constituents (a, b, c), and thereby the individual intentionality, into shared intentionality. The first stage of this transformation is joint intentionality – a cognitive system allowing a small scale pre-cultural and pre-linguistic dyadic collaboration and communication.

According to Tomasello's hypothesis, approximately 400,000 years ago, representatives of *Homo heidelbergensis* rejected the individualistic way of living based on competition and adopted a strategy consisting in common search for food.[18] Although the paleo-anthropological evidence does not determine the validity of Tomasello's hypothesis regarding the cognitive capacities of *Homo heidelbergensis*, he still assumes that a model for their cognitive ability may be sought in infants' skills to cooperate and communicate during the pre-linguistic period, and before they become participants in culture. According to Tomasello, the model for collaborative actions rests in the conception presented by Skryms,[19] expressed in the scenario showing two individuals hunting deer where the participants, although playing their own individual roles and having individual perspectives, needed to adapt their actions to external situations and coordinate perspectives with a partner toward different common goals, to collaborate successfully.[20] Within collaborative activities, their participants create socially shared *joint* goals and *joint* attention which constitute common ground for them. On that common ground, they assume *individual* roles and *individual* perspectives of the world shared *ad hoc*. The coordination of such roles and perspectives required a new type of cooperative communication based on natural gestures of pointing and pantomiming.[21] Participating in this type of structure caused a radical change in how its participants thought, and resulted in a transition from individual intentionality to joint intentionality. The

[18] Ibidem; Tomasello, "Precís of A Natural History of Human Thinking".

[19] Brian Skyrms, *The stag hunt and the evolution of sociality The stag hunt and the evolution of sociality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[20] Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*, 33.

[21] Ibidem.

joint intentionality was the direct stage to collective intentionality – the unique human ability allowing us to develop cultural products in the form of norms, conventions, institutions and practices through the collective action of both individual and collective subjects over hundreds of thousands of years.[22]

Collective intentionality enabling to form complicated cultural artefacts and establishing relations on an abstract level is the next stage. In this kind of intentionality the "we-mode" emerged from the "me" and "you".[23] The "we-mode" allows the shift of the perspective from the individual onto the interpersonal level. According to the examples from evolutionary psychology, individual subjects have their own individual intentions, but in order to survive they must consider themselves as members of the same group, so they must create a common ground of understanding.[24] They need to shape a social subject "we". The transition from joint intentionality to collective intentionality allowed the coordination and collaboration with strangers (but still group members) which emerged along with the growth of human populations living in smaller groups. The solution to such a problem consisted in creating the practices and conventions neutral to particular subjects, and following them on a common cultural ground which can be called a specific human cognitive niche.[25] The cooperation within such groups was no longer based on a second-personal *ad hoc* common group but on a new capacity to establish concepts, norms, institutions, and thus a *common cultural ground*. Cooperative communication replaced conventionalized linguistic communication.[26]

Navigare Necesse Est

The above presented research legitimates the thesis put forth in this article that selves are given through perspectives, and culture is entirety of cumulated perspectives which serves to learn. Culture itself as a set of perspectives is an effect of learning processes and heritage of knowledge. But this knowledge is possible owing to human ability to navigate among perspectives because culture accumulates perspectives: for ex-

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[22] Tomasello, Rakoczy "What Makes Human Cognition Unique? From Individual to Shared to Collective Intentionality", 121.

[23] Tomasello, "Precís of A Natural History of Human Thinking"; John A. Dewey, Elisabeth Pacherie, Günther Knoblich, "The phenomenology of controlling a moving object with another person", *Cognition* 132 (2014): 383–397.

[24] Tomasello, "Precís of A Natural History of Human Thinking"; Skyrms, *The stag hunt and the evolution of sociality*.

[25] Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking*, 33.

[26] Ibidem; Tomasello, "Precís of A Natural History of Human Thinking".

ample, we can read Aristotle, look closer into his perspective and learn from him. Learning by imitation requires developing a skill of perspective-taking of another person. Therefore, a relational self is a postulated entity which allows the learning processes. We learn by differentiating our own perspective from the perspectives of others.

According to what was said above, from the evolutionary point of view we have to deal with two selves: the first one, equipped in individual intentionality, is pre-cultural (non-perspectival) and shared with great apes; the second one is cultural, social (perspectival) and hence relational. The question is how the perspectival self evolves from the non-perspectival one. Tomasello tells the story of this transformation describing the origins of thinking and morality.

The perspectiveness exemplified in language is also discussed more theoretically in the field of philosophy by Robert Brandom. According to him, navigation among perspectives is a general form of understanding, communication and social practices, which could be described in terminology used by Brandom as "the game in giving and asking for reasons" ("On this line, only communities, not individuals, can be interpreted as having original intentionality".[27]

On Robert Brandom's account, perspectiveness means that social practices are games in which each participant discloses various commitments and entitlements, having a deontic status.[28] In a more traditional way, commitments and entitlements can be compared to beliefs and entitlements to those beliefs, and then, to the attribution of the beliefs and entitlement to them by the participants of practices. In this way, talking about language practices comes down to talking about practices as dynamically interweaving networks of beliefs and entitlements.

> Thus inferential *contents* are essentially perspectival – they can in principle be specified only from a point of view. What is shared is a capacity to navigate and traverse differences in points of view, to specify contents from different points of view. Explaining this capacity is explaining what it is to take or treat (understand or interpret) someone's remark as representing or being about one thing rather than another.[29]

Considering Robert Brandom's theory, one can say it is conceptuality that is perspectival because content is generated by practices. To grasping a concept is to understand, what role it plays in the Space of Reason because concepts are defined as broadly inferential norms. The way to understand concepts is a kind of a language-game in giving and asking

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[27] Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit. Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Harvard University Press), 61.

[28] Ibidem, 166.

[29] Ibidem, 485.

for reasons. To understand a concept means to know what inferences it entails.[30] The inferential role semantics allows intentionality to extend beyond a single mind and become a pragmatically mediated semantic relation, as formulated by Robert Brandom. According to Brandom, without understanding of the "essentially world-involving practices"[31] and without their analysis one will be unable to understand the relation in which he as a subject remains with regard to other subjects and objects. In other words, one is unable to understand the elements of the relation of the discursive intentionality – subject and object – without the semantic intentional relations, that occur between them.

In social practices subjects use vocabulary to describe these practices, especially logical vocabulary ("Logic is the organ of semantic self-consciousness"[32]). What results from these practices is the abilities enabling the self-consciousness of practices. The conflict and incoherence recognized in navigation among perspectives are recognized in vocabulary used by subjects. There are two kinds of vocabulary and two concepts of incompatibility: the normative and the modal one. According to Brandom, the subject is a postulated entity of normative vocabulary and an object of modal vocabulary. The self (subject) is a social structure made by social interactions in which they are not a source of content, but rather an element of the social mind structure (or the we-mode) founded on social practices.[33] Social practices, or in Brandom's terminology, "the game in giving and asking for reasons" make a fundament of the intentionality:

> Taking linguistic practice and therefore intentionality to be essentially social only in the sense that it can be made intelligible only in the context of mutual interpretation-an I-thou relationship.[34]

On such a neopragmatic account, beliefs have a normative character, which means that they are acquired in social interactions, shared with others, and understood by taking a perspective of others. This procedure allows judging someone's beliefs as true or false, to revise own beliefs, to change the subject's own attitudes and, generally, to cooperate. It means that an individual self interacts with other selves in the sphere of propo-

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[30] Brandom, *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Harvard University Press, 2001); idem, *Between Saying and Doing. Towards an analytic pragmatism* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

[31] Idem, *Between Saying and Doing. Towards an analytic pragmatism*, 179–180.

[32] Idem, *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

[33] Idem, *Making It Explicit. Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*, 650.

[34] Ibidem, 659.

sitional attitudes. In the light of Robert Brandom's theory, intentionality is a pragmatically mediated sematic relation.

Finally, we can come to the conclusion which is already expressed in the approach called social extended mind.[35] General theory of extended mind states that the mind is not under the skull, but it extends on artefacts such as notebooks which overtake mental functions such as memory.[36] The theory of socially extended mind says that not only mental functions are realized on physical artefacts such as digital devices, but that they are also overtaken and realized – and even possible – in societies. Hence, the mind is *de facto* a social mind constituted in social interactions with others and involved in institutions, norms, and practices.[37] In other words it is a mind extended on the sociocultural structures.[38] From this point of view, Brandom's social practices – the game in giving and asking for reasons – are Gallagher's mental institutions.

> I appeal to certain social practices and institutions that are what we might call 'mental institutions' (…) in the sense that they are not only institutions with which we accomplish certain cognitive processes, but also are such that without them such cognitive processes would no longer exist. They are at least enabling conditions, and on the most liberal reading, constitutive of those processes. Examples include things like legal systems, research practices, and cultural institutions.[39]

This approach also says that the mind is not limited to individual selves but extends on the new kind of subjectivity – enculturated "we", which can be called social mind emerging as an effect of interactions between minds. Furthermore, an individual mind is a product of prior relations with other minds. A cognitive system becomes a subject because it is useful for the individual subject to change his beliefs or even a system of beliefs not only for the purpose of cooperation. This "switching" is possible owing to navigation among perspectives constitutive for the self. On such an account, it would be impossible to enact if selves were not relational.

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[35] Shaun Gallagher, "The socially extended mind".

[36] Andy Clark, David J. Chalmers, "The extended mind", *Analysis* 58 (1998): 7–19.

[37] Shaun Gallagher, "The socially extended mind", 4.

[38] Cf. idem; Brandom, *Making It Explicit. Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment*.

[39] Gallagher, "The socially extended mind", 6.

Conclusions

In this paper, the authors develop the claim that cognitive abilities of a subject are revealed in his relations to other subjects and that the relational self is constitutive for being a subject. In order to gain social cognition, an individual self (mind) needs to navigate among different perspectives of other minds. Mind is not limited to individual minds but extends in a new form of social mind. It means that subjects need to have an access to other minds and he gains this access due to the ability of intentionality which is gradated in humans. The collective intentionality is its highest level. This kind of intentionality allows making collective (plural) subjects "we". This ability also explains how in the frame of perspectives a subject builds his identity by assimilation of the perspectives of the others in the process of enculturation, i.e. by learning. A subject becomes the subject owing to his being in the cognitive relations to other subjects and these relations allow him both to create collective subjectivity and form his own individuality.

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Summary

In this paper, the authors develop the claim that cognitive abilities of a subject are revealed in his relations to other subjects and that the relational self is constitutive for being a subject. A subject becomes the subject owing to his being in cognitive relations with other subjects, and these relations allow him to create collective (plural) subjects: "we". However, to achieve it , he needs to have an ability to recognize and take the perspective of other subjects. In this article, we show how these relations are realized in praxis on the basis of examples provided in psychology and philosophy. On such an interdisciplinary account, culture is understood as a collection of cumulated perspectives, due to the subject's ability to form collective subjects. This ability also explains how, within the frame of perspectives, a subject builds his identity by assimilation of the perspectives of others in the process of enculturation, i. a. by learning.

Keywords: social cognition, self, subjectivity, intentionality

Streszczenie

Podmiot jako istota społeczno-kulturowa

Główna teza niniejszego artykułu głosi, że zdolności poznawcze podmiotu uwidaczniają się w jego relacji do innych podmiotów oraz że konstytutywna dla bycia podmiotem jest jaźń relacyjna. Stajemy się podmiotami w wyniku naszych relacji z innymi, które pozwalają na tworzenie podmiotu zbiorowego – „my". Jednak by do tego doszło, podmiot musi dysponować zdolnością do przyjmowania perspektywy odmiennej niż jego własna. W niniejszym artykule pokazujemy, jak owe relacje zachodzą w praktyce, na przykładzie badań z zakresu psychologii i filozofii. W takim interdyscyplinarnym ujęciu kultura rozumiana jest jako zbiór skumulowanych perspektyw, dzięki którym podmiot dysponuje zdolnością do tworzenia podmiotowości zbiorowej. Zdolność ta ukazuje, w jaki sposób podmiot buduje własną tożsamość w procesie ukulturowienia, np. poprzez uczenie się.

Słowa kluczowe: poznanie społeczne, jaźń, podmiotowość, intencjonalność