own constitution through acts of creative interpretation — interpretations that if not true in a sense connoting accuracy are nonetheless truthful, empirically adequate, coherent, and believable.

*The Stories We Are* is a book that I would recommend rather highly. Its principal aim is to explore the possibility and nature of self-creation on a hermeneutical or narrative account of the self and is, in my view, largely successful in doing so. While readers will likely find the book excessive in length owing to frequent repetition, Randall’s treatment of the self is easily accessible to a general audience and does not limit itself to any single academic discipline or subdiscipline. As well as being of interest to philosophers and other humanists, the book is no less relevant to psychologists and social scientists generally. One criticism I would offer of Randall’s account is that while it ably develops the hermeneutic and aesthetic dimensions of selfhood, the pragmatic dimension which he recognizes as being a principal realm in which self-refashioning occurs is a topic that calls for greater thematization than it receives in this account. The self becomes what it is no less in the realm of (present) action and deliberation (concerning future action) than in the realm of narration (concerning in the first instance past experience). A narrative account of the self would benefit from placing the pragmatic together with the hermeneutic as mutually illuminating and reinforcing dimensions of selfhood, a suggestion with which I suspect Randall would not be unsympathetic.

**Notes**


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**The Self after Postmodernity**

CALVIN O. SCHRAG


Originally presented as the 1995 *Gilbert Ryle Lectures* at Trent University, Calvin O. Schrag’s *The Self after Postmodernity* is a lucid treatise on an
extremely complex and diverse subject. What is most remarkable about the project is the breadth of its scope given the 148 pages that comprise its length. Schrag is on familiar ground most of the time and consistently showcases his ability to summarize and delimit the multiple facets of the debates surrounding the topic of identity.

From the dawn of philosophical modernism (Descartes) to our present day, Schrag traces the history of the conceptions of selfhood up to the stalemate with which we are confronted today. On the one hand, Schrag observes, there is the modernist conception of a self as unified and self-identical. On the other hand, however, there is what he calls the ‘postmodern counteractant’ which, by “celebrating plurality, incompleteness and difference...leaves us with a subject too thin to bear the responsibilities of its narratival involvements” (27-8). Schrag articulates the pitfalls in subscribing to either school of thought and then proceeds to salvage a concept of subjectivity by prescribing several ‘correctives’ to the positions tendered by both Cartesian thinking and current postmodern strains of thought found in Foucault and Lyotard.

By deconstructing some bogus dualisms and dichotomies (mind/body, fact/value, absolutism/relativism), Schrag is able to bypass the aforementioned stalemate in order to arrive at a conception of the self which is neither dependent on unity, totality and self-identity nor simply the result of a fragmentation deprived of the power of agency. Narrative is a key term for Schrag. While the conventional sense of this word refers to a style of discourse, its stronger sense denotes an ontological claim; Schrag argues: “To be a self is to be able to render an account of oneself, to be able to tell the story of one’s life” (26). The self should be considered as a ‘who of discourse’ rather than as a ‘thing’. While “admittedly fragile, subject to forgetfulness and semantic ambiguities,” the who of discourse, in the act of narrating, achieves a “unity and species of self-identity...through a transversal extending over and lying across the multiple forms of speech and language games without coincidence with any one of them” (33, my italics).

Transversality is another key term for Schrag. Borrowing from Sartre, Deleuze, and Guattari, who all use the concept of transversality for different purposes, Schrag describes selves as always in the process of unification, “moving beyond the constraints of universality versus particularity and identity versus difference” (133). While being ‘context-conditioned’, the self is not ‘context-determined’ (a distinction, Schrag claims, that is frequently overlooked by the Relativists). Such a self, Schrag maintains, experiences a ‘transcendence’ that is not dependent upon a foundationalist universality. Appealing to Kierkegaard’s concept of the ‘Absolute Paradox’, Schrag sidesteps the ‘grandiose metaphysical project’ of Hegel to forge a notion of the subject as transcending “the immanent culture-spheres of science,
morality, art, and [he argues for the existence of a fourth] religion, but still efficacious within them" (121).

Schrag moves from a notion of the self in discourse to a conception of the self in its community via an intermediary step of establishing the self ‘in action’, where an embodied self always already finds itself involved in embodied communicative practices:

The self-identity achieved through the emplotment of the who of discourse blends with the bodily self-identity achieved through the enactments of the who in action. It is in this wider perspective that self-identity appears in the guise of self-constancy and existential continuity (62).

Schrag distances himself from Habermas by refusing to acknowledge rationality as a universalizing norm while, at the same time, chastising both Deleuze and Foucault for valorizing desire and power (respectively) at the expense of a “praxis-oriented reason” (56-7). Charting his course between Habermas and the postmodernists, Schrag skirts many a Scylla and steers clear of many a Charybdis (he has a penchant for Greek mythological metaphors), and embarks on an odyssey leading him beyond a priori theorizing to a critique of the self as it appears in its community. By inverting the Cartesian doctrine of the other as other-for-me and by also allowing the other to make a prior claim on the subjectivity of the self perceiving the other, Schrag articulates a concept of the self as always already implicated in a “dynamic economy of being-with others” (84). In such a community, ethical responsibility falls on the shoulders of subjects who make decisions based on the communicative practices in which they participate daily. Schrag invokes William James’ notion of the genuine option to prove his point that a priori normative systems play no meaningful role in determining the self’s ethical responsibility.

The *Self after Postmodernity* is an innovative attempt to reconstitute the notion of human agency after the wave of postmodernist thought that, in its extremes, eradicated the notion of subjectivity. As Schrag cleverly remarks, perhaps, like rumors of Mark Twain’s demise, the reports of the death of the subject might also be premature. Couched at times in the discourse of economic exchange, Schrag’s argument offers a caveat to intellectual consumers. In trying to sell his own position, he warns of those ‘trafficking in theory construction’, and questions the ‘practical cash value’ of conceptual constructions that have been ‘sold’ as genuine problems but remain inadequate in the realm of praxis.

Although Schrag’s characterization of postmodernity is at times too uniform and undifferentiated, his resurrection of a ‘self’ out of a “discourse
without speakers...and action without actors" (61) is a welcome enterprise. Readers interested in theorizing about a self in the wake of postmodern philosophy will find this book to be worth its price.

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Postmodern Platos
CATHARINE H. ZUCKERT

Catharine Zuckert’s Postmodern Platos, despite the valuable service it actually performs, leaves the reader thinking of what might, and should, have been. The title of the text brings to mind what would have been an extremely welcome and valuable addition to Continental scholarship. What could provide a better point of contact for the works of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, and Derrida than the text (and problem) of Socrates/Plato? Moreover, what could provide a better method of introduction to postmodern thought than a systematic look at each thinker’s relationship and attitude toward the philosopher most familiar to beginning students of philosophy?

The title of this book, however, is somewhat misleading. The book does unfold as a systematic, chronological exposition of the vital and original ‘returns’ to Plato offered by the thinkers mentioned above. To a large degree these sections rise above the empty caricatures we have come to expect in such general ‘po-mo’ texts. One is struck with wonder and confusion, however, at the figure who is the central focus in this book of postmodern Platonic studies — the late Leo Strauss.

While the Straussian legacy may not readily call to mind the term ‘postmodern’ for many readers, the real value (and joy) of Zuckert’s book lies in the startlingly convincing case she makes for Strauss’ inclusion within the postmodern scene. Zuckert goes to great lengths (and a full one-third of the text) to dispel the myths that surround Strauss’ thought and highlights his comfort in the postmodern field of play.

Zuckert argues that Strauss, similar to Heidegger, recognized that the insights of historicism constituted a crisis for modernity. Ultimately, however, Strauss was able to accept none of the ‘solutions’ offered by Nietzsche, Heidegger or Gadamer. Like Nietzsche, Strauss turned to the Greeks and found a striving for nobility and something higher than any modern, moral or political quest for equality sought through mere comfortable self-preservation. This recognition of the noble in Greek culture — particularly as depicted in the figure of Socrates — led Strauss to study the medieval Jewish philosopher