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### Book Review:

*Dialogical Self Theory. Positioning and Counter-Positioning in a Globalizing Society* by Hubert Hermans and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka. Cambridge University Press, 404 pages, 2010

In *Dialogical Self Theory*, Hubert Hermans and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka introduce self as a dialogical entity, which emerges from social, historical and societal processes and which overcomes the classical dichotomy between individual and society. Dialogical self theory is a new way to approach questions typical to psychological and sociological research, although, the idea of the book is to provide a general analysis of dialogical self based on pragmatism, and Bakhtin's ideas about the role of dialogue in human sciences. But, as the writers say in the beginning of the book, they want to go even further than the pragmatist or the dialogical tradition has gone by analyzing the questions related to the nature of self and the dialogical processes. It is the basic idea of the study to analyze the formation of self and identity in the context of globalization, and also to present some practical ideas concerning organizations, conflict-resolution and questions connected to motivation. According to the writers, they attempt "to generate new ideas" (p. 19), not to formulate testable hypotheses. By doing so, their intention is to integrate various views presented in sociology, psychology and human sciences and sketch out a broader framework, which they call a dialogical self theory, as the title of the book reveals.

The study consists of six long chapters, which are like parts in a long journey into the basic questions of dialogical approach. The analysis starts from globalization and continues then to the historical formation of identity and to the different forms of self and identity. A rather large part of the book considers positioning theory and its fundamental concepts. This is understandable because the whole idea of the book is to broaden our view of self both spatially and temporally. According to Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, "the self and identity can only be properly understood when their spatial and temporal nature is fully acknowledged" (p. 120). Because of this, they present a detailed analysis of the theory of dialogical self theory. It differs essentially from postmodern self theory, for there is no wall between the internal life of the self

and the social world outside of self. In the final chapters of the book, the writers consider emotions from a dialogical point of view and some practical implications of their theory. This inspiration to practical considerations comes from pragmatist tradition, which also underlines the connection between theory and practice. On the whole, the study provides an exciting journey into various social scientific, psychological and philosophical studies that are seen as important building blocks of dialogical theory of self.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the book is the analysis of the historical development of identity and self. It contains a wide variety of different views about cultural development, globalization, psychological questions typical to the modern world system, uncertainty and the differentiation of positions in relation to action. This analysis belongs mainly to the field of sociology, but the psychological and social psychological dimensions are also important to notice. The fundamental idea of the analysis is to connect wide societal and global processes to the individual level of action. Because individuals belong to the states and global world, it is important to pay attention to this point of development. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's analysis shows the meaning of global development for the study of dialogical self theory. Although, they do not, for example, refer to Mead's ideas about the role of international relations, internationalism and politics, which are similar to their views. Actually, Mead's internationalism or cosmopolitan ideas can be seen as an attempt to analyze the globalization development and his concept 'the generalized other,' which refers to individual's relation to society. Perhaps it could be said that the global community around us is, for us, the modern version of 'the generalized other,' which would also be in harmony with Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's views.

There is no room here to analyze all the details of argumentation in Dialogical Self Theory. What is essential for the analysis is that the writers show the meaning of positioning and counter-positioning as a fruitful starting point for further analysis considering the questions typical to globalizing society. An interesting dimension in dialogicality is that we also have a dialogical relationship to ourselves, not only to other people around us. Especially this side of dialogicality makes it possible to construct a dialogical self theory. According to Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, such phenomena (e.g., self-conflict, self-criticism and self-agreement) means that there is a "basic similarity between the relationships among people and the relationship between different parts of the self" (p. 127). They also refer to William James' psychological self theory as a starting point for further analysis on the questions connected to the dialogical processes inside the human mind. Positioning and counter-positioning mean that we are able to change our views, take distance to some questions, form coalitions with other persons and create new solutions in a dilemmatic situation, where two positions are in conflict. The analysis ends with a list of main features of 'good dialogue,' which underline some fundamental principles of good communication as the recognition of social power and the role of misunderstandings.

The main goal of the study is to show the conceptual potential of the dialogical self theory for the understanding of psychological, organizational and societal processes connected to globalization. The developmental dimension of dialogical self theory is an important part of the analysis in order to see the developmental role of dialogicality, while the last two chapters of the book deal with emotions and the practical implication of dialogical self theory. The developmental perspective makes

sense of the developmental roots of dialogicality in an individual's life. The analysis starts from the early years of an infant's development and continues to the different phases of the socialization process. As a result, a multi-level model for the development of the self is constructed. According to this model, important life events and subjective responses determine the development of the self. Emotions have a special role in the development because they have a double position in our action. Emotions can namely change self and self also has the potential to change the emotions we may have. The writers present a detailed analysis of the meaning of emotions in social life: a distinction between primary and secondary emotions, an analysis on emotional authenticity and a phase model for changing emotions, which is based on dialogical movements. Perhaps the most interesting part of the study is the analysis of love as an extension of self. According to dialogical self theory, love differs from other emotions because it extends our self to other persons.

Why do we need an integrated view of dialogical self? The point comes clear when considering the recent development in psychology and sociology. Because of globalization, there is a need to understand the dynamics of social, political and historical processes. In relation to previous books on the same subject, such as Kenneth Gergen's (1991, 1999) *The Saturated Self* or *An Invitation to Social Construction*, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's study contains some essential view points, which deepen our understanding of globalization and its psychological effects. However, there are some weaknesses in Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's study concerning the approach. Firstly, their approach to positioning is very optimistic. Although, the concept of habitus, as developed by Bourdieu, refers, for example, to the point that our action is based on dispositions, which we have internalized in our community and which are based on power structures. It also means that we have a very limited capacity to understand our actions or change our routines, and as the pragmatic social scientists have stated, our habits do not alter quickly. Secondly, while analyzing globalization, Hermans and Hermans-Konopka refer to the cognitive organization of the human mind only. Perhaps we are mentally more flexible today than some decades ago, but the globalization development can be seen as a multi-sided process based on national and economic interests. Critically speaking, positioning, as a feature of the human mind, does not provide a good analytical tool to understand these processes.

This book does not directly belong to any particular field of research. As I said before, the role of analysis is to connect different large-scale societal processes typical to globalization to psychological and social psychological studies on dialogical relationships. The book provides a highly original contribution to the understanding of these societal and psychological processes. Although, it is quite difficult to say how we should continue the analysis sociologically about different questions typical to the global world. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka's study is written with excellent style and the analysis proceeds logically from one question into the next. This conceptual clarity helps the reader to follow the main ideas of the book. The writers define clearly the basic concepts of dialogical self theory, even though the book contains a lot of information about various themes connected to dialogicality. However, the book is not just an eclectic compilation of views or examples, but an attempt to analyze the current societal situation from a new meta-theoretical perspective. In this sense, there is need to make more empirical analyses based on dialogical self theory and show the usefulness of this new approach in a more concrete way. However, first we

must know the fundamentals of dialogical self theory. Thanks to this new book we now have an understanding of these principles at hand.

## References

Gergen, Kenneth J. 1991. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of identity in modern life*. New York: Basic Books.

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