

Should the classical notion of self be preserved?

In the self-no-self debate there is a new way to be a realist about the self. Instead of asserting the existence of a self as classically conceived – of the sort that no-self advocates invariably deny – the new approach advocates proposing another definition of self and then asserting the existence of this newly-defined self. So for instance 'the self' might be recast as the mere having of a first-person perspective (Zahavi), or as the neurological pattern that helps preserve the organism's boundary (Ghin). Such proposals are sometimes coupled with an injunction to abandon or marginalise the 'outmoded' classical notion of self (viz., unified, bounded, persisting subject that is an owner/thinker/agent). The idea is that if the classically depicted self-entity does not exist, then why hold onto that conception? In this paper, I defend the semantic primacy of the classical conception of self. The subject is approached from within the framework of a broader inquiry: when is radical revision of a term appropriate?