

Reflection and Higher immediacy

Utech seminar part 2



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Recap



- We've seen that for Kierkegaard:
 - Immediacy is always-already mediated in consciousness
 - Consciousness is interestedness
 - Consciousness, will, and selfhood are co-constitutive and scalar
 - Kierkegaard's tripartite structure of consciousness and selfhood rules out the self as a discrete 'ego-pole' - there's no homuncularism in Kierkegaard!

Self and reflection



- “The self *is* reflection, ” (SUD 31/SKS 11, 147, emphasis added)
- The ‘inner being’ owes its existence to ‘concern’ by which it differentiates itself from its environment
- *Either/Or*: only by distinguishing itself from its immediacy, becoming a ‘naked’ self, and then immediately re-concretising itself does the self become a *self*.
- *The Sickness Unto Death*: selfhood is constituted by a process of self-re-

Against rElection

- Yet Kierkegaard is also notoriously wary of reflection.
- Even aesthetes can be highly reflective (e.g. Johannes the Seducer), though not necessarily in the right way.
- The absent-minded (professors, Soldin etc) reflectively abstract themselves out of existence



Against rElection

- *Two Ages*: the age is an ‘essentially reflecting’ age
- Kierkegaard acknowledges even there that reflection is necessary for ethical action, but that it also enervates and makes action less likely.
- (Compare SUD: “We will consider it tomorrow” (SUD 94/SKS 11, 206) as a key avenue of moral evasion - implies reflection is *used* evasively)



Against rElection

• “Reflection has the notable quality of being infinite. But being infinite must in any case mean that it cannot stop of its own accord, because in stopping itself it indeed uses itself and can be stopped only in the same way as sickness is cured if it is allowed to prescribe the remedy, that is, the sickness is promoted.” (CUP 1:112/SKS 7, 109)



Against rElection

• “I am charging the individual in question with not willing to stop the infinity of reflection. Am I requiring something of him, then? But on the other hand, in a genuinely speculative way, I assume that reflection stops of its own accord. Why, then, do I require something of him? And what do I require of him? I require a resolution. And in that I am right, for only in that way can reflection be stopped.” (CUP 1: 113/SKS 7, 109-10)



Self and reflection

- So we have a problem:
 - Reflection is **necessary** for self-constitution: only via reflection can we separate ourselves from our environment and understand ourselves as distinct beings.
 - Consciousness is the actuality of reflection - hence there can be no consciousness without it



Self and reflection

- But:

- If consciousness and self-constitution consists in thinking ‘I-thoughts’ then we are only intermittently conscious or selves (call this our *ontological problem*)
- Reflection is structurally an expression of our emplaced existence but it can also drag us *away from* that emplacement into abstraction
- Moreover, we would be thinking about ourselves at all times, which suggests other-directed ethical action would be impaired (call this our *ethical problem*)
- Reflection cannot be stopped except by act of will, so reflection cannot instigate action - instead it must be stopped for the sake of acting (call this our *agential problem*)



Subjective Reflection?

- Climacus on objective vs subjective reflection:

“The way of objective reflection turns the subjective individual into something accidental and thereby turns existence into an indifferent, vanishing something. The way to the objective truth goes away from the subject, and while the subject and subjectivity become indifferent, the truth also becomes indifferent, and that is precisely its objective validity, because the interest, just like the decision, is subjectivity.” (CUP 1:193/SKS 7, 177)

Subjective Reflection?

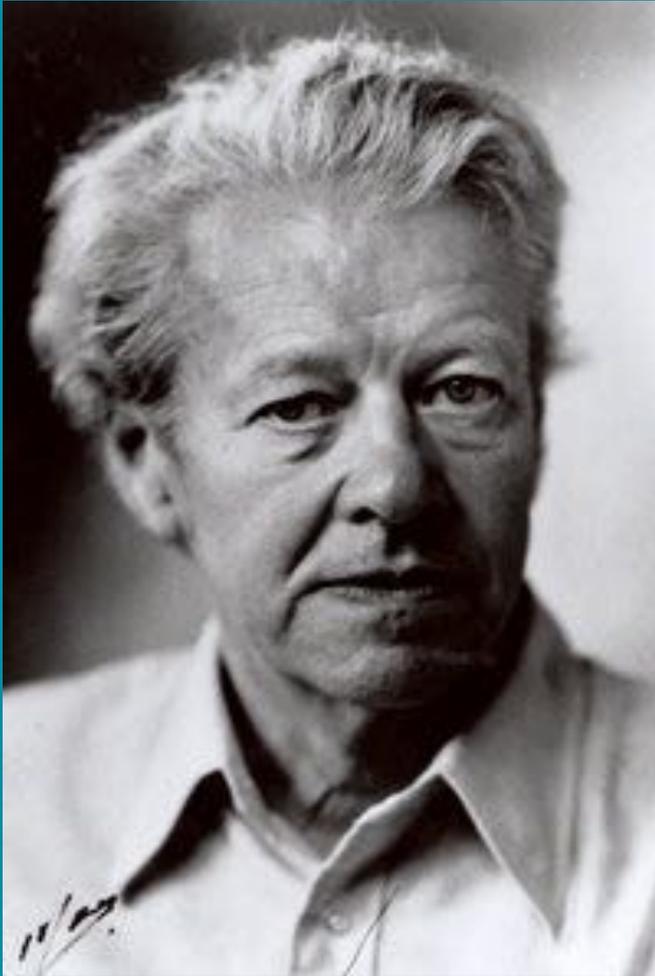
- Climacus on objective vs subjective reflection:
 - “Subjective reflection turns inward toward subjectivity and in this inward deepening will be of the truth, and in such a way that, just as in the preceding, when objectivity was advanced, subjectivity vanished, here subjectivity itself becomes the final factor and objectivity the vanishing. *Here it is not forgotten, even for a single moment, that the subject is existing*” (CUP 1: 196, my emphasis/SKS 7, 180)
 - What does ‘not forgetting for a single moment’ involve?



Subjective Reflection

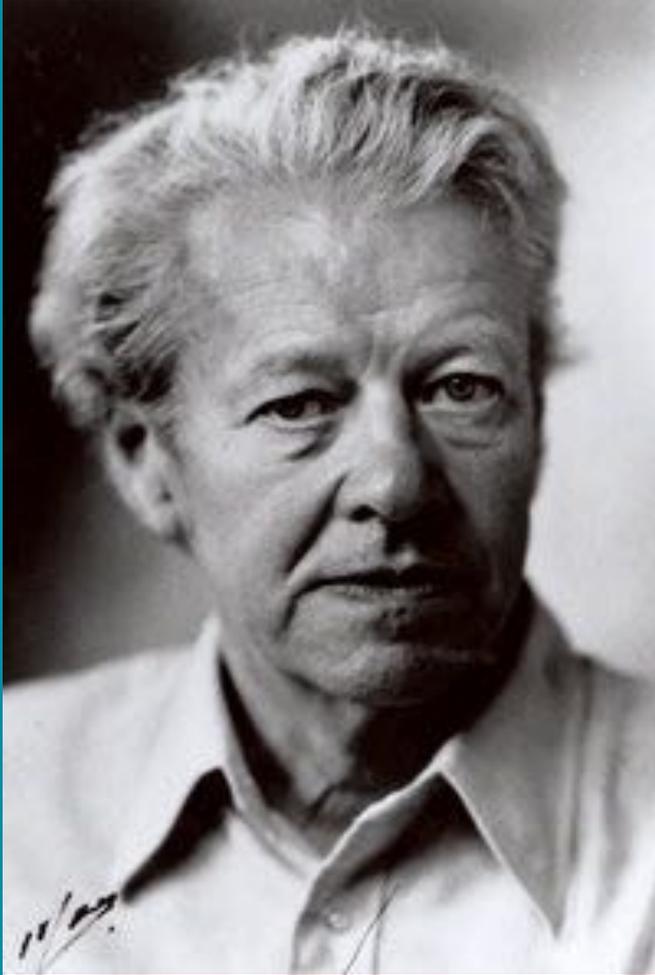
• *“When the question about truth is asked objectively, truth is reflected upon objectively as an object to which the knower relates [himself]. What is reflected upon is not the relation but that what he relates [himself] to is the truth, the true. If only that to which he relates [himself] is the true, then the subject is in the truth. When the question about truth is asked subjectively, the individual’s relationship is reflected upon subjectively. If only the how of this relation is in truth, the individual is in truth, even if he in this way were to relate [himself] to untruth.” (CUP 1: 199/SKS 7, 1*

Knud Ejler Løgstrup



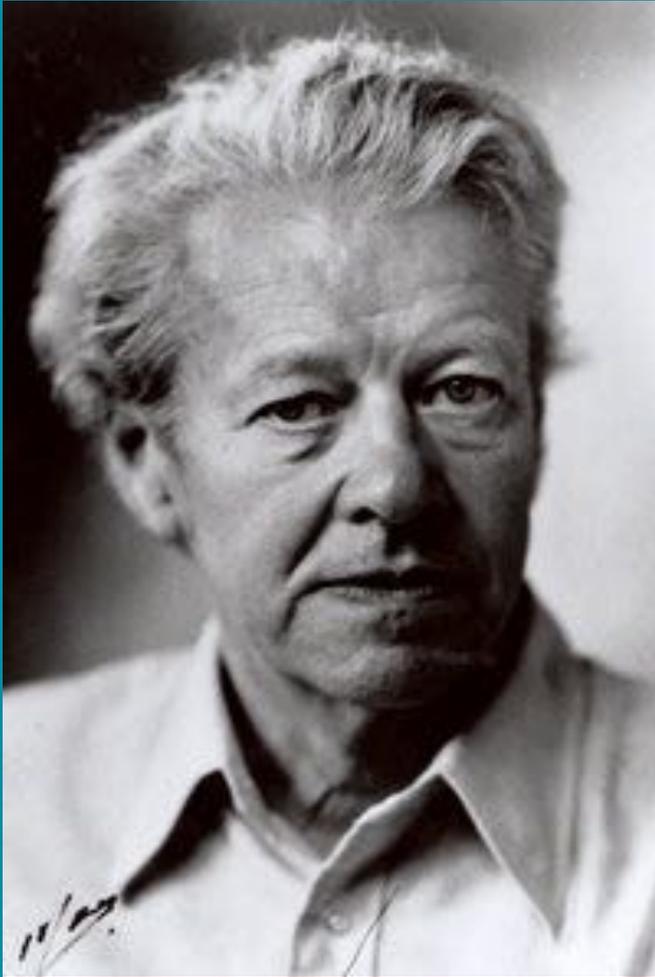
- Critique of Kierkegaard as too self-absorbed, too reflective.
- Løgstrup's charge seems strange: doesn't *Postscript* condemn reflection as abstraction out of existence?
- Yes, says Løgstrup, but for Kierkegaard, "The task is and remains to think that existence which thinking consists in abstracting from" (Løgstrup 1995: 257)

Knud Ejler Løgstrup



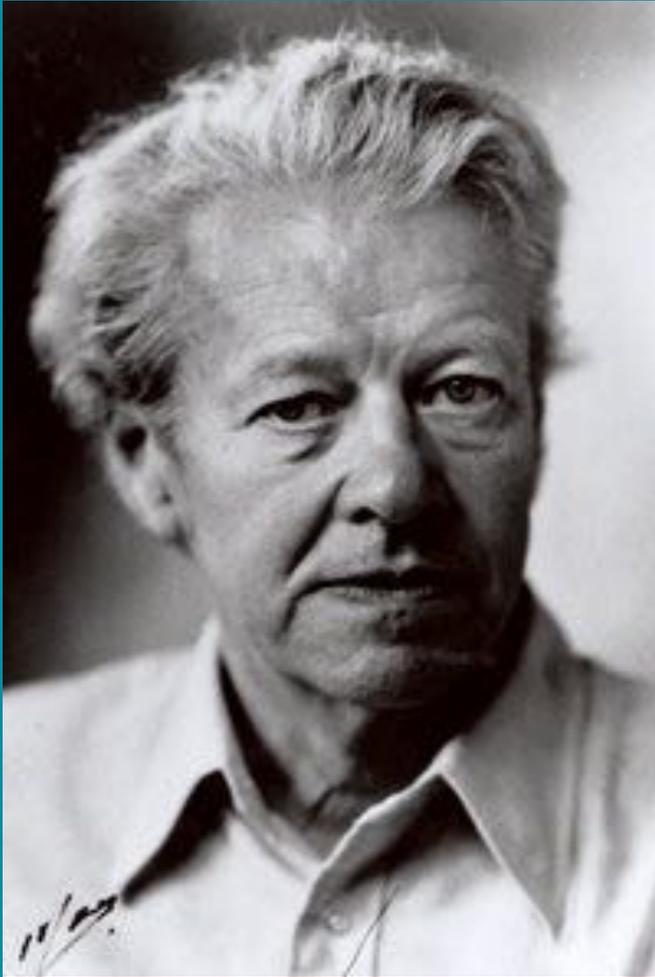
- Both see existence as structured by a *demand*
- But for Kierkegaard that demand points beyond the world: die to the world, renounce the finite (including the ethical)
- For Løgstrup, the demand is to act for others whose life (welfare) is ‘in our hands.’

Knud Ejler Løgstrup



• “Kierkegaard never spared the sovereign expressions of life so much as a thought. And that is no accident. He is forced to leave them out of account in order to preserve the role of self-reflection. For to say that the expressions of life are sovereign is to say that in them, the human person is - ipso facto - himself. He no longer has to reflect upon becoming an independent person, nor has he to reflect upon the task of becoming his true self; he only has to realise himself in the sovereign expression of life, and it is that expression of life - rather than reflection - that takes care of the person’s selfhood.” (Løgstrup 2007: 54)

Knud Ejler Løgstrup



In accession to the sovereign expressions of life, one “no longer has to reflect about becoming his own person, nor has he to concern himself about becoming his true self; he has only to realize himself in the sovereign expression of life, and it is that expression of life—rather than reflection—that secures for a person his being himself.” (Løgstrup 2005, 54)

Two poles

Reflection vs Spontaneity

- Consciousness is impersonal; the ego only arises reflectively
- Action is only *ethical* when it is reflective (cf. Kant)
- Action is only *personal* when it is reflective

- Consciousness is personal, suffused with *mine-ness*
- Action can be most ethical when it is non-reflective (Løgstrup)

Two answers

Temporality and Non-Theticality

- Temporality of selfhood complicates how we talk about duration in a way that obviates the ontological problem

- Non-theticality solves both the ontological *and* the ethical and agential problems



The Temporal Answer

Must we always be thinking I-thoughts?

- Temporality of despair in *The Sickness Unto Death*: despair = loss of self, yet despair reveals someone *was always* in despair
- ‘Not to be in despair must signify the destroyed possibility of being able to be in despair; if a person is truly not to be in despair, he must at every moment destroy the possibility ’ (SUD, 15/SKS 11, 131).



The Temporal Answer

Must we always be thinking I-thoughts?

- “Every actual moment of despair is traceable to possibility; every moment he is in despair he is bringing it upon himself. It is always the present tense; in relation to the actuality there is no pastness of the past: in every actual moment of despair the person in despair bears all the past as present in possibility.” (SUD, 17/SKS 11, 132-3)

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This only makes sense if the question is *always present tense*: am I *now* in despair? Am I *now* a self? So ‘do selves cease to exist when we’re not thinking I-thoughts?’ involves a category mistake.

For more on this, see Stokes 2015



The Temporal Answer

- The Temporal Answer implies “are we only conscious/selves when we’re thinking I-thoughts?” embeds the same sort of category mistake as the ‘ontogenetic question’ we discussed yesterday.
- From the inside*, such a question never arises: if I’m asking about my status as a self I’m already thinking I-thoughts.
- This answer makes sense of a great deal of the temporal claims in *The Sickness Unto Death* and elsewhere.
- But it won’t, on its own, answer the ethical and agential problems.

The non-Thetic Answer

- What is it to e.g. “think death into every moment”?
- Overt I- [will die] thoughts?
- “Under this impossible, morbid, and no doubt immoral scenario, whenever offered a penny for my thoughts, I could answer, ‘I am thinking about my death and immortality.’” (Westphal, 1996: 109-10)
- Death, then, has to somehow be part of every thought without every thought being *about* death on the level of propositional content.

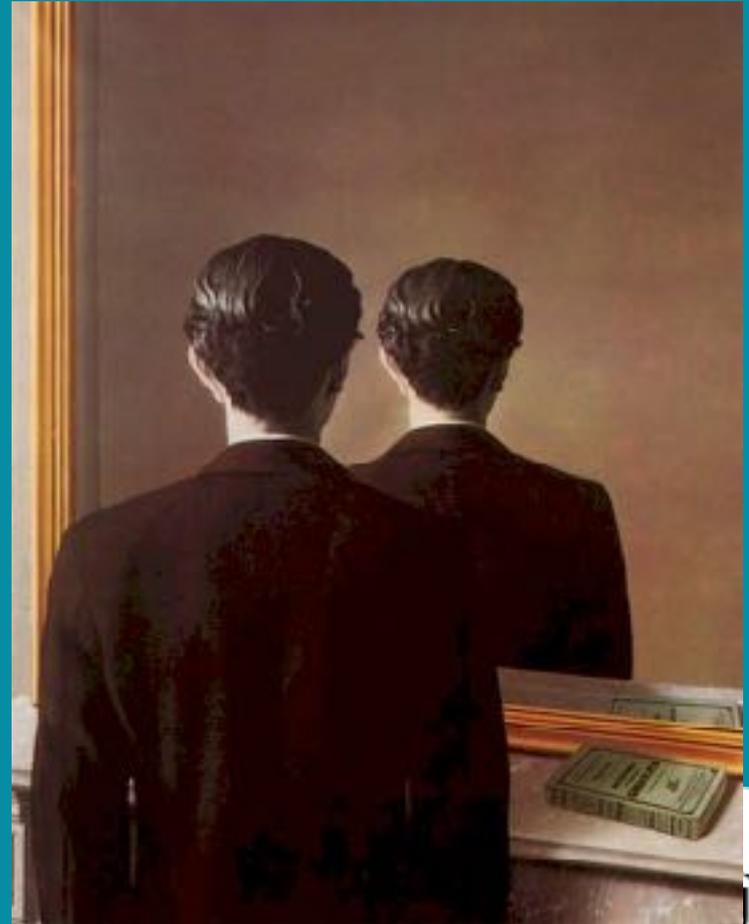


The non-Thetic Answer

“But if the task is to become subjective, then for the individual subject to think death is not at all some such thing in general but is an act, because the development of subjectivity consists precisely in this, that he, acting, works through himself in his thinking about his own existence, consequently that he actually thinks what is thought by actualizing it, consequently that he does not think for a moment: Now, you must keep watch every moment—but that he keeps watch every moment.” (CUP, 1:169/SKS 7, 156-7)

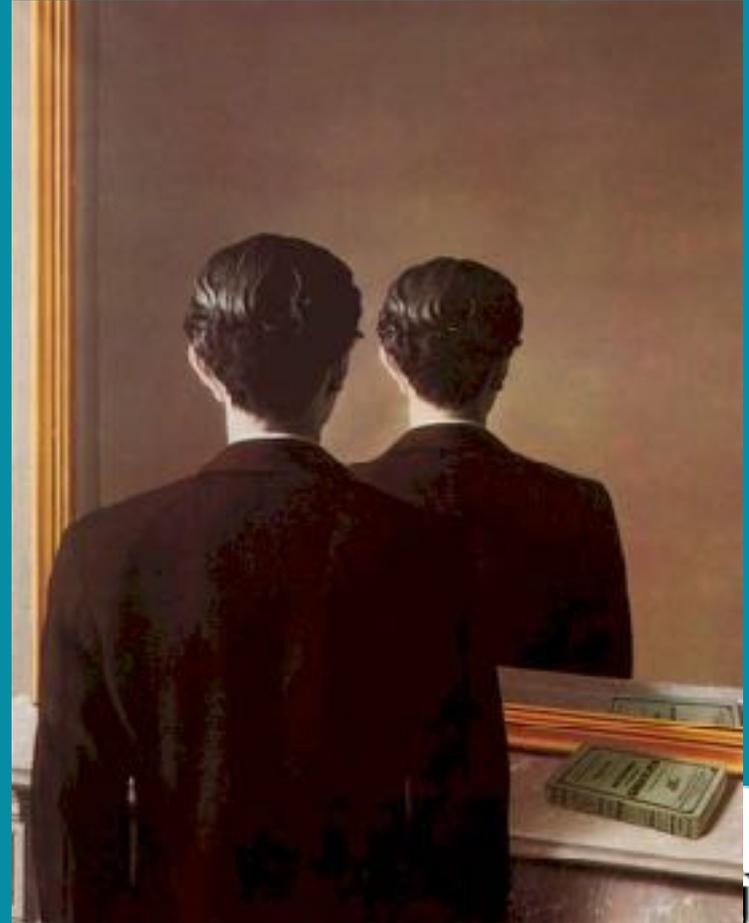
Mirror Metaphors

- *For Self-Examination:* to 'be alone with' Scripture is to see oneself in the 'Mirror of the Word' - which does not contain oneself on the propositional level
- Compare Nathan's parable (about a rich man slaughtering sheep) and David's failure to understand it - "Thou art the man"



Mirror Metaphors

- “What the prophet Nathan added to his parable, “You are the man,” the Gospel does not need to add, since it is already contained in the form of the statement and in its being a word of the Gospel’ (WL, 14/SKS 9, 22).
- “...beside every word in the holy books a disturbing notice in invisible writing confronts [the reader] that says: go and do likewise” (WL, 46/SKS 9, 53).



'The tale is told of you'

- Mirrors are a paradigm of *immediate* self-recognition.
- Temporal structure of being frustrates us: “repentance must acquire itself as an object, inasmuch as the moment of repentance becomes a deficit of action” (CA, 118/SKS 4, 419).
- In other words there is a regulative ideal of *immediate* recognition, self-recognition, and action.

On SK's use of mirror metaphors, see Stokes 2010



responsiveness



Gustav Dore, *Arrival of the Good Samaritan at the Inn*

- That's precisely what Løgstrup commends!
- The Good Samaritan does not think of his own moral status but simply helps the wounded man - but we often fail and so need 'substitute motives.'
- For SK: we only need to think 'thou art the man' or 'go and do likewise' due to this failure of spontaneity

Stopping reflection?

- What about the agential problem?
- If reflection cannot be stopped by reflection itself then *resolution* cannot be a product of reflection, but becomes a (non-rational?) interruption of reflection.

Higher immediacy

•“This is to say that most people never reach faith at all. They live a long time in immediacy, finally they advance to some reflection, and then they die. The exceptions begin the other way around; dialectical from childhood, that is, without immediacy, they begin with the dialectical, with reflection, and they go on living this way year after year (about as long as the others live in sheer immediacy) and then, at a more mature age, faith's possibility presents itself to them. For faith is immediacy after reflection.” (NB4 159; SKS 20, 363)

The INfant

One who embraces the fullness of virtue
Can be compared to a newborn babe - *Daodejing* 55

“In order to enter the kingdom of heaven a person must become a child again, but in order that his life can express that he has entered the kingdom of heaven he must become a youth a second time. To *be* a child and to *be* a youth when one is a child or a youth is easy enough, but a *second time* - the second time is what is decisive. To become a child again, to become nothing, without any selfishness, to become a youth again (although one has become sagacious, sagacious from experience, worldly-wise), to disdain acting sagaciously, to *will to be* the youth, to *will* to preserve youth’s enthusiasm, rescued in all its original character, to *will* to struggle to the end, more uneasy and ashamed about haggling and bargaining and, what amounts to the same thing, about acquiring earthly advantage than the modest girl is uneasy about an impropriety - yes, that is the task.” (PC, 192/SKS 12, 191)



Mystical Purgation

Imitatio and *Via Purgativa*

- Kierkegaard's debt to mystical writers e.g. Eckhart, Tauler (Sajda 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Becker 2009)
- The self must become *nothing* before it can mirror God
- Purgation of ego and selfishness before one can reflect divine goodness



Becoming Nothing

“Finally it seems to him that he is reduced to nothing at all. Now the moment has come. Whom should the struggler desire to resemble other than God? But if he himself is something or wants to be something, this something is sufficient to hinder the resemblance. Only when he himself becomes nothing, only then can God illuminate him so that he resembles God. However great he is, he cannot manifest God’s likeness; God can imprint himself in him only when he himself has become nothing. When the ocean is exerting all its power, that is precisely the time when it cannot reflect the image of heaven, and even the slightest motion blurs the image; but when it becomes still and deep, then the image of heaven sinks into its nothingness.” (EUD, 399/SKS 5, 380)



For a fuller discussion of the last five slides, and of SK and Løgstrup, see Stokes 2016.

conclusion

Self-reflexivity is both:

- Proper to consciousness *and*
- A regulative ideal of consciousness
- Both enabled *and* frustrated by overt reflection
- Both a product of reflection *and* teleologically intended to go beyond reflection.



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