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# Structural Realist Theory of the Self

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**Abstract:** My goal is to investigate if a structuralist theory of the self can be defended successfully. Some proponents of structural realism have pushed towards developing theories in other domains beyond fundamental physics: chemistry, biology, economics, and cognitive science. The question is posed if a version of (ontic) structural realism could be further developed within the domain of consciousness. In particular, could the subject of experience (the self) be explained by appealing to structures?

There are no objects in ontic structural realism or, if there are any carrier entities, they are grounded in the structure, and individuality is contextual rather than intrinsic. The “no object” problem of ontic structural realism seems particularly pressing if the theory is to be applied to the case of the self (the subject of experiences).

I consider a prime example of a structuralist theory of the self (Beni 2019) that aspires to provide a viable alternative to classical substantivalism. It amends the shortcomings of Metzinger’s (2003) “self-model” eliminativism and pluralism of Gallagher’s (2013) pattern theory. This theory is motivated by an analogous problem as structural realism - the underdetermination of the metaphysics - in this case of the self by various scientific theories of cognitive neuroscience. The structural realist theory of the self emphasizes the role of cortical midline structures of the brain in the processing of pieces of self-related and self-specific information. It is the information processing in the brain’s cortical midline structures that would be the realizer of the basic structure of the self. In my talk, I will pose several problems for an ontic structural realist theory of the self.

This particular theory purports to be a non-eliminativist version of ontic structural realism that retains a thin notion of individual objects, “weakly discernible individual selves” and “weakly discernible nonstructural aspects of the self”. Beni claims that such features like the sense of agency, sense of ownership and mineness are identified in virtue of their location in the structure of selfhood. I argue for this both from within the theory itself (to show it’s empirical inadequacy) and from a general perspective of ontic structural realism itself. I give arguments that if the structural realist theory of the self is a moderate version of ontic structural realism it is in danger of collapse into eliminativist structural realism since the inflation of ontological priority of structure/relations precludes any notion of intrinsic nature of the relata. In the end, I will explain that a structural realist theory is only viable if one adopts a deflationary view of the self/subject.

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### **Structural Realist Theory of the Self**

**Abstract:** My goal is to investigate if a structuralist theory of the self can be defended successfully. I consider a theory of the self (Beni 2019) that aspires to provide a viable alternative to substantivalism. If this theory is a moderate version of ontic structural realism it will collapse into eliminativist version since the inflation of ontological priority of structure precludes any notion of intrinsic nature of the relata. A structural realist theory is only viable if one adopts a deflationary view of the self.