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Affectivity in its Relation to Personal Identity

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Abstract. When looking into the very constituent of the personal identity one of possible candidates is his affectivity. At first glance, it could be a surprising suggestion given that emotions, feelings and affects are often considered as fleeting phenomena. Yet, if we proceed by reduction of components which are repeatable or imitable, affectivity appears to be an element which could hardly be quoted or borrowed. In other words, a quoted or remembered thought is still a thought, while a quoted or remembered feeling is no longer a feeling. Two persons can be like, even indistinguishable in their way of thinking but it seems improbable they are so in their way of feeling. If, then, identity is understood as what defines the person in her distinctness, affectivity could be accepted as a core of such distinctness, unrepeatability and uniqueness.

Keywords: personal identity, epistemic, ontic, diachronic, synchronic, affectivity.

1.

In a debate on personal identity two conflicting perspectives are suggested: either bodily identity or memory identity is adopted as a criterion.

1.1.

Bodily criterion is rejected by some because body changes throughout the life of an individual. But, as observed by others, this is also the case of memory. Moreover, memories can be inadequate. This is why one needs to distinguish a veridical memory from a non-veridical one. For instance, e.g. “[i]n order for a specific memory to constitute personal identity, then, that memory is required to be veridical” (Slors 2001, 188). That leads to circularity because

[e]stablishing whether or not a memory is veridical means, however, establishing whether or not the person who remembers really witnessed the remembered event. And that just means establishing whether the witness and the rememberer are identical. Thus, personal identity seems to be presupposed by veridical memory so that, on pain of vicious circularity, the latter cannot be a criterion for the former. (Slors 2001, 188)

That what is remembered veridically must have been experienced. If it is not, it is not a veridical memory but a fantasy or an illusion. This is why to claim that “[n]othing that I remember, I can possibly remember it unless I have experienced it” (Malvestiti [no date], 30) is too confident in memory which may deform and ordinarily deforms the past. There are cases in which it deforms it in such a way that it is not easy to know whether remembering is veridical or is a fantasy.

In what follows I want to suggest that affective experience - feeling for short - can do better because there is no such thing as a non-veridical feeling. Yet, I insist on distinguishing a memory of feeling and a feeling, a distinction that is as huge as between a second-order and a first-order act. Having an experience is different to having had an experience which may or may not be remembered. Accordingly the second-order experience is veridical in what concerns its occurring but not necessarily in what concerns its content, in this case a first-order experience. For instance, I can be jealous while nothing jealousy-producing has happened. In that sense my jealousy would be inaccurate. Nevertheless my instance of jealousy - regardless of its being accurate or inaccurate - if it occurs actually, is veridical. And the same, *mutatis mutandis*, works for remembering: an instance of remembering - be it veridical or non-veridical - my past experience is itself veridical. Since the suggested criterion of identity is *what is* remembered and not *the act* of remembering, I want to stress the distinction in this respect between memory referring either the content or the act and feeling as an experience in which the content and the act are not separable, more particularly, take into consideration the veridicality of feeling as a criterion for personal identity.

As said, any feeling - as much accurate as inaccurate - is veridical. But is that really the case? Is indeed feeling always authentic? And if so what about Plato's expression “false pleasures”? I think a note of caution is needed. As the context shows, what Plato means are unjustified pleasures. If so they are not properly speaking false or inauthentic. In Plato “false” refers to nothing more and nothing less than inaccuracy or incorrectness of feeling as parallel to inaccuracy or incorrectness belief, that is to a belief representing a thing differently than it is. But this feature of accuracy or incorrectness of feeling has nothing to do with its being authentic. Quite the opposite, Plato makes the following point: “opinion is both true [ψευδής] and false [ἀληθής] and pleasure only true [ἀληθές], though the holding of opinion and the feeling of pleasure are equally real [ὄντως]”. This is to say that being false (or true) in the case of opinion is a different parameter than its occurring really nevertheless. And to sum it up:

I mean that he who feels pleasure at all in any way or manner always really feels pleasure [χαίρειν ὄντως αἰεὶ], but it is sometimes not based upon realities, whether present or past, and often, perhaps most frequently, upon things which will never even be realities in the future [μὴ μέντοι ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐσιμηδ' ἐπὶ τοῖς γεγονόσιν ἐνίωτε, πολλακίς δὲ καὶ ἴσως πλειστάκις

ἐπὶ τοῖς μηδὲ μέλλουσί ποτε γενήσεσθαι]. [...] And the same may be said of fear and anger and all that sort of thing—that they are all sometimes false? (*Philebus* 40d–e, transl. H. N. Fowler).

Feelings (please note I use *feeling* not in the sense of *sensation* but in the sense of *experiences of emotions*, close to German *Gefühl*), here pleasure, fear and anger, can be either true or false but this is independent of their occurring as such, this is as either true or false. Regardless of how one feels, he feels it really or, to tell it otherwise, there is such a thing as a feeling that occurs. Therefore the issue of authentic feelings should not be confounded with accuracy or rightfulness, or still, with justification of feelings.

We have however other circumstances when we label feelings as inauthentic. There is a peculiar example of simulation of actors. Does an actor experience actually a feeling he plays, this is a feeling he wants us to believe he experiences? Is he one with it or does he remain distinct and only externally give an impression of being *as though* feeling it?

Another case of what is called inauthentic feelings concerns feelings that have been introjected. They are feelings of another person interiorised for several reason, say feelings of a mother, a violent one for instance, interiorised in her child. They can build up a major part of child's personality. In an extreme case a child's own psyche may be inhibited and develop only as a copy of his parent: the child reacts, feels and thinks both for modality and content as his parent does. Examples of such, some will say pathological identification with another self, affectivity included, are Stockholm syndrome, Hegel's master – slave dialectic, etc. Without going into details suffice it to say that the expression *inauthentic feeling/s* refers to things what precisely are *not* feelings, either because they have been mistakenly taken for such or because they imitate - often in a very subtle way - feelings without being themselves feelings. If so, speaking about authentic feeling is pleonastic.

If therefore feeling is always veridical - and please keep in mind I don't refer to its accuracy - let me test it as a candidate for a criterion of personal identity.

1.2.

One may wonder to what degree this thesis is new. As far as I know, affectivity has not been yet considered a candidate for a criterion for personal affectivity. Occasionally it has been referred in analysis of identity criterion, but indirectly. What I mean is that when philosophers talk about experience and they do not specify what they mean by it, one cannot be sure whether affectivity is or is not included in what they talk about. Here you are a couple of examples as few and as representative as I am able to provide.

B. Williams in his paper "Personal Identity and Individuation" refers (after M. Prince) - in the context of Miss Beauchamps' case - to moods and this only in the last paragraph of the paper (see Williams 1957, 247 ff.). M. Slors mentions several times "[...] beliefs and thoughts [...] Thoughts, desires, and beliefs [...] thoughts, beliefs, and desires [...]" (Slors 2001, 206) etc., but never feelings, emotions or affectivity. In a recent collection of papers on personal identity (see Gasser & Stefan, 2012) M. Nida-Rümelin speaks about being of a person as consisting in "living that person's life [...] experienc[ing] the world from that person's perspective [...] hav[ing] that person's body, and [...] enjoy[ing] that person's pleasures" (Nida-Rümelin 2012, 168), and about being the very subject of experiencing, i.e. that subject that exists rather than non-exists, especially because, for that particular subject, it is fundamentally different whether he exists or not. Finally, she insists that "[t]he difference lies in nothing but *who* is experiencing that life" (Nida-Rümelin 2012, 173)¹. The most close to my view is Malvestiti who uses *feel* and *feeling* and this in the following ways:

Actually, she being the person whose identity is in question, she does have privileged access to her inner self and if she feels she is still the same person, she is more right in saying that that we are in negating it. [...] We do not need to make a case to justify our identity, for it is already justified by the way we feel. (Malvestiti [no date], 7 & 16)

But, again, I wonder if I may understand *feel* and *feeling*, as he uses these words, as including affective dimension or only amounting to awareness. Let it be then concluded that - provided that the category of experience may charitably comprehend affectivity/feeling - the authors quoted above consider affectivity/feeling as contributing to personal identity but they do so implicitly and with no special focus on affectivity/feeling.

2.

That affectivity constitutes personal identity is what remains to be shown. But as soon as such option has been taken into account, a serious trouble emerges. As a matter of fact, affectivity is often considered as fleeting or even as an example of fleetingness par excellence. If so suggesting that affectivity be a criterion of affectivity is absurd. Hume used this feature not only for ruling out affectivity as a possible *constituent* of the personal identity, but for ruling out any idea of identity throughout. For, he said, "there is no impression constant and invariable" (Hume 1978, 251), and, more patently:

It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions [which include: pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations], or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently there is no such idea. (Hume 1978, 252)

For Hume, if we speak about such thing as identity this is because we make replace resemblance with identity (see Hume 1978, 254). According to him the personal identity “is only a fictitious one” (Hume 1978, 259).

Yet, two remarks are to be made here. First, if impressions are not constant and invariable at all, I mean if they do not last even a slightest fraction of the second, however minuscule may it be, and are subject to Heraclitean rule of everything moving at all timesⁱⁱ, if they are as punctual as not to form any state at all, then there would be no impressions either, unless an impression has no duration at all. If so they are in this respect similar to points in geometry which have no size and to Zeno’s arrow which does not move at all. Consequently, if we destroy impressions as state, however short, because they are all extremely variable at every single moment, they would be hardly existing and, in consequence, imperceptible. It seems to me this is not what Hume wants to claim. If there is any resemblance or comparison of two or more resembling impressions there must be a subject which lasts in order to compare them and also more or less constant images of these impressions if they be compared. This is why I think that he rather speaks about grief and joy, which are very short, this is with a very short duration, “succeed[ing] each other” (Hume 1978, 252)ⁱⁱⁱ. If there is a succession, there must be some continuity of a succeeding impressions which, in this sense, are states, though very short-lasting and succession itself is a state or a series of states as well. There must be also a continuity of succession or Hume cannot end his sentence.

The second point is that once we have accepted however–shortly–lasting sensations, we are in a position to accept shorter (extremely short) and longer, yet still short, sensations, pains, pleasures, grief and joy and so on. And this is where the crux lies. For, if the difference between extremely short and a bit longer impressions is of difference of quantity, all impressions are similar in essence. But everyday experience shows that while some sensations are short and it is hard to prolong them because they wane quickly, other sensations are longer and are it is hard to shorten them. Examples may include a perfum’s scent of a passer-by that is hardly prolongable even if it is very sharp versus a sadness resulting from a bad news I can’t manage to ignore. If the difference in their duration is not accidental, we face two qualitatively different sensations. And if this is correct, we should distinguish two different kinds of affective phenomena. They are different and should be not confused because they do not turn ones into others, a perfum’s scent disappears as soon as the passer-by goes away, my sadness lasts for some time after I have learnt the news and it is hard to reduce it to the only moment of being informed about it. I would suggest that more than two levels of affective experiences are to be distinguished - and in fact I have been making such distinction in several papers (see Zaborowski 2016), most often drawing on a model of affectivity developed by Max Scheler by means of his “four well-delineated levels of feeling, essentially connected” to the “phenomenal character of the ‘depth’ of feeling” (Scheler 1973, 332) - but let me limit myself now to a weaker claim assuming that they are only two.

This step of pointing to difference in a duration of affective experiences is important in order to move from homogeneity to heterogeneity of affectivity. Here, the homogeneity/heterogeneity distinction is a corollary of different duration of affective phenomena which, in turn, will be necessary to link affectivity with identity, because I don’t want to claim that any affective experience, let alone a short-lasting one, may be a criterion of personal identity. Again I give an example. At the beginning of his literary project Marcel Proust had titled his work “Intermittencies of the heart” (this title had been kept for the title of one of chapters in “Sodom and Gomorrah”). This is what his work is often meant to be: to provide us with images and analyses of irregularities of impressions, passions, emotions or however you like to call affective phenomena or events. Yet, Proust’s ambition and aim was to establish or reconstruct general psychological laws and, especially, laws pertaining to affectivity. Indeed, he set forward several laws of affectivity. On other hand, however, there is another and more important element for my argument. This is the fact that Proust insisted also on another kind of affective phenomena, the one of durable feelings and, thereby, crucial to the formation of a personality, in this case, Proust’s own personality, namely his vocation of becoming a writer, to take it in an objective way. Proust’s desire for becoming a writer lasted for several years and as such could scarcely be put on the same level as brief impressions Proust analyzed on many pages of his work.

To sum up, short impressions are related to personal identity in this-moment perspective and may at the best pertain to synchronic identity, this is to make a person what she is at this very moment. Since they last a short time they *constitute* the diachronic identity either not at all or in an ephemeral way only. Quite different are long-lasting experiences. They refer not only to synchronic identity of a person but also to her diachronic identity, that is to making a person the same at two different moments of her existence. The distance covered is warranted by a duration of affective experiences: the longer experiences the longer identity.

3.

Now, I want to strengthen my thesis in a different way. Let us look at a person as active unity, her activity being described *grosso modo* by terms of thinking and feeling^{iv} or, as I understand thinking and feeling, by terms of a deliberated and a spontaneous activity. I look for arriving at the core of the person, in other terms, of what is supposed to be the personal identity. To this end I suggest proceeding by a simple reduction. Thus the personal identity can be approached in two ways:

1. As such, that is by referring to constituents that a person cannot be got rid of.
2. In opposition to other entities, other persons, by grasping what forms the core of her distinctness, uniqueness, or unrepeatability.

To grasp elements by which she is distinguishable from other persons is to refer to constituents that account for what

makes her distinct from others. And to know that a person is distinct from other person/s is an epistemic issue. On the other hand to grasp elements by which she is she is about person as such and her core she may not be got rid of. The core of person is approached independently of similarities and differences to other person/s. This is so, because distinctness, unrepeatability and uniqueness are needed for a person to be distinguished but they are not needed for being what/who she is.

3.1.

If I start removing a person's deliberated acts I realize that of deliberations many - when isolated from the person whom I get rid of them - are common because they may be found in other persons. But if I do the same with her spontaneous acts, this is different. They are unique because they have no copies in other persons.

One reason of this difference may lie in the origin of thoughts and feelings. Thoughts can originate from several sources. My own thinking is only *one way* to acquire its content because I may also get it by being told, informed, learnt etc. As for feeling/s their content can not be told, communicated or learnt. The *only way* to acquire the content of feeling/s is through feeling. If I am told about anyone else's feeling what I am told about is a proposition about that person's feeling. Certainly, I may have a specific feeling related to what I am told but this is another, not only numerically, experience, clearly distinct from the feeling of the person whose feeling provokes my feeling just as anyone else's thought/s may provoke another - distinct and different - thought/s in me. In the case of thought/s I may also simply repeat or quote someone's thought/s, while I can not repeat nor quote someone else's feeling/s. This is why it seems that in the case of thoughts their content can be provided either by myself or by others, while in the case of feeling their content can be provided only by myself.

Here I must pause for a moment. My now reaction to the idea of thought/s originating from one's own thinking is that this is so only in the case of extraordinary thoughts, rare discoveries, uncommon ideas, exceptional theories, etc. This is because, say, Einstein's theory in the moment preceding its disclosure was the exclusive thought of Einstein. However, it may be objected that today there are more than one physicist able to present the theory of relativity. If so, what was originally Einstein's exclusive thought has become, so to speak, a common property and is no more a mark of distinction. If so I don't see what example of thought may be provided as a mark of distinction. It should be a thought which is impossible to replicate which seems implausible.

A second reason why thoughts are removable from their thinking subject/s while feelings are not separable from their feeling subject/s stems from constraints we put on thoughts: we expect them to be interpersonal so that they be impersonal in the sense that they be independent from their subject (i.e. author). This is because thoughts are meant to pertain to objects and in order to satisfy this the best they must be *object-ive*, that is *subjectless*. If so, thoughts not only are not a mark of distinctiveness but they *dis-individuate* in so far as they have to be anonymisable. They need be no more recognizable as being of this or that person. The corollary is that, since they may be quoted or borrowed, or, in a worse case, stolen by another person, a copyright is needed. By contrast, in the case of affective experiences there is neither such requirement nor risk. How feelings could be quoted^v, borrowed, or stolen? Because they cannot no copyright for them is demanded. Because feelings are about feeling's subject's relation to the world, this relation informing about an individual relation of an individual to the world, they are *subject-ive* (but not *objectless*).

The third reason that feelings have no copies in other individuals while thoughts do is that not only there are constraints put on thoughts as stated above and not on feelings but also, and more importantly, in the case of thinking the act of thinking and the content of a thought are separable, while in the case of an affective experience the act and its content are not separable. Since they are inseparable, an affective experience is unique and unrepeatably. That said, I must modify my first intuition that thoughts, say belief, guess, judgement, hypothesis, presumption, conviction, suspicion, doubt, imagining, can individuate in the sense of making known as different, while feelings, say joy, sorrow, love, courage, hope, anger, always individuate in the same sense (i.e. making known as different). This is not exact because thoughts individuate epistemically only contingently. This is:

- i) only in exceptional cases of unprecedented thoughts, genius thoughts, etc.
- ii) insofar as a thought has not been replicated by another thinking subject.

But since a replica is counterfactual, the epistemic individuation by thought is weak. For instance, think about an ordinary yet unique thought, such that it is not a borrowing or a quote, say a calculus nobody has never made before, e.g. $5729884x42827244$ of which the result I arrive at on my own. It seems that it me to the same extent as (my) most banal impression does. Yet it may be easily replicated, and this not only by humans but also but a calculator.

Let me then pass on to considering thoughts and feelings as criteria for ontic identity.

3.2.

But is what makes a person distinguishable the same as what makes her be what/who she is? On the one hand being known as distinct is an epistemic issue, but on the other hand being known as different is founded on being different. However, one may be different but in such a way that the difference is not known, because doesn't appear at all or enough. In this case two persons *are* different though they *are not known* as different. A reason may be for instance an insufficient cognitive or perceptive capacity of he who is supposed to grasp the difference.

Imagine two people who think the same and they think thoughts crucial for their identities. It is hard to see the difference between them in this respect. Let us then start removing any thought and feeling that can removed without

endangering the identity of a person. It is no more about looking for what has no replica.

What then may be removed of a person's active, her thinking and feeling without modifying her identity? It is not easy to tell. Surely there are thoughts and feelings that can be easily removed without any modification and there are others which cannot be removed. But how to determine the threshold? Einstein's original theory probably is such element and the fact that now it may be replicated in other smart minds doesn't affect its ontic constituency of Einstein's ontic identity. This is where I encounter an obstacle. I have just asked *how to determine the threshold?* Since it amounts to *how to know the threshold?* here I am back to epistemic issue.

I would like to end with an example from literature. In the "Nekyia", or "the Underworld", 11th book of the *Odyssey* you are shadows of dead persons approaching Odysseus and having a word with him. But there is one which keeps aloof, without addressing a word to Odysseus. This is Ajax who still experiences his anger at him:

Alone of them all the spirit of Aias, son of Telamon, stood apart, still full of wrath for the victory that I had won over him in the contest by the ships for the arms of Achilles [...] So I spoke, but he answered me not a word [...] (Homer, *Odyssey* 11, 544–565) (transl. A. T. Murray).

Ajax' long-lasting anger is the main feature by which Odysseus recognizes him. So we should assume that anger is an epistemic criterion here. But since Ajax is described by the poet as experiencing this anger thus: "Aias, son of peerless Telamon, wast thou then not even in death to forget thy wrath against me", and thus:

So I spoke, but he answered me not a word, but went his way to Erebus to join the other spirits of those dead and gone. Then would he nevertheless have spoken to me for all his wrath, or I to him, but the heart in my breast was fain to see spirits of those others that are dead.

we should infer, I think, that Ajax' long- or even ever-lasting wrath is an ontological criterion of his identity. For, it goes beyond the earthy existence of Ajax. Even if we take it as an artistic license, one should not misestimate its importance. To delete any doubt, the feeling of Ajax is strong and univocal. The feeling in question transcends as nothing else in this passage the border of which the meaning is to be determined by anyone unwilling to follow the so called Greek mythology. But this is an important border, regardless of whether we interpret the narrative eschatologically or psychologically or in another manner. Ajax' feeling is not only a mark that makes him recognizable to Odysseus, but it is also what builds his unrepeatable unity in a different condition. In a word, of what Ajax was, his anger is still left over despite the change of his state, be it considered eschatologically, ontologically, or simply psychologically.

4.

It appears that epistemic and ontic identity correlate. The epistemic is founded on the ontic. If there is a difference at the epistemic level, there is one at the ontic level too (unless an epistemic error of taking the identical for the different occurs). But it may be that there is a difference at the ontic level which is not grasped: two things looks identical. But since they are known as identical, we are confused: is the difference unknown or there is no difference at all? Hence although the ontic identity is stronger it may not come to be known. But if it is unknown how to know about it.

The trouble is manifest already in Hume he recognizes that the issue is complex and hard to tackle: "I find myself involv'd in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent". In fact, on the one hand Hume considers the issue as epistemic, since he says: "we have no impression of self or substance" (Appendix, p. 633), but then he switches to ontic level when he speaks about "composition" (p. 634), "the principle of connexion" (p. 635), and "feel[ing of] a connexion or a determination of the thought" (p. 635), since a subject of composing and connecting is, as it seems to me, implied.

My shortest conclusion may be limited to the following:

If we deal separately with both epistemic and ontic identities in both synchronic and diachronic aspects, there would be four criteria:

- i) criterion of epistemic and synchronic identity, i.e. of being distinguishable from another person at this very moment,
- ii) criterion of epistemic and diachronic identity, i.e. of being recognizable as still the same person,
- iii) criterion of ontic and synchronic identity, i.e. of being distinct from another person at this very moment,
- iv) criterion of ontic and diachronic identity, i.e. of being still same person over time.

At the more general level one would like to arrive at:

a criterion both synchronic and diachronic, and

a criterion epistemic and ontic,

and, in the end, at criterion being diachronic-synchronic-epistemic-and-ontic?

An important proviso is to note that there are various (kinds of) thinking and various (kinds of) feelings. Both classes are not homogeneous in the sense that their genera are distinct among them qualitatively, e.g. a belief is not a weak knowledge and a strong knowledge a belief. There is a qualitative novum^{vi} involved in knowledge. Hence, as already said above when I claimed that *only in exceptional cases of unprecedented thoughts, genius thoughts, etc.*, thoughts may individuate, so is the same with feelings. Not all of them but only some kinds of feelings are constituents of identity: visible in the case of epistemic identity, long-lasting in the case of ontic identity.

This is why it is more accurate to assume that feelings *always individuate* both in the sense of *making known as different* and in the sense of *making different=differentiating*, while thoughts *individuate* only in the sense of *making different=differentiating* without *making known as different*.

Alternatively it may be said that

- i) no thought doesn't individuate epistemically unless contingently (whether they do or do not depends on the character of thought and the context of events),
- ii) a kind of thoughts may individuate ontically,
- iii) a kind of feelings individuate epistemically - yet, only to a small degree if feelings are not transparent,
- iv) a kind of feelings individuate ontically - yet, the identity depending on feelings is a corollary of the duration of feelings it relies on.

I must acknowledge that my conclusion is more modest than what expected: although affectivity is a criterion of both epistemic and ontic as well as synchronic and diachronic identity, it individuates epistemically poorly, because its transparency is weak. If it individuates ontically this is because it cannot be copied. However, how strongly it individuates depends on the character of feelings involved: whether they are short- or long-lasting.

I have obtained a little: no solid identity or, if one wants identity to be either solid or not at all, no identity at all (vide Hume). However, a little is this: there is an identity longer than nothing and the short-one (vide Proust).

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Endnotes

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See also 176: "the nature of what it is to be an experiencing subject is revealed to us by being a subject of experience".

ii Hume speaks (252) about "perpetual flux and movement". Accordingly, it seems as there is at least *one* constant and invariable observer so that the change may be reckoned.

iii He doesn't say that impression have no duration at all but only that they don't last as long as self, for he writes (251): "If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives".

iv For the sake of simplification. Otherwise other aspects could be added.

v On interiorizing another person's affectivity see above on authenticity.

vi Nicolai Hartmann's (2012) term.

A short bio-note

Robert Zaborowski, a Professor of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Warmia & Mazury and researcher at the Polish Academy of Sciences. He has published extensively on ancient thought and philosophy of affectivity (e.g.

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