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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE. A GRADUALIST APPROACH

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Abstract: What are we, most fundamentally? Two topical answers to this question are discussed and rejected and a more evolutionary account is offered. Lynne Baker argues that we are persons: beings with a first-person perspective. Persons form a separate ontological category, with persistence conditions that are different from those of the body. Eric Olson, by contrast, claims that we are human organisms. No psychological property is definitive of what we are. Our persistence conditions are those of the human organism. In a more evolutionary approach to the notion of personhood, it is argued that we are indeed, most fundamentally, beings with a first-person perspective. But such a perspective is not definitive of personhood. It is precisely living organisms that have it, and cannot fail to have it. There is no separate ontological category of persons.

Key-words: Evolution. First person perspective. Person. Personal identity. (Self)consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I address the question where I was during a period of profound unconsciousness. This question leads to the question of our persistence conditions, and ultimately to the question of what we are. According to Lynne Baker, in her *Persons and Bodies. A Constitution View* (2000) we are, most fundamentally, persons: beings with the capacity of having a first-person perspective. I will show that her analysis of the

first-person perspective leads to a number of difficulties, especially with respect to the acquisition and development of this capacity. One has to take a closer look at what constitutes the capacity for a first-person perspective – something Baker conspicuously fails to do. This closer look will lead to an alternative analysis of the first-person perspective.

I will show, in what I call a *gradualist approach*, that to be a living organism is precisely to have the capacity for a first-person perspective, in various degrees of sophistication. In my analysis it will turn out that nothing *other* than a living organism could ever have a first-person perspective. The conclusion will be that we are most fundamentally (human) animals, living organisms, as Eric Olson, in his *The Human Animal. Personal identity Without Psychology* (1997) has it, and not something else. More specifically, there cannot exist a separate class of entities, namely persons, that have this capacity for a first-person perspective. But neither is it true that all organisms with a first-person perspective are persons. Baker's claim that persons have what she calls ontological significance is untenable. There is no fact of the matter as to which entities are persons.

On the other hand, there *is* a fact of the matter concerning personal identity. According to Baker personal identity is constituted by sameness of personal perspective. But here again her view runs into difficulties. Baker's problems with personal identity over time can be solved if we do not assume that we are persons but living organisms. The criterion for personal identity is sameness of *life*.

This seems like a clear victory of animalism over the constitution view, but it is not quite. I will argue that these two positions are not all that different. Being alive is already having a first-person perspective, be it in a very attenuated sense. Both Baker and Olson fail to see this, because of their Cartesian, physicalistically biased conception of the body.

The resulting gradualist view of what we are is a kind of animalism, but an animalism in which the first-person perspective plays a crucial role. The gradualist view gives an analysis of the first-person perspective that shows how it could have developed from its humble origins in

simple organisms into the very sophisticated capacity that we human organisms have. Nowhere in this evolution does a new, separate, non-organismic entity come into being.

1. WHERE WAS I?

Some years ago, I had to undergo an operation. Afterwards I was told that it had been a most gory business. Indeed there had been so much blood, that one of the trainee nurses, who had been allowed to watch, had fainted. "Oh well", I said, "lucky I wasn't there".

Now this was meant, of course, as a funny remark. Funny haha. But it was also rather funny peculiar. Was I really not there? Of course I was. But let us take a closer look at the episode.

I was wheeled into the operating theatre, slightly sedated but fully conscious. I got the needle of the anaesthetic in my arm, someone said, "Sleep well", which I found rather ridiculous, and *immediately* after that I was in a different room and it was three hours later. What happened during that gap?

Daniel Dennett speaks, in his characteristic abrasive way, of

> Even very sophisticated thinkers [making] crashing mistakes, perfectly epitomized by Edelman: "One of the most striking features of consciousness is its continuity" (1989, p. 119). This is utterly wrong. One of the most striking features of consciousness is its *dis*continuity (Dennett 1991, p. 356).[1]

[1] He goes on to remark: "The discontinuity of consciousness is striking because of the *apparent* continuity of consciousness" (1991, p. 356). This remark strikes one as somewhat inconsistent, as earlier in the book he has vilified those "thinkers [who] have set their faces so hard against "verificationism" and "operationalism" that they want to deny it even in the one area where it makes manifest good sense: the realm of subjectivity" (ib., p. 132). In other words: in consciousness, if we experience no gap, there is no gap.

The question is moot. It appears that both authors are speaking at cross-purposes. If consciousness is considered as a point of view, as essentially a first-person perspective[2] then of course it is continuous. The stream of consciousness cannot contain any gaps. If consciousness is studied from a third-person perspective, as Dennett (1987, p. 5) explicitly does, it is just as obviously discontinuous.

So where was I during those three hours? There seem to be two answers, equally plausible. From a third-person perspective I was on the operating table, most of the time. After all, it was certainly some person they were operating on, and it certainly wasn't someone else. So it must have been me. From a first-person perspective I wasn't there at all. I wasn't anywhere else either. For the duration of three hours I just wasn't, I had been gone. Yet from a first-person perspective that is not quite true either: in my experience I had been there all the time. There simply was no gap. It is only that "all the time" was much shorter from the first-person perspective than it was from the third-person perspective.

The answer to the question "Where was I?" depends on the answer to another question, namely "What am I?" or, "What are my persistence conditions?" If I am, for instance, most fundamentally a Lockean person, constituted by consciousness, I am much shorter-lived than if I am most fundamentally a human animal[3], or a trajectory through space-time.[4] Not only would my existence be shorter by those three hours of anaesthesia, but also by all the hours of deep and dreamless sleep. More-

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[2] Here I use 'first-person perspective' simply as opposed to 'third-person perspective'. This is the sense in which it has figured in various discussions following Nagel, 1974 (see e.g. Meijsing 1997, 1998; Varela and Shear 1999; Velmans, 2000). Of course Baker (2000) gives her own idiosyncratic interpretation of what it means to have a first-person perspective.

[3] See e.g. Williams (1973a), Olson (1997), Van Inwagen (1990).

[4] See Strawson, (1966, p. 164).

over, forgetfulness would continually eat away at my existence: every episode I would forget would be taken from my existence.

I want to discuss two answers to the question "What am I?". In Lockean terms these answers are, on the one hand, that we are a Lockean *person*,

> a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflexion, and can consider itself as itself … which it does only by … consciousness (Locke 1959, p. 448),

and on the other hand, that we are a Lockean *animal*,

> a participation of the same continued *life* communicated to different particles of matter, as they happen successively to be united to that organized living body (ib., p. 445).

I consider the conclusion that both answers are true (as in the case of consciousness, which is both continuous and discontinuous) as too facile. Yet the two answers are not as mutually exclusive as their proponents are inclined to think.

2. PERSONS AND PERSPECTIVES

According to Lynne Baker we are most fundamentally *persons*, where a person is defined as a being with a capacity for a 'first-person perspective'. Moreover, a being has a first person perspective if and only if she can think of herself as herself* (Baker 2000, p. 72), that is if she "can think of herself in a way naturally expressible in the grammatical first person as the bearer of first person thoughts" (ib., p. 65). Although human persons are constituted by human organisms, they are not identical to organisms. Baker defines constitution as "an intermediate position between identity and separate existence" (Baker 2001a, p. 2). Human persons and their bodies (organisms) occupy the same space at any time. But it is the person, and not the organism, that has a first-person per-

spective[5]; and it is the organism, and not the person, that has a certain weight.

This position is clearly Lockean in character, with its emphasis on "a Being, that … can consider itself as itself" (Locke 1959, p. 448). It differs from most Lockean and Neo-Lockean positions in not concentrating on memory, but on self-consciousness. Baker states: "… underlying self-consciousness in all its forms … is what I call 'the first-person perspective'" (Baker 2000, p. 60).

This is a very attractive position. In fact I will argue for a position that in some respects strongly resembles this one. Yet as it stands it is subject to problems. These problems may seem to be fairly disparate, but I will show that they are in fact simply different aspects of the same problem. That problem is that Baker gives an analysis of the first-person perspective in terms of the grammar of thoughts and sentences. This first-person perspective is a very sophisticated capacity, requiring the mastery of the *concept* of the self and even of the semantics of the first-person pronoun. It is completely *sui generis*, not derived from other, non-linguistic or non-conceptual capacities.

The first set of problems concerns Baker's use of Castañeda's asterisk, as in "to think of herself as herself*". Now Castañeda introduced the *-convention to mark the reflexive use of the third-person pronoun. This is clearly necessary, as the third-person pronoun can be used to refer to any number of persons. In the sentence "John believes that he is

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[5] Actually, according to Baker the person has a first-person perspective non-derivatively; the organism only has one *derivatively*. This means that the organism doesn't have a first-person perspective at all if it doesn't constitute a person that has one non-derivatively. I can only read this as meaning that the organism never *really* has a first-person perspective; as soon as it acquires one it *ipso facto* constitutes a person that has it non-derivatively. If Baker claims that having a property derivatively simply *is* having that property, I fail to understand what work the derivative/non-derivative distinction is doing, apart from allowing her to have her cake and eat it.

bald", "he" can refer to John or to someone else. But in the sentence "I believe that I am bald" no such ambiguity is present. There is only one person to which "I" can refer and that is me.[6] With the first-person pronoun the asterisk is superfluous.

What Baker wants to stress – and she does not need the asterisk for this – is the fact that her notion of the first-person perspective involves second-order intentional states.[7] Now I fully agree that *this* capacity, the capacity for second-order intentional states, is important and perhaps crucial for the very real difference between (most) human beings and other kinds of animals. But we should realise that this difference is a moral rather than an ontological characteristic.[8]

According to Baker a person cannot only *make* a first-person reference, she can also *attribute* a first-person reference to herself; compare "I am bald" with "I think that I am bald". Though the asterisk isn't necessary to fix the reference of the pronoun "I", there is a lot involved in this kind of reference. Baker rightly stresses the fact that all uses of "I" are immune to error through misidentification. "I" can only refer to me.[9] She argues against those like Wittgenstein (1958) and Shoemaker (1968), who think that only ascriptions of *mental* states or use of "I" as a subject are immune to such error. Such authors believe that it doesn't make sense to ask, when I say, "I have a toothache", "Someone is having a toothache, but is it I who is in pain?" Yet they think that it does make

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[6] See Garrett (2001).

[7] Cf. Dennett (1978), Frankfurt (1971).

[8] As I will try to show, no separate *ontological* category of persons is being constituted by this capacity; it is not a substance concept that determines our persistence conditions. Conflating the capacity for second-order intentional states with that of the first-person perspective leads Baker into all kinds of difficulties. The capacity for second-order intentional states *presupposes* a first-person perspective, but it is much more sophisticated.

[9] It is therefore strange that she doesn't seem to see that the *-convention is not necessary here.

sense for me to ask, when I say that the wind blows my hair about, "Someone's hair is blown by the wind, but is it my hair?"[10] This possibility for error presupposes a rather contrived situation, as when I see several people, including myself, in a mirror, and lots of hair blowing about. But in such a case, these authors argue, there is no immunity to error through misidentification.

Baker argues that in all cases there is this kind of immunity. According to her there never can be misidentification. But her argument misses the point. According to her, the only mistake that could be made is simply the misattribution of a property.

> When I make a first-person reference – even in the use of 'I' as object – I make no mistake about which person I mean to refer. (Baker 2000, p. 71).

No indeed. But the point about the immunity to error is not a linguistic point about the semantics of the pronoun. It is about the fact that if one knows, in an appropriate, non-inferential way, that the property of toothache is instantiated, there is no possibility of error as to whom it is instantiated in. The content of our own mental states, and only our own, are immediately known to us. This is a Cartesian intuition.

Gareth Evans (1982) gives a compelling argument that there are lots of bodily states that are attributed with the same immunity, namely all those bodily states directly known through proprioception. He wisely uses different examples from the Wittgenstein ones. His examples are having one's legs crossed, feeling hot and sticky, and being pushed. But he could have used the blowing hair example. In particular, if I *feel* my hair blown by the wind, it does *not* make sense to wonder if it is *my* hair (I

[10] The example is from Wittgenstein (1958, p. 66). He also uses the examples of having a broken arm, having grown six inches, and having a bump on one's forehead.

may not feel the hair itself, but I certainly can feel the roots!).[11] So our bodily states are *just as immediately* known to us as our mental states. Both are, without possibility of error through misidentification, states of *us*. We are exactly the kind of beings to whom both mental and bodily states can be attributed. We are persons in Strawson's (1959) sense.

That is the reason why both the use of 'I' as a subject and 'I' as an object are immune to error through misidentification. But this fact undermines Baker's position. For according to her Constitution View the person and the body are not identical. They are separate entities linked by constitution. We (as "Baker-persons") are not the kind of beings to whom bodily states can be attributed. The person is constituted by the body and has her bodily states only derivatively. Strictly speaking, bodily states are attributed to the body and only mental states, more precisely, only I*-thoughts, are attributed to the person. There simply is not a single kind of being to which both I*-thoughts and bodily states are attributed in the very same sense.[12] 'I' never really refers to the body, but only to the person. So according to Baker, in the operation case it was, strictly speaking, my body that lost so much blood, and not I. I wasn't there at the time. Where was I? Nowhere.

This brings me to the second set of problems: those related to Baker's definition of a person as a being with the *capacity* of having a first-person perspective. Baker does not take the Lockean view that only beings who actually have a first-person perspective are persons. According to Locke, beings under the influence of alcohol are simply not persons, anyway not if they subsequently cannot remember anything. The episode

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[11] It is remarkable that in Wittgenstein's examples of the use of 'I' as a subject, the relevant bodily states are never felt (through proprioception), but always seen.

[12] *Organisms* do have both bodily and mental states or properties non-derivatively; it is just that they never have a first-person perspective non-derivatively. And a person has *no* bodily states non-derivatively.

of drunkenness does not belong to any person. The drunkard is unaccountable. Beings under general anaesthesia certainly are unaccountable, and therefore not persons. But Baker is more careful: a real person only has the *capacity* for a first-person perspective. This seems to do away with problems about drunkenness, anaesthesia or sleep. So was I there after all?

This is a tricky question, as Baker steadfastly refuses to say what constitutes this capacity for first-person perspective. She never gives more than a dispositional analysis. This means that, at the time of the operation, there was no saying whether they operated upon a person or upon a body. Should I have died without regaining consciousness, who is to say whether the person ceased to exist from the onset of the anaesthesia, or only at the moment of the death of the body?

Of course Baker might insist that there was a fact of the matter whether the capacity was there or not. If the disposition is actualised afterwards it was there all the time. But even if it weren't, it might have been there. After all, so she could say, a disposition can very well exist without ever being actualised.

Yet it does remain strange that we shouldn't know if some being is a person. If a disposition is not constituted by something else, something which is not a disposition itself, there is no knowing whether it is there or not. So no one, not even God Herself, could know if a being under anaesthesia were a person. And the same goes for beings in deep sleep, for occasionally people die in their sleep.

Actually, Baker does say something about what a capacity for a first-person perspective is, in the sense of giving necessary and sufficient conditions:

> An object *x* has the capacity for a first-person perspective at *t* iff *x* has all the structural properties at *t* required for a first-person perspective and either (i) *x* has manifested a first-person perspective at some time before *t* or (ii) *x* is in an environment at *t* conducive to the development and maintenance of a first-person perspective. (Baker 2000, p. 92)

This definition is supposed to take care of comas and anaesthesias: if I still had the right structural properties during the operation I, being a person (and 'I' can only refer to a person, I am most fundamentally a person), was there all right. What are these structural properties? Baker is rather short about this:

> It is up to neurophysiologists, not philosophers, to determine the conditions under which a human organism is able to support first-person intentional states. (ib., p. 93).

But this definition raises some awkward questions. If it is the neurophysiological properties of the *human organism* that are at stake, why does not the human organism have a first-person perspective? This seems quite straightforward, yet Baker is adamant that *no* organism, not even one in the right environment, ever has a first-person perspective. So those structural properties are at best necessary but not sufficient for being a person. What else is needed? Baker doesn't say.

Moreover, she *cannot* say what more is needed. Presumably all the necessary properties together with the right environment are sufficient, but until all those properties are present there simply is no person. But when all the necessary properties are there, the organism having all those properties still does not *become* a person. It only *constitutes* a person, and that person is not identical with the human organism. When a person comes into being, the human organism is still there. The person is a new individual. So every single necessary property is the property of the human organism, but that *never* has sufficient properties for a first-person perspective, or even the capacity for one. The first-person perspective simply cannot take off the ground and so there never come to be any persons. One could speak of the paradox of the first-person perspective: a person is defined as having (the capacity for) one, but no amount of necessary conditions is ever sufficient for having one.

Now this problem is related to a familiar problem, known as the paradox of self-consciousness. In self-consciousness one is both subject

and object of an I-thought, both the thinker of the I-thought and that what is thought about. So one must be able to refer to oneself as oneself*, as in "I think that I am bald". The semantics of the first-person pronoun guarantees that both instances of 'I' have the very same reference. This constitutes self-consciousness. But in order to refer to oneself one must know that one (oneself*) is the producer of the pronoun, one must be *conscious* of *oneself* uttering the pronoun. This constitutes self-reference. The analysis is circular. This is a problem with a long history, both in the continental tradition[13] and in the Anglo-Saxon tradition.[14] Bermúdez (1998) analyses this paradox as consisting of two strands: explanatory circularity and capacity circularity. Explanatory circularity results from the fact that any attempt to elucidate the capacity to think I-thoughts in terms of self-reference will be circular, as self-reference can only be elucidated in terms of I-thoughts. The capacity circularity refers to the fact that it *prima facie* seems that no one is ever capable of acquiring self-consciousness: in order to have I-thoughts one must be able to refer to oneself, and in order to refer to oneself one must already be able to have I-thoughts. Bermúdez' solution is to drop the overly linguistic analysis of self-consciousness, and to take a gradualist approach.

Similarly, Baker's problem could be solved by dropping the linguistic bias in her analysis of the first-person perspective, and taking a gradualist approach. But the result of such an approach would come at a price: she could no longer maintain that (human) organisms are not persons.

4. A GRADUALIST APPROACH

According to Baker, persons have the capacity for a first-person perspective and having this capacity constitutes being a person. But the

[13] E.g. Tugendhat (1979).
[14] E.g. Bermúdez (1998).

issue cannot be handled as a merely definitional matter. If one wants to take evolution at all seriously, one has to analyse this capacity in such a way that it is at least possible that it has evolved. And even if one should want to claim that only human beings have this capacity – as Baker does – one must explain how the human infant ever can acquire it.[15] Surely more can – and should – be said about it than that there have to be the right structural properties in the right environment?

The notion of a first-person perspective originated with Thomas Nagel's 'What is it like to be a bat?' (1974).[16] For Nagel the first-person perspective is the essence of *consciousness*, not of personhood: every conscious being has a unique, individual point of view.[17] Baker gives a rather different analysis of the first-person perspective as a linguistic, or at least conceptual, capacity, thereby excluding most conscious beings from having such a perspective. In the following I will give my own,

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[15] It is remarkable that Baker claims that at least the *capacity* for a first-person perspective is present in the human being *from birth*: given the right environment the infant will actually develop a first-person perspective. But why shouldn't the capacity be present before birth? Baker states explicitly that a foetus is *not* a person: I, a person, have never been a foetus, which is not a person (Baker 2000, p. 204 ff). What is wrong with a foetus as a candidate for personhood? It does have the right structural properties – they just need some developing, but so does the nervous system of the newly born – and I would have thought that the uterus is, for the time being, the very environment "conducive to the development and maintenance of a first-person perspective" (ib., p. 92).

[16] Baker only refers to Nagel three times in a footnote: twice to name him as the originator of the brain-criterion for personal identity, and once as to "the most prominent … [in] discussions of subjectivity and related issues" (Baker 2000, p. 60n).

[17] "[the} … ascription of experience is possible only for someone sufficiently similar to the object of ascription to be able to adopt his point of view – to understand the ascription in the first person as well as in the third, so to speak … In our own case we occupy the relevant point of view …" (Nagel 1974). See also Nagel (1986).

gradualist account of the first-person perspective and of (self-)consciousness. I propose to take the notions of perspective and point of view quite literally, in the sense of a *perceptual* capacity. In their primitive form both consciousness and self-consciousness are *perceptual* phenomena. Self-consciousness is not so much having an internal representation or *concept* of the self *in the mind*, as the perception of one's own *body*.

How does this perceptual first-person perspective arise? Let's start with an idea of Maturana and Varela's (1980). They claim that living systems are characterised by *autopoiesis* (*autopoiesis* is Greek for *self-making* or *self-construction*). An autopoietic system is a homeostatic system that maintains its own organisation. Such a system need not have any consciousness or intentionality, but it is not an entirely passive, reactive mechanism either. It has an interest in life, an interest in the maintenance of its own organisation. The components of the system continuously regenerate and realise the system as a whole. In doing so the system forms a unity that, in the process of self-production and self-maintenance, specifies its own boundaries and thus preserves its own identity. An autopoietic system also has, in some way, a first-person point of view.[18] Varela says:

> In defining what [an autopoietic system] is as a unity, in the very same movement it defines what remains exterior to it, that is to say, its surrounding environment. A closer examination also makes it evident that this exterior organisation can only be understood from the 'inside': the autopoietic system *creates a perspective* from which the exterior is one [an exterior organisation, MM], which cannot be confused with the physical surroundings as they appear to us observers, the land of physical and chemical laws *simpliciter*, devoid of such perspectivism (Varela 1991, p. 85).

This kind of autopoietic system is in a sense a self, a biological self. It defines itself in contrast with its environment. This guarantees, for in-

[18] Not of course a first-person perspective in Baker's sense. Yet this is the first, primitive step in building such a sophisticated perspective.

stance, that a hungry organism normally does not eat itself, for that would destroy its homeostatic, autopoietic organisation.

Life, and therefore autopoiesis, is the very first step in creating a first-person perspective. Movement is the next step. In order to move purposefully and coherently, some kind of feedback is needed. Proprioception is the perception of position, posture and movement of the body in physical space. Though it functions automatically, for the greater part, in continually updating the body schema, it does give an awareness of one's own body, and in a very important sense, of *oneself* as spatially extended and bounded.[19] At the same time it gives an awareness of the bodily self as responsive to the will, as an agent.

It is only creatures with locomotion, agents, that are endowed with perceptual systems for perception-at-a-distance: mostly vision, but also echolocation. Moreover, the creature must be able to move fast enough for it to be damaged by collisions with obstacles. Very slow-moving creatures can stop at the first impact with an obstacle, without injury to their bodies.

Vision is a very efficient way of perception for moving animals, because it makes optimal use of the fact that what is transparent for light is generally move-through-able for the animal – fog and glass walls being the obvious exceptions.[20]

One must see in order to move. But one must also move in order to see. If the retinal image of an object is stabilised, the object quickly becomes invisible. The psychologist J. Gibson has shown in numerous experiments that a stationary perceiver misses all kinds of information that a moving perceiver picks up easily.

But it is not just movement that is needed in order to see; it is *active* movement, indeed self-movement. In a famous experiment Held en Hein describe the sensorimotor skills of kittens, reared in the dark. They

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[19] See Evans (1982); Brewer (1995); Meijsing (1997), (1998); Bermúdez (1998).

[20] Cf. Campbell (1974).

spent several hours a day in daylight, some actively exploring, and some being moved passively. After some weeks, the active kittens showed a normal visuomotor development, whereas the visuomotor skills of the passive ones were seriously impaired (Held and Hein, 1963). Movement and perception always go together; perception belongs to an active, moving organism. With the emergence of locomoting animals, the notion of a first-person perspective comes into its own. Perception gives information about the world, but from a very specific point of view.

Furthermore, perception of the environment always goes together with self-perception. Gibson says:

> The optical information to specify the self, including the head, body, arms, and hands, *accompanies* the optical information to specify the environment … When a man sees the world, he sees his nose at the same time … The nose is here (1979, pp. 116-117). … Egoreception accompanies exteroception, like the other side of a coin… One perceives the environment and coperceives oneself. (ib., p. 126)

Consciousness and self-consciousness go hand in hand. You do not need a *concept* of the self for this kind of self-consciousness. An observer perceives the position of *here* relative to the environment and also his body as *being here*. A perceiving animal is aware of itself in the sense that it knows where it is and how and where it is going.

> Egoreception and exteroception are inseparable kinds of experience. The seeing of oneself is not a complex intellectual experience but a simple primitive one. The orthodox dogma that no animal but the human animal has *self-consciousness* is surely false. (ib., p. 205)

This kind of primitive, non-conceptual self-consciousness is firmly in place long before there is any question of the mastery of the concept 'I', and the capacity to think I-thoughts in a linguistic sense. The animal that navigates its environment by deploying dead reckoning, the mouse that doesn't get stuck in its mouse hole, the zebra that uses its own shadow to

protect its young from the sun, they all have a first-person perspective and they all use a form of self-reference.[21]

5. HONORARY PERSONS

Now of course there is much in the foregoing that Baker would not deny. Animals have weak first-person phenomena, according to her. She may even admit that strong first-person phenomena are not possible without those weak first-person phenomena. It is just that creatures that lack strong first-person phenomena are not persons, and only persons have strong first-person phenomena.[22] But this admission of weak first-person phenomena in animals does have implications for her position. For the strong first-person phenomena that persons have are acquired. And surely they are acquired by beings that already have weak first-person phenomena. Without non-conceptual, sensorimotor self-consciousness and self-reference, no concept of the self could ever arise.[23] But even so the concept of the self can only be acquired if is it the very same self as the non-conceptual, sensorimotor, spatially extended and located self. If this concept refers to a different self, the whole paradox of self-consciousness remains unresolved: without some non-conceptual form of self-consciousness, of consciousness of the same self, already in place, no concept of the self can ever be acquired. So the person, with her strong first-person phenomena, cannot possibly

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[21] Gallistel (1990), Wemelsfelder (1993), Bermúdez (1998).

[22] And the person has *only* strong first-person phenomena. If it is the organism that has the weak first-person phenomena nonderivatively, the person can only have them derivatively, on pain of duplication of properties. Baker's defence against what she calls assorted charges of overpopulation is that only one of the pair in a constitution relation (organism and person, in this case) can have a property nonderivatively. See Baker (2001a).

[23] See Stern (1985) and Bermúdez (1998) for a detailed and stepwise account of the origins of conceptual self-consciousness.

be *not identical* with the organism with its weak first-person phenomena. We are identical with our living, moving bodies, and we have both weak and strong first-person phenomena.

And it stands to reason. For what happens when a person comes into existence? According to Baker a completely new entity comes into being. A person has no learning history.[24] The whole learning of sensorimotor coordination and self-location and navigating has nothing directly to do with the person. The person has these weak first-person phenomena only derivatively, because the organism that constitutes her has them nonderivatively. Its learning history cannot become *her* history. Or if it is, that is because she has usurped it. The poor living organism, complete with all its weak first-person phenomena, will forever totter on the brink of personhood, for once it acquires the requisite strong first-person phenomena, someone else will take all the credit. The organism will only have strong first-person phenomena derivatively, not really. It will never be admitted to the privileged class of persons.

And persons *are* a privileged class. They are special. We ought to take them seriously, and we do. It would be very nice if this deep-felt intuition, which is shared by animalists and constitutionalists alike, could be grounded in a metaphysical fact. If persons were indeed a separate kind of entity, if they had ontological significance, as Baker puts it. Otherwise persons could simply cease to exist once we stopped considering or treating them as persons. This would imply an unbearable lightness of being for us, persons. So one might insist that some metaphysical fact of the matter must underlie our reactive attitudes.

This view is certainly attractive. But it is a philosophical dream, as Amélie Rorty put it so well:

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[24] This is slightly complicated, as according to Baker a newborn baby is already a person, though it certainly *lacks* strong first-person phenomena.

> There is a philosophical dream, a dream that moral and political ideals are not only grounded in and explained by human nature, but that fundamental moral and political principles can be derived from the narrower conditions that define persons. (Rorty 1990, p. 21)

Merely wishing our dream would come true doesn't make it come true. If spelled out it runs into serious difficulties. Rorty shows that "… there is no such thing as 'the' concept of a person" (ib., p. 21). And she concludes her overview of the conflicting functions of our contemporary concept of person with the remark: "Another metaphysical longing remains unsatisfied" (ib., p. 38). And for all the diligence Baker shows in carving out a place between numerical identity and separate existence, her Constitution View fares no better. A being that acquires the capacity to think of herself as herself* may fall in a different *moral* category, it does not suddenly come to be a new, separate kind of entity. It remains in the same *ontological* category, under the same substance concept, namely that of a living organism.

So perhaps it is better to admit it. We are honorary persons. The concept of a person is not a metaphysical concept. It is a moral concept. Personhood is constituted by the reactive attitudes of others (Cuypers 2001) plus the possibility of reciprocity of these attitudes. These attitudes are partly historically and culturally determined, and have not always been what they are now. This explains the endless debate over whom to count as a person. And it is, alas, possible to stop treating people as persons in such a way that they actually stop *being* persons without their stopping to exist altogether.[25]

Nothing but our own attitudes constitutes personhood. So in a way Baker is right: it is the way we think of ourselves that makes us persons. And perhaps even more importantly: it is the way others think of us. That is perfectly in line with Baker's stress on the relationality of the

[25] Though they often die fairly soon as a result of it: see Bettelheim (1960) on so-called Muselmen in the concentration camps. See also Meijsing (1998).

concept of a person. And it is also in line with the fact that we, human beings, are in an important sense constituted by what we think we are. Personhood is autopoiesis on a higher level.

6. THE ONTOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

Whereas persons do not have ontological significance in Baker's sense, the question of personal identity does have ontological significance. There may not be a fact of the matter as to whether a foetus or an infant is a person, but there is a fact of the matter as to whether I ever was a foetus or an infant, and moreover which foetus or infant I was.

Baker's position notoriously has difficulties with personal identity over time.[26] She claims that personal identity is constituted by sameness of first-person perspective.

> Every morning when I wake up, I know that I am still existing – without consulting my mirror, my memory, or anything else (Baker 2000, 136). The question how I know that my first-person perspective persisted through the night makes no sense on my view: If I have any experience at all – indeed, if I have any property at all – then I exist; and if I exist, I have a particular first-person perspective. (Baker 2001b, p. 2)

But this is not enough for personal identity over time. The question is not whether a person *has* a first-person perspective at all, or even whether that is her own perspective. Of course she has and of course it is. The question is whether it is the *same* particular perspective as last night (or, in my own example, the same as before the anaesthesia).

In a way, Baker is right in stating that it doesn't make sense to ask how she knows that her first-person perspective persisted through the night. The reason for this, however, is not that she still exists and so still has a particular perspective. The reason is that a first-person perspective

[26] Cf. Garrett (2001).

is *continuous*. As I showed on my description of the operation case, there is no gap from a first-person perspective.[27] If personal identity is constituted by the first-person perspective, the question of persistence through the night (or the operation) does not make sense indeed, as there simply is no gap to be accounted for. Of course the continuous first-person perspective is continuously mine. This would make the question of personal identity quite simple.[28]

However, there are two problems with this elegant solution. The first one is the problem of duplication. Suppose I go to sleep, and during the night the famous mad scientist performs his nefarious tricks. On the following morning several people, psychologically and physically indistinguishable, wake up, each of them thinking, "I am still alive". Which one is me? Baker claims that there is a fact of the matter which one is, and moreover that she can know: "… I would know with certainty which one was I" (Baker 2000, p. 141).

If indeed personal identity is constituted by sameness of first-person perspective, there *is* a fact of the matter which one is me: only one particular perspective can be identical with the one of last night. And again Baker is right in claiming that "I would know with certainty which one was I" – but only in the sense that "any person can say the sentence "I am me" and thereby speak the truth" (Garrett 2001, p. 5). Baker equivoques between two senses of "I". In the fact-of-the-matter case "I" refers to one individual, LB. In the knowing-with-certainty case, "I" refers to the *speaker*. The identity of the speaker *qua* speaker was never

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[27] This is not so clear in the case of normal sleep. There we do seem to experience a gap at waking. We also experience dreams during sleep, which are often quite disconnected and in some way *discontinuous* with waking experience. Is the gap (or gaps) really experienced, or is it just a learned inference that there must have been a gap? Can one ever experience the absence of experiences?

[28] Cf. Meijsing (1998).

the issue. *Every* speaker knows that she is herself. But the identity of LB is *unknowable*. *No* speaker can know that she is LB. If the first-person perspective is completely *sui generis*, and consists in nothing but itself, then no one, not even from a God's eye point of view, can know which one is LB, even though there is a fact of the matter.[29]

One could bite the bullet and still claim that the duplication problem is solved: there *is* a fact of the matter who is LB, even if it is unknowable. But in that case the solution amounts to no more than the bare claim that duplication is impossible, because a particular perspective, just like strict identity, doesn't allow for branching. A little disappointing, surely.

The other problem is the already mentioned shortening of my existence: if there are no gaps from a continuous first-person perspective, there are no nights and no operations from that perspective either. Who was being operated? Not me. I wasn't there. I wasn't anywhere else either. So who lost all that blood? Oh, just my animal. No, not my pet, I mean my human animal. But of course I pay the bill (one might be accused of slavery, but one is humane towards one's human animals).

Of course Baker wouldn't say that there was no person during the operation, though she would say that it wasn't the person that lost any blood. A person needn't actually have a first-person perspective, but just the capacity for one. So for her the person's existence is not that much shorter than the organism's existence (though it *is* shorter: a foetus doesn't constitute a person yet and a human organism in a persistent vegetative state doesn't constitute one anymore). But in that case it does make sense to ask how a first-person perspective persists through a pe-

[29] It is unclear whether Baker thinks it is knowable. On the one hand she admits, "perhaps no one could discover which one really was L.B." (Baker 2000, p. 141). But on the other hand she says, "… one of us is right about being L.B. (I am, actually) and the others are wrong" (ib.). Is the remark "I am, actually" a give-away, a slip of the pen or just a joke?

riod of unconsciousness. It is the *capacity* that persists throughout, but not the *perspective itself*. And again, if Baker refuses to state what that capacity consists in – and she cannot tell us at the risk of undermining her own position (see before) –, it is very difficult to explain what it is that persists and how it can account for the perspective remaining the same.

There is a solution, though it is not the solution Baker would want. If personal identity were constituted by sameness of *life*, in Locke's parlance, instead of sameness of perspective, there would be no problem with gaps. I continue to exist in real time, through dreamless nights and operations, through periods of unconsciousness. The sameness-of-life criterion also solves the problems around duplication, Brain Transfer Systems, teletransportation and what have you. Lives cannot be split or duplicated.[30] [31] But the sameness-of-life criterion looks suspiciously like animalism.

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[30] The aura of importance or even mystery that surrounds cloning is spurious. There is no more ambiguity about who is who with clones than there is with identical twins. There *is* a problem about when to start counting individual organisms: this must be after the time when twinning is still possible. This is, according to many embryologists, about sixteen days after fertilisation (Olson 1997; see also Van Inwagen 1990; Ford 1988). Of course there are organisms that survive being split in two, and indeed survive as *two* viable organisms; worms are the favourite examples here. And there are lots of organisms that just duplicate of their own accord, as their way of procreation. These are clear cases of actual duplication, where counting individual organisms becomes problematical and the question of personal identity over time doesn't seem to make sense. Where there is only the barest form of *autopoiesis*, without any possibility of a richer first-person perspective, the concept of personal identity over time simply loses its meaning.

[31] It also tallies with Bernard Williams' wonderful reflections in "The self and the future" (1973b).

CONCLUSION: LIFE AND THE FIRST-PERSON PERSPECTIVE

So must we conclude that Baker's constitution view is wrong and animalism, which claims that what we ultimately are is human organisms or human animals, is right? Not quite.

If the argumentation above is right then Baker's constitution view is wrong: the entity having (the capacity for) a first-person perspective, in whatever degree of sophistication, simply must be the moving agent, the living organism. No other entity could ever acquire a first-person perspective. Yet animalism, which is, according to Olson (1997), a plea for "personal identity without psychology" is not quite right either.

The gradualist approach stresses the importance of the first-person perspective. But it does not analyse this perspective in an exclusively conceptual, and even linguistic way. It recognises that the first-person perspective has a history, both phylogenetic and ontogenetic. It comes in many grades of sophistication, without a sharp cut-off point. Because of this the importance of the first-person perspective does not give rise to a view in which the person is not identical with the living organism. It is the living organism itself that comes to have an ever more sophisticated first-person perspective, both in a phylogenetic and an ontogenetic sense.

So the gradualist approach also stresses the importance of the living organism. It does not analyse the living organism in an exclusively biological way. There is no sharp cut-off point between biology and psychology. Again: living organisms have a history, both phylogenetic and ontogenetic.

Being alive is already the first step in having a first-person perspective, because autopoiesis is precisely creating a perspective from the inside. It is the lower boundary of the first-person perspective, the last barrier between being a self-maintaining, well defined unity in contrast with its environment and a mere mereological sum of particles, disinte-

grating into and thus simply being a part of the rest of the world – a corpse in short.

Normally, we human beings have a very sophisticated first-person perspective. We do have language and it does make a tremendous difference. Yet in times of dreamless sleep, anaesthesia, unconsciousness, fugue, confusion or coma, it is the attenuated form of the first-person perspective that safeguards our integrity and our identity; that keeps us from disintegrating, from becoming someone or something else. After all, the specific horror of becoming completely demented, or even a human vegetable, is that it happens to us. We are still there, it is our fate. Why else should one say: "I'd rather be dead", if one would already have ceased to exist?[32]

Life and the first-person perspective are not such very different criteria for personal identity. Life is simply the simplest form of the first-person perspective, its lower boundary. Only if one has a too physicalistic conception of the body, one is apt to overemphasise the difference between body and mind, or the human animal and the person, or life and a first-person perspective, or biology and psychology. Once you recognise that there is no such divide, life and the first-person perspective are merely different ends of the same continuum. We are most fundamentally living human organisms, living animals, and our personal identity is constituted by our particular, first-person perspective. In its most attenuated form, this perspective is created by simply being alive.

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[32] One might wonder whether a human vegetable is a person. Such indeterminacy is perfectly consistent with the view that there simply is no fact of the matter whether something is a person. It is up to us. But there *is* a fact of the matter about personal identity. If I were to suffer the kind of brain damage that would lead to a persistent vegetative state, it would be perfectly determinate who would be the human vegetable in question: it would be me.

So where was I? I was there all the time, during the whole period of anaesthesia. And I will persist as long as I, a living organism, manage to define myself in contrast with my surrounding environment.[33]

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