

in *Encyclopaideia* 23 (2008) [Italy]

Persons: Natural, Yet Ontologically Unique

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The question—Are Persons More than Social Objects?—is an important one, and my answer is somewhat complicated. What I shall talk about here is the way in which persons are natural objects, but I do not want to deny that we are also social objects. I believe that to be a person in the way that I shall describe—as a natural object—is a necessary condition for various enterprises that may be thought of as the social construction of persons. For example, one could not construct a self-narrative that makes sense of one’s life as a whole unless one had the formal ontological property of personhood that I’ll discuss.

Let me begin with an overview: Persons are natural objects, animals that evolved by means of natural selection. Biologically speaking, I’m a Darwinian: I believe that there is important continuity between the most primitive organisms and us, that we have animal natures, and that biology can uncover all there is to know about our animal natures. But there is more to us than our animal natures. I do not believe that biological knowledge suffices for understanding our nature, all things considered. Like the Substance Dualist, I think that we are ontologically special: the worth or value of a person is not measured in terms of surviving offspring. But unlike the Substance Dualist, I do not account for what makes us special in terms of having an immaterial soul or mind. What make us ontologically special are our first-person perspectives, as I’ll explain.

So, we human persons are animals, but not *just* animals. What I hope to do here is to make clear how we can be animals, yet ontologically unique, and how ontologically unique beings like us can still be part of the natural order. So, on my view, ontology does not recapitulate biology. Biology is one thing, and ontology is another. I'll begin by setting out my view of human persons.

The Constitution View of Persons

According to the Constitution View, human persons are constituted by human bodies without being identical to the bodies that constitute them. Let me begin with a clarification. Several philosophers suppose that I hold that “no actual human person is identical with any actual human being.”¹ That is not my view. In ordinary language, the term ‘human being’ is used ambiguously—both to name a psychological kind and to name a purely biological kind.² I usually try to avoid the term ‘human being;’ but when I use it, I am talking about human persons, not human bodies, or human organisms. Rather, I am talking about persons-constituted-by-bodies (or by-human-organisms).

Here is a rapid summary: The kind *person*—like *statue*—is a primary kind, one of many irreducible ontological kinds.³ Everything that exists is of some primary kind—the kind that determines what the thing is most fundamentally. Things have their primary-kind properties essentially. Members of the kind *human organism* are human organisms essentially; members of the kind *person* are persons essentially. Persons and bodies (or organisms) are of different primary

¹ E.g., see Harold Noonan’s contribution to an electronic symposium on *Persons and Bodies*, sponsored by the University of Rome. See *A Field Guide to the Philosophy of Mind* at <http://www.uniroma3.it/kant/field/bakersymp.htm>.

² cf. *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 7.

³ Since I have written a whole book developing a theory of human persons, I shall only review the theory briefly here.

kinds. Thus, they are not identical. But to say that a person is not identical to her body does not mean that the person is identical to the body-plus-some-other-thing (like a soul).⁴ Michelangelo's *David* is not identical to a piece-of-marble-plus-some-other-thing. If x constitutes y and x is wholly material, then y is wholly material. The human body (which I take to be identical to a human organism) is wholly material, and the human body constitutes the human person. Therefore, the human person is wholly material. A human person is as material as Michelangelo's *David* is.

So, what distinguishes a person from the body that constitutes her? The person has a first-person perspective essentially. When a human organism develops a first-person perspective, a new thing—a person—comes into existence. The human organism does not thereby go out of existence, any more than the piece of marble goes out of existence when it comes to constitute a statue. A human person and her body are related in exactly the same way as a marble statue and a piece of marble: The relation is one of constitution. When a piece of marble is suitably related to an artworld, a new thing—a statue—comes into existence. Constitution is a vehicle for ontological novelty. When x comes to constitute y, y is a new entity, of a different primary kind from x.

Being a person is not just a property of some essentially nonpersonal kind of thing, like an organism.⁵ The nonidentity of a person and an organism is manifested in the fact that organisms have different persistence conditions from persons. Human organisms have third-personal persistence conditions: whether an

⁴ Someone may ask: If a human person is not identical to a body or to a soul or to a body-plus-a-soul, what is she identical to? This question is a red herring. A person is identical to herself and not another thing.

⁵ Fs are essentially nonpersonal if and only if being a person makes no difference to whether or not an F exists.

animal continues to exist depends on continued biological functioning. Persons have first-personal persistence conditions: whether a person continues to exist depends on its having a first-person perspective.

I distinguish between a rudimentary first-person perspective (which human infants, chimpanzees, dogs and cats have) and a robust first-person perspective (which only persons with self-concepts have). A rudimentary first-person perspective requires consciousness, intentionality, and the ability to imitate. If a being with a rudimentary first-person perspective is of a *kind* that, in the normal course of things, develops a robust first-person perspective, there is a person. Since a chimpanzee is not of a *kind* that normally develops a first-person perspective, a chimpanzee is not a person, despite its having a rudimentary first-person perspective. A human infant (and perhaps a late-term fetus) that has a rudimentary first-person perspective is a person in virtue of being of a kind that normally develops a robust first-person perspective.

So, what is a robust first-person perspective? A robust first-person perspective is a very peculiar ability that all and only persons have. It is the ability to conceive of oneself as oneself, from the inside, as it were. Linguistic evidence of a robust first-person perspective comes from use of first-person pronouns embedded in sentences with linguistic or psychological verbs—e.g., “I wonder how I will die,” or “I promise that I will stay with you.”⁶ If I wonder how I will die, or I promise that I’ll stay with you, then I am thinking of myself as myself; I am not thinking of myself in any third-person way (e.g., not as Lynne Baker, nor as that woman, nor as the only person standing up in the room) at all. Anything that

⁶ Hector-Neri Castañeda developed this idea in several papers. See “He: A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness,” *Ratio* 8 (1966): 130-57, and “Indicators and Quasi-Indicators,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (1967): 85-100.

can wonder how it will die ipso facto has a first-person perspective and thus is a person.

What one thinks from a first-person perspective cannot be adequately translated into third-person terms. To wonder how I will die is not the same as wondering how Lynne Baker will die, even though I am Lynne Baker. This is so, because I could wonder how I will die even if I had amnesia and didn't know who I was. A being with a first-person perspective not only can have thoughts about herself, but she can also conceive of herself as the subject of such thoughts. I not only wonder how I'll die, but I realize that I am having that thought.

A first-person perspective cannot be duplicated. A molecule-for-molecule qualitative duplicate of you would not be you, and would not have your first-person perspective. She would start out with a first-person perspective that was qualitatively just like yours; but the qualitative indistinguishability would be short-lived, as you and your duplicate looked out on the room from different perspectives. Moreover, what she would think when she entertained the thought, "I wish that I felt better," is different from what you would think when you entertained the thought, "I wish that I felt better." The content of her thought-token would include the concept of herself, not yourself; and vice versa. There cannot be two persons both with your first-person perspective.

A being may be conscious without having a first-person perspective. Nonhuman primates and other higher animals are conscious, and they have psychological states like believing, fearing and desiring. They have points of view (e.g., "danger in that direction"), but they cannot conceive of themselves as the subjects of such thoughts. They can not *conceive of* themselves from the first-

person. (We have every reason to think that they do not wonder how they will die.) So, having psychological states like beliefs and desires, and having a point of view, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for being a person. A sufficient condition for being a person—whether human, divine, ape, or silicon-based—is having a first-person perspective.⁷ So, what makes something a person is not the “stuff” that it is made of. It does not matter whether something is made of DNA or of silicon or, in the case of God, of no material “stuff” at all. If there are Martian beings made out of green slime who had first-person perspectives, then they would be persons—Martian persons, not human persons. All and only beings with first-person perspectives are persons. In short,

A being *x* is a person if and only if either: (i) *x* has a robust first-person perspective (i.e., can conceive of herself from the “inside”) or (ii) *x* both has a rudimentary first-person perspective and is of a *kind* that normally develops a robust first-person perspective.

From the standpoint of evolution, first-person perspectives may have been “selected for” by natural selection. Alternatively, first-person perspectives (like the architectural example of spandrels) may have been a by-product of some other change. My interest in the first-person perspective is not in its origin, but in its status. First-person perspectives do not appear to be biologically significant; but whether they are biologically significant or not, first-person perspectives are ontologically significant. Only persons have inner lives, and a world populated

⁷ Gallup’s experiments with chimpanzees suggest the possibility of a kind of intermediate stage between dogs (that have intentional states but no first-person perspectives) and human persons (that have first-person perspectives). In my opinion—for details see *Persons and Bodies*, pp. 62-4—Gallup’s chimpanzees fall short of full-blown first-person perspectives. See Gordon Gallup, Jr., “Self-Recognition in Primates: A Comparative Approach to Bidirectional Properties of Consciousness,” *American Psychologist* 32 (1977): 329-38.

with beings with inner lives is ontologically richer than a world populated with no beings with inner lives.

In sum: There are two important aspects of the Constitution View of human persons: On the one hand, a human person has unique first-personal persistence conditions. I continue to exist as long as my first-person perspective is exemplified; if something has my first-person perspective, then that being is a person and that person is me—and there is only such person. Although sameness of person consists in sameness of first-person perspective, we cannot give noncircular conditions for sameness of first-person perspective over time. This is no surprise: If there were noncircular conditions, we would have a reductive account of persons in terms of nonpersonal properties.⁸ The conditions for the persistence of persons are first-personal conditions that elude third-personal formulation. On the other hand, a human person is essentially embodied: I am a wholly material being, constituted by, but not identical to, my body.⁹

What guarantees that I am not identical to the organism that constitutes me is that my body and I have different persistence conditions. My persistence conditions are first-personal: As long as my first-person perspective is exemplified, I exist. My body's persistence conditions are third-personal: As long as biological functioning of organs is maintained, the organism that constitutes me exists.

I said earlier that constitution is a vehicle for ontological novelty. It is also a unifying relation. I can explain the unity of constituted entities by means of a

⁸ I discussed this point at some length in *Persons and Bodies*, Chapter Five.

⁹ For further technical detail, see my *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life: An Essay in Practical Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

technical distinction between having properties derivatively and having properties nonderivatively. Roughly, (omitting reference to times), x has F nonderivatively iff x's having F does not depend on x's constitution relations, and x has F derivatively iff x's having F depends on x's having constitution relations with something that has F nonderivatively. One more technical point: not all properties may be had derivatively. Several classes of properties are excluded from being had derivatively. One of them is the class of properties expressed in English by 'constitutes' or 'is identical with' or 'essentially'. Other excluded properties are those rooted outside the time that they are had, such as what is denoted by 'having started out as a single cell'. Such properties are not shared; they are either had nonderivatively or not at all.

The way that this distinction between having a property derivatively and having it nonderivatively applies to the case of persons and bodies is this: I, the person, have a first-person perspective nonderivatively (as well as essentially). The organism that constitutes me has a first-person perspective derivatively (as well as contingently)—in virtue of constituting me. Indeed, the organism has my first-person perspective. There is just one instantiation of a first-person perspective here, which I have nonderivatively, and my body has derivatively. I have the property of being an organism derivatively, in virtue of my body's having that property nonderivatively. So, there are not two bodies or two persons where I am. A human person, like a marble statue, is a unified thing. Constitution is a unifying relation.¹⁰

¹⁰ If, by a miracle, I had a resurrection body, or a prosthetic body run by computer chips, then the resurrection body or the prosthetic body would have my first-person perspective derivatively. Now, I have the property of being an organism derivatively; after the miracle, I would lose the property of being an organism, and gain the property of being a resurrection body or a prosthetic body derivatively. At any time that I exist, I am embodied.

Quasi-Naturalism and the Ontological Uniqueness of Persons

A metaphysical account of human persons should accommodate well-known established facts. First, there are the facts of biology that situate human persons in the animal world. Darwinism offers a great unifying thesis that “there is one grand pattern of similarity linking all life.”¹¹ Human and nonhuman organisms both find their place in this one grand pattern. Second, there are the facts of self-consciousness that distinguish human persons from other parts of the natural world. People often know what they are thinking, feeling, deciding, etc. They can think about the future, wonder how they are going to die, hope for an afterlife. They can reflect on their own motivations—from St. Augustine in the *Confessions* to former army generals in their memoirs. Such descriptions all presuppose self-consciousness: they presuppose beings with the ability to be conscious of themselves from a first-personal point of view. And, as far as we know, what they describe is unique to human persons.

I believe that the Constitution View fully honors both these kinds of fact. Some philosophers doubt that the claim that persons are natural products of the natural world is compatible with the claim that persons are ontologically unique. Part of my aim here is to dispel that doubt, by showing that the Constitution View can do justice to both of these *desiderata*:

- (1) Human persons are wholly part of the natural world, produced and governed by natural processes;
- (2) Human persons are ontologically unique.

¹¹ Niles Eldredge, *The Triumph of Evolution* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 2000): 31.

Let me explain further what I mean by these *desiderata*. First, to say that human persons are wholly part of the natural world is to endorse a kind of *quasi-naturalism*. Quasi-naturalism is naturalistic in taking the established results of scientific inquiry seriously: Science is the source of important knowledge of the natural world that is not subject to reinterpretation by philosophers. I am not saying that scientists' remarks about the meaning of scientifically confirmed facts is unchallengeable by nonscientists: In reporting the results of science, scientists sometimes give interpretations that depend on philosophical assumptions that philosophers rightly criticize. What I think that nonscientists should respect are results stated in the proprietary vocabularies of scientific theories on which scientists generally agree. Although I doubt that there's a sharp line here between what nonscientists should respect and what they may challenge, I want to rule out philosophers' giving interpretations of scientific results that the scientific community largely rejects.

The natural world is a spatiotemporal order that has its own integrity and autonomy, and that exhibits regularities that can be understood without regard to any immaterial objects or supernatural beings. The sciences are sovereign in their domains (and they are silent about matters outside their domains). Regularities and processes in the natural world have naturalistic explanations—that is, explanations that make no appeal to any supernatural beings.

However, quasi-naturalism falls short of full-blown naturalism in two respects—one epistemological, the other metaphysical: First, quasi-naturalism does not claim that the sciences are the only source of knowledge; rather, it allows there are kinds of knowledge—e.g., personal experience, humanistic studies of

history and the arts—that do not belong to the sciences, as standardly understood. A second way that quasi-naturalism falls short of full-blown naturalism is that quasi-naturalism is not a metaphysical thesis at all: it does not claim that the natural world is all there is to reality; quasi-naturalism remains neutral with respect to the existence of anything that transcends the natural world. Another way to put it is that quasi-naturalism is not metaphysical naturalism, according to which science is the final arbiter of all knowable reality. Rather, quasi-naturalism implies only that scientific explanations are genuine explanations that do not and cannot appeal to immaterial entities or to supernatural agents.¹²

The issue of the nature of human persons is philosophical. The sciences can tell us about the biology and biochemistry of human persons, but whether the nature of human persons is exhausted by biology and biochemistry is not itself a scientific question. On the one hand, the sciences do not need a foundation in prior philosophy; on the other hand, philosophy is not just “continuous” with science. Paradigmatic philosophical questions—questions like What is the nature of necessity and possibility? How should vagueness be understood? What would a just society be like?—there are questions that do not arise in the sciences. According to quasi-naturalism, philosophy should cohere with the results of the sciences, without being merely an extension of the sciences.¹³

Quasi-naturalism is justified by the successes of the sciences in the past four hundred years. Even if there is more to knowable reality than what the sciences

¹² For this reason, it is wrongheaded to hope to find support for theism in science. The theory of Intelligent Design, advocated by certain Creationists, is a nonstarter as a modern scientific theory.

¹³ See my “Philosophy *in Mediis Rebus*,” *Metaphilosophy* 32 (2001): 378-394. As one result of this coherence with science, I take human persons to be part of a natural world that has evolved by means of natural causes over eons. As inhabitants of the natural world, human persons are natural entities that live under the same necessity as the rest of nature (whatever that may be).

can uncover, the success of the sciences—in shaping and re-shaping our social and physical environment and the framework for thinking about it—still gives them authority in their domains. Philosophers are in no position to re-interpret, in any large-scale or systematic manner, what scientists say about their domains in ways that the scientists themselves do not recognize.

The second *desideratum* is that human persons are ontologically unique. To say that persons are ontologically unique is to say that the kind *person* must be included in any complete account of what there is: An inventory of what exists would be incomplete if it left out persons qua persons. The properties in virtue of which entities are persons are, in the first instance, the properties in virtue of which they exist at all.¹⁴ The claim that human persons are ontologically unique is common to the great monotheistic traditions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.¹⁵ But I do not rely on this fact to justify ontological uniqueness of human persons as a *desideratum*; rather, a look at the natural world—the range of thoughts that people can have (for example, thoughts about differential equations or about anti-missile defense systems, or about world hunger or about the choices that they have made in the past), as well as cultural accomplishments of the arts, sciences, technology, morality, the production of wealth—gives ample evidence of the uniqueness of human persons.

That human persons are in *some* respects unique is indisputable; everything is unique in some respects. What is controversial is whether persons are *ontologically* unique—whether, as I hold, the coming-into-being of a new person

¹⁴ I am speaking of nonderivative Fs here. See *Persons and Bodies*, Chapter Two. For a discussion of ontologically significant properties, see Chapter Eleven and my “The Ontological Status of Persons,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2002): 370-388.

¹⁵ The ontological uniqueness of persons may be explained in more than one way. Some explain it in terms of an immaterial soul; I explain it in terms of the first-person perspective.

in the world is the coming into being of a new entity, or whether it is merely the acquisition of a property by an already-existing entity. I submit that our being persons is the deepest fact about us: the properties peculiar to persons are sufficiently different from the properties of nonpersons to warrant the conclusion that persons—with their inner lives that spawn memoirs, confessions, autobiographies, conversions, etc.—are a unique kind of being. The variety and sophistication of the products of human endeavor are good evidence for the ontological uniqueness of persons.¹⁶

Three Approaches Contrasted

Now consider how various approaches to the nature of human persons fare with respect to the two *desiderata*—quasi-naturalism and ontological uniqueness:

Animalism: According to Animalism, human persons are fundamentally animals.¹⁷ Animalism does not contravene quasi-naturalism, but some of its proponents do. For example, some Animalists believe that, whereas animals literally exist, their organs (hearts, livers, kidneys and so on) do not.¹⁸ Anyone who denies the existence of items that are (putatively) in the domain of biology contravenes quasi-naturalism.

¹⁶ For more detailed arguments, see my “The Ontological Status of Persons,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2002): 370-388, and “The Difference that Self-Consciousness Makes,” in *On Human Persons*, Klaus Petrus, ed. (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2003): 23-39.

¹⁷ Prominent Animalists include Eric T. Olson (*The Human Animal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)) and Paul F. Snowdon, “Persons, Animals and Ourselves,” in *The Person and the Human Mind*, ed. Christopher Gill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990): 83-107.

¹⁸ See Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), and Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

In any case, *all* animalists deny that human persons are ontologically unique. The basic metaphysical line, as they see it, is between organisms and nonliving things like artifacts. Let me remark in passing that recent work in biotechnology suggests that that line is not metaphysically basic. (Consider the so-called digital organisms, robo-rats, bacterial batteries, genetically engineered viral search-and-destroy missiles.) But even if there were a sharp demarcation between organism and nonorganism, it would not secure the ontological uniqueness of persons, as opposed to organisms generally.

Animalists typically take the kind *person* not to be ontologically significant. They tend to treat ‘person’ as a phase sortal. Being a person, like being a student, is a contingent property that some animals have some of the time. If Animalism is correct, then there could be a complete inventory of the objects that exist that neither mentioned persons nor entailed that persons exist. Therefore, according to Animalists, persons are not ontologically unique.¹⁹

Substance Dualism: According to Substance Dualism, human persons have immaterial parts (souls or minds).²⁰ Substance Dualism—mind-body dualism or soul-body dualism—in contrast to Animalism, does allow for the ontological uniqueness of persons; but Substance Dualism takes human animals to have natures partly outside the purview of biology. They take human animals to be radically unlike nonhuman animals in ways that biologists cannot detect.²¹ (I take

¹⁹ On the Animalist view, being a person is not a deep fact about persons. Ontologically speaking, the world would be no poorer without persons: if an Evil Genius took away all first-person perspectives, but left lower biological functions like metabolism intact, there would be no loss in what exists.

²⁰ Prominent Substance Dualists include Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); John Foster, *The Immaterial Self: A Defence of the Cartesian Dualist Conception of the Mind* (London: Routledge, 1991); Charles Talliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

²¹ Some Substance Dualists, like William Hasker, take nonhuman animals, as well as human animals, to have souls. According to Hasker, “Animals have souls, just as we do; their souls are less complex and sophisticated

Thomas Aquinas's view to be a form of Substance Dualism. Although he did not think that the soul is a substance, but a substantial form, he did think that it could exist apart from a body.) If being a human animal entails having an immaterial soul, and biologists have no truck with immaterial souls, then biologists are not authoritative about the nature of human animals. So, if Substance Dualism is correct, biologists are not authoritative about *biology*.²² Hence, Substance Dualism violates quasi-naturalism.

The Constitution View: It should come as no surprise that the Constitution View, and (as far as I know) the Constitution View alone, satisfies both *desiderata*. First, it is quasi-naturalistic: Human animals are exactly as biologists tell us they are. Biologists *are* authoritative over the animal kingdom, and they agree that the animal kingdom is a seamless whole that includes human animals; there are no significant *biological* differences between human and higher nonhuman animals. The Constitution View does not have to put a special gloss on biology to accommodate the ontological uniqueness of human persons. There is no gap in the animal kingdom.

Second, the Constitution View recognizes—nay, insists on—the ontological uniqueness of persons. Although biologists have animals in their domain, we look beyond biology (to the humanities and social studies, and perhaps, to religion) for a full understanding of persons that animals constitute. Here is an analogy: Although chemists have paint in their domain, and chemists are authoritative about the nature of paints, we look beyond chemistry (to art history and connoisseurship)

than ours, because generated by less complex nervous systems.” (p. 193)

²² Although I agree with Substance Dualists that our person-making properties are not those that biologists care about, on my view, biologists do have the last word on human animals: again, human animals constitute us without being identical to us.

for a full understanding of the paintings that the paint constitutes. Similarly, although biologists have human animals in their domain, and are authoritative about the nature of human animals, we look beyond biology for a full understanding of the human persons that human animals constitute.

In sum, the Constitution View makes sense of both the biological claim that we are animals, continuous with nonhuman animals, and the philosophical claim that we are ontologically and morally unique. The Constitution View accommodates both these claims by holding that we are animals derivatively in that we are wholly constituted by animals, and yet we are ontologically unique in virtue of having first-person perspectives nonderivatively.

Again: My claim to the ontological uniqueness of persons rests on our unique abilities that presuppose first-person perspectives. Our inwardness is a different kind of reality from third-personal reality. (We may brood over our wrongdoings, and resolve to do better in the future; we may think over strategies for combatting climate change; we may decide to dedicate ourselves to trying to end government-sponsored torture.) So, on the one hand, persons are ontologically unique. But on the other hand, first-person perspectives may have arisen by strictly natural processes—perhaps as by-products of traits that conveyed direct advantage for reproduction and survival. If so, we are natural, yet ontologically unique.

Conclusion

Considered in terms of genetic or morphological properties or of biological functioning, there is no gap or discontinuity between chimpanzees and human

animals. In fact, human animals are biologically more closely related to certain species of chimpanzees than are chimpanzees are related to gorillas and orangutans.²³ So, *biologically considered*, there's no significant difference between us and higher nonhuman animals. But *all things considered*, there is a huge discontinuity between us and nonhuman animals. And this discontinuity arises from the fact that we, and no other part of the animal kingdom, are self-conscious. (If I thought that chimpanzees or computers really did have first-person perspectives, I would suppose them to be persons too—although not human persons.)

To be ontologically unique, as I think that we are, is not necessarily to be biologically unique. Biologists have the last word on what is biologically salient, and if biologists do not take first-person perspectives, or inwardness, to be biologically significant, then so be it. The fact that first-person perspectives may have arisen as by-products of biological processes entails nothing about the *ontological* significance of first-person perspectives. What is ontologically significant may or may not be biologically significant.

In sum, the Constitution View allows human persons to be part of the material world—as material as trees and statues and traffic signs. It shows both how we are similar to other material things (ultimately constituted by aggregates of atoms), and how we are distinctive (we nonderivatively have first-person perspectives).

I should like to leave you with a question: Is the development of a robust first-person perspective—with the learning of a language and all manner of

²³ Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995): 336. Dennett is discussing Jared Diamond's *The Third Chimpanzee*.

interactions with others—inevitably a social phenomenon? Developmental psychology suggests that it is. If that is so, then what makes us ontologically unique is both natural and social.