

Two Kinds of Unity: Conscious Experience and its Subject

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As I was thinking about the problem of the unity of consciousness, I made what seems to me to be a significant discovery: There are two distinct kinds of unity associated with consciousness, and both can be called ‘unity of consciousness.’ On the one hand, there is the familiar unity of conscious experiences—for example, hearing a bird sing while smelling a rose. On the other hand, there is the unity of the subject who has the experiences—unity provided by the general dispositional property of consciousness that subjects have even when they are asleep. This distinction has been blurred, I believe, by the phrase ‘the unity of consciousness.’ The phrase applies both to the unity of the conscious states that the subject has (an occurrent phenomenon) and to the unity of a subject’s consciousness (a dispositional phenomenon). Clearly, these are different kinds of unity. One is the unity of conscious experiences, and the other is the unity of the subject of conscious experiences.

What I intend to do here is, first, to discuss the two kinds of unity, each of which is indispensable. Then, I shall argue for two conclusions: (1) the unity of conscious experiences presupposes the (different kind of) unity of the subject of experience, and (2) although there are subjects of conscious experience, there is no self that is distinct from a whole embodied person. My overall aim is to relate my metaphysical picture of the unity of subjects or persons to phenomenological issues of the unity of conscious experience.

I shall try to avoid the term ‘the unity of consciousness’ since I think that it can apply to both kinds of unity.

Two Kinds of Unity

At the outset, I should identify one of my assumptions. I think that conscious experiences are intricately tied to subjects, to the entities that have them. There are no free-floating conscious experiences untethered to anything that experiences them. I cannot make sense of the notion that there are experiences just drifting in space, experiences that nobody has. I do not think of conscious experiences as entities standing on their own, but rather as properties of subjects. Every experience has a subject.

Now turn to the two kinds of unity—the unity of conscious experiences and the unity of the subject of conscious experiences. The big difference between these two kinds of unity is that the unity of conscious experiences is phenomenological, dependent on experience, and the unity of the subject is metaphysical, dependent only on the nature of the subject of experience.

Let me say briefly what I think metaphysics and phenomenology are. Phenomenology is characterized by David Woodruff Smith in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as “the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view.” “Phenomenology, Smith continues, “studies conscious experience as experienced, analyzing the structure...of perception, thought, imagination, emotion, and volition and action.” (Smith 2010)

The phenomenological issue of the unity of conscious experience is illustrated by my experience of feeling the jet touch the ground at the Pulkovo airport and simultaneously, seeing the terminal for the first time; there is a single experience of

feeling the jet touch the ground and seeing the terminal at the same time. What would have been two experiences in different circumstances give way to a more primitive unity that possesses “a joint experiential character.” Tim Bayne and others call this ‘phenomenal unity.’ (Bayne 2010, 10)

The kind of unity at issue in most accounts of the unity of conscious states is phenomenal unity: There is something that it is like to be in the unified state. Consider some more examples: If you are a normal person walking on a city street, and you are conscious of seeing the traffic light change while feeling the hardness of the pavement, your experience is unified at a time; or if you hear a train coming and then see it rounding the bend, your experience is unified over time. I think that we all agree that normally “conscious experience as experienced” is unified in these ways, as David Woodruff Smith put it in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (Smith 2010)

In a recent book entitled The Unity of Consciousness, Tim Bayne focuses on the phenomenal unity of states, the unity of complex conscious states such that there is something that it is like for a subject to be in them. Bayne’s example is that there is something that it is like to have the complex experience of hearing a rumba playing on the stereo while seeing a bartender mixing a mojito. (Bayne 2010, 10) There has been a great deal written about how to understand such conscious states. In addition to discussing normal cases like those I just cited, Bayne has discussed abnormal or pathological cases, like split-brain phenomena (are there two streams of consciousness or just one shifting stream?), and symptoms of schizophrenia (like thought insertion in which patients feel that someone else has forced thoughts on them (Bayne 2010, 157–58). In these cases, among other abnormal cases, while elements of the unity of consciousness

are impaired, Bayne argues that phenomenal consciousness remains unified. In short, Bayne takes the central kind of unity of consciousness to be phenomenal unity, the unity of conscious experience. The avenue to this kind of unity of consciousness (i.e., the unity of conscious experiences) leads through phenomenology.

But the avenue to the unity of the subject of conscious experiences leads through metaphysics. Metaphysics, at least for purposes here, may be considered as study of the natures of things that are genuinely real—namely, the natures of irreducible and ineliminable entities, properties, and kinds. My interest here is with subjects of experience. I take all persons to be subjects of experience, but not all subjects of experience to be persons; some nonhuman animals (dogs and cats) are subjects of experience.¹

All subjects of experience, persons and some animals, have what I call ‘rudimentary first-person perspectives.’ However, since I do not know how to apply ‘unity of consciousness’ to nonhuman animals (or to human babies, for that matter), I shall confine my discussion of subjects of experience to persons who have what I call ‘robust first-person perspectives.’ I leave to others the question of unity of consciousness of animals and infants who have only rudimentary first-person perspectives.

The metaphysical issue here concerns persons as subjects of conscious experience; the phenomenological issue here, as we just saw, concerns conscious experiences. There are two differences between the phenomenological and the

¹Although my interest here is persons, let me say a word about animals. Many animals, like dogs and cats and cows have what I call a rudimentary first-person perspective and are thereby subjects of conscious experience. Any entity with a rudimentary first-person perspective—any entity that can feel pain and act intentionally—is a subject of experience. (So my notion of a first-person perspective is decidedly nonCartesian.)

metaphysical issues: First, the phenomenological issue always concerns experience; the metaphysical issue concerns the nature of the subject of experience, and the nature of the subject of experience may or may not itself be experienced. Second, the phenomenological issue concerns states, whereas the metaphysical issue concerns entities that have those states.

If conscious experience is a person-level manifestation of the dispositional property of consciousness, as I believe it is, then the metaphysical issue about the subject of consciousness and the phenomenological issue about conscious experience are inextricably linked. So, my view of subjects as persons overlaps both metaphysics and phenomenology.

You may ask: Why start with metaphysics and phenomenology? Why not start with science? My answer is that if we want to study persons or persons as subjects of experience, science requires supplementing. Science, with its objective methods, can never say what makes me a person; it simply lacks the conceptual first-person resources. (For an extended argument on this point, see my *Naturalism and the First-Person Perspective*. (Baker 2013a)) So, if we want to understand persons as subjects, and if we take persons to be genuinely real, as I do, we are forced into phenomenology and metaphysics. Science is not enough.

So, back to phenomenology and metaphysics. The kind of unity that I want to focus on does not highlight *states* of consciousness or their contents, but rather highlights the *subject* of these states, the bearer of the property of consciousness generally. In order to have states of consciousness—to be a subject—an entity must have the general property of consciousness: the dispositional property of being a conscious entity. The

general property of consciousness is what enables entities to have states of conscious experience: I have the experience of speaking here in part because I am a conscious entity, a conscious being. This property is a dispositional property (like honesty, or fragility) that can be exemplified when it is not being manifested. (For example, a fragile thing remains breakable even when it is not broken; and an honest person is honest even when she is silent.) So, a subject has the dispositional property of consciousness, even when asleep and having no conscious experiences. On my view, the unity of the subject is the unity conferred by the first-person perspective, a dispositional property, over time.²

I want to offer a metaphysical account of the unity of the person as subject of conscious experience and to argue that the metaphysical account of the unity of the subject of conscious experience (in terms of exemplification of a dispositional property) is more fundamental than a phenomenological account of the unity of conscious states.

Subjects of Experience and the First-Person Perspective

The issue of the unity of subjects of conscious experience takes us to two aspects of the unity of a person: the nature of persons (or subjects) and the way that they endure over time. For convenience, I shall say ‘persons’ here instead of ‘subjects’ since *person* is the primary kind of the subjects that I am talking about.³

An account of the nature of persons discloses the unity of persons *at a time* (synchronic unity), while an account of the way that they endure (i.e., personal identity) discloses the unity of persons *over time* (diachronic unity). (By ‘person’ here, I mean

²Although he does not focus on it, Bayne does describe a kind of subject unity unlike mine. He says, “My conscious states possess a certain kind of unity insofar as they are all mine; likewise, your conscious states possess that same kind of unity insofar as they are all yours. We can describe conscious states that are had by or belong to the same subject of experience as *subject unified*.” (Bayne 2010, 9)

³I am a person in virtue of having a first-person perspective essentially; I am a subject in virtue of having experiences.

‘human person.’) I appeal to a first-person perspective to account for both synchronic and diachronic unity of a person. On my view, having a first-person perspective essentially--a dispositional property--is what unifies a person both at a time and over time.⁴

Synchronic Unity of a Subject of Conscious Experience

In order to understand personal identity, we must understand what a person is. On my view, a person is essentially an exemplifier of a first-person perspective and is essentially embodied. Essential embodiment means that a person cannot exist without some body or other that can provide the mechanisms needed for all the person’s mental, social, and physical activities. At any time the person exists, she is constituted by a body, but she is not identical to the body that constitutes her at that time. I’ll not discuss my views on embodiment here, but I’ll focus on the first-person perspective—the unifier of persons, and hence of subjects of experience.

The first-person perspective, as I see it, is a dispositional property that has two stages: rudimentary and robust. Persons begin existence at the rudimentary stage of the first-person perspective. Entities at the rudimentary stage have consciousness and intentionality. So, the property of having consciousness is an ingredient of the first-person perspective, even at the rudimentary stage. This makes the property of having consciousness an essential property of persons and so of subjects.

Although a human infant does not yet have a robust first-person perspective, she does already have a second-order capacity to develop a robust first-person perspective, and it is the robust first-person perspective that makes persons absolutely unique.

⁴I say 'essentially', because, I am a nonreductionist about persons. Unlike, say, a teacher, who can exist without being a teacher, a person cannot exist without being a person.

(Instead of constantly saying ‘stage’, I will sometimes just say, ‘the rudimentary first-person perspective’ or ‘the robust first-person perspective’; this is just a stylistic convenience: I am always talking about stages of a single dispositional property.) The second stage of the first-person perspective (the stage that only human persons have) is the robust stage. A robust first-person perspective adds to the rudimentary first-person perspective a peculiar conceptual ability—self-consciousness, in which the conscious subject has the ability to conceive of herself as herself from the first person. So, a person with a robust first-person perspective can manifest her personhood in a much richer and more variegated way than can an infant only at the rudimentary stage. Indefinitely more kinds of conscious experiences are available to a person with a robust first-person perspective than to a nonhuman animal that has only a rudimentary first-person perspective.

Unlike the rudimentary stage of the first-person perspective, which does not require language or concepts, the robust stage is a conceptual stage that entails the ability to conceive of oneself as oneself in the first person. A robust first-person perspective is the capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself in the first-person—without need to identify oneself by means of any description, name, or other third-person referring device. Evolutionarily speaking, my guess is that the robust first-person perspective evolved along with natural language.

Conclusive evidence of a robust first-person perspective comes from use of complex first-person sentences like e.g., “I wonder how I will die,” or “I promise that I will stay with you.” (Castañeda 1966; Castañeda 1967) With a robust first-person perspective, one can experience one’s own thoughts; a person can know what she is

thinking. If I wonder how I will die, or I promise that I'll stay with you, for example, 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 in the room) at all. Even if I had amnesia and didn't realize that I was Lynne Baker, I could still wonder how I'm going to die. I can consciously experience that thought, and experience myself thinking it. Any entity who can wonder how she—she herself—will die ipso facto has a robust first-person perspective and thus is a person. She can understand herself from “within,” so to speak.

In order to have a robust first-person perspective, one must have a concept of oneself as oneself from the first-person—a self-concept. The second occurrence of ‘I’ in “I wonder how I am going to die” expresses a self-concept. A self-concept cannot stand alone; it is a nonqualitative concept that is used in tandem with other concepts. If I promise that I will take care of you, then I manifest a robust first-person perspective by expressing a self-concept; but also I manifest mastery of other concepts like ‘promise’ and ‘taking care’. And it is in learning a natural language that one masters these other common empirical concepts that one deploys with a self-concept.

Perhaps surprisingly, David Hume illustrates the point that the self-concept cannot be understood by considering it in isolation. Even though I often disagree with Hume, I think that he was right in his famous passage, “When I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble upon some particular impression.” (Hume 1968, Bk I, Part IV, sect. VI, 253) But I think that he drew the wrong conclusion from this observation. He concluded that there was no subject of experience. I think otherwise: Hume's observation does not imply that that there is no subject of experience or that a self-

concept has no extension; it only implies that a self-concept must be deployed with other concepts. That seems to me to be phenomenologically correct. I can experience myself thinking that I wonder how I'm going to die, but I cannot experience myself *simpliciter*, without thinking something *about* myself. The self-concept does not stand alone.

Full mastery of the first-person pronoun 'I' brings with it a self-concept, and with a self-concept, a robust first-person perspective. Even though the robust first-person perspective is what sets persons apart from all other creatures, it is not essential to persons that they develop the robust first-person perspective. What is essential to persons is that they have a rudimentary *or* robust first-person perspective.

In short: A person has a first-person perspective essentially. At the rudimentary stage, a person—like any entity with a rudimentary first-person perspective—has consciousness and intentionality. At the robust stage, she has self-consciousness. In both cases, a person or a subject has consciousness, a dispositional property that she instantiates or exemplifies even when she is not manifesting it. Persons are not just physical systems, or collections of interacting parts—or as Dennett might say, a grab-bag of tricks. Persons are unities, where unity is secured by the first-person perspective, which a person has essentially.

Diachronic Unity of a Subject of Experience

Unity of consciousness can also be diachronic. So, turn now to personal identity over time: What remains the same throughout our existence—no matter how diverse our experiences become—is our exemplifying the dispositional property that is the first-person perspective: as long as the first-person perspective is exemplified by me, I exist. As long as the first-person perspective is exemplified by you, you exist. What makes me

me and you is a nonqualitative difference between us: we are different exemplifiers of the first-person perspective. So, given a person, who has a first-person perspective essentially, her personal identity resides in her continued exemplification of the first-person perspective, rudimentary or robust. Again, the metaphysical unity of person—both synchronic and diachronic—is provided by the first-person perspective, a property which persons have essentially.

Admittedly, this view of personal identity over time is uninformative, but the only way that it could be informative would be to explain persistence in nonpersonal terms, or in terms of distinct shorter-lived objects. (Baker 2013b, 596) If we had such informative sufficient conditions, persons would just reduce to them and hence would not be basic entities. But on my view, persons are basic entities: that is, being a person does not consist in satisfying nonpersonal or subpersonal conditions, such as psychological or physical continuity. (Support for this view comes from the fact that all of the various proposed informative conditions—psychological continuity, bodily continuity, the existence of an immaterial soul—are in one way or another defective, and we have no reason to believe that the future will be different.) If I am right that being a person does not consist in satisfying some nonpersonal or subpersonal conditions, then (pace Parfit) no reductive account of personal identity over time will be correct. Any correct account of personal identity over time must be uninformative; otherwise it would be reductive.⁵

In short, what unifies a person or subject—both at a time and over time—is her first-person perspective, which includes consciousness as a constituent.

⁵My metaphysical view of personal identity trivially guarantees what Bayne called ‘subject unity’. Since on my account, x and y are the same person if and only if x and y are the same exemplifiers of the first-person perspective, it just follows that if x and y are the same person, x’s and y’s states are states of the same subject, and hence exhibit subject unity—whether they exhibit phenomenal unity or not.

Why the Metaphysical Unity of the Subject is Deeper than the Phenomenal Unity of Conscious Experiences

Unity of the subject of consciousness is deeper than the phenomenal unity of conscious experiences in this respect: Unity of conscious experience presupposes unity of the subject. Whenever there is unity of conscious experience, there is unity of its subject. Here are two examples in which unity of conscious experience presupposes unity of its subject:

A prisoner alone in a small cell may have a conscious experience of remembering that he was marched into the small cell and regretting that he has a sore back. His experience may be phenomenally unified: While regretting that he has a sore back, the prisoner remembers being marched into the cell. The phenomenal unity is provided by the prisoner's having the complex experience at a single time, and his realizing that he is having a complex experience (even though he may not express it that way). The prisoner's having the complex experience of simultaneously remembering and regretting is itself a manifestation of a robust first-person perspective. He could not have that unified complex experience if he could not conceive of himself as himself in the first person. He could neither have that memory nor have that regret without being able to conceive of himself as himself from the first person. So, this example illustrates the point that the phenomenal unity of his conscious experience (his remembering and regretting simultaneously) presupposes the metaphysical unity of the subject in terms of a robust first-person perspective.

This example also illustrates that the converse does not hold: The metaphysical unity of the subject of consciousness does not presuppose the phenomenal unity of

experience. Unity of the subject of consciousness is independent of the phenomenal unity of experience. The unity of the subject is conferred by a dispositional property (the first-person perspective) which the subject exemplifies at every moment that she exists, but the unity of phenomenal experience may be intermittent. If our prisoner had first remembered being marched to his cell, and then regretted having a sore back, he would not have had the unified experience of remembering and regretting at the same time. In that case, there would have been the unity of the subject without the unity of the experience. So, this example, I believe, illustrates the fact that the metaphysical unity of the subject of consciousness, in terms of the first-person perspective, is more fundamental than the phenomenal unity of conscious experiences.

Here is a second example in which unity of conscious experience presupposes unity of the subject of consciousness. Bayne suggests that the body may make a contribution to certain aspects of the unity of consciousness. Forms of bodily experience (for example, touch) “represent one’s body as one’s own body.” The contents of bodily sensations are phenomenally unified with each other in virtue of the fact that the contents “represent one’s body as a single integrated thing.” (Bayne 2010, 251) After noting that many forms of conscious experience (e.g., trying to remember a telephone number) do not bring with them “a sense of oneself as an embodied being, even implicitly,” Bayne goes on to say, “[T]hose conscious states that do contain implicit reference to one’s own body—roughly, bodily sensations and perceptual states—must represent one’s body as a single integrated object in order to be phenomenally unified with each other.” He calls this “the embodiment constraint.” (Bayne 2010, 252)

Although Bayne ultimately concludes that “phenomenal unity is fundamentally independent of the sense of embodiment” (Bayne 2010, 268), the point that I want to make is that the embodiment constraint itself presupposes the robust first-person perspective: One could not represent “one’s body as a single, integrated object” without being able to conceive of it as one’s own, in the first person. Anything lacking a robust first-person perspective would be unable to represent his own body at all. To put it the other way around, any entity that had the experience of her body as a single, integrated object would ipso facto be a unified subject of consciousness. So, here we have phenomenal unity of experience that presupposes metaphysical unity of the subject of consciousness.

Of course, the converse does not hold. Metaphysical unity does not presuppose or entail phenomenal unity. A unified subject could have very disunified experience, as seems the case in pathological examples. For example, in the pathology of “thought insertion,” a subject remains unified by the first-person perspective, but her experience may lack phenomenal unity. It seems to me that cases like these require empirical investigation.

This completes my argument that the metaphysical unity of the subject of conscious experience is deeper than the phenomenal unity of conscious states.

Are There Such Things as Selves?

Although I heartily endorse the view that there are genuinely real subjects of experience, I do not believe that there are any selves—if a self is anything considered to be anything other than a whole embodied person. Of course, this view puts me at odds with many other philosophers, like, for example, Bayne. Bayne claims, without

argument, that there are intimate relations between the unity of consciousness and the self, and goes on to argue that both the animalist and neo-Lockean accounts fail to do it justice. Then, Bayne develops an account of the self that he hopes does justice to “the essential connections between the self and the unity of consciousness.” (Bayne 2010, 269) I see no such essential connections, because I see no selves. My own metaphysical account of persons and personal identity is neither animalist nor neo-Lockean; yet, on my view there is no item that can be called a ‘self.’

What could a self be? A self could not be a subpersonal item that is the subject of conscious experience inasmuch as conscious experience is a person-level phenomenon, and its subject could not be subpersonal. If a self were supposed to be a person-level item, what could it be—if not the whole person? Indeed, I think that the first-person perspective, a dispositional property, simply pre-empts the need for a self. Of course, I believe that there are subjects of experience, but I believe that subjects of experience are simply entities that have first-person perspectives. Some subjects of experience are persons with robust first-person perspectives, and such persons—whole embodied persons—I believe, serve the functions that Bayne assigns to selves.

Bayne finds three roles for selves: First, according to Bayne, selves are owners of conscious states. Second, selves are “the objects of first-person reflection – I thoughts.” (Bayne 2010, 269) Third, selves have a perspective or point of view on the world. “A self is not merely an entity *in* the world; it is also something for which the world is an entity.” (Bayne 2010, 270) It seems obvious to me that whole persons with robust first-person perspectives have all these roles:

1. Whole embodied persons are the bearers or subjects of experience (I wouldn't say that they "own" their experiences). I, the whole person, see you coming; I, the whole person, am glad that you are here. No subpersonal or nonpersonal part of me has experiences: Even if my eyes and my brain supply the mechanisms of experience, they are not what *has* the experience. How could my eyes or brain be glad to see you? I, the whole person, have the experience.
2. Whole embodied persons are the objects of first-person reflection. If I say, "I am glad that I came to see you," I do not attribute gladness to some subpersonal part of me (like a self), but to myself, the whole person.
3. Whole embodied persons have a perspective on the world. Again, it is the whole person who has this particular orientation to the world, not any subpersonal part.

None of these roles requires any appeal to a self. I understand the first role and third role in terms of conscious beings both at the rudimentary and robust stages, and the second in terms of persons with robust first-person perspectives. So, I conclude that we have no reason to postulate any self. Consciousness of oneself does not imply consciousness *a* self. The whole person suffices on her own to fulfill all the functions ascribed to a self. If so, Bayne's view of the self is left without motivation.

According to Bayne, selves "are the central characters in a kind of phenomenal fiction." (Bayne 2010, 269) Here is another reason not to believe that there are selves. I am too much of a realist to endorse this conception of selves as "merely intentional entities—entities whose identity is determined by the cognitive architecture underlying a

stream of consciousness.” (Bayne 2010, 289) Transmuting Daniel Dennett’s notion of the self as a center of narrative gravity, Bayne advises us to think of the self as “a merely virtual centre of ‘phenomenal gravity.’” Instead of beginning with a fixed idea of the self (as an organism) and looking for how it unifies conscious experience, “start with the thought that selves must have a unified consciousness and use this claim to constrain our conception of the self.” He develops “a notion of the self, according to which the relationship between the self and the unity of consciousness is constitutive.” (Bayne 2010, 281; emphasis his)

According to Bayne, the self is brought into being by de se representations (like ‘I wonder how I am going to die’) that represent subjects to themselves as themselves. The “de se representations that occur within a single phenomenal field will be co-referential”—thereby tying the self to the unity of consciousness. (Bayne 2010, 289)

I have two objections to Bayne’s view: (1) Bayne holds that phenomenal unity is constitutive of the self, but why not just say—as Bayne did when discussing pathologies—that phenomenal unity is where you find it? We do not need a self to understand phenomenal unity. If we return to our original examples of phenomenal unity, we’ll see that they can be explained in terms of (metaphysical) subject unity: When a single subject consciously hears a bird and smells a rose at the same time, she (normally) has a complex conscious experience of hearing a bird while smelling a rose. And when a single subject consciously hears a train and a second later, sees the train rounding the bend, she (normally) has a temporally-extended complex conscious experience of hearing a train and then seeing it. We do not need a self—especially a virtual self—to account for phenomenal unity. And appeal to a self does not tell us how the hearing of the bird

and the smelling of the rose are bound together. (Bayne holds what he calls a “mereological” account and says that the parts of the complex experience are unified by being subsumed by a complex conscious state. Without further explication, this is almost vacuous.) We can stick with whole embodied persons and person-level phenomena, all the way through, and leave selves aside.

(2) My more important objection to virtual intentional selves is that the idea of a virtual self dissolves into fictionalism. Virtual selves, Bayne tell us, are “merely intentional entities” – like fictional characters, say, the Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot in Agatha Christie’s mysteries. But fictional entities are nonexistent. However, Bayne says that “it should not be thought that the self is fictional in the way that Hercule Poirot and other creatures of fiction are.” (Bayne 2010, 293) Here is the difference that Bayne sees between intentional selves and fictional characters: The character Hercule Poirot is to be contrasted with “real (non-fictional, actual, existent) Belgian detectives,” but no such contrast pertains to selves. “The kinds of selves that we possess are as real as selves get.” (Bayne 2010, 293)

But, hold on! How real are virtual selves? I would say that virtual selves are not real at all. Bayne says that “there is no kind of real self with which our kinds of selves could be contrasted, for it is in the nature of selves to be virtual.” (Bayne 2010, 293) Well, it is just as true that there is no kind of real ghost with which poltergeists could be contrasted, for it is in the nature of poltergeists to be virtual. But poltergeists are wholly unreal; why not selves?

Let me underscore that I do not think that the difference between my view of whole embodied persons and Bayne’s view of a self is merely terminological. Bayne

thinks that the self is a merely intentional object; I think that whole persons are as real as electrons. Bayne thinks of a virtual self as generated by “the cognitive architecture underlying the stream of consciousness” (Bayne 2010, 292); I think of persons as having first-person perspectives (rudimentary and robust) essentially, where a first-person perspective is a dispositional property as real as elasticity. A metaphysical account of the first-person perspective (rudimentary and robust), I think, just obviates any need for selves. In short, the subject of conscious experience is a whole embodied person, not a virtual or fictional self.

Conclusion

To conclude: I have presented a metaphysical account of the subject of conscious experience—whole embodied persons—as unified by the first-person perspective. And I have argued that the metaphysical unity is more fundamental than the phenomenal unity of consciousness in this respect: Phenomenal unity of experience presupposes metaphysical unity of the subject of experience, but not vice versa. Then, I turned to Tim Bayne’s view of selves, and argued that it is both unnecessary (since the metaphysical account of the first-person perspective precludes the need for a self) and inadequate (since his selves are only intentional entities). Whole embodied persons are the subjects of experience, unified by the essential first-person perspective.

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