

Possibility, Personal Identity, and the First-Person Perspective

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We usually call the kind of entity I am a *person*. Say you consider yourself as the *same person* as the child in that old photograph. Although you may have grown taller since then, held different beliefs, and made new memories, that was *your* childhood rather than of someone else. *This* sense of personhood does not concern the sociological or psychological question of who you are, but the metaphysical question of what you are. That persons are bodies, brains, bundles of perceptions or memories, or even four-dimensional ‘worms’ comprised of the regions of spacetime a body occupies from birth till death are among some viable answers to the said question. However, statements like “I am *this* body” or “I am *this* bundle of perceptions” carry a sense of contingency, whereas identity is generally considered to be a necessary relation. Moreover, some counterfactual scenarios described by expressions like, “If I were Vincent van Gogh...”, do not appear to be genuine possibilities if we accept theses such as “persons are bodies” (for I cannot imagine this body to be another body). On the other hand, such scenarios still seem to be logically possible, as I can imagine that I experience the world “through” another body.

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In this paper, I will focus on a particular view of personal identity that seems to evade these problems. This view holds that a person is a subject of a first-person perspective (Baker (2000) and Ninan (2009)). To argue in favor, I will assert that a complete picture of reality should include phenomenal experiences and their subjects (§1), clarify what I mean by a ‘first-person perspective’ (§2), discuss the constitution relation between persons and their bodies (§3), defend the necessity of identity (§4), and suggest that the proposed definition of persons does not violate the principle of the necessity of identity and helps us to make sense of counterfactual scenarios where a person could have been wildly different (§5).

1. What should our ontology admit to the real world

I experience that I am in this world in a quite peculiar way: my body is *always* at the ‘center’ of my world, and it offers me a *perspective* from which the world can be experienced, wherever it is located in the fabric of the universe. I can also imagine being located *elsewhere* via another body, and in doing so, I do not take ‘what is out there’ in the world to be different. Rather, I imagine the same ‘external’ world from a *different* perspective. If so, and if persons are subjects of first-person perspectives (FPPs), then it seems persons are singled out purely indexically, that is, a purely objective description of the world cannot include FPPs. To argue for the mentioned view of personal identity, therefore, it is needed for us to acknowledge that reality is *not just* objective reality,¹ that a merely objective description of what there is, however extensive, would be incomplete (Nagel (1986), 26). A *complete* description of the world must also include *subjectivity*.

Take my experience of observing a single leaf. Although it *appears* green to me, I would surely be mistaken if I assume this appearance—i.e., greenness—is a property of *the leaf itself*, or even that the leaf appears in such a way in general. My experience of the leaf would most probably be quite different from how a duck or a dog experiences it. We also have no reason to hold that any conscious being has a privileged position in perceiving reality in terms of their color qualia.² So, insofar as we seek some ‘objective’ truth, we can only maintain a statement like the following:

¹There would, of course, not be any such requirement to claim, for example, that ‘persons are human bodies.’

²Of course, compared to others, some may have richer, more detailed experiences. That does not mean those experiences reflect the *objective* nature of the perceived world.

The surface of the leaf is structured in a particular way,
which reflects the light in such and such manners.

We cannot, however, derive the phenomenal quality of greenness from any such objective truth. This experience must be a part of the world because, in imagining that I do not experience greenness, I seem to represent the world *differently*, I imagine a counterfactual state of affairs. Similarly, I cannot doubt my pain since what feels like pain *is* pain, irrespective of whatever else may be true about my nervous system. Although my pain is mere appearance, we cannot say it has reality only to me either. Though it exists in *my* world, *my* world is a part of *the* world, so my pain is also a part of the picture of the whole world: A world in which I do not experience any pain is a different one than I do.

If experiences are part of the world, so are their subjects. It is inconceivable that there is something like being in a certain state without a subject *being* in that state. Genuine experiences require a subject to ‘experience’ them, implying phenomenally conscious beings. As one such being, and as being embodied, I experience that my world has a *center* and I am *at* this ‘center.’ I am thus located in the texture of reality. To hurt me, for example, you have to bite *this* body rather than something else. However, neither that I have a perspective nor that “*this* body is mine” are *objective* truths: As they are not expressible without reference to the first person, they would not be included in a purely objective description of reality. It seems, on the other hand, they are nonetheless *true*, so we should argue that:

- P1. The objective, ‘centerless’ description of reality does not involve FPPs.
- P2. There exist FPPs.
- C. The objective description of reality cannot be a complete description of reality.

One does not need to be a substance dualist to hold such a view. The picture we have just drawn is incompatible only with a particular kind of materialism, which maintains that a physical description of the world is sufficient for a complete description of it and that all mental facts are ontologically dependent on physical facts (i.e., following from them by necessity) (Kripke (1980), 155). As Nagel points out, however, this kind of materialism is false—not because there are nonphysical substances, but because some truths regarding conscious beings cannot be reduced to

physical terms given their subjective characters (Nagel (1986), 29).³

2. What kind of an entity a person is

While I defend Baker's definition of persons (insofar as it defines a person as a subject of an FPP), I do not regard this paper as an interpretation of her views.⁴ In fact, I shall distinguish our theses. Baker considers first-person perspectives in two developmental 'stages' (Baker (2013), 30–31):

RUDIMENTARY FPP: Manifested by human infants and probably most non-human animals—it is, very roughly, the *nonconceptual* ability to experience the world from a particular location in spacetime.

ROBUST FPP: Manifested by language users who have mastered the first-personal language (i.e., uniquely human), it involves having conceptual thoughts and the consideration of *oneself as oneself*—very roughly, corresponding to self-consciousness.

Baker claims that to be a person, one must be the subject of a ROBUST FPP, whereas I hold that a RUDIMENTARY FPP suffices. We are justified in suggesting that we are talking about a distinct ontological kind carved out by *subjectivity*; for a world without subjectivity could have been the same in all physical respects but still be different from the actual state of affairs in lacking 'inner life,' in being devoid of experiences and persons.⁵ But that concerns only RUDIMENTARY FPP. Although ROBUST FPP is a remarkable capacity—and should be more than sufficient to be considered a person—I question why it should carve out a distinct ontological kind from the bearers of RUDIMENTARY FPP. Self-consciousness seems only necessary to *represent* a person (be it yourself or someone else), not to *be* one. Having a first-person *concept* of myself should be distinguished from

³One might worry that once we allow a person to not be *identical* to a particular physical object, then it must be some *nonphysical* thing. I will answer that in §3.

⁴For such a collection of papers, see the 7th issue of *Phenomenology and Mind* (2014).

⁵In other words, it would be a possible world without subjectivity. I will discuss such a possibility in §5 as well.

possessing a first-person *perspective*.⁶ So from now on, whenever I bring up the FPP-DEFINITION, I will talk about the thesis that a person exists by virtue of *any* particular RUDIMENTARY FPP.

3. Constitution

If the subject of an FPP is not *identical* to some particular, objectively described physical object, but a member of a distinct ontological kind, does not FPP-DEFINITION entail that there must be some immaterial substance to ground this distinction?⁷ Indeed, some critics underlined “...the inadequacy of sameness of first-person perspective as the criterion of personal identity would remain” as long as its avoidance of substance dualism is not clarified (DeGrazia (2002), 120). Baker attempts to avoid admitting nonphysical substances by positing the ‘Constitution View’ of persons.

Suppose I take a lump of clay (let us call it ‘the lump’) and mold it into a raccoon-shaped statue (and let us call it ‘Rocky’).⁸ Baker rejects the identity of Rocky with the lump because of the principle of the necessity of identity and provides the following argument (Baker (1997), 600):

- P1. Rocky is essentially (that is, necessarily⁹) a statue.
- P2. The lump is not essentially a statue.

⁶ As opposed to Baker (200), 60. Perhaps I am being a bit careless here. The concern might be that merely *having experiences* might not suffice to amount to a perspective. Maybe, by having the conceptual ability to think of ‘ourselves as ourselves,’ by being able to conceive ourselves from the ‘inside,’ from our own point of view; we can distinguish ‘how things are with the world’ from ‘how things are with us.’ That is, representing the world objectively might be peculiar to self-conscious beings (I would like to thank Dr. Eylem Özaltun for this point), since they are able to differentiate their subjective experiences from what is ‘out there’ in the world. In that sense, it may appear that only ‘to bear a ROBUST FPP’ is to have a genuine ‘perspective’ directed toward the world. I would, then, object by positing that ‘how things are with you’ must be a part of the world too. Imagine I am only the bearer of a RUDIMENTARY FPP, and not only that, but the entirety of my phenomenal experiences is also illusory: They all ‘misrepresent’ the world, so to speak. But—similar to an earlier point—those sets of experiences must also be a part of this world (by virtue of being a part of my presentational content): In that case, I might have been said to have a ‘perspective’ directed toward a portion of the world (Thus I—rather controversially—claim that one cannot have subjective experiences without them amounting to a point of view). Besides, even if I am under some such illusion, it seems ‘I’ should exist as the subject of that illusion.

⁷ I am thankful to Süleyman Çağlar Varol for articulating related concerns.

⁸ For the sake of analogy, grant for a moment that everyday objects are genuine ‘things,’ including the lump and Rocky.

⁹ See Baker (2000), 35.

C. Rocky is not identical to the lump.

But of course, Rocky and the lump are not *independent*; nor the lump is a proper part of Rocky since Rocky is not identical to the “lump plus some other thing” (Baker (2000), 31). Even the expression that they are ‘spatially coincident’ gives the misguided impression that there exist two independent and penetrable physical objects, coexisting in some sort of superposition. Instead, there is only one ‘mass of matter.’ In that sense, Rocky is not something *over and above* the lump (Wiggins (1968), 91). The relation between them is still a genuine unity: It is what we can get closest to identity without admitting it as such. Their relation is constitution:¹⁰ Rocky *consists in* the lump. But unlike identity, ‘constitution’ is an asymmetric relation: The lump constitutes Rocky, but not vice versa.¹¹ Similarly, Baker argues that persons are *constituted* by their bodies (Baker (2000), 31).

Phenomenologists, like Gallagher and Zahavi, argue that the distinction between the ‘lived’ body (as an embodied FPP) and the ‘objective’ body is not ontological (Gallagher and Zahavi (2012), 57, 136). They suggest we are talking of *one* entity, the *embodied mind*, and that the objective body is merely an abstraction (153). The upshot of the embodied mind view is that my bodily existence makes my experience *possible*—and shapes it—through situating my FPP (152–153): Hence a ‘disembodied’ FPP cannot exist. We should, again, note that a person and their body exemplify a genuine unity in the sense that there exists one ‘mass of matter.’ That is, nonetheless, not to say there exists one ontological kind: As I will discuss in §5, my body *could* have existed without constituting an FPP, so something fundamentally new *comes into existence* as an FPP somehow emerges from a bodily system.

The point is that my consisting in my body does not mean that I am identical to my body. We may share the same mass of matter (and in that sense, I may be nothing *over and above* it), but what accounts for the difference is that I have an FPP ‘non-derivatively’: I came into existence as a *new kind of thing* that is dependent on (and united with) a body, *in virtue* of that body being in certain circumstances (which amounts to being *capable* of producing an FPP). Here, having laid out that the relation between persons and their bodies are contingent, we can move onto the necessity of identity.

¹⁰ For a formal definition of constitution, see Baker (2000), 42–43.

¹¹ Consequently, their persistence conditions are different.

4. Identity: Contingent or necessary?

To demonstrate a particular merit of the FPP-DEFINITION, I will argue that identity cannot be contingent. The view that there can be contingent identity may come from two quarters: It is either to say that a statue can be truly said to be *identical* to the lump of clay from which it is made, even though “that statue might have existed and not been identical with that lump of clay” (Bricker (2007), 133); or, as Yablo suggests, it expresses the “identity of a different, less demanding, character” (Yablo (1987), 303). Yablo’s use of the term appears to refer to the relation Baker calls ‘constitution’ (Baker (1997), 612)¹² and if so, it could be misleading, as it does not concern proper identity. However, the first sense of ‘contingent identity’¹³ contradicts the principle of the necessity of identity, which follows from the following argument:

- P1. $\forall x \Box (x = x)$ Self-identity
- P2. $\forall x \forall y ((x = y) \rightarrow (\Box (x = x) \rightarrow \Box (x = y)))$ Leibniz’s Law
- C. $\forall x \forall y ((x = y) \rightarrow \Box (x = y))$ From P1 and P2

The conclusion is also equivalent to the following:

- C’. $\forall x \forall y \Diamond \neg (x = y) \rightarrow \neg (x = y)$

In English, this says that for all x and y , if it is possible that x is not identical to y , then x is not identical to y .

FPP-DEFINITION entails whenever we have a *person*, we necessarily have *the subject of an FPP* (and vice versa) since the subject of an FPP is a person. We cannot, however, simultaneously maintain the necessity of identity with other proposed definitions of personal identity:

- P1. For all x and y , if x is identical to y , then x is identical to y necessarily (i.e., identity cannot be contingent).
- P2. That I have *these* memories, *this* bundle of perceptions, *this* psychology, and even *this* brain and this body are *contingent* truths (I could have different memories and so on). Even the ‘four-dimensional

¹² Here, for example, we can reconcile that a particular statue might have existed and not been identical to that lump of clay by positing “the statue *consists in* that lump of clay.”

¹³ That is, $[\exists x \exists y (x = y) \ \& \ \Diamond \exists x \exists y \sim (x = y)]$. Baker (1997), 611.

worm' comprised of the spatiotemporal locations my body will occupy from my birth till my death exists contingently, given my death date is not somehow fixed.

C. I cannot be *identical* to any of these things.

Hence, to ask “What is a person?” is to ask, “What a person necessarily is.” Exploring whether I might have been different may help me answer this question.

5. Might I have been *different*?

I *could* have been a centimeter shorter. I am a brother, but I am not necessarily so: I might have not been one if my brother had not been born. I could *not* have been a pencil sharpener. Such statements appear to be true and commonsensical, yet what the world is *actually* like cannot help us understand why such statements are true. We can, instead, explain such modal truths (describing what is possible or necessary) by appealing to the standard possible world semantics. How can a possible world represent me as existing and lacking some property I *actually* have? By having *counterparts* of me in its domain, Lewis responds (Bricker (2007), 127). Kripke, however, complains that “the counterpart of something in another possible world is *never* identical with the thing itself” (Kripke (1980), p. 45). If we consider a counterfactual scenario in which the counterparts of the Wright brothers are *not* the inventors of the first successful motor-operated airplane, then, we are not talking about *the Wright brothers themselves*. That is true—but trivially so. The Wright brothers themselves inhabit only the actual world (Bricker (2007), 133). What *matters* is that the Wright brothers themselves have the modal property ‘might not have inventing the Wright Flyer’ in *virtue* of their counterparts having the property ‘not inventing the Wright Flyer’ (Bricker (2007), 129), so this modal statement is still an informative claim about the Wright brothers themselves.

My body’s “might having been 1.77 cm tall”, for instance, is true in virtue of one of its counterparts having the property “being 1.77 cm tall”. In such cases, we can conceive the world objectively, and possible worlds represent the counterfactual states of affairs by differing *qualitatively*. Lewis

seems to hold that counterpart relations are relations of *qualitative similarity* as well (Lewis (1973), 39). But consider this puzzle suggested by Bricker:¹⁴

- P1. Representation *de re* being *entirely* based on relations of qualitative similarity implies that, within the domain of another world, some possible individual who can be picked out as being *qualitatively most similar* to me must be one of my counterparts.
- P2. Concerning representation *de re*, we can consider a possibility *not involving* me, even if there is some ‘doppelgänger’ at the world in question that can be singled out as *qualitatively most similar* to me.
- C. Representation *de re* cannot entirely be based on relations of qualitative similarity.

If so, the counterpart theorist is in trouble finding an alternative. Though P2 seems to be a legitimate possibility, that “We can consider a possibility not involving me” does *not* have to mean “We can stipulate a possibility where there is a doppelgänger of this particular human body that is not a counterpart of this particular human body.” As long as we describe the world objectively, representation *de re* can be based on relations of qualitative similarity.

From a purely objective conception, there should be no problem in treating the doppelgänger at the world in question as a counterpart of this particular human body.¹⁵ Otherwise, how could we imagine the following possibility?

FLOWER: There could have been a flower pattern on the surface of this table.

And its paraphrase in the possible-worlds talk:

FLOWER-*w*: There is a possible world in which a counterpart of this table has a flower pattern on its surface.

¹⁴ Laid out at the final of Bricker (2007). I hope I am sufficiently charitable in my reconstruction of his argument.

¹⁵ Here, keep in mind that we keep treating ‘SÖ’ as picking out a particular *body*. It appears Lewis too would agree with the above discussion: In Lewis (1971), he distinguishes *personal* and *bodily* counterpart relations (208). Relating to §4, he suggests the relation of a person with their body is contingent. However, like Yablo, he explains their ‘coincidence’ through ‘contingent identity’ instead of *constitution*.

Since this—actual—table is not identical to the possible one (which has a flower pattern on the surface of it), I think the only tangible way to *represent* the said possibility is qualitative similarity. There seems to be nothing else that could make the table in FLOWER-*w* a counterpart to the actual one. The doppelgänger of this particular human body in another possibility can be considered as one of the counterparts of this body in the same manner. So, this body can exist in a possibility where I do not: “I am this body” is not necessary.

That “I am SÖ,” however, may *seem* necessary if, like Kripke, we analyze representation *de re* not in terms of counterpart relations but as the abstract states of the *same* thing (Kripke (1980), 17).¹⁶ If a term designates the *same* object in every possible world, it is called a *rigid designator* (48), and different rigid designators (like ‘Venus,’ ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’) may designate the same object, hinting that there are a posteriori necessary truths (like ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’). Similarly, one may try to establish that my utterance that “I am SÖ” expresses one such a posteriori necessity if one assumes that indexicals like ‘I’ could function as rigid designators (Chalmers (2004), 59).

Here, the truth of my claim that “Necessarily, I am SÖ” depends on how we understand ‘SÖ.’ If we take it to mean no more than ‘*this person*’ or ‘*me*,’ i.e., if we treat it just as another indexical, then surely, the claim in question must be true. If, on the other hand, ‘SÖ’ is a rigid designator picking out something that is ‘out there’ in the world, we cannot keep insisting that my being SÖ is an a posteriori necessity, at least without presupposing that what is it to be a person is to be the said kind of thing. If, for example, my claim that “Necessarily, I am SÖ” is true, and what it is to be ‘SÖ’ is to be a particular human body, then we have to hold that a person could not possibly exist without being a human body.

If we are using ‘SÖ’ in the latter sense, however, I think my use of ‘I’ cannot mean SÖ; since it is not possible to imagine SÖ to be a different body whereas I *can* conceive of experiencing the world through a different body. For example, I can imagine ‘seeing the world’ from the eyes of Vincent van Gogh (VG), I can imagine being located in the texture of spacetime in such a way, but while doing so, I do not imagine SÖ to be VG. I do not imagine any difference in ‘what is out there,’ but rather I imagine that I experience ‘what is out there’ through a different perspective, I imagine that I am VG. That should imply that I am SÖ is *not* necessary, at least given that conceivability implies possibility.

¹⁶ Talking of ‘possible worlds,’ therefore, is to talk of these abstract states.

Take Olson, for instance, who argues that persons are essentially animals, i.e., that a person could not possibly exist without being an animal (Olson (2003), 3). Surely, I am an animal, but that is not to say Olson is right: The logical form of the statement that “I am an animal” is Φa , not $a = b$. I could have existed *without* being an animal, as opposed to what Olson had suggested. Similarly, if we admit that the relation between *this person* and $S\ddot{O}$ is of constitution and not of true identity, we can also stipulate I could have existed by virtue of being constituted by a different body. Kripke may once again come to our aid here, in showing that “I am $S\ddot{O}$ ” is not necessary. He points towards a ‘reversed’ version of the Cartesian argument (Kripke (1980), 145):

- P1. For all x and y , if it is possible that x is not identical to y , then x is not identical to y .
- P2. The body could have existed without the mind.
- C. The body is not identical to the mind.

We can apply this kind of argument to Bricker’s puzzle. Consider Kirk and Chalmers’ zombies, for instance. They would lack first-person, subjective experiences and, thus, would not possess FPPs. Yet, they would be *qualitatively indiscernible* from our bodies. Therefore, at least in terms of biology, we can still consider them ‘human,’ as we would not regard the ‘inner life’ when making a scientific—so, objective—classification. And as long as we let ‘ $S\ddot{O}$ ’ be a rigid designator picking out a particular human *body*, it would also pick out the possibilities where $S\ddot{O}$ is merely a zombie and not a person. That is:

- P1. For all x and y , if it is possible that x is not identical to y , then x is not identical to y .
- P2. We can consider a possibility *not involving* me, even if that possibility is *qualitatively indiscernible* from actuality, where a counterpart of $S\ddot{O}$ is a zombie (i.e., $S\ddot{O}$ *could have* existed without constituting me).
- C. $S\ddot{O}$ is not identical to me.¹⁷

¹⁷ That is, of course, not to say that I am actually *independent* of $S\ddot{O}$; my existence surely depends on this particular human body constituting me right now. The point is that I am not numerically identical to it.

As Williams puts it, that I might have been somebody else “is a very primitive and very real thought; and it tends to carry with it an idea that one knows what it would be like for this ‘I’ to look out on a different world, from a different body, and still be the same ‘I’” ((1973), 40). In the same spirit, the following scenarios—however colorful—seem *logically* possible:

THE ROBOT: I could have ‘opened my eyes to the world’ as some robot (of a distant future) having an FPP.

THE SIMULACRUM: A simulated universe could have come to constitute *me* by virtue of being capable of constituting the subject of an FPP.

THE MARTIAN: I could have been a Martian.

Remember, while we understand ‘SÖ’ as designating a particular body, we cannot consider a possibility *not involving* SÖ if there is some ‘doppelgänger’ at the world in question that can be singled out as *qualitatively most similar* to SÖ, as it would be self-contradictory. But qualitative similarity concerns only SÖ, not *me*, so the following possibility is still legitimate:

A VANISHED CENTER: We can consider a possibility not involving *me*, even if that possibility is qualitatively indiscernible from actuality.

When I imagine THE ROBOT, THE SIMULACRUM, or THE MARTIAN, I consider myself from the ‘inside,’ as the center of a *centered* world, that is, as having an FPP. When I imagine A VANISHED CENTER, on the other hand, I consider a counterpart of SÖ without an FPP. While THE ROBOT, THE SIMULACRUM, or THE MARTIAN would be qualitatively more dissimilar to SÖ—to this particular body—compared to a doppelgänger, they might represent *me* as long as they possess an FPP.

An objection to the possibility of A VANISHED CENTER might be raised by (i) rejecting the world might differ non-qualitatively without differing qualitatively, and (ii) insisting there can be no haecceitistic differences between maximal possibilities (a total way the world could be is a *maximal possibility*) (Cowling (2016)).

A VANISHED CENTER contradicts (i), and if that entails haecceitism, so be it—but it is not the sort of haecceitism protested by (ii). We can still hold (ii) by positing that a qualitative, uncentered description of the world is *not* a maximal possibility:

- P1. A qualitative, uncentered description of the world does not involve the total ways *I* could have been.

- P2. As I discussed in §1, the subjective conception of the world from its various ‘centers’—which would involve the facts that are not expressible without reference to the first person—is part of a whole description of the world.
- C. A qualitative, uncentered description of the world is not a maximal possibility.

Here, inspired by Kaplan’s theory of indexicals and subsequent work on 2D semantics¹⁸ (Kaplan (1989a); Schroeter (2021)), we can introduce a 2D matrix in which we represent two dimensions of possibilities, centered and uncentered—imagined either from ‘inside’ or ‘outside’—along vertical and horizontal axes.

Consider our actual world through an uncentered description and compare it with another such possibility, say, where Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is not a fictional work but describes an actual series of events. Just as in the standard possible-worlds framework, we can represent such uncentered, objectively described possibilities as $w_1, w_2 \dots w_n$, and so on. Let us call the Romeo-and-Juliet world ‘ w_2 .’ But notice, for me, that I could have been Romeo or Juliet, that I could have viewed the world from *either one* of their perspectives, are distinct centered possibilities. We could represent them with a pair of the objectively described possible world and some perspective-bearer (i.e., some constituter of an FPP), such as $\langle w_2, \text{Romeo Montague} \rangle$ or $\langle w_2, \text{Juliet Capulet} \rangle$.

Ninan characterizes uncentered possibilities as possible ways for the world (or ‘what is out there’ conceived from the outside) to be and centered ones (conceived from the inside) as possible ways for me to be (Ninan (2009), 446). So, an analysis of a claim of possibility concerning how I—as the subject of an FPP—could have been different may go like this:

JULIET. “I could have been Juliet Capulet,” as uttered by me in w_{actual} is true, if and only if there is a centered world $\langle w_2, \text{Juliet Capulet} \rangle$ such that Juliet Capulet constitutes a counterpart of me in w_2 .¹⁹

Nagel warns us, however, for not to confuse epistemic with metaphysical possibility: “What I imagine may be possible so far as what I know

¹⁸ By distinguishing two dimensions of the meaning of expressions; *contexts of use* (that determine which content is expressed), and *circumstances of evaluation* (that reflect the modal profile of that content), Kaplan demonstrates how indexicals, definite descriptions, and proper names function differently.

¹⁹ See also Ninan (2009), 447.

about my nature is concerned, but not be possible so far as my actual nature is concerned” (Nagel (1986), 42). Some may be skeptical of whether JULIET is possible in a similar manner. Leibniz, for example, thought that my desire to be the King of China was nothing but the wish that I should perish, *and* there should be a King in China (Williams (1973), 42–43). If I cannot retain any property that uniquely individuates me (such as my history, my memory, my psychology...) when I think of *being* Vincent van Gogh or Juliet Capulet, do I manage to consider a metaphysical possibility? Or do I just imagine Vincent van Gogh or Juliet Capulet, and nothing more? Is it something so absurd such as comparing my drawing a picture of a banana and proudly concluding “this is how tigers would look if tigers were bananas” (Thomson (1997), 168)? I do not think so.

My imagining *being* Moses, an elephant, or Paul Klee’s paintbrush is *not* equivalent to my imagining SÖ’s being such things (Wiggins (1976), 134). In imagining *being* Moses I imagine a counterfactual scenario in which I am located in the fabric of spacetime in a different way than I actually am. *Actually*, my being Moses or being an elephant are impossible states of affairs. But positing that I *could* have “opened my eyes to the world” as Moses is not some logical impossibility; whereas SÖ is necessarily SÖ, and not Moses. My imagining being Moses, an elephant, or Paul Klee’s paintbrush is not equivalent to my imagining the impossible states of affairs of my actually being such things (Wiggins (1976), 134), nor to my imagining SÖ’s being Moses. Surely I am *not* Moses, and surely no counterpart of this particular body is that body picked out by the name ‘Moses.’ But positing that I could have ‘opened my eyes to the world’ as Moses is not some logical impossibility. In doing so, I only imagine a counterfactual scenario in which I am located in the fabric of spacetime in a different way than I actually am. Furthermore, *all* of my uniquely individuating properties can be accidental: What is essential to me is only what I am (Kripke (1980), 5). This is why Williams writes that none of the individuating properties that I do have, this body, these memories, etc., seem necessary to *being* me (Williams (1973), 41).

In a nutshell, JULIET does not seem unwarranted. It explains THE ROBOT, THE SIMULACRUM, and THE MARTIAN too. If so, I might as well consider “I could have been a squirrel.” It was one of the reasons I was inclined to reject the ROBUST-DEFINITION in §2: Although most probably a squirrel does not consider *itself as itself* and does not have irreducible first-personal thoughts as a competent language-speaker would have, the body of this animal still constitutes a subjective perspective that is irreducible and ineliminable. That should be sufficient to count what *consists in* that squirrel as a person. On the other hand, just as I cannot

possibly have been a zombie, I could not have been a paintbrush, a banana, or a pencil sharpener, as long as these do not constitute an FPP somehow.

6. Conclusion

I acknowledge that what I have laid out falls short of a comprehensive account of personal identity. One unanswered puzzle is the question of how we can persist through time: For instance, what will make me identical to the person stumbling upon this paper years from now and getting annoyed by its nonsense? The FPP-DEFINITION alone cannot help us in that regard.¹ Claiming that I continue to exist as long as my FPP is exemplified might offer an easy solution, but, as Baker (2000) admits, it would be circular: I am already the subject of an FPP per our definition. Besides, some issues regarding the Constitution View need to be addressed: where do the boundaries of bodily systems that constitute persons lie? Would thinking of our constituters as merely being spatial extensions be accurate, or should we consider them as occupying spatiotemporal regions? Are their boundaries strictly fixed, or can they be vague?

This paper is merely concerned with *what* kind of an entity a person is. I discussed the 'constitution' relation between persons and bodies, defended the necessity of identity, and proposed that analyzing individuals as subjects of FPPs does not violate this principle. I explored counterfactual scenarios where I could have been wildly different, insisting that we can only make sense of them if we define a person as the subject of a first-person perspective.

²⁰ The Constitution View, however, might shed some light on examining whence I cannot survive. Recall: while I am not necessarily this body, I am necessarily embodied. My *consisting* in my current constituter also means I *depend* on it, so I would cease to exist if my constituter were to cease to exist. I would end, to put it simply, if my body were to explode, or otherwise irreversibly lose its ability to bear a subjective perspective.

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