

# Self-Concernment without Self-Reference

Roberto Horácio de Sá Pereira

Philosophy Dept.  
University of Rio de Janeiro  
Av. Pedro Calmon, 550  
Cidade Universitária  
Rio de Janeiro - RJ, 21941-901  
Brasília  
robertohsp@yahoo.com.br

## Abstract

This paper is a new defense of the old orthodox view that self-consciousness requires self-concepts. My defense relies on two crucial constraints. The first is what I call Bermúdez's Constraint (2007), that is, the view that any attribution of content must account for the intentional behavior of the subject that reflects her own way of understanding the world. The second is the well-known Generality Constraint of Evans (1982), which is also termed the recombability constraint. The claim I want to support in this paper is the following: Since whether and to what extent we can attribute to non-linguistic creatures and prelinguistic infants genuine knowing self-reference or *de se* contents is an open empirical question, the proponents of the nonconceptual self-consciousness face a dilemma. If we are convinced that the available empirical evidence is overwhelming, I argue based on Evans's Generality Constraint—that these self-representations are nothing but primitive prelinguistic self-concepts. However, if we are convinced that the available empirical evidence is not persuasive, I mainly—relying on Bermúdez's Constraint—that we do better by assuming that the subject is not self-represented. The content of her experiences and thoughts are best modeled as simple selfless propositional functions that are true or false relative to the subject of these experiences and thoughts. I refer to this as *self-concernment without self-reference*. Thus, against the recent ingenious work of Peacocke (2014), I claim that there is no compelling reason for postulating nonconceptual middle level self-representation, between self-concernment and conceptual self-reference. However, as I hope to make clear, my claim is quite different from those of other recent oppositions to the idea of nonconceptual self-consciousness. According to the thesis of *self-concernment without self-reference*, the contents of experiences and thoughts are selfless propositional functions, true or false relative to the bearer of the respective mental states.

## Introduction

The idea that self-consciousness depends on self-concepts was, until recently, orthodoxy. The best example is found in Baker's paper on this topic (1998). She argues that all sentient beings are *subjects* of experience in the sense that they all experience the world from their own egocentric perspectives. In doing so, they show themselves to be in possession of what Baker calls weak first-person phenomena (Baker, 1998: 60). However, merely being the subject of experiences is not the same as being conscious of oneself *as the subject* of those experiences. Self-consciousness, or what Baker calls strong first-person phenomena, requires the further ability to think of oneself *as oneself*, that is, to conceptualize oneself *as a subject possessing a first-person perspective*. This ability is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for self-consciousness

(i). In this view, self-consciousness is something that only emerges in the course of a long developmental process and that crucially depends upon the acquisition of a self-concept.

This orthodoxy has been challenged from both philosophical (Bermúdez, 1998; Gallagher, 2000; Zahavi, 2006; Peacocke, 2012, 2014) and psychological standpoints (Gallup, 197; Rochat, & Hespos, 1997). The philosophical argument claims that without the postulation of a non-conceptual form of self-consciousness, we cannot avoid an infinite regress (Zahavi, 2006) or defuse a paradox (circularity) in the account of the subject's acquisition of the self-concept that reflects her mastering of the rule of the first-person pronoun (Bermúdez, 1998).

The psychological argument claims that without the existence of primitive forms of self-awareness, one cannot understand the phylogensis and ontogenesis of the full-fledged linguistic form of self-consciousness. We are told that the empirical findings of developmental psychology, the phenomenological analyses of embodiment, and the studies of pathological self-experience point unequivocally to the existence of primitive forms of self-consciousness that do not require the ability to conceive of oneself as oneself by means of a self-concept. It has become a widespread conviction today that long before the acquisition of a self-concept, conscious beings are already aware of their own selves. According to Gallup (1970), a being is self-aware if it shows the capacity to become the object of its own attention.

The idea of a primitive form of self-consciousness is quite tricky. It might engage us in both a mere verbal dispute around the concepts of self-consciousness and of self-concept and empirical questions as to whether an entity is self-conscious or self-aware. To be sure, these are concepts may be understood quite differently (at least when we compare with what the analytical and the continental traditions have to say about them). Therefore, one might suppose that there is nothing relevant at stake in this new trend in philosophy and psychology (Rochat, & Hespos, 1997). For example, one might suppose that what philosophers and psychologists are calling nonconceptual forms of self-consciousness is simply what Baker calls "weak first-person perspective" ("what is likely to be"). Indeed, to avoid any further ambiguities, several psychologists and philosophers avoid the pompous term "self-consciousness" in favor of the term "self-awareness."

Nevertheless, I claim that beyond any verbal dispute, there is a real philosophical issue at stake here. Regardless of the words used, the question is whether there are conceptual reasons to postulate knowing self-reference (in opposition to an accidental self-reference, when the subjects happens to self-refer without knowing) in case the subject does not possess the self-concept required to specify correctly the alleged *de se* contents of her experiences and thoughts.

## Self-Concepts

There are several philosophical routes leading to the idea of self-consciousness without a self-concept. In this section, I first want to consider what Bermúdez calls the deflationary view of self-consciousness (Bermúdez, 1998: 13). This is the orthodox view, according to which the ability to have first-person thoughts is reduced to the ability to employ the first-person pronoun in a way that reflects the subject's mastery of its semantics (*ibid.*: 15). In this view, a self-concept is just a self-representation that, according to Bermúdez's Constraint, reflects this mastery. Thus, to possess a self-concept is to understand the key rule according to which the subject knowingly refers to herself as the producer of the relevant token "I" whenever she employs that pronoun (Bermúdez, 1998).

With the deflationary view in mind, it is relatively trivial to define, in contrast, nonconceptual first-person, or *de se*, contents: They are any mental state with *de se* contents, even though the subject's self-consciousness does not reflect a mastery the token-reflexive rule of the

first-person pronoun, such as *the producer of that token*. In other words, it does not reflect her knowledge that whenever one employs a token of that pronoun, one refers to oneself as its producer. Let us call this *prelinguistic self-consciousness*.

The first person to raise doubt about the misidentification of nonconceptual self-consciousness with prelinguistic self-consciousness was certainly Meeks (2006). The source of the problem is Bermúdez's so-called *priority thesis*: *Creatures without language are creatures without conceptual abilities* (Bermúdez, 2007: 87). In other words, conceptual abilities are nothing more than linguistic abilities. However, Meeks does not draw the obvious conclusion from Bermúdez's priority thesis: It makes nonconceptualism quite uninteresting. For one thing, the priority thesis trivializes nonconceptualism by rendering almost everything that a nonlinguistic creature represents as nonconceptual content. There is overwhelming empirical evidence in the psychological and ethological literature that supports the assumption that nonlinguistic creatures possess concepts (Herrnstein et al. 1976, Seyfarth et al. 1980; Schütt, 1990; Allen, Bekoff, 1997; Savage-Rumbaugh, & Brakke, 1996). Bermúdez's priority thesis is simply empirically false.

*A fortiori*, the priority thesis also trivializes the notion of non-conceptual *de se* contents as a prelinguistic self-consciousness. Now any non-linguistic creature or prelinguistic infant is supposedly capable of self-consciousness because they certainly self-refer, although in a way that does not reflect the mastery of the pronoun "I." For example, if I am a creature representing a pond to *my* left or a predator coming toward *me* (Peacocke's examples in 2014: 22), I am in a mental state endowed with a nonconceptual *de se* content. For one thing, under the assumption that I am knowingly self-referring in these cases, my self-representation does not reflect the mastery of the first-person pronoun. How can we *a priori* rule out the existence of non-linguistic self-concepts? Why must we assume that non-linguistic creatures are devoid of self-concepts?

I seriously suspect that the idea of prelinguistic self-consciousness is behind the new trend in developmental psychology that construes pieces of the intentional behavior of animals and prelinguistic infants as nonconceptual forms of self-consciousness on several different levels before the full-fledged linguistic form of self-consciousness. Non-linguistic animals and prelinguistic infants are considered as nonconceptual self-conscious creatures because they represent themselves; however, such self-representations are non-linguistic and do not reflect the mastery of the pronoun of the first person.

The identification of self-concepts with the mastery of the token-reflexive rule of the first-person pronoun raises a further problem. I can only knowingly refer to myself by means of a self-concept that reflects my mastery of the semantics of the first-person pronoun insofar as I know that I satisfy the identifying condition of the token-reflexive rule of the first-person, that is, roughly, as *being the producer of the relevant token*. Again, this trivializes the nonconceptualism content. This renders every nondescriptive reference nonconceptual and every direct, or *de se* non-descriptive self-reference, nonconceptual.

Even worse, the identification of concepts with the mental analogue of linguistic descriptions launches a vicious regress or a vicious circle. As Bermúdez puts it, to self-refer conceptually, one has to master the token-reflexive rule of the first-person pronoun that imposes the identifying condition of *being the producer of the relevant token*. However, the satisfaction of this identifying condition requires another *de se* content to get off the ground. I can only learn that I refer to myself when I employ a relevant token of the first person pronoun, if I *already know* that I am the producer of that token. Bermúdez calls this the "paradox of self-

consciousness” (Bermúdez, 1998: 24), and his way of solving it is to postulate a nonconceptual form of self-consciousness that is prior to and independent of the rule

In fact, there is nothing new in Bermúdez’s paradox. The idea has a long philosophical tradition that traces back to Locke and the so-called *Theory of Reflection*. Fichte (1937) was the first to see the problem. If we want to account for self-consciousness as the result of a reflection, we must assume that the subject that carries on the reflection *already knows* that she is the one performing the very act of reflection. In this way, the account presupposes rather than explains self-consciousness. This is what Fichte calls circularity. The alternative is to assume that when the subject performs a higher-order reflection by means of it, she identifies herself as the author of the first-order act of reflection. However, the same question is raised repeatedly, and so we face an infinite regress. Thus, we find ourselves grappling either with a vicious circle or with an infinite regress.

Even though there is deep disagreement about the nature of self-concepts (see, for example, Bermúdez, 1998; Recanati, 2007 and Peacocke, 2014), I think that all parties to the debate generally agree on one basic feature. A self-concept, linguistic or prelinguistic, is the representation of oneself *as oneself* or, in other words, the *knowing* representation of oneself. In that sense, a self-concept is distinct from any other concept that accidentally and unknowingly refers to oneself. Thus, if one sees one’s own image reflected in a mirror, but does not recognize oneself, one unknowingly self-refers.

Nevertheless, as a concept, it must fulfill a further constraint. Even though there is deep disagreement about the nature of concepts, I think that all parties to the debate generally agree that states with conceptual content must meet Evans’s famous Generality Constraint (1982). In a nutshell, an individual can be credited with the predicative concept *F* should he be able to entertain thoughts in which *F* is applied to any object for which he has individual concepts, such as *b*, *c*, *d* (i. e., *a* is *F*, *b* is *F*, *c* is *F*, and *d* is *F*). Similarly, an individual can be credited with the individual concept *a* should he be able to entertain any thoughts in which *a* is freely recombined with any predicative concept, such as *F*, *G*, and *H* is in her possession (i. e., *a* is *F*, *a* is *G*, *a* is *H*) (Evans, 1982: 104).

Thus, an individual can only be credited with a self-concept if she is capable of freely recombining some knowing self-representation with any predicative concepts in her possession. For example, the self-representation I employ in the thought “I am in pain” is a self-concept because I am able to recombine freely that representation with any such predicative concepts as “I have to see a doctor,” “I have to take painkillers,” “I must stay in bed,” etc. In contrast, a self-representation is supposedly nonconceptual when the subject is unable to recombine it freely with any other predicative concepts in her possession.

That said, all we need to defuse Bermúdez’s paradox is to assume, first, that there are primitive non-linguistic self-concepts: knowingly self-representations that meet Evans’s generality constraint. Next, that these self-concepts refer directly, that is, without the mediation of any identifying conditions, without the subject’s knowledge that she meets any of them. Thus, a prelinguistic infant learns the key token-reflexive rule insofar as she prelinguistically is able to represent herself as the producer of the relevant token. Are there really knowing self-representations that meet Evans’s Generality Constraint? This is an empirical question, but data from ethology seem to support it.

## Nonconceptual self-consciousness or the weak first-person perspective?

Another route that leads to the idea of self-reference without self-concept is Baker's conception of self-consciousness (1998). According to her, this first ability requires the further higher-order ability of self-attributing first-person thoughts. Jones is not self-conscious when she entertains simple first-order I-thoughts like "I am tall." On Baker's account, Jones only becomes self-conscious when she is able to self-ascribe a first-order, first-person thought, that is, roughly, "I think that I am entertaining the I-thought that 'I am tall'" (Baker, 1998: 330). According to her, a self-concept requires the ability to think or represent oneself as oneself or to conceptualize the distinction between the third and the first-person perspectives. And that (strong first-person perspective) requires in turn the ability to self-ascribe the weak first-person perspective: "I wish I was tall."

A similar idea is suggested by Rosenthal's higher-order theories of consciousness *HOT* (2004). According to him, HOTs (higher-order thoughts about under-order states or thoughts) are already first-person thoughts. The HOT theory postulates that by representing under-order thoughts to which HOTs refer, the under-order thoughts and experiences result in general consciousness. However, HOTs are not self-conscious so long as such they do not represent or refer to the very individual entertaining the HOTs. Thus, self-consciousness emerges only when the HOT disposes the subject of that thought to entertain a further higher-order thought that now identifies her as the individual of the first thought (Rosenthal, 2004: 164).

Even though neither Baker nor Rosenthal are friends of the idea of non-conceptual *de se* contents, with too demanding a conception of self-consciousness in mind, it is relatively trivial to define this notion by contrasting non-conceptual first-person or *de se* contents, while keeping too demanding a conception of self-consciousness in mind. They are any first-person thoughts (e. g., "I am in pain") of a creature that does not possess the further higher-order ability to self-ascribe her own first-person reference ("I think that I am the subject entertaining the first-order thought that 'I am in pain'"). Nor is it about the further ability that disposes her to entertain any higher-order thought that identifies the herself as the individual of the first-order I-thought (e. g., "I think that I am the one who is in pain," etc.).

Nevertheless, as before, these higher-order views on self-consciousness trivialize the notion of non-conceptual *de se* content by rendering any first-order first-person personal thought non-conceptual. To be sure, self-consciousness involves self-reflection (the phenomenological notwithstanding). Still, I see no reason to support the claim that the ability to think of oneself as oneself entails this higher-order ability of self-attributing first-order first-person thoughts. For the same reason I see no reason why should we exclude *a priori* the existence of non-linguistic self-concepts by means of which the subject knowingly represents herself as herself. What is crucial for a self-concept is the satisfaction of Evans's requirement for concept possession (namely, free recombination), rather than higher-order abilities of self-attribution for a first-person perspective.

Let me give you a clear counter-example. Let us suppose a creature is several different phenomenal states just as to be in pain, to be hungry, to be sleepy etc. Then there is something it is like to feel pain, to be hungry etc. for *the creature itself and for nobody else*. Under pressure of social interaction with the caregivers, the creature learns to represent mentally herself *as the one for whom* there is something like it is to be in pain, to be hungry, to be sleepy etc. Thus, when the infant thinks the first-order thought, "I am in pain," she is probably able to recombine freely that self-representation with any other predicative concepts in her possession,

such as “I am hungry,” “I feel sleepy,” etc. (see Evans’s Generality Constraint, 1982: 104). If that is so, then the infant, by fulfilling Evans’s constraint of content attribution, already has a self-concept. Therefore, I see no reason to assume that the infant must possess the further higher-order linguistic ability to self-attribute her own first-person perceptive (“I think that I am entertaining the first-order thought ‘I am in pain’”). Nor must she require the ability to master the token-reflexive rule of the first-person pronoun: I am the producer of a relevant token of the first-pronoun.

## Nonconceptual middle level self-representations: The Empirical Dilemma

The intriguing question is why should we accept the existence of middle level non-conceptual self-representations? Peacocke (2014) shows us two independent reasons. Let us consider Peacocke’s own example: “*That a thing (say a predator) is coming towards me; I had such-and-such an encounter; I am moving my head*” (Peacocke, 2014: 6). Peacocke’s first argument is that “it is in the very nature of the type of content in each of these examples that their correctness conditions concerns the subject who enjoys the event” (Peacocke, 2014: 7). The idea is that if we assume that both events have representational contents and further that these contents are best modeled as classical complete propositions by Fregean standards, we can only say that these contents are correct or not under the key assumption that the subject of the events is also represented as an essential part of the content.

The crucial assumption is that we do have to assume that these contents are best modeled as complete propositions. Why, however, need we assume this? Why can we not assume that what is represented by these mental states and events are merely propositional functions, correct or not, of their subject, as in “the pond is to the left of x” or “the predator is coming towards x”? I see no compelling conceptual reasons against the idea of relativist content (see Recanati, 2007; Brogaard, 2012). I return to this question at the end of the paper.

Still, psychologists usually talk here about “self-awareness” as a kind of primitive nonconceptual self-representation (see Gallup, 1970; Rochat, & Hespos, 1997). Nevertheless, the assumption of such “self-awareness” yields more questions than answers. First, is it really compelling to ascribe such self-representations to account for the creature’s behavior? The fact that some creatures recognize their own images in a mirror is good empirical evidence (Gallup, 1970). Still, even if we assume the existence of such self-awareness, a further question arises: Is it a genuine form of self-consciousness when the subject is given in the first-person way? Peacocke answer to this second question is no:

*Why is there no such thing as being given as oneself in perception, sensation, or certain kinds of sensory imagination or memory? To ask the question in compressed form and only slightly oversimplified form: why can’t the subject be an object of perception?*

However, Peacocke has a second ingenious reason in favor of the middle level non-conceptual self-representations. He argues as follows:

Though a creature can be in a subject-reflexive state that represents it as *F*, and also in a subject-reflexive state that represents it as *G*, nothing in what I have said so far has explained how the subject is in a position to register that he is in a subject-reflexive state of being both *F* and *G*. (Peacocke, 2014: 13f.)

Now subjects must be in fact capable of integrating the contents of those of their conscious states that exhibit subject-reflexivity into such a conjunctive

representation. For a person who possesses and exercises the first-person concept, it is unproblematic how could this be done. A perceptual experience which represents the subject having a pond to his left entitles the subject, other things being equal, to judge the conceptual content of that form *that pond is to left me*. This content contains the first-person, with “me” as the accusative form of the English expression of the first-person concept. The judgment that the pond is left to me is then suitable for inferential integration with other first-person contents, such as I am running strictly straight ahead. (Peacocke, 2014: 14)

In contrast, if both self-representations are non-conceptual, their integration is not supposed to be the product of any conscious inference, but rather results from the fact that they both belong to the same file. While the inferential integration operates at the personal level, the subject’s file on itself does not.

By contrast, as time passes in the first person case, nothing of quite the same kind is required as is needed for the second task in the perceptual case. If a subject at  $t_1$  has a nonconceptual representation of itself a *f*, by means of a file on itself, it suffices to update this t  $t_2$  to a representation that at the earlier time, it was *f*. (I continue to use lower case italics for nonconceptual contents.) A past tense predicate capturing this can be combined with other present tense predicates in the subject’s file on itself to yield representations to the effect that the subject as *f* and is *g*. (Peacocke, 2014: 16)

Peacocke’s idea of conscious inferential integration satisfies Evans’s Generality Constraint. I conceptually represent myself as being *F* & *G* as the result of the conscious inference that I conceptually represent myself as being *F* and that I conceptually represent myself as being *G*. However, this conscious inferential integration undoubtedly supposes that I am able to recombine freely my own self-representation with any other predicative concepts in my possession in the first place: *H, J, R*, etc. or I am *H*; I am *J*; I am *R*, etc.

However ingenious, Peacocke’s explanation is far from convincing. For one thing, his own examples are centered on the simple cases of the inference of conjunction-introduction of properties that the subject self-ascribes, and the only explanation of non-inferential integration he provides is the update of the same property. Let us reconsider Peacocke’s other example of middle level self-representation: “That predator is coming towards *me*” (Peacocke, 2014: 6). To begin with, if the creature possess mental states that refer to itself, such as *that predator is coming towards me*, it is reasonable to assume to she also possesses other subject-reflexive states that represent itself, such as *I am in danger*, *I must space myself from the predator*, etc.

Therefore, the same empirical evidence that might convince us to attribute to a creature *de se* contents, such as *that predator is coming towards me*, also allow to attribute to the same creature several similar I-thoughts, in which self-representation is freely re-combined with any other predicative concepts that she possesses: “I am in danger”; “I must try to escape; run”; and so on. Thus, Peacocke’s own examples of middle level self-representations easily meet Evans’s General Constraint for concept attribution. They seem to be primitive self-concepts rather than nonconceptual self-representations. Peacocke says:

(..) States of consciousness with nonconceptual *de se* contents such as *there is a pond to my left an I am running straight ahead* cannot be reached on the model of conceptualized inferences of conjunction-introduction. (Peacocke, 2014: 29)

Furthermore, if we consider the creature's intentional behavior as good empirical evidence from which to attribute to the creature *de se* contents, such as *there is a pond to my left* and *that I am running straight ahead*, we cannot help but fill the gap and attribute to it the further *de se* content *I am thirsty*. The natural assumption here is to regard the same overall empirical evidence as good reasons to consider the creature's intentional behavior of *running straight ahead to the pond* as the result of an inference. Roughly, *the pond is to the left of me; I am thirsty; therefore, I am running quickly, straight ahead to pond to drink water*. The natural assumption here is that representations can only be integrated non-inferentially and sub-personally, if the subject is not part of the putative *de se* content, but rather merely self-concerned by the selfless content of her visual experience.

## Perry's notion of unarticulated constituents

In his attack on the idea of nonconceptual self-consciousness, Meeks (2006) was the first scholar to appeal to Perry's famous thought-experiment (1986/2000). Considering it, Meeks claims, "we cannot extend the immunity condition to account for the ostensibly self-conscious states we may wish to ascribe to such creatures (that lack self-concept)" (Meeks, 2006: 97). Musholt (2013), inspired by Meeks, argues that "the nonconceptual representational contents of perception and bodily experience are neither self-representational, nor do they fall under the category of representations that can be said to be immune to error through misidentification" (Musholt, 2013: 23). However, before proceeding, it is worth mentioning, first, how Perry himself describes his thought-experiment

Perry (1986/2000) invites us to consider Z-landers, a group or a tribe that lives in complete isolation and that has never left Z-land, its present place of residence. What matters to us is the following. When residents of Z-land file weather reports like "it is raining," "Z-land" has an argument role of a certain relation  $\langle \text{rains}; \text{Z-land} \rangle$ . The correct conditions of its content certainly *involve* Z-land, the place where the Z-landers' weather report is filed. That content is correct or accurate if it is raining in Z-land at the time Z-landers report this weather condition. However, as Z-land has argument role that never changes, Z-landers do not need to worry about Z-land. According to Perry, Z-land is a so-called "unarticulated constituent" of the weather report "it is raining"; that is, it is a constituent of their report that is neither verbally articulated nor mentally represented by their utterances.

Let us suppose now that anthropologists find Z-land. As usual, an exchange of gifts takes place, and residents of Z-land receive cell phones from the anthropologists to communicate with their new fellows outside Z-land. Now things change. When they communicate weather conditions in Z-land to the anthropologists outside of Z-land, they must learn to articulate Z-Land in their weather reports. They thus acquire the key concept "Z-land."

The analogy to the problem of self-reference is straightforward, to the extent that the non-linguistic animal and the prelinguistic infant are just an egocentric, unchanging frame of reference in the subject's experiences. They are also an argument role that never change; therefore, in these states, the subject does not have to worry about herself when she experiences or thinks something. Perry's assumption is that the subject, as the egocentric frame of reference, is also an unarticulated constituent of the content of her visual experience. Things naturally change when the prelinguistic infant begins to acquire language and starts to communicate her experiences and thoughts to her parents or to her caregivers. Now the subject of experience becomes an argument role that changes constantly. Thus, the infant must learn to articulate her self-concept in her mental states reports.

However, in his seminal paper of 1986/2000, Perry is ambiguous about his own notion of “unarticulated constituent”. In a few passages, he clearly states that neither Z-land nor the subject are *referred to* as part of the content itself:

Let us develop a little more vocabulary to mark this distinction. We shall reserve “about” for the relation between a statement and the constituents of its content, articulated and unarticulated. We shall say a belief or assertion *concerns* the objects that its truth is relative to. So the Z-lander’s assertions and beliefs *concern* Z-land, but are not *about* Z-land. (Perry, 1986/2000: 179)

In other passages like this one, Perry *seems* to say that both Z-land and the self, as “unarticulated constituents”, are *not referred to* as part of the content of their respective experiences and thoughts, but only *concerned* with the same experiences and thoughts (actually, that is the view that Recanati has been defending for almost a decade, since 2007). However, in his same seminal paper of 1986/2000, he clearly seems to state the opposite:

The unarticulated constituent is not designated **by any part** of the statement, but it is identified by the statement **as a whole**. The statement is *about* the unarticulated constituent, as well as the articulated ones. So, the theory is (i) some sentences are such that statements made with them are about unarticulated constituents; (ii) among those that are, the meaning of some requires statements made with them to be about a fixed constituent, no matter what the context; whereas (iii) others are about a constituent with a certain relationship to the speaker, the context of use determining which object has that relationship. (Perry, 1986/2000: 174; emphasis in bold is mine)

Despite all appearance to contrary, Perry’s official doctrine after 1986/2000 is that the “unarticulated constituent” of the content is certainly referred to by the subject’s entire mental state, even though it is not mentally or verbally articulated in utterances. The reason is clearly articulated as follows:

Similarly, the Z-landers’ beliefs about the weather lead them to actions that make sense if it is raining in Z-land. So, it seems that those beliefs ought to be true, depending on how the weather is in Z-land. *And so it seems that the objects of the belief should be about Z-land, so that they will be true or false depending on the weather there.* (Perry, 1986/2000: 214; emphasis is mine)

Thus, without the key concept “Z-land,” the Z-lander’s weather reports *as a whole* undoubtedly refer to Z-land as an unarticulated constituent of their content. Likewise, without a self-concept the subject’s experiences and thoughts undoubtedly refer to the subject of those experiences as an unarticulated constituent of the *de se* content of her experiences and thoughts. Perry supports this claim by arguing that otherwise those contents would be an incomplete, in the sense of being a propositional function without a determined truth-value.

If this is Perry’s conception, Meeks misunderstands his position when he says, “the Z-landers’ weather reports [. . . neither explicitly nor implicitly represent Z-land and are therefore not about it” (Meeks, 2006: 95) and adds:

In the case of proprioception, then, such states represent the properties and states of one’s body without representing oneself, instead simply concerning oneself in that they regulate and mediate one’s own behavior in the appropriate way. We may need to identify the subject of such states when specifying the conditions under which such states successfully represent (or misrepre-

sent) the property or state in question, but the states themselves need not represent the proprioceiving subject at all. (Meeks, 2006: 95)

To be sure, without a self-concept *no part* of the subject's statements or thoughts refers to the subject. Nonetheless, as Perry clearly puts it (quote above), the unarticulated constituent (the subject) is not designated or referred to by *any part* of the statement, but by the statement or the thought *as a whole* (Perry, 1986/2000: 174)

Regardless of whether Meeks case is based on a misunderstanding of Perry's official doctrine, his explanation of why one cannot extend immunity through misidentification is also not satisfactory. Meeks complains that states that are immune to error through misidentification require complex structured conceptual contents (Meeks, 2006: 98). Because of its noncompositionality, nonconceptual content cannot accurately represent the subject of a self-ascription while misrepresenting the property; it can only misrepresent tout court (or else fail to count as genuine content). To be sure, nonconceptual content is noncompositional, otherwise it would satisfy Evans's Generality Constraint (Evans, 1982: 104). Still, it does not seem to follow that nonconceptual states *can only misrepresent tout court*. On the contrary, it seems to me quite possible to misrepresent, say, the color of this object, while being immune to error through the misidentification of *this object*.

In contrast, Musholt argues that the notion of immunity to error through misidentification cannot apply to nonconceptual content in the first place. For one thing, the immunity to error through misidentification can only arise at the level of judgment, not at the level of nonconceptual content (Musholt, 2013: 19). According to her, "it is a category mistake, so to speak, to try to apply the notion of immunity at the level of nonconceptual content" (Musholt, 2013: 19). To be sure, judgments are the paradigmatic cases of immunity to error through misidentification. Still, I see in this no reason contrary to the assumption that when I nonconceptually represent *that color* in normal conditions, I am also immune to error through the misidentification of the object that I mentally demonstrate as "that" while misrepresenting its color.

The problem is not that of extending the notion of immunity to error through misidentification to nonconceptual contents in general. Rather, it is that of extending that notion to the idea of nonconceptual self-consciousness in particular. For one thing, immunity through error misidentification is a limiting case, where the reference dispenses identification of the referent. However, if the subject of exteroception and proprioception never self-refers, it is difficult to understand how proprioception could be immune to misidentification in the first place. Still, we must further assume that even without self-reference, any experience with a phenomenal character provide self-specifying information whose source is the subject: there is something that is like to be in a phenomenal state *for the organism*. Thus, when the subject begins to self-refer knowingly, the self-reference is immune to misidentification because it is based on this intrinsic relation between the phenomenal states and the concerned subject of those states.

Nevertheless, let us go on. Musholt's appealing to Perry's thought-experiment suffers from the same ambiguity of Perry's seminal paper. Sometimes, she seems to merge both readings of the notion of unarticulated content in just one: "The squirrel representation does not need to be *about* itself, it does not need to contain a *self-referring component* in order to be action-guiding" (Musholt, 2013: 10–11). Now, from the fact that mental states do not contain particular components to refer to the subject, it does not follow that Perry does not regard the subject as implicit self-referred.

Elsewhere, Musholt seems to oscillate between the two readings. Like Meeks, she indicates in several passages that Z-land is not a matter of reference but merely one of concern:

Z-landers' thoughts about weather *concern* Z-land insofar as they lead to behavior that is appropriate to the weather in Z-land (e. g., taking an umbrella when leaving the house upon thinking "It is raining"), but Z-land does not have to be represented for this to hold (hence their thoughts are not *about* Z-land). (Musholt, 2013: 12)

Nevertheless, in other passages she clearly assumes that Z-land is part of the content of the Z-landers' weather reports, as when, for example, she states:

Z-land figures as an "unarticulated constituent" of the utterance because in order to determine the truth conditions of the sentence "It is raining" we need a location (in this case Z-land)—the sentence will be true if it is indeed raining in Z-land. (Musholt, 2013: 11–12)

However, when, in a footnote, Musholt clarifies her opposition to explicit self-representations and implicit self-related information, she leaves no doubt that she is assuming Perry's official doctrine of the unarticulated constituents:

A fact or state of affairs is represented *explicitly when the mental state in question contains a component that directly refers to this fact or states of affairs*. In contrast, a fact or state of affairs is *implicit* in a mental representation when the mental state in question does not contain a component that directly refers to this fact, but *when this fact or state of affairs is conveyed as part of the contextual function of the mental state*. (Musholt, 2013: 9; my emphases)

Nevertheless, if the same fact that is explicitly represented by a mental state and implicitly conveyed by the context, Musholt's entire case against nonconceptual self-consciousness collapses. She argues, "theories of nonconceptual self-consciousness are incomplete insofar as they only establish the existence of *implicit* self-related information in perception and proprioception, but not the existence of *explicit* self-representation" (Musholt, 2013: 8). However, the question is why the proponents of the nonconceptual self-consciousness need to assume that there is an explicit nonconceptual component in the mental states of non-linguistic creatures and prelinguistic infant that refer to themselves. All they need is the acknowledgement of implicit, self-related information that indicates the presence of the subject in the *de se* content of her own exteroceptive and proprioceptive experiences, without self-concepts or "explicit self-representation".

The only way to build a case against the idea of nonconceptual self-consciousness, based on the Perry's official notion of unarticulated constituent, is the following. Before the acquisition of the key concept "Z-land," Z-lander's weather reports as a whole already designate Z-land as a part of their content, otherwise the content would be *a mere propositional function without a fixed truth-value*. Likewise, without the acquisition of the key self-concept, the prelinguistic infant's thoughts and experiences as a whole already designate herself as a part of the content, otherwise the content would be a mere propositional function without a fixed truth-value. Now, the opponents of the idea of nonconceptual self-conscious could argue as follows: To be sure, even without a self-concept the prelinguistic infant and other nonlinguistic creature's thoughts and experiences already designate the infant herself. However, without the key self-concept, her self-reference is *unknowing*. Now since self-consciousness is knowing rather than accidental self-reference, the prelinguistic infant may be self-represented by her experiences and thoughts, but she is not genuinely self-conscious.

Now, this line of thought clearly supposes what in the literature (Heck, 2000) is known as the state nonconceptualism (state view). According to the state view, nonconceptualism is a property of mental states, that is, a view about the relation between the subject undergoing a mental state and the representational content of that state. A mental state is state-nonconceptual when it is concept-independent. Conversely, a mental state is state-conceptual when the subject cannot be in that the state in question without possessing the concepts involved in the correct specification of its contents. Thus, according to the state view, the main difference between nonconceptual and conceptual states is that only in the second case does the subject knowingly refer, that is, understand to what his mental state refers. Therefore, according to state nonconceptualism, experiences and attitudes might share the same content, even when the subject is in different types of states.

In contrast, according to the nonconceptual content view, nonconceptualism is better characterized in terms of *the kind of content* that experiences possess, as opposed to the content of beliefs and other propositional attitudes. A mental state is content-nonconceptual when the content of the state is of a particular type, namely, when it is not composed of concepts. Conversely, a mental state is content-conceptual when it is a structured complex compounded of concepts. Therefore, according to content nonconceptualism, experiences and propositional attitudes could not possibly share the same representational content.

Accordingly, before and after the acquisition of key concepts, Z-landers and prelinguistic infants' mental states *as wholes* do designate Z-land and the infants themselves, respectively. The contents of their states may be modeled Russellian propositions consisting of the very designated entities, such as <Z-land, the property of being raining> and <subject, the property of being in pain>. According to the state view, the only difference is that in both cases, without the key concepts, they have only the faintest idea of what the whole mental states represent.

However, here a crucial asymmetry emerges between Z-landers and prelinguistic infants. By assuming that Z-landers already refer to Z-land by the weather reports as a whole, without the relevant concept "Z-land," Z-landers do represent Z-land, albeit nonconceptually. In contrast, as we saw, by assuming that the prelinguistic infant can already self-refer as an unarticulated constituent of the content of her experiences without the relevant self-concept, we cannot talk about nonconceptual self-consciousness because self-consciousness is knowingly self-reference, that is, a non-accidental self-reference when the subjects knows that she self-refers. In other words, without a self-concept, her self-reference is what psychologists like Gallup (1970) called *self-awareness*: an accidental self-reference. The assumption here is that the creature sees itself in the mirror, but without a self-concept she does not actually recognize herself as Gallup claimed.

## Self-Concernment without Self-Reference

Now, based on Bermúdez's constraint of content attribution (2007), I want to present and defend my own view, which I call *self-concernment without self-reference*. Against Perry and all his followers, I will argue that without the key concept "Z-land" and the self-concepts, what is missing is not a knowing reference (Z-land) or a knowing self-reference, that is, a non-accidental self-reference (prelinguistic infant). What is missing is reference and self-reference in the first place! However, to avoid the ambiguity I found in Meeks (2006) and Musholt (2013), I claim additionally that without self-concepts, the contents of creatures' states are propositional functions that are true or false relative to the bearers' of those states.

Thus, the crucial question we have to face is whether the state view can satisfy Bermúdez's constraint of content-attribution. This is a reasonable view, according to which any attribution

of content must be the best available account for the subject's intentional behavior that reflects her way of understanding the world (Bermúdez, 2007). However, what content we should attribute to a creature in the face of her intentional behavior is an open empirical question, which is not up to us, as philosophers, to decide. Consequently, the questions are the following: Can we really say that the content of Z-landers reports remains unchanged before and after they learn the concept "Z-land"? Before learning the concept "Z-land," do Z-Landers possess the ability to refer to Z-land as the state that nonconceptualism supposes?

The only reason in Perry's paper that supports his view is clearly that Z-land must figure as an "unarticulated constituent" of the utterance, since, otherwise, we do not have a complete proposition, with a fixed truth-value, but rather a propositional function that is true or false relative to Z-land.

This last assumption is also questionable, however (Recanati, 2007; Brogaard, 2012, etc.). Within the framework of Kaplanian semantics (1989), a sentence *S* is true at a context of use *c* if the proposition *p*, expressed by *S* at *c*, is true at the default circumstance of evaluation, determined by *c*. The default circumstances of evaluation are pairs of a world and a time, so a proposition *p* is true at a given circumstance if the proposition is true at the world and time of that circumstance. Nevertheless, nothing hinders us to enlarge these circumstances, including the locale and the subject.

In this relativistic framework, the natural assumption is to think that content of Z-lander's weather reports as simple propositional functions that are true or false relative to Z-land (the argument). I see no compelling conceptual reasons against such a suggestion. However, I cannot defend such a relativistic claim here for obvious reasons of space. The best defense that I know is Brogaard's (2012).

Interestingly, even Perry seems to think that a propositional function could do the job of making sense of the Z-lander's reports and actions:

The only job of their assertions and beliefs concerning the weather is to deal with the nature of the weather in Z-land. Their assertions and beliefs are satisfactory, insofar as their "weather constituent"—rain, snow, sleet, etc.—matches the weather in Z-land, were our need also to register the place of the weather. By taking the propositional content of their beliefs to be propositional functions, rather than complete propositions, and taking them to be true or false relative to Z-land, we mark this difference. (Perry, 1986/2000: 215)

Nevertheless, Bermúdez's Constraint is a powerful reason against Perry's idea that "the argument role that never changes" is an unarticulated constituent of the content. In accounting for the Z-lander's communicative exchanges about the weather in Z-land, we do better in assuming that they are not referring to Z-land. For one thing, residents of Z-land, who have never left their country, cannot *discriminate* Z-land from other lands; they cannot *visually indicate*, *track*, or *pick out* Z-land on a map. Therefore, they cannot refer to Z-land not, even by means of the concept "here." If by chance they possess the concept, "here" refers at most to a certain place *inside* Z-land, rather than Z-land itself. For one thing, since they never left Z-land, they have no other land in mind to oppose to "here"

Compare this to a nonconceptual representation of something in my visual field. Being nonconceptual, I really do not know or understand what I am seeing. Still, I can easily discriminate it from other objects in the field. I can easily indicate it by a pointing gesture and the pronoun "this" or by the adverb "here." I can easily track it down as it moves. None of these abilities is available to the residents of Z-land.

Perry's own examples further substantiate the same point. Time zones certainly have argument roles in any time report. However, before the Europeans' great discoveries of new continents, time zones had argument roles in time reports that never change. Thus, in the light of Bermúdez's constraint of content attribution, people never refer to time zones as unarticulated constituents of their time reports, because they do not have the ability to discriminate times zones or to indicate or pick out a particular time zone. Now on Bermúdez's Constraint, the most parsimonious account of the Z-landers' weather report is to assume that Z-land is a mere aspect of the wide circumstance of evaluation rather than an unarticulated constituent of the placeless content itself.

In this regard, the reference to Z-land as the reference to a time zone is quite different from the reference to objects and properties within the subject's perceptual field. For one thing, like entities postulated by science (quark, atom, energy, photon, etc.), Z-land is never given as *an object* of perception that the residents of Z-land can discriminate from other places outside Z-land. Imagine the first man who arrived at the idea of "universe." In these cases, references rely on and are created by concepts. Now, after their first acquaintance with the anthropologists, we must assume that residents of Z-land begin to refer to Z-land, since that assumption is the best available explanation for the Z-landers' intentional behavior of communicating with their new friends (anthropologists) outside Z-land that reflects their way of grasping the world.

As before, the analogy to the problem self-reference is straightforward. To the extent that the subject is just an egocentric frame of reference in her experiences that never changes (she is also "an argument role that never changes"), the infant has no mental abilities to discriminate herself from others that could justify a self-reference as an unarticulated constituent of her experience. In the particular case of self-reference, the ability to discriminate herself from the others come together with the ability to knowingly represent oneself as such.

Thus, the best available account of the content of the prelinguistic infant's mental states is the assumption that it takes the forms of selfless propositional functions that are true or false of the subject of the mental states. This is what I am calling here *self-concernment without self-reference*. The subject is *concerned* by what her mental state represent (a propositional function) insofar as she belongs to the wide circumstance of evaluation of that content. But she is *not referred to* the extent that she is a constituent of the content. Let us suppose our subject sees a predator coming in her direction. If she possesses the concept of a predator, she might think: "That predator is coming (towards)". This propositional function is true or false, relative to the subject of that mental state or event. In that sense the subject is merely concerned by her content rather than being represented.

## Conclusion

Even though we are arguing against Perry's notion of unarticulated constituent of the content on the basis of Bermúdez's constraint of content attribution, we must recognize that it is an open empirical question whether we should consider the prey's pieces of intentional behavior as compelling empirical evidence for attribution of a self-representation to non-linguistic and prelinguistic infants.

Therefore, we face the same dilemma as before. If we think that it is not, the most parsimonious explanation for the creature's intentional behavior that reflects her comprehension the world, is to assume that the content of her experience is a mere propositional function that is true or false relative to the subject of the mental state. In order to account for why the prey tries to escape, we do not need to assume that she is representing herself knowingly as herself.

By contrast, if we may consider the prey's intentional behavior as compelling empirical evidence for the attribution of a self-representation, the subject is part of the *de se* content of her visual experience. Nonetheless, as we saw, if that creature's intentional behavior is compelling empirical evidence to attribute to her the first-person "a predator is coming towards *me*," it must also be seen as compelling empirical evidence to attribute to the creature several similar I-thoughts in which the self-representation is freely recombined with any other predicative concepts that she possesses ("I must run," "I must climb the nearest tree," "I am about to die," etc.). Thus, the self-representation easily meets Evans's constraint for concept attribution. By all accounts, they are self-concepts rather than non-conceptual self-representations.

However, as in case of Z-landers, things change when the subject starts to communicate with someone who holds a quite different viewpoint than hers. Let us suppose a fellow addresses her, saying, "My dear, I am without my glasses. Is that a predator coming?" Now the subject cannot help but refer to her own viewpoint in response to this question: "I can assure you that a predator (a lion) is coming." It is no longer an open empirical question as to whether we should consider the prey's behavior as compelling empirical evidence for the attribution of a self-representation to the prey. In the face of the communicative exchange, the subject is no more an aspect of the circumstance of evaluation, but rather an essential part of the *de se* content itself. The best available explanation for her intentional behavior that reflects her way of perceiving the world is to assume that she is essentially part of the content. Still, by all accounts, the subject's self-representation meets Evans's Generality Constraint on concept attribution and hence qualifies as self-concept. Thus, we come to the following skeptical conclusion: There is no compelling reason to accept a middle level nonconceptual self-representation.

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