

## **Rejecting the why-do-fieldwork-there question and the metaphysics of the self**

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*Abstract.* Jeanette Edwards sounds as if she wishes to reject the question “Why did you do fieldwork there?” I propose a metaphysical route to this, which is to say, “The self before fieldwork is not my self,” but this conflicts with the traditional Lockean account of personal identity.

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*Translation of a bird that goes “coo”:*

*You should have come for the Locke course too*

O bother! What to do with a bothersome question? About her place of fieldwork, or one of her places, Jeanette Edwards writes:

I am often asked, ‘Why Bacup?’ A question which requires me, I always think, to identify some significant or special feature that makes it a suitable focus for anthropological interest. (2000: 8)

She sounds as if she does not want to answer the question, as if she wants to say, “This question is based on an assumption and I reject the assumption,” in the manner of Oxford philosopher F.H. Bradley even (1876: essay 2).

I can see a way of doing this, which is to say that there was something so powerful about the fieldwork encounter that she cannot even speak of the same self before and after. Consequently, she cannot even truly answer the question of why that self decided to do fieldwork there, in terms of “I did it because...” That self is some other self. But this goes against the traditional English empiricist account of personal identity, recommended by John

Locke. If the young woman has memories of being a girl and the professor has memories of being a young woman, then this is one person, even if the professor has forgotten her girlhood. I am not sure how to help Edwards here, but perhaps someone somewhere can.

### **References**

- Bradley, F.H. 1876. 'Why should I be moral?' in *Ethical Studies*. London: Henry. S. King & Co.
- Edwards, J. 2000. *Born and Bred*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.