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A New Deflationary Account of the “Primitive Sense of Selfhood”

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Abstract

This paper proposes a new deflationary reading of the metaphor of the “primitive sense of selfhood” in perception and proprioception, usually understood as an “experiential self-reference” that takes place before reflection and any use of concepts. As such, the paper is also a new defense of the old orthodox view that self-consciousness is a highly complex mental phenomenon that requires equally complex concepts. The author’s defense is a clear case of inference to the best explanation. He argues that postulating an “experiential *self-reference*” to explain the “primitive sense of selfhood” (ecological self, proprioception and the first-person perspective) is as explanatory overkill as attributing perceptions to bacteria to explain the remarkably sophisticated ways in which they adapt, attune, and respond to their environments. This is what the author calls trivialization of self-consciousness. The metaphor of the “primitive sense of selfhood” in perception and proprioception is far less extravagantly explained by what, based on Recanati, the author calls self-involvement without self-consciousness: there is no “experiential self-reference” because there is no *self-reference* in the first place. Rather than being articulated as a constituent of the contents of her/his perceptions or proprioception, the self/subject is the key element of the circumstance of evaluation of these selfless contents.

Keywords

self-consciousness – self-awareness – nonconceptual *de se* contents – minimal sense of selfhood – experiential self-reference

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To the memory of Lynne Rudder Baker

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1 Introduction

The idea that self-consciousness depends on complex concepts was, until recently, orthodoxy. The best example is found in Baker's paper on this topic (see Baker 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, also requires the 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 (see Baker 1998, 60). In this view, self-consciousness is a complex phenomenon that only emerges in the course of a long developmental process and that depends upon the acquisition of complex conceptual resources.

This orthodoxy has been challenged from both philosophical (see Bermúdez 1998, 2011, 2017; Gallagher, 2000, 2017a, 2017b; Zahavi, 2006) and psychological standpoints (see Gallup 1970; Gibson, J. 1979; Rochat & Hespos 1997; et alia). Philosophers argue that without the postulation of a nonconceptual form of self-consciousness, either we cannot avoid an infinite regress (see Zahavi 2006), or we cannot defuse a paradox (vicious 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 (see Bermúdez 1998). In contrast, psychologists usually claim that without the existence of primitive forms of self-awareness, one cannot understand the ontogenesis of the full-fledged intersubjective 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 a *primitive sense of self* (see Rochat & Hespos 1997). Both in the field of philosophy of mind and that of cognitive psychology, the conviction that long before the

acquisition of complex conceptual resources a *primitive sense of self* is already present in preverbal infants has become the new orthodoxy. What better expresses the metaphor of "a primitive sense of self" is the assumption that, before reflection and any use of concepts, there is an "experiential self-reference."

This paper is a new defense of the old orthodox view. My defense is a clear case of inference to the best explanation. The paper is conceived as follows. In the first section, I argue that the postulation of primitive nonconceptual forms of self-consciousness lacks a clear motivation. I argue that we have better solutions to the old and new puzzles raised by the phenomenon of self-consciousness. The conclusion of the section is that the postulation of primitive forms of self-consciousness is absolutely unnecessary. The second section is devoted to showing that the empirical assumption of a minimal sense of selfhood to explain the "primitive sense of selfhood" is explanatory overkill. For a question of space, I limit my case to what Bermúdez following Neisser and Gibson calls "the ecological self."

The third section is devoted to providing a deflationary, less extravagant and more elegant account of the "primitive sense of selfhood" in perception and proprioception, based on Recanati, which I call self-involvement without self-consciousness. The whole point of this section is to show that the postulation of "experiential self-reference" is cognitively extravagant because we can account for the primitive self-involvement without the need of assuming any *self-reference*. The section begins with a criticism of Perry's position in his celebrated paper (see Perry 1986/1993 and his new followers Meeks 2006; Musholt 2013). Rather than being articulated as a constituent of the contents of her/his perceptions or proprioceptions, the "primitive sense" of selfhood is better accounted for as the key element of the circumstance of evaluation of those selfless contents.

2 The Lack of a Clear Motivation

According to what Bermúdez calls a deflationary view of self-consciousness (Bermúdez 1998, 13), 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 semantics, that is, the mastery of the token-reflexive rule of the first-person pronoun according to which the user of that pronoun knowingly refers to himself by virtue of his knowledge that he is the producer of that relevant token of the pronoun (Bermúdez 1998, 15). In this view, the subject could not knowingly refer to himself in the first-personal thought:

(1) I feel pain.

unless he already knew that he was the producer of thought-token 1. Thus, to refer knowingly to himself in 1 in a way that reflects mastery of semantics, the subject is required to know beforehand that:

(2) I am the producer of token 1.

The obvious problem is that 2 is another *de se* thought that requires some deflationary explanation in conformity with the subject's mastery of semantics, that is, in conformity with the same token-reflexive rule of the first-person pronoun. We are thus dealing with a circular explanation in the sense that we presuppose further *de se* thoughts to explain the original *de se* thought. Bermúdez's way of defusing what he calls the "paradox" is to postulate a primitive, nonconceptual form of self-consciousness that is prior to and independent from conceptual forms of self-consciousness that rest on the mastery of the first-person pronoun. In conformity with the literature, let me call this a "primitive sense of selfhood."

On closer inspection though, to defuse the paradox in the way Bermúdez does, we do not need to endorse his heterodox claim about the existence of primitive nonconceptual forms of self-consciousness. All we need is to assume that before the first-person rule is mastered there are already nonlinguistic, albeit full-fledged conceptual, forms of self-consciousness. Bermúdez seems to assume without argument that nonconceptual contents are nonlinguistic.¹ But I see no reason to assume nonlinguistic creatures are devoid of concepts.

Yet, the classical motivation for the postulation of the "primitive sense of selfhood" is found in a long philosophical tradition that traces back to Locke and the so-called Theory of Reflection. In this view, full-fledged self-consciousness requires from the subject the knowledge that he, as the object represented in sentences like 1, is identical to the individual performing the relevant act of representation in sentences like 2. This requires the subject to also know that he is the individual performing the relevant act of reflection. Now, the same problem arises again. Full-fledged self-consciousness requires the subject to know that as the entity satisfying the property of being the performer of the relevant act of reflection, he is identical to the subject performing the higher-order act of reflection. Thus, we find ourselves grappling either with a circle or with an infinite regress.

¹ I believe that Bermúdez has changed his mind in 2007.

According to the phenomenologist diagnostic, the theory of reflection is at the root of the problem, that is, the idea that to be self-conscious is to represent oneself as the object of one's own intentional act of reflection. Phenomenologists argue that by abandoning this theory we can find a simple solution to the traditional problem. In order to know that I am in pain, I do not need to represent myself as the individual who is in pain in sentence 1. Just by being in pain I am already pre-reflexively self-conscious. This pre-reflexive, intransitive, or adverbial form of self-consciousness is the "primitive sense of selfhood."

On closer inspection, however, the root of the problem is not the theory of reflection (how else could someone be self-conscious if not by reflecting or representing themselves as the subject of their own representations?), but rather the descriptivist assumption that self-consciousness requires the subject to identify herself that he, as the object represented by his own intentional act, is identical to the subject performing the act. To solve this problem, we do not need to endorse the extravagant assumption that the subject is *always self-consciously* thinking and experiencing the world, even when he is not reflecting on himself.

Yet, Shoemaker provides the obvious solution to the regress problem. In those basic but full-fledged forms of self-consciousness expressed by 1, there is no identification component precisely because the same source that provides the information that someone is in pain also provides the information that I am the one who is in pain. The knowledge of that identity in such basic full-fledged forms of self-consciousness is a consequence of the cognitive architecture of the system and as such it dispenses the *capability* to make identification judgments. Thus, we have no compelling reason to consider the "primitive sense of selfhood" either as a primitive nonconceptual form of self-consciousness (self-awareness) or a primitive pre-reflexive or intransitive form of self-consciousness.

3 The Ecological Self

Regardless of whether we have compelling reasons to postulate the existence of a primitive nonconceptual form of self-consciousness or of a primitive pre-reflexive or intransitive form of self-consciousness, one could sustain that the "sense" of primitive selfhood is an empirical phenomenon well documented in the psychological literature. Bermúdez mentions three fields in which the minimal sense of self is manifest: what he calls the *self of ecological optics*, *somatic proprioception* and the first-person perspective. For a question of space, I limit my case to what Bermúdez calls "the ecological self." However, I believe

that my diagnostic applies across the board, even in the case somatic kinesthesia. I will return to this point later.

The idea of a self of ecological optics goes back to Gibsonian psychology (see Gibson 1979). We are told that empirical research in recent developmental psychology offers a large amount of data that seem to support the assumption that the subject is a ubiquitous element in the field of perception (Bermúdez 1998, 109). While in the traditional constructivist view of perception visual perception is understood statically, seeking to show how the three-dimensional representational contents of the world result from processing and storage of information received in the retina, according to Gibson's well-known view, perception is to be understood as an active process that involves movement and takes place in time. The emphasis shifts from the information received in the retina to the changing patterns in the optical series resulting from movement of the perceiving subject. As a result of this Gibsonian ecological view, it is claimed that there could be no structured visual perception without structuring self-perception or self-awareness. The idea is that a minimal self is directly seen/manifested as a structural invariant of the visual field. In this section, we focus on the self as a *structural invariant*.²

To start with, it is claimed that the self is manifested in visual experience as being responsible for the boundedness of the visual field. Second, the self is manifested in visual experience as being responsible for the parts of the visual field that are hidden or occluded by various parts of the body. According to Bermúdez, it is the minimal sense of self as the underlying invariant structure of the visual field that allows perceptual order to emerge from what would otherwise be complete chaos. As the structural invariant that makes perceptual order out of complete chaos possible, the ecological self is better seen as the origin of the subject's perspective: the egocentric framework. The subject's position is the origin of the spatial coordinate system within which the elements seen are represented. Egocentric origins figure in representations of spatial and temporal relations. The distance of the object is computed as a relation between the subject's position and the position of the object. The timing of an event is measured with respect to the present time of the subject's experience. Still, as the structural invariant, the subject is indexed rather than perceived. The subject is part of the representational apparatus, even though he is not an object of his own visual experience.

2 Rochat, for example, equates structural invariant with a "minimal, perceptual sense of self" (2011, 66), describing it as an implicit 'proto'-experience that is "a first level of self-conceptualizing in the generic sense of seizing the essence of selfhood ... a gist of its meaning" (2011, 67).

Visual experience provides two further types of self-specifying information. First, the minimal sense of self is manifested in visual experience to the extent that visual experience provides not only exteroceptive information about objects, properties, and relations in a scene, but also self-specifying information about the subject's movement. Second, the minimal sense of self is also manifested through the perception of so-called affordances, that is, properties of objects that relate to the abilities of the perceiver to provide the subject with information not only about the objects that are being perceived but also about the possibilities for action that these objects afford in the creature's environment.

Let us focus first on the idea of visual kinesthesia. The idea is that the mass of constantly changing visual information generated by the subject's motion cannot be accounted for by the traditional hypothesis of mechanisms that parse cues from neutral sensations into information about the movement and other properties of static objects. The crucial idea behind visual kinesthesia is that flow patterns in the optical array and the relations between the variant and invariant features make information available about the movement of the perceiver.

In a nutshell, it is argued that even quite basic forms of perceiving and acting require perceivers to be informationally sensitive to their own position relative to what they perceive. As such, in perceiving and acting on the world a creature's own activity is treated as an invariant and such informational sensitivity to one's own activity over time is crucial for coordinating successful perception and action cycles. The crucial question is whether the available propriospecific information concerning the subject as the structural invariant can be regarded as the minimal sense of self in exteroception.

There can be no denying that one could claim that newborns and several animals have a "minimal sense of themselves" since self, self-consciousness, and self-awareness are terms of art that we can use freely provided we define them clearly. Still, the interesting question is not the verbal one. The only interesting question is whether by ascribing primitive forms of self-consciousness to animals and newborns we are providing explanatory insight to their behavior that could otherwise be better explained in deflationary terms.

Now, let us take a look at what Burge says about attribution of perception across the whole animal kingdom (Burge 2010, 503; emphasis added):

Registering information is not having representational content. We can judge the information in the bee that correlates with distance as accurate or inaccurate. We can correlate the bee's states systematically with distance. We can safely claim that the states function to correlate with

distance in enabling the bee to navigate. But the bee's navigational states are formed by summing retinal flow. Nothing in the explanation of the bee's states need appeal to representational content, with veridicality conditions.

Registering retinal flow involves no perceptual constancies. Of course, information that correlates with a given distance can derive from many types of retinal stimulation as long as they all produce the same summation of retinal flow. But this is no perceptual constancy. *No explanatory insight is gained by invoking representational states with veridicality conditions.*

Now, if no explanatory insight is gained by ascribing perception to bees, Gibson's view is certainly much worse. To accept it would be to assume that the existence of primitive forms of self-consciousness is utterly ubiquitous throughout the animal kingdom. Again, a moving subject can only keep track of the position of a certain object in his visual field in relation to his own motion. Consider the optical flow in the visual field when the perceiver is moving. The optical flow starts from a stationary ego-center. This stationary ego-center specifies the point that is being approached; that is, the target point of locomotion is at the vanishing point of the optical flow. Still, none of this entails the assumption that by tracking the object the subject is tracking his own movement by representing it as a visual kinesthetic invariant. Yet, to qualify the available propriospecific information about the subject's movement as a minimal sense of self is explanatory overkill.

Let us finally focus on the idea of affordances. Gibson's whole notion of affordance is one of environmental information about one's own possibilities of action. The idea behind this is that perception of affordances is also a manifestation of the minimal self-consciousness. To be sure, infantile activity is impressive—it is engaged, targeted, and non-randomly coordinated. Moreover, it is certainly true that infants' embodied engagements require them to differentiate their own activities from those of others and from other things that they are acting upon. Nonetheless, there is no compelling reason to think that exercising such capacities, even when this incorporates a degree of proprioceptive sensitivity, equates to or entails having a minimal self-consciousness. For one thing, quite generally, all adaptive organisms—if they are to act successfully—need to be able to responsively differentiate between their own activity and the contributions of the world and others. The cases of simple bacteria are instructive and revealing. Even unicellular bacteria are remarkably sophisticated in the ways in which they adapt, attune, and respond to their

environments. However, as strikingly impressive as the achievements of bacteria are, they all derive from purely adaptive dynamics and do not imply anything like responsiveness to rational norms or "inferential capacities to think or deliberate about how to act" (Fulda 2017, 79).

4 Searching for a Deflationary Account of the "Primitive Sense of Selfhood:" Perry's 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 (see Perry 1986/1993; Meeks 2006). 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 a self-concept)" (2006, 97). Inspired by Meeks, Musholt 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." (See 2013, 23). Along similar lines, but also inspired on Perry thought experiment, I have also argued that "the content of ... experiences and thoughts is best modeled as simple selfless propositional functions that are true or false relative to the subject of these experiences and thoughts" (see Pereira 2016, 69) and that "the idea of an intransitive self-consciousness can be phenomenologically described in an analogy with the adverbial theory of perception" (see Pereira 2015, 67). However, before proceeding, it is first worth mentioning how Perry himself describes his thought experiment.

Perry invites us to consider the Z-landers, a group or 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" plays 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 accurate if it is raining in Z-land at the time the Z-landers report this weather condition. However, as Z-land plays an 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 the residents of Z-land receive cell phones from the

anthropologists to communicate with their new friends outside of 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 changes”; 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. That clearly suggests a possible reading for the metaphor of the “primitive sense” of self. Things naturally change when the prelinguistic infant begins to acquire language and starts to communicate her experiences and thoughts 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 state reports.

However, in his seminal paper of 1986/1993, 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 (1993, 215):

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.

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 1986/1993, Perry clearly seems to state the opposite (1993, 209; emphasis in bold is mine):

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.

Despite all appearances to the contrary, Perry's official doctrine after 1986 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 (1993, 214; emphasis is mine):

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.*

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 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" (2006, 95) and adds (2006, 95):

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 misrepresent) the property or state in question, but the states themselves need not represent the proprioceiving subject at all.

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*. (1993, 209)

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 unsatisfactory. Meeks complains that states that are immune to error through misidentification require complex structured conceptual contents (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' Generality Constraint (see 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, immunity to error through misidentification can only arise at the level of judgment, not at the level of nonconceptual content (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" (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 provides self-specifying information whose source is the subject: there is something that is like being 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 subject they concern.

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 into 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" (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 implicitly 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 (2013, 12):

Z-landers' thoughts about the 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).

Nevertheless, in other passages she clearly assumes that Z-land is part of the content of the Z-landers' weather reports, such as when, for example, she states (2013, 11–12):

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.

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 (2013, 9; my emphases):

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*.

Nevertheless, if the same fact is explicitly represented by a mental state and implicitly conveyed by the context, Musholt's entire case against nonconceptual

self-consciousness collapses. She argues that “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” (2013, 8). However, the question is why the proponents of 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 Perry’s official notion of unarticulated constituent, is the following. Before the acquisition of the key concept “Z-land,” the 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-consciousness could argue as follows: To be sure, even without a self-concept the prelinguistic infant and 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.³

Now, this line of thought clearly supposes what in the literature is known as state nonconceptualism (state view) (see Heck 2000). 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 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

3 Here I am not presenting my position, but rather alluding to a hypothetical position inspired by Perry.

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 as 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 knowing self-reference, that is, non-accidental self-reference when the subject knows that she self-refers.

5 The "Primitive Sense" of Selfhood as Self-involvement without Self-consciousness

Now, based on Bermúdez's constraint of content attribution (see Bermúdez 2007), I want to present and defend my own reading of the idea of a "primitive sense" of selfhood, which I call *Self-Involvement Without Self-consciousness*. 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 and Musholt, I also claim 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. 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 the 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 (see Recanati 2007; Brogaard, 2012; et alia). Within the framework of Kaplanian semantics (see Kaplan 1989), a sentence *S* is true in a context of use *c* if the proposition *p*, expressed by *S* at *c*, is true in the default circumstance of evaluation, determined by *c*. The default circumstances of evaluation are world and time pairs, so a proposition *p* is true in a given circumstance if the proposition is true in the world and at the time of that circumstance. Nevertheless, nothing hinders us from enlarging these circumstances, including the locale and subject.

In this relativistic framework, the natural assumption is to think of the content of the Z-landers' 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 (see Brogaard 2012).

Interestingly, even Perry seems to think that a propositional function could do the job of making sense of the Z-landers' reports and actions (1993, 215):

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, whereas we 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.

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-landers' 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 even by means of the concept "here."

Now someone could retort that Z-landers could have some sense (maybe non-conceptual sense) of the distinction between 'here' and 'there', and hence be able to contrast 'here' and 'there' even if they could not reference Z-land as whole. 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." The question is: does Perry's suggested analogy break down here?

To substantiate the same point, Perry provide us with a different example: time zones. Time zones certainly play argument roles in any time report. However, before the Europeans' great discoveries of new continents, time zones played argument roles in time reports that never change. Here there is no sense (not even non-conceptual sense) of the distinction between European- and American times zones. Thus, in light of Bermúdez's constraint of content attribution, people never refer to time zones as unarticulated constituents of their time reports without the relevant concept of time zone, because they do not have the ability to discriminate by senses times zones or to indicate or pick out a particular time zone. Now on Bermúdez's Constraint, the most parsimonious account of time zones report is to assume that time zones are 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 (quarks, atoms, energy, photons, 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 the 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 self-reference problem 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 others comes together with the ability to knowingly represent herself as such.

Now, someone might retort that by leaving aside the somatic proprioception (for a question of space), in particular somatic kinesthesia, my analogy between Z-land and the egocentric frame of reference that never changes breaks down. To be sure, the objection continues, there is a basic self/non-self distinction (common to all biological phenomena). Still, in the infant's case, there is in addition awareness (experience, consciousness) of the self/non-self distinction, based on the contrast between self-movement and being moved by others.

Again, if the basic self/non-self distinction is common to all animal kingdom, so is the somatic kinesthesia! When you try to kill a simple mosquito or cockroach, they run away from you in the opposite direction. It is undeniable, therefore, that insects distinguish their own bodily movement from being moved by others. But does this authorize us to affirm that the insect not only distinguishes itself from what it is not itself, but also is *aware* of this distinction? Probably, but not sure, there is something that it is like to be a bee (assuming that bees, unlike mosquitos have perceptions and are conscious). Still, what is the point to assert that bees are self-aware in the sense that they are self-aware in the relevant sense of possessing "experiential self-reference?" Here we are back to Burge's fundamental point: registering of information is not perception or awareness. No explanatory insight of the insects' behavior is gained by ascribing them the perception of the distinction between the self and non-self. It is a cognitive extravagance to assume that to account for the escape movement of a cockroach one has to assume that the cockroach possesses "experiential self-reference."

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-involvement without self-consciousness*. The subject is *concerned* by what her mental state represents (a propositional function) insofar as she belongs to the wide circumstance of evaluation of that content. But she is *not referred to* 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 x)." 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.

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