

*Philosophy and phenomenological research* 63, no 3, 2001, 272-30.

José Louis Bermudez *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness* Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1998. 338 pp.

Bermudez' main theme is that first-person thoughts require a less elaborate conceptual background than many philosophers think. In particular, a small child can have the resources to think about herself independently of her developing capacity to use a public language. In this way Bermudez aims to resolve the paradox of the title: the circular trap formed by the apparent sophistication of I-thoughts, requiring a rich repertoire of concepts (person, self, indexicality) and the apparent impossibility of finding a route to the acquisition of this sophistication that does not presuppose the prior capacity to have such thoughts. It is a very good book, suggestive and persuasive. I really think that anyone interested in consciousness, concepts, the self, or the acquisition of folk psychology, should read it. And of course I have some disagreements.

Bermudez argues that there can be non-conceptual first-person contents to thoughts. In a pre-conceptual stage of development a child can form thoughts which refer to herself, and these thoughts can then be the ground on which concepts of self, other person, and objective physical world can grow. He describes several ways in which capacities that are plausibly innate in human beings could provide the means for thinking about oneself. One of these ways is perceptual, and relies on Gibson's ecological optics. The main idea is that when one sees one is situated with respect to a visual field that has a certain topology. One moves towards some things, some things are nearer than others; in general one finds that the information that one is picking up has a center, one's invisible location, and changes in a way that defines a trajectory, one's path through space. So in processing visual data in a way that respects this topology one is

implicitly representing a self-as-location.

The other main argument for the accessibility of I-thoughts concerns action. Bermudez draws on a variety of data to argue that in the control of bodily motion we make use of a system of representations in which the body and its parts play a privileged role. But this is not the same structure as in vision. Bermudez presents a daring and interesting analysis which I think can be summarized by saying that the progress of bodily motions is represented in terms of a tree structure in which the torso is the base and other bodily locations are identified in terms of a series of branching points leading from the torso. (If this is right then it would be conceptually easier to learn to flap ones fingernails than to split ones chest in two.) The important point is that this structure too defines a privileged location with respect to which other loci are identified. (So both the visual and the motor data structures implicitly locate a self, though the first self lives between the eyes and the second nearer the heart.)

What these two arguments have in common is a simple insight. Suppose one thinks of a seen object or a body part in terms of its relation to one's own position, e.g. as a little off to the left. This thought can be taken as about the object and predicating P of it, where P holds of objects bearing R to oneself. But it can also be taken as about oneself and predicating Q of one, where Q holds of objects to which some other thing bears R. (For one thing, both types of covariance can hold: if the thing had been differently located the thought would have been different in one way, but if one had been differently located the thought would have been different in another way.) Thus we see the specific sense in which one sees oneself whenever one sees almost anything, in that one sees that a relation hold between the thing and oneself. So thoughts that represent the self can be had without introspection, higher-order thought, or even a developed concept of a person.

Thinking about oneself in these rudimentary ways is obviously a long way short of full rich intellectual self-consciousness. Bermudez argues that starting with a creature with the kind of I-thoughts just described we can equip it with something like a Nagelian point of view if we add a temporal aspect. If the creature can also recognize the locations and objects as being ones that bore self-related properties at specific past times then it has an implicit grasp of its own history with respect to the objects and locations. And this gives it a capacity for some patterns of thinking characteristic of richer kinds of self-consciousness. Bermudez comes to the Kantian-Strawsonian conclusion that a conscious point of view, which appreciates the contrasts between self and other and experience and object, must be spatially based. I suspect that the argument here really leads to a weaker conclusion, that such a point of view must be based on thoughts about a set of relations whose Ramsey-sentence is much like that of naive geometry. There may also be other instantiations.

I have not yet mentioned an aspect that is central to Bermudez' exposition, that of non-conceptual content. For him what the arguments I have been simplifying show is that one can have thoughts which involve a non-conceptual representation of oneself. They are non-conceptual in that they do not require the kind of language-dependent, holism-respecting, generality-constraint-obeying cognition that is characteristic of the reflective thought of adult humans. One of my purposes in outlining Bermudez' argument without mentioning non-conceptual content is to show that it can be done. Bermudez' accomplishment can be described, I think, in more straightforward terms as showing that there are simple forms of I-thinking which can be a basis for more sophisticated forms. I think, in fact, that Bermudez has innocently gone along with some fashionable ways of talking when in fact his arguments not only do not require them, but tend to undermine them.

You are pushed towards non-conceptual contents if you have a very demanding interpretation of conceptual thinking, and yet think that there is a lot of real thinking which does not meet the demands. Advocates of non-conceptual thought associate with each concept a set of criteria which have to be met by someone who has 'mastered' the concept. Failure to meet criteria of the kind typical of full mastery of adult concepts means that what is shaping one's thinking is not a concept. But it is still thinking, still about things, still often leading to true or false conclusions. So it is thinking that is done with un-concepts, leading to thoughts which are not beliefs. Un-concepts have all the important characteristics of a concept except that of meeting some philosophical constraints on concept mastery.

But this is highly resistible. And two reasons why it should be resisted are both reinforced by Bermudez' considerations. One reason is the fact that many concepts are never fully mastered by any adult. Bermudez writes that spatial awareness - a necessary but not sufficient condition for having thoughts about oneself as located, and thus a necessary but not sufficient condition for having the concept of self - requires that one have "an understanding of the nature of space" (p 198, and on p 171 conceptual thought is burdened with needing a full understanding of the nature of objects.) If "an understanding" means "some grasp or other, however weak" then the condition is vacuous. If it means "understanding the real nature of space" it is not satisfied by mere humans. Even if it means "having predominantly true beliefs (thoughts) about space" it may be false of most of us. The point is that space is a deep property of the universe which is grasped to different degrees by ants, babies, and physicists, and perfectly by none of them. If an angel possessing the true nature of space descended and began to enlighten us, we would probably at first suspect that it violated some a priori condition on having a space-concept.

The second, closely related, reason for resisting non-conceptual contents

is that any distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual thinking would have to describe an ideal of conceptual thinking to which mature thought could approximate. But the conditions would almost never be fully met. This is clear with holistic constraints, according to which the tenability of a person's set of beliefs depends on their overall structure, so that a change in any belief should set off a check for possible tensions throughout the set. Not only are these clearly not satisfied by most people at most times, it is far from clear that any human person *could* ever fully satisfy them. So to that extent all of us are all of the time operating at something below the fully conceptual level. In Bermudez' exposition the issue arises with his need for explanatory minimalism, positing a certain level of conceptual development only when a less demanding explanation cannot be used. Even non-conceptual contents are not to be attributed when a mechanistic explanation would apply. Thus he requires that a creature's behavior is not to be explained in terms of representations of spatial features of its environment if it is sensitive merely to features that covary with spatial features (p 211). But this seems much too demanding. A person navigating around a city is sensitive to street signs and landmarks, and these are not themselves pure coordinates but features linked to coordinates by profound and superficial principles. A driver using a map is sensitive to spatial features of the map, which covary with spatial features of the town. The problem here is very general. Every level of thought not only includes but probably depends essentially on processes that are characteristic of more primitive thinking. So forms of explanation appropriate to simple thinking have their place among the tools for explaining complex thinking. (Einstein had his conditioned reflexes, some relevant to the way he understood the continuum.) Any criterion for relegating some contentful thought to the non-conceptual reserve will if consistently applied also relegate much normal adult thinking.

At the end of the book Bermudez tries to make explicit how the sub-

conceptual framework he has been developing can explain the acquisition of the capacity to use the first person pronoun. The crucial link is between spatially mediated mechanisms of joint attention and the satisfaction of Gricean conditions on communication. This is an important topic, and what Bermudez says raises the possibility that without innate capacities to share our spatial awareness human beings would lose a basic route to linguistic communication. I cannot make out in this chapter a definite deduction of a set of conditions for the possession of the mature I-concept from a capacity to have a spatio-temporal point of view and to share allusions to it with others. What I can make out are a number of very suggestive devices by which spatial sophistication can facilitate thinking about oneself and others. Given my skepticism about conditions for concept possession I should not expect more.

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