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HAECCEITY?

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

abstract

The concern of this paper is the nature of personal identity. Its target is the account Lynne Baker gives of personal identity in terms of haecceity, or rather, in terms of that particular reading of Scotus' principle of individuation that has been widely accepted in a late 20th century debate on the metaphysics of modality (Plantinga 1974, Adams 1979 and others) and that Baker's account appears to share. I shall try to show that such "haecceitistic implications" (Baker 2013, p. 179) of her theory of personhood miss something essential to the very question of personal identity, such as the question emerges within the lifeworld, i.e., in the world of everyday encounters and ordinary experience. This "something essential" seems to be better accounted for by a different theory of essential individuation or haecceity, which, as it happens, turns out to be more similar to Scotus' original theory (prior to Occam) than modern haecceitism.

keywords

Personal identity, personality, individual essence

1.
A Crucial
Question

Baker's theory of personal identity is a completion of her deep and rigorous view of personhood. Yet it is far from obvious that the former is logically dependent upon the latter view, though I shall not raise this issue. I will presently only address Baker's theory of personal identity. What strikes the reader is its remarkably deflationary appearance. It appears to be a critical deconstruction of all "informative" theories of personal identity, that declines to present an alternative (informative) theory. And that is quite on purpose, for any "informative" theory, Baker thinks, is one more example of that "wholly impersonal account of the world" (2013, pp. xv) characteristic of (scientific) naturalism. "Impersonal", in this context, must be understood as "third personal". All informative accounts of personal identity – so goes Baker's claim – conceive of personhood in non-personal or sub-personal terms. And this is exactly what is supposed to make them informative. But if personhood *cannot* be understood third-personally, then we cannot give a non-circular condition for personal identity over time. Given that a persisting first-person perspective cannot be but the one of that persisting person, that person's sameness over time is presupposed in the identity condition. "You, a person, continue to exist as long as *your* first person perspective is exemplified" (2013, p. 144).

I wholeheartedly endorse the main point. *If* what makes personal identity theories informative is that personhood is accounted for in non-personal or reductive-naturalist terms, then those theories overlook the essential feature of being a person, and *a fortiori* that of being *this* person, one and the same, persisting over time. But I don't endorse the premise. It is true that all the recent examples of informative theories I am aware of do understand personhood in non-personal or sub-personal terms. But I believe that alternative ways of working out an informative theory of personal identity remain on the table.

Maybe such a non-reductive but informative theory, though, should be more ambitious than traditional ones. Maybe specifying a *condition of temporal persistence for persons* is only part of a wider problem concerning the very nature of *individuality*, the solution to which is thus key to solving the problem of personal identity over time.

Before cashing out these suggestions in greater detail, let me give a general idea of my perplexity about Baker's, by my lights, deflationary strategy. Baker's theory of personal identity in terms of modern haecceitism (as

opposed to Scotus' actual principle of individuation) is a brilliant solution to what I will call *the crucial puzzle of personal identity*. Yet it is a solution, if I may say so, *not (entirely) true to the sense of the puzzle*. It ultimately ought to answer to the intuitive, pre-philosophical sense of the problem of personal identity, which, incidentally, is one of the few philosophical problems with deep roots in the world of everyday life. It is one of those rare philosophical problems that sound quite intelligible in their naïve, pre-philosophical understanding. Putting the point in Baker's own language, her view of personal identity does not seem to take the problem as seriously as a real and decisive question originating from the world of pre-theoretical encounters deserves. The question of personal identity is indeed one belonging *par excellence* to the "metaphysics of everyday life" (Baker 2007). Baker's theory of personal identity, I have said, is a deflationary theory. By that I mean that it takes the question to be deceiving or illusory if it asks for an informative answer. Because this expectation is unjustified or unreasonable, a circular answer will suffice as a kind of Wittgensteinian therapy for pseudo-problems. But does the deflationary strategy do justice to the metaphysics of everyday life? Should not we first try to unravel the implicit, often confused meaning of those basic questions which arise in the lifeworld across all cultures, rather than brushing them aside as logical or conceptual errors? Should not we attempt to clarify the desire for information rather than dismissing it as illusory?

There is a question that we raise all the time, crucial to our lives, values, interests, crucial to ethics, law, politics, friendship and love, and the question is, *Who are you? Who am I?* Because such a question is so significant, and so difficult, its meaning cannot be such that the general form of an answer to it turns out to be non-informative, or circular. For an account of personal identity, at least from the point of view of a philosopher taking the lifeworld seriously, should provide us exactly with a better understanding of *the general meaning of this basic question*, one that would *not* make the question hopeless or redundant. It should shed light on the general form of an answer to it, so as to tell us in which direction we might turn our gaze in searching for the answer in particular cases. And it should do so in such a way that explains why that basic question is so hard and so crucial for us, or how it is linked to what is so singular about us as individuals, about *each one* of us. Dealing with this "more ambitious task" by *first* addressing the very nature of personal *individuality* would *then* put us in a position to solve the narrower problem of personal *identity across time*, yielding a non-circular condition of temporal persistence for persons. Or so I shall argue.

2. **What Exactly
the Traditional
Metaphysical
Problem of
Personal
Identity is
About**

Let us first consider the terms of our problem more precisely. I shall defend a phenomenological perspective. Yet my purpose, like Lynne's, has nothing to do with what is called "narrative identity", that some (like Paul Ricoeur, Dan Zahavi)¹ take to be part of a phenomenological account of personal identity.

A brief clarification of what a phenomenological perspective amounts to is in order here. It is the perspective one has when adopting the phenomenological stance.

Adopting the phenomenological stance toward any object is clarifying how that object appears from an appropriate first-personal perspective, e.g., a perceptual one, if it is a perceptual object, or an emotionally qualified one, if it is an object of emotional experience, and so on. In short, adopting the phenomenological attitude means putting oneself ideally in the place of the subject of some kind of intentional state (in the Husserlian sense of "intentionality", e.g., the basic subject-object structure of consciousness). One adopts this stance "ideally" by "bracketing" whatever is contingent upon an actual subject, e.g., as this person I am.

I endorse another qualification Baker makes about how to account for personal identity. As she explains, the problem is not how we re-identify a person, nor does it have to do with psychology, not directly at least.

Indeed, the problem is metaphysical. Let us recall a recent rephrasing of the problem by Harold Noonan: "The problem of personal identity over time is the problem of giving an account of the logically necessary and sufficient condition for a person identified at one time being the same person as a person identified at another time" (2003, p. 16).

Lynne Baker distinguishes Simple and Complex Views of personal identity in this sense.

Simple Views are simple because they hold personal identity over time to be non-analyzable, similar to the case of the Self that enjoys Cartesian self-reference, which is also supposed to be unanalyzable. Hence such views cannot give an informative, or non-circular, criterion of identity, *i.e.*, one not already presupposing that identity. Simple Views are typically immaterialist. They tend to identify persons with immaterial minds or souls.

Complex Views do specify necessary and sufficient conditions of personal identity over time. They do not presuppose that RDM at t_1 is the same as RDM at t_2 , but give necessary and sufficient conditions for that identity to hold, such as, for instance, persistence of body and brain, psychological continuity, or continuity of mental states². Complex Views are typically reductionist about persons. That is the price they pay for being informative.

1 P. Ricoeur (1990, pp. 137-198); D. Zahavi (2005, pp. 106-114).

2 Contemporary examples of Complex Views: S. Shoemaker & R. Swinburne (1984); D. Parfit (1971); D. Parfit (1984); D. Lewis (1983).

Baker's Not So Simple Simple View rejects the analysis of personal persistence in terms of subpersonal properties and relations, thereby sharing the attitude of familiar versions of the Simple View, but only up to a point, since it also rejects immaterialism. If I follow Baker correctly, it is not because a person is something simple and unanalyzable that non-circular conditions of persistence inevitably fail. It is rather because the capacity for first-personal *self*-reference (of a reflective or robust kind) is a necessary condition for a person to exist. A persisting self is embedded, so to speak, in the very definition of personhood.

For this reason, a person exists when and only when *her* first-person perspective is instanced, or in all possible times (and worlds) in which it is. If one wishes to specify a (numeric) identity condition holding for some person, one will have to make reference to that person in the *explicans*: *Lynne Baker's* perspective, *your* perspective, *my* perspective.

That is why the explanation is circular, as this "Bakerian Identity Condition" (BIC) makes clear:

(BIC) \underline{x} at t_1 is the same person as y at t_2 iff the state of affairs of \underline{x} 's exemplifying a first-person perspective is the same as the state of affairs of y 's exemplifying a first-person perspective (Baker 2013, p. 150, emphasis added).

I claim that this is a deflationary theory because it accepts circularity not only as inevitable, but as an obvious consequence of an illuminating truth concerning personhood, namely, that the identity of a person across time cannot really be given in non-personal terms, *i.e.*, "from outside" of that person's life. For what else is persistence over time, for a person, if not living her life, making choices, questioning herself and her choices, suffering remorse and regrets, and the like?

While I do wholeheartedly agree with this last point, I doubt that it implies there is *nothing* to discover about the identity of Lynne Baker that would not be given from Lynne's first-personal perspective, or from within her life. I agree that there is nothing to discover *in sub-personal or impersonal terms* – for such discoveries would not tell us what it is to be Lynne Baker. But I claim that third-personal talk is not necessarily non-personal or sub-personal. To understand why, consider the following case, a slight variation of a well-known argument.

3. A Borgesian Library

Suppose I am an amnesiac about what happened to me prior to last year – and in fact I now live in another country, with a different passport and another name. Reading in a library, I discover some works by a certain RDM, which I find extremely exciting. After having read all I can find by and about her, I decide to write a biography of RDM. Now, once finished, what I wrote is a biography, *but not an autobiography*. It happens to be about myself – but I ignore that it is, and I write about myself exactly as I would write about anybody else.

This case has some remarkable implications.

First of all, it shows that third-personal speech need not be impersonal or sub-personal. A biography is a perfect example of this claim.

Further, the fact that personal identity cannot be construed in sub-personal or non-personal terms does not mean that it can only be given from *one's own* personal perspective.

I suppose that Baker would agree with that. While written in third-personal language, a biography cannot help referring to its subject *as the subject of a first-personal perspective*, exactly as we do when addressing mutually in conversation or speaking of other people. Understanding others, reporting their deeds and beliefs, investigating the reasons for their choices is only possible under the assumption that they do have robust first-person perspectives. For this is exactly what rational agency presupposes, as Baker (2013, chapter 8) convincingly shows. So, the future biographer who will reconstruct my life before succumbing to amnesia as well as the amnesiac span of my life will provide all the necessary evidence that I, the amnesiac person in a library at time *t*, was in fact RDM, the author of some works written before time *t*. But will he *need* to take up my own perspective on myself to identify me correctly, thereby showing who I was and am? Not necessarily, I would venture.

The second remarkable thing that this case shows is the role a Cartesian “spirit” plays within the account of a robust first-person perspective, by which I mean the amount of “Near-Cartesianism” it tolerates and exploits in the form of essential or irreducible self-reference.

For suppose that at some point I realize that *I am RDM*. This proposition cannot possibly be replaced by the proposition that *RDM is RDM*, without a very significant loss of information. The first one can be a shocking discovery for me, changing my present life. The second is a tautology.

Used in one way, this argument may be good support (equivalent to that of the messy shopper)³ for Baker’s irreducibility thesis (BIT):

³ J. Perry 1979.

(BIT) 'I am LB', entails that I have a first-person perspective, which is irreducible and ineliminable (from a true description of the world). (Baker 2013, p. xv)

In fact, the case shows that:

- a. *There is a way in which a subject is given to herself, a way of self-reference, which is quite independent of any objective or third-personal reference (such as biographically true descriptions), so that the former (first-personal) can be preserved when the latter (third-personal) is excluded, or "bracketed".*
- b. *This first-personal self-reference is essential or irreducible to a third-personal one salva veritate.*

This quite peculiar way in which every person is given to herself, and to no other person, is familiar enough from the Cartesian *cogito*, a kind of reflection explicitly devised to "bracket" any other source of reference to oneself than first-personal self-reference. Descartes' case is even stronger: I could suffer not only from amnesia, but, worse yet, be completely wrong in my beliefs about any state of affairs whatsoever in the world (hyperbolic doubt). And yet I cannot doubt that *I* exist. Such evidence is the upshot of what Baker calls a robust first-person perspective.

Let us call such Cartesian-style self-reference *transparent* and *absolute*. By calling it "transparent" I mean to say that it is immune from the misidentification error, and by "absolute" I mean that it is unqualified, free from any description or conceptual specification.

This is part of what "having a self-concept" amounts to according to Baker: "A self-concept is a 'formal' (non-qualitative) concept. Its role is to self-attribute a first-person reference – in such a way that the user of a self concept *cannot be mistaken* about who she is referring to" (2013, p. 137). So, a capacity for Cartesian self-reference is at least *part* of a robust first-person perspective. In fact, Baker writes, "a self-concept is constitutive of a robust first-person perspective" (2013, p. 137).

Notice that I am not making any claim about the way in which one acquires a self-concept (one probably cannot obtain it without a body and a common, acquired language). I am simply agreeing with Baker that having a capacity for Cartesian

self-reference or a reflective *cogito* is at least a necessary condition for personhood, and hence a property which cannot be eliminated from an adequate ontology. If reductive naturalism entails that it can, then that view is false.

So, a phenomenologist could go along with Descartes and Baker up to this point. But how far down this road can we follow Descartes? Not very far, I contend. For

the case of the Borgesian Library can be read the other way round. Granted, it is only because I can enjoy independent Cartesian self-reference that I may discover that *I am* that author. But now suppose that I never figure out that I am that author, RDM.

Well, in this case, knowledge of myself will be severely incomplete – but that is not very noteworthy, since our knowledge of ourselves is already very incomplete, as is our knowledge of anything real. It is a familiar phenomenological tenet that whatever is real is an infinite source of information, and that knowledge of it is forever inadequate, forever partial.

The relevant point is different. If I am RDM and I do not know that I am RDM, then I literally do not know *who I am* or, even worse, *I have a false belief* about my identity. I believe that I am not RDM.

So in this instance, I not only miss a lot of relevant information about myself, but I am actually mistaken about myself. I incur in a misidentification error.

This fact proves that *there is more* to having a first-person perspective than a capacity for Cartesian self-reference. What more might there be? Well, purely Cartesian self-reference does not tell *whose self* the referred-to self is.

In so far as it is transparent and absolute, it picks out a homeless self, so to speak. In so far as it picks out a particular person, this one, which I fail to recognize as being in fact identical to RDM, it is no longer transparent. My demonstrative or indexical reference to myself here, this person suffering from amnesia, unexpectedly does *not* refer to the person to whom I mean it or I believe it to refer. *My self-concept does not refer to myself as the particular person I in fact am, even if it refers to myself as myself.*

This is a puzzling situation. Let us call it *the crucial puzzle of personal identity* – the one previously mentioned. I think that Baker's haecceitism is a very brilliant response – and even solution – to the apparent paradox involved.

It is a solution delivering us from any heritage of Cartesian immaterialism and/or internalism. For that reason, I do not accept the claim of those critics who take the self of the self-concept to be a purely intentional or merely mental object (as Johnston 2010 does). Baker is extremely clear on this point: "I suggest that we dissociate the idea of the first-person perspective from the Cartesian ideas of transparency, infallibility, and logical privacy" (2013, p. 140), and haecceitism, as we shall see in a moment, supports this statement by pinning the referred-to self in each instance to the particular person in the world to which it belongs.

But this solution, as I anticipated already, is not (entirely) true to the sense of the puzzle and, ultimately, to the intuitive, pre-philosophical sense of the problem of personal identity.

Two further steps now remain: 1) explicating Baker's solution in greater detail, and 2) discerning why it is untrue to life and what different view could give life and the

basic question as it arises pre-theoretically their due.

**4. Modern
Haecceitism**

Recall Baker’s “core problem”. How can a third-personal, exhaustive description of the world leave room for the further fact that I am one of the individuals in it? It cannot, according to the main argument. Yet, if the main argument is based on the irreducibility of Cartesian self-reference, then one has to meet the objection that Cartesian self-reference has no individuating power, at least if each of us is an embodied person. Purely Cartesian self-reference is utterly uninformative about just *whose person* it is supposed to pick out.

Hence, answering this objection is crucial to Baker’s personal ontology. That is precisely the aim of what she calls the “Haecceitistic implications” of her ontology (2013, p. 179). What follows is Baker’s answer, which we shall present by splitting her Identity Condition for personhood (BIC) into a Specific Identity Component (SIC) and a Numeric Identity Component, which is in fact the Individual Identity Condition, specifying the identity condition of a particular person (PIC).

Given that having a first-person perspective is a necessary condition for being a person, we may define a person as the exemplifier of a first-person perspective, which will be designated as ‘F’:

(SIC) *x* is a person if and only if *x* exemplifies F essentially.

This Specific Identity Condition of a person “opens up room for a distinction between being a person and being me” (2013, p. 179).

We must now specify the Numeric Identity Condition of a person, the one picking out this particular person, *me* for example, or *you*. We have to define the individuating difference that “constrains” a person to be this person, *me*. And this individuating difference is a very simple property: *being the same as me*.

The intuition here is the same one that revived Scotus’ term “haecceity” in contemporary modal-ontological debate, as opened by widely-read essays such as Plantinga (1974), Adams (1979), and others. Consider a relevant passage from Adams:

A thisness is the property of being identical with a certain particular individual – not the property that we all share, of being identical with some individual or other, but my property of being identical with me,

your property of being identical with you, etc. These properties have recently been called ‘essences’, but that is historically unfortunate; for essences have normally been understood to be constituted by qualitative properties, and we are entertaining the possibility of nonqualitative thisnesses (Adams 1979, p. 6).

Echoing such an understanding of haecceity, Baker explains: “Haecceity, roughly, is ‘thisness’, a nonqualitative property responsible for individuation. I want [...] to take an haecceity to be the state of affairs of someone exemplifying a property” (2013, p. 180), and “a haecceity does not add to the ‘whatness’ of a thing but distinguishes it from other things of the same kind” (2013, pp. 180-181).

In fact, on this conception, haecceity is a property that bears reference to an independently given individual. It specifies the identity condition for being a (particular) person (PIC):

(PIC) A person y is a particular person x iff y has the haecceity of x (*i.e.*, the property of being identical to x).

In fact, all that claim really amounts to is that a person is me iff this person has my haecceity, that is, is identical to me.

As a property defining the condition for being me, the “property of being identical with me” seems circular. But the fact that PIC is “blatantly circular”, says Baker, is no objection: “Circularity follows from the nature of the case” (2013, p. 180).

Haecceity provides Baker’s decisive solution to the core problem, captured by the question: How can we understand the fact that a particular person in this world is *me*? What exactly is the condition under which, of all persons now living in the world, at least one and only one, call her RDM, is *me*? Well, RDM must share my haecceity.

To make the point more formally, we must recall (SIC) and (PIC). That RDM is a person means that there is an x such that

a) x exemplifies F essentially.

This is a Specific Identity Condition valid for any x . Of course we must also specify the Numerical Identity Condition of that person we call “RDM” (there is at least and at most one RDM):

b) $(\exists x) (y) [(x = \text{RDM}) \text{ AND IF } (y = \text{RDM}) \text{ THEN } (y = x)].$

So finally the condition for RDM to be identical to some particular *z*, say, me rather than you, is the fact that RDM and *z* share the same Haecceity, *z* being the same as RDM:

c) $(\exists z) (z = \text{RDM}).$

To sum up, as Baker remarks, “We are now in a position to understand how my being LB is a fact. The key is that personal identity can be understood in terms of haecceity: $x=y$ if and only if *x* and *y* have the same haecceity” (2013, p. 181).

5. Criticism Well, what is wrong with all of that? Nothing is really wrong, as I said. Yet, modern Haecceitism is not true to life, that is, to the sense of the crucial puzzle of personal identity, and to the basic question underpinning it, Who am I?

When I start wondering about that, it is *not* because I run the risk of mistaking myself for you in the way that I might mistake you for your twin. It is because *there is much more* to my being this particular person than my self-concept affords. That is so even if we add to it all the properties I am aware of having. It is because *self-knowledge* infinitely transcends *self-consciousness* and *self-awareness*, or because each of us is to himself and to others an infinite source of information, like anything worthy of being called a real thing.

In this respect, this who-question has the same sense whether one asks it in the first or in the third person. It takes a life to acquire an even partial knowledge of another person, whereas it takes a few minutes to be acquainted with her or to be able to tell her from someone else.

Raised in the first-person, the who-question has one more peculiarity, namely, that “Cartesian” self-reference which can deceive us into the illusion of being self-transparent. The latter point underpins the crucial puzzle that, although I refer to myself as myself, I can be mistaken about whom I am.

First-person research into self-knowledge is – as our entire literary, religious and philosophical tradition testifies – a serious cognitive adventure, an exploration permitting genuine discoveries. The question “Who am I?” expresses in any case a true desire for further substantive knowledge, further information about the whatness – the *individual* nature or essence of myself. This desire could not possibly be satisfied by answering “You are

you”, “You are RDM”, or even “You are this person here, not that one there”. Think of Ulysses, think of Oedipus, think of Dante’s wayfarer or of Faust, think of Macbeth, of King Lear...

A metaphysical theory of personal identity, of course, could not aim at yielding the kind of individual knowledge that the basic question “Who am I?” – or “Who is this person?” – is striving for. Yet a metaphysical theory of personal identity that seeks to be true to life should account for the *meaning* of the basic question, of *that* meaning, actually, that implies a desire for further substantive knowledge. How can such a question arise? What is there in the being of a person – *any* person – that motivates such a question?

One might object that there is another way to understand question “Who is Lynne Baker?”. Perhaps it means “Which one of the speakers is Lynne?”. Perhaps so, but if this were the only reading, there would be no need for a distinct interrogative *personal* pronoun. Asking which one Lynne is would be just like asking which one of these seats is mine. In fact, if all we can ask for is the *distinctive* feature, or the individual *difference*, of a material particular, then no qualitative and intrinsic feature is relevant, no *content of the person*, so to speak. The circumstances of existence (e.g., the space and time in which a thing exists), as typically registered for persons (e.g., in one’s passport or ID card), are quite enough. We can also give a distinctive extrinsic mark to any object, similarly to how we assign a number to each seat in a row.

In fact, why should there be a relative or interrogative *personal* pronoun at all, if that understanding were the only possible one? But it is not. There is another reading, for which “Which one of a plurality of persons is Lynne?” is no synonym (nor is “Which *kind* of person is she?”). *It is a conception on which asking “Who is Lynne?” would make sense even if Lynne were the only person left in the world after a catastrophe.* This question would not inquire after which property picks out Lynne Baker instead of some other person, but would inquire into the inexhaustible, *partially quite visible, but mostly neither visible nor evident individual whatness* of Lynne (in her “*ultima solitudo*”, as Scotus would say). It would look for Lynne’s *individuality* – or *individual essence*. Ordinary language calls it her *personality*.

Many will object: Aha, that is it, *personality* is a psychological, not a metaphysical notion! I do not think so. Take an instance of personality: Socrateity. There is nothing psychological to the question: Who is Socrates? The Socrates of Plato’s dialogues, the one of Xenophon, the one of Aristophanes? We know *which one of the Athenians* of his generation he was, we have all the information that an identity card might contain in terms of the circumstances of his existence. And yet we still debate *who he really was*. Even if we could never know it, is not there a truth of the matter? If you think there is, you *need* a metaphysics of individuality, if only

to argue against post-modern narrative theories of personal identity, according to which – as for the naturalists – there is no truth of the matter, but only a socially negotiated narrative.

So, we need a theory of the individual whatness of a person – of its individual *nature* or essence. A theory telling us what individualizes Socrates' animality and rationality, *i.e.* the common nature he shares with Plato and with Lynne Baker. Here we are indeed looking for something informative, “adding” to the otherwise common whatness of Socrates.

Is Modern Haecceitism such a theory? I think it is not. For Socrates' thisness – the property of being identical to Socrates – “does not add to the whatness of a thing”. It is a non-qualitatively differentiating property.

But is it a reasonable request to ask for such a theory? What has metaphysics to do with a person's personality? Is not that a matter of empirical research?

Of course, the question about Socrates is a matter of historical research. But what makes such research possible is that persons do have an *individual* whatness, an individual *nature* – a *personality*.

That persons have personality seems to me to be as essential to their personhood as is their having a capacity for a robust first-person perspective.

This would lead us to “add” something to the Specific Condition of Personhood (BIC):

(R1) Anything having personhood has personality (an *individual* nature).

So, what (R1) says is that the individuality of a person is not merely due to that person's instantiating some property. True enough, material particulars are individuals just in that sense. But there is something more to the individuality of a person. Let us call it *personality*.

Surely having personality *is not* the property of being identical to me, or to you, or to some other person, as modern haecceity. For personality *does* “add to the common nature” or the whatness. How? Is such a metaphysical notion – call it an *individual nature* – not empty or vain?

I do not think so, and explicating what essential individuality must contain will yield an outline of an *alternative theory of individuality*, or of an *alternative principle of individuation*.

6. Material Adequacy Conditions of an Alternative Theory

We can identify three sets of contents making up personal individuality. First of all, such an individuality must surely include all the *circumstances of the existence* of a given person, such as the origin, time, and places of her existence, and thus all the *contingencies of her being*. For there is an inescapable and dramatic link between individuality and contingency. This link is not the whole story, but certainly part of it. Lynne Baker's personality is not really

separable from her origin, the circumstances of her birth (*those* parents, and so on), the time and place of her life (including of course nationality), language, education, etc. And these facts are definitely contingent, as contingent as the accident of birth on which they all depend.

Secondly, we must include all a person's *modes of appearance*, chiefly, one's personal physiognomy (in the broad sense including *bodily and dynamic personality*). I take Lynne's visage, way of speaking, and even of walking to be features essentially belonging to Lynneity, along with her intellectual and moral physiognomy, her style of behaviour, her way of thinking, and the like. Of course, this third class of contents – intellectual and moral personality, a part of which may be manifested in books or personal choices, while other parts may not (or not yet) be – is the first one we tend to think of as being constitutive of Lynne's whatness.

Now, take the first class and the third class of features. The former are on Lynne's passport. Let us call them Lynne's extrinsic properties (accidents). The latter would comprise the bulk of an ideal portrait of Lynne, like a monograph on her as an author, setting aside the biographical data. Let us call them Lynne's intrinsic properties (like her beliefs, character traits, etc.). In a way, these two sorts of information are linked by the photograph on the passport. Clearly, they are logically independent. *That* person with *that* physiognomy could conceivably have a completely different moral and intellectual personality.

And yet we feel that they must be somehow connected in the thing itself. How? There is a relation of *ontological dependence* between circumstances of existence (non-qualitative properties) and the whatness of a thing, the set of its qualitative properties.

Intuitively, this relation is obvious in our paradigm case of essential individuality, that of persons. Of course, a human person does *not* merely exemplify humanity, without any further qualification, as the tiles of a roof exemplify the colour red. Each person literally *personalizes humanity*. Each one *enacts* this common nature differently. Each one not only “instantiates” it, but also “substantiates” it. By substantiating it, she individualizes it in all aspects, from her way of walking to her way of loving. She enacts human nature by all her acts, in such a way that her individual physiognomy is easily discerned.

Doubtless, me and this cup in front of me are alike in so far as our existence is contingent. We are both contingent instances of our specific natures. But while the circumstances of the existence of this cup remain accidental to it, mine become part of my whatness, and hence *essential* to me, to my *nature*. They add to it or further qualify it. The accident of birth stops

being accidental to a person. This is what living as a person *is*. *This is the individualizing nature of a person.*

What we need in our ontology to do justice to this intuition is therefore a *being capable of transforming contingency* (its accidental circumstances) *into individual essence* (its whatness or nature) – to internalize contingency, so to speak. Once they become *part of* such an individual, accidental circumstances are absorbed within the foundations of that individual’s possible futures. This yields some more or less equivalent definitions of personhood, corollaries of (R1):

(R2) A person is a producer of essence out of accidents;

(R3) A person is a machine that incorporates existence into its individual essence;

(R4) A person is a transformer of the accident of birth into a destiny.

7. **Towards an Alternative Theory of Personal Identity (and Haecceity)**

Suppose our informal, phenomenological intuitions are plausible. Now, what would my formal substitute for Baker’s theory of personal identity in terms of Modern Haecceitism be?

Conceiving of haecceity as the property of being identical to one particular person may be perfectly compatible with all these intuitions. Nevertheless, that falls short of a formal expression of the difference between having and not having what I have called an individual nature or personality.

So, informally, if somebody were to ask me, “Is Kate’s individuality specified by the property of being the same thing as Kate?” (*i.e.*, claim of Modern Haecceitism), I would reply in the negative. For this condition is not a plausible desideratum intimated in the basic question, Who is Kate? Crucial to responding adequately to this basic question is discerning what Kate has done with the circumstances of her existence and how she has become the person she is.

To advance towards a formal rendering of this intuition, we have to embark on a general *conceptual clarification of what an individual nature is*. An individual nature is that by which something is an individual. What, then, is that? It is a *kind of unity*. Let us call it the *unity of containment*. Scotus famously uses the phrase “less than numerical unity”⁴. This is the unity of a common nature, for example, that of personhood. Now what makes personality out of personhood, numerical unity out of a “less than numerical” unity, is the unity of containment. Scotus also calls the latter *substantial* unity, as opposed to accidental unity. The intuitive idea is that there is something

4 “Minus quam numerica unitas”, cf. Duns Scotus (1973, *passim*, pp. 391-410).

“keeping together” all the different aspects of Lynne’s existence, and this unity becomes apparent (a phenomenon) in so far as a person appears to us as a structured whole (as opposed to a mere sum of “parts”).

Now, this containing unity or *ultimate unity of containment* is what I take to be the individuating principle of persons. Moreover, I take this to be their haecceity. So, how might we represent it more formally? On what condition does one have such unity?

Another great metaphysician of individuality – Leibniz, probably after reading Scotus – came upon this same conception of haecceity. The idea, expressed in a more Leibnizian way, is that a genuine individual is such that it possesses all of its properties, whether necessary or contingent, essentially. I could not be anywhere else than here, now – without being a different person. This doctrine is often called “superessentialism”.

One may be inclined to object that if this were true, I could not survive a haircut.

One will be so inclined if one thinks of essential properties in terms of logical necessity *de re*, that is, a truth that holds in all possible worlds in which the thing exists. But, in fact, the only essential property that is logically necessary *de re* for any individual whatsoever is *being the same as that individual*, or, in short, Modern Haecceity.

If such were the case with any of my properties, I could not, indeed, survive a haircut. Thank God, that is not the case. Superessentialism means that I can survive a wide range of hairstyles, *but within the range* of what my hair can sustain.

This gives us a clue for how to define haecceity in more formal terms.

Haecceity is not a simple non-qualitative property, as Modern Haecceitism would have it. Haecceity is an essence, namely an individual essence. A given essence (e.g. personhood) is a *constraint on possible (co)variations of properties*.

If an entity is not so constrained, it fails to exemplify that essence (e.g., to be a human person). An *individual* essence or unity of containment (like personality) is a constraint on the possible (co)variations of individualized properties a person may possess while remaining that same individual.

We can formally represent this in modal terms. The question is, Within what limits can this person’s intrinsic and extrinsic properties co-vary such that she survives those changes in her properties?

In fact, I have ruled out both logical equivalence and mere factual conjunction of extrinsic and intrinsic properties. I intimated above that there is a relation of *ontological dependence* between circumstances of existence (non-qualitative properties) and the whatness of a thing, the set of

its qualitative properties. Ontological dependence is a relation of “necessity” that is less than logical but more than accidental.

So, for example, suppose that it is true that Lynne could have been born and brought up in Japan instead of in the States. Let us suppose such an alternative course of events is conceivable. Nevertheless, for Lynne as she is *now*, for all the contents of her actual being, it is essential for her to have been born and educated in the States and not in Japan. To be specific, her unity of containment could not possibly hold together being such a distinct American philosopher and speaking Japanese as her only language. This is how superessentialism works for persons, that is, for producers of essence out of accidental circumstances (recall corollaries R2-R4). The accident of birth, and all contingencies bound up with it, are in a way “swallowed up” by the person’s being – they become essential to it. But if superessentialism holds for things having an individual nature, ultimate unity of containment, or haecceity, that yields our desired formal characterization. Such entities are unique, that is, they satisfy Leibniz’s principle of the identity of indiscernibles. Consider the following proposal, let us call it SH (short for “Scotistic Haecceity”), which is, I propose, the genuinely “Scotistic” notion of haecceity:

(SH) An individual x has a substantial or ultimate unity of containment

IFF:

a) For all $F, x, y : [(Fx \leftrightarrow Fy) \rightarrow x = y]$.

How is this uniqueness to be understood? For Leibniz, it is a metaphysical principle, defining true individuality. It is therefore a necessary truth. But “necessary” in what sense? Can this uniqueness or property of not having indiscernible copies be enjoyed by an individual thing *in all* possible worlds in which it exists? Hardly so. We can always imagine counterexamples along the lines of P.F. Strawson’s chessboard-like world (1964, p. 125) where two symmetrical cases are indiscernible and yet remain numerically distinct. On the other hand, including the property of being the same as x (Modern Haecceity) among the properties F would trivialize the principle. Hence, we need another clause preventing SH from collapsing into Modern Haecceity. Such a collapse would result, quite clearly, in uniqueness being reduced to mere numerical unity. In fact, numerical unity is to uniqueness what “accidental unity” is to “substantial unity” (ultimate unity of containment or Scotistic Haecceity).

Many things have only accidental unity. In fact, the accident of birth and its circumstances make whatever is born (in the broad sense of having a temporal origin) unique in some sense. But this uniqueness is *accidental* for most kinds of entities. Two bacteria can (in principle) be perfect duplicates, even if each of them is unique in the weak sense of originating at a different point in space-time. On the other hand, no creature in time can be necessarily unique, if this means *logical* necessity. As a medieval thinker would say: *omne ens est unum*, but only a necessary being is necessarily one in number, or unique. Only God, if God exists, exists necessarily, and only God, if God exists, is necessarily unique. But we exist contingently, if we exist.

We human persons lie somewhere between the bacteria and God (if God exists). How then should we characterize Scotistic Haecceity in more adequate details? Let us call *conditionally necessary uniqueness* the limitation that makes us different from God. Here “conditionally necessary” refers to the sort of uniqueness that is compatible with and even conditioned by an entity’s contingent existence. So the required enrichment of our characterization of Scotistic Haecceity must capture this idea of conditional uniqueness. We are necessarily unique under the condition of a fatal accident – the accident of our birth.

This amounts to positing a restriction on the modal truth of clause a) of my previous formulation of SH, which as it stands says no more than the principle of the identity of indiscernibles. Clause a) must be true not just in the actual world, not in all the possible worlds either, but only in those worlds which are temporally accessible from the actual world. That is, only in the present and in its future worlds.

Let it be granted that L and M are modal operators for necessity and possibility, respectively, and that most ordinary modal principles hold. We shall obtain the required restriction by *negating* a principle valid within S5, the modal system in which the accessibility relation is an equivalence relation. That excludes from consideration *any* world’s being accessible from any other as well as the standpoint of an unconditional, necessary being not bound to space and time. Our second clause will thus restrict the validity of clause a) in such a way that a) is necessarily true only in the sense of conditional necessity:

b) NOT $Lp \rightarrow LLp$ (whatever is necessary, is only conditionally necessary)

NOT $Pp \rightarrow LPp$ (whatever is possible, is only conditionally possible)⁵.

⁵ This double clause b) is true in the Modal System S4, where the accessibility relations among possible worlds is reflexive and transitive, but not symmetric (Hughes & Cresswell 1996).

This restriction is intended to capture the temporal character of that ultimate unity of containment which is the individual essence of persons, *i.e.*, their personality.

Clauses a) and b) indicate the pertinent elements of a formal presentation (which cannot be carried out within this paper) of my conception of haecceity, a more genuinely Scotistic one, I have suggested, and an alternative to Modern Haecceity.

Suppose that a) and b) help to clarify the basic intuition concerning the individual essence of persons, or personality. That would fulfil the “more ambitious task” of addressing *first* the very nature of personal individuality in order *then* to solve, on its basis, the narrower problem of *personal identity across time*, thereby yielding a non-circular condition for the temporal persistence for persons.

Here, perhaps unsurprisingly, is my suggestion:

A person x at time t_1 is the same person as a person y at time t_2

IFF:

$(\exists x)(y) [SH(x) \text{ AND } (IF SH(y) \text{ THEN } (y = x))].$

The idea here is that personal identity across time consists in sharing Scotistic Haecceity or substantial unity. This does not prevent a person from changing, but allows for just those changes that preserve a person’s non-accidental unity. Temporal identity is, to put it phenomenologically, change constrained by a consistent global style. Max Scheler had an apt expression for what it is to be identical across time: *Anderswerden*.

8. Informal Conclusions

So what about my haircut? Of course I can survive it. And yet, that is so only because the haircut is within that *bond of possible variations of each one of the properties* admitted by my haecceity. And this is exactly what it means for each property to be essential to me. No property can vary independently of the changing whole which the property is a part of. Possible (co) variations *are different for each individual*. They depend on one’s accidental circumstances, as well as on one’s freedom. The sum of those constraints constitute one’s personality. Or, better yet, in holding to those constraints, the very you-ness of you becomes manifest.

I think that the Latin word *haecceitas* expresses, in Scotus’ use of it, the idea of a relation between the *specific* nature of one’s personhood (*i.e.*, the *necessary property of a person qua person*, her primary kind), and the accidents

of one's birth and life (*i.e.*, *contingent circumstances of a person's existence*). The latter are not essential to a possible person, but become essential to the actual person once she is born and has carried on in just the way she has. They are, as it were, swallowed up by the being of that person, becoming "one thing" with her. This word, "*haecceitas*", calls to mind a most dramatic indexical scene of Christianity and that simple utterance, "*Ecce homo*". "*Ecce*". Here you are. Here and now, with your unique visage and body, with your own singular and novel human destiny, the kind that every person, every individualizer of humanity brings to existence.

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