

Why Am I Me and Not Someone Else?

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Abstract

Why am I me and not someone else? The answer to this question seems rather trivial; *I am me and not someone else, because otherwise I would not be me but someone else*. Moreover, it seems simply a matter of *necessity* that I am identical with myself. On the other hand, I can easily imagine being someone else. And so it seems I can legitimately wonder why I am not in fact someone else. This also makes it that there is a sense of *contingency* accompanied with the fact that I am *this* particular human being rather than another. But how can we reconcile this sense of contingency with regard to the particular being each of us happens to be and the apparent platitude that I am necessarily identical with myself? In the following sections I will discuss this problem and other issues that surround it.

1 The business of being someone

That I am this living self-conscious entity, right here and right now, seems to me one of the most basic facts that I know of. Indeed my very life *consists* in this fact. If it were not for this fact, nothing else could ever really matter to me. Yet given that there are more self-conscious entities like me out there in the world, it comes to me as rather arbitrary that, of all these self-conscious living entities, I happen to be *this* particular self-conscious entity rather than another. So why is it that I am me rather than someone else? Before we go into this question, let us first try to make more clear what is involved in this business of being a self-conscious entity.

In his famous article ‘What Is it Like to Be a Bat?’ Nagel argues that for some x to be conscious there must be *something it is like* for x to be x . Nagel also refers to this as the “subjective character of experience”.¹ Another popular way of characterizing consciousness in this way is to say that consciousness is essentially ‘qualitative’ or ‘phenomenal’. Although intuitively appealing, I find these characterizations not wholly satisfying. The reason for this is that to me it is not clear what the necessary and sufficient conditions are under which something may be counted as ‘qualitative’. If this is not well-articulated, then there might as well be something it is like to be a rock; being a rock then *is like* nothing at all. A better way

¹Thomas Nagel, ‘What Is It Like to Be a Bat?’, [27]

to characterize consciousness might be to say that it is simply the *sense of existence*. On the other hand attempting to define consciousness in order to *inform* someone about its nature simply seems futile; only beings that *are* conscious can know what it is. And because I assume that my readers are all self-conscious beings, it is a waste of energy to put too much effort in conveying what it is like to be conscious.

Now, for human beings like you and me, being conscious of ourselves and the world seems essentially to be accompanied by perceptions, thoughts and emotions. And indeed, these all have their own particular qualitative characters; there is a world of difference between what it is like to see and what it is like to hear, and the same holds for the difference between feeling pain and feeling pleasure. And in that sense we can indeed say that ‘there is something it is like’ to be a human being.

An important feature of our perceptions, thoughts, and emotions is that they are *private* to ourselves, i.e. they are only accessible via the particular first-person perspectives that each of us uniquely occupy. Moreover, we can never be mistaken as to whom it is that is having these perceptions, thoughts, and emotions. When I look at my laptop, there is no room for doubt as to whether *I* am looking at my laptop or someone else. This epistemic fact about our conscious states is called by Sydney Shoemaker ‘*immunity to error through misidentification*’.² More about this later.

To the extent that our individual lives essentially consist of the perceptions, thoughts, and emotions we have, our very lives are essentially private to us. After all, these are only accessible, or experienced, from our own unique first-person perspective. This means that having *this* rather than *that* first-person perspective, is what makes us being *this* rather than *that* human being. And so the fact that I am me and not someone else is constituted by the particular first-person perspective, this particular point of view, that I happen to occupy.

2 A Modal Paradox?

Now that we have established a close connection between the fact of who we are and the particular first-person perspective that we occupy, let us look more closely at the central question of this essay: *why am I me and not someone else?* Of course, this question does not only pertain to me in particular; anyone whose being is defined by a particular point of view can ask his or her self this question. In the following however, I will often address the question from my own point of view. But bear in mind that my questions equally apply to anyone else endowed with a first-person perspective.

²See ‘Self-Reference and Self-Awareness’, [32]

At a first glance, the answer to the question ‘why am I me and not someone else?’ seems simple: I am me and not someone else because *otherwise* I would not be me but someone else. And so it seems that me being me seems a matter of sheer *necessity*. Still, it seems that I can easily imagine that I could have been someone else. I can imagine having been the son of other parents, born in a different country several centuries ago. So at the same time, there is a sense of *contingency* with respect to the fact that of all persons, I happen to be *this* particular person. But how can we reconcile this sense of contingency with the fact that I am necessarily identical to myself? How can we account for this seeming paradox?

The sense of contingency that accomponies the simple fact that I happen to be me, is not solely facilitated by the imagination. In fact, there is another way in to this. To demonstrate this, I will again draw on Thomas Nagel’s work. In chapter *IV*, ‘The Objective Self, from *The View From Nowhere* Nagel sets out a problem closely related to our own:

One acute problem of subjectivity remains even after all points of view and subjective experiences are admitted to the real world—after the world is conceded to be full of people with minds, having thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that cannot be completely subdued by the physical conception of objectivity. This general admission still leaves us with an unsolved problem of particular subjectivity. The world so conceived, though extremely various in the types of things and perspectives it contains, is still centerless. It contains us all, and none of us occupies a metaphysically privileged position. Yet each of us, reflecting on this centerless world, must admit that one very large fact seems to have been omitted from its description: the fact that a particular person in it is himself.³

Nagel’s problem seems to come down to this: given a complete objective description of the world, i.e. a description solely consisting of third-personal facts, it seems impossible for me to deduce that I in fact *am* one of the particular creatures mentioned in that description.⁴ Although such a description contains, on the face of it, everything there is to know about Tim Klaassen

³See *The View From Nowhere* [28, p. 54]

⁴Thus Nagel’s problem is not the same problem that I am adressing here (the problem of why I am me rather than someone else). Nagel is concerned with the problem that third-person descriptions of the world, that purport to be complete, in fact seem to leave something out, i.e. the fact of occupying a certain point of view. Nagel’s problem, I think, is essentially *epistemological* while the problem with which I am concerned is of a more *metaphysical* nature. The solution that Nagel proposes to his own problem is quite interesting. He says that in order to make our picture of the world complete, one must somehow succesfully integrate both the objective and subjective realms into a coherent whole. The solution he proposes is that an objective world conception can only be con-

(e.g. that my date of birth is 15 – 02 – 1989, that my parents are called Marco and Ans, that my favorite food is fries with lamb chops, that my current girlfriend is from the city of Huelva in Spain, and even that I am having the thought P and the perception S at time t etc.), I will never come to learn that I , as a matter of fact, *am* Tim Klaassen. Now if, from a complete objective description of the world it does not follow that I in fact am Tim Klaassen, might we not conclude that, therefore, I am not Tim Klaassen necessarily but only contingently?

I must admit that this conclusion might not be wholly warranted from the premises from which it is drawn. It might simply be a category mistake to suppose that the modal conditions under which I am Tim Klaassen can be decided upon on the basis of an objective third-personal description of the world. Moreover, Nagel’s intention is merely to show that it is wrong to suppose that everything there is to know lends itself for being captured in a purely objective picture of the world. Consequently, if Nagel is right, a complete objective description of the world might indeed leave out a whole body of modal facts, such as the, possibly necessary, fact that I am me. In any case however, if the knowledge that I am Tim Klaassen cannot be acquired by me on the basis of an objective description of the world, it is certain that by means of such a description I also cannot decide upon its modal status. And so we are left with the problem of how we can otherwise find out about the modal status of occupying a certain point of view rather than another. In any case, conceiving the world objectively does seem to foster the sense of contingency that is accompanied by the fact that I am Tim Klaassen

It is interesting by the way to see that the modal problem that is involved in occupying a certain first-person perspective, can be seen as part of the much more general problem of accommodating subjective conscious phenomena within a physical worldview. In the article that I have already mentioned (What It Is Like to Be a Bat?), Nagel argues that the body of knowledge that the physical sciences provide us with is not able even *in principle* to capture the existence of conscious phenomena. Frank Jackson refers to this as the Modal Argument, which argues that no amount of physical knowledge ever *logically entails* the presence of conscious phenomena.⁵ This is also more commonly referred to as the ‘Zombie Hypothesis’ which states that it is possible that certain organisms could be physically identical to us without being conscious.⁶

ceived by an *Objective Self*, i.e. a subject that is not tied to any point of view. Although I think Nagel’s solution has problems, I will not go into it. However, for a criticism of Nagel and an alternative solution see ‘The Sense of Identity’ by John Perry, [29]. See also Velleman’s essay ‘Self to Self’, [37]

⁵See ‘Epiphenomenal Qualia’, [15]

⁶The most systematic account of this idea was given by David Chalmers in his book *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*, [5]. But for other versions of

Another way of saying all this is that there seems to be an *explanatory gap* in case we suppose conscious phenomena to be the *explanandum* and a body of physical facts to be the *explanans*; it seems that only by making a leap of faith we can arrive at the first from the latter.⁷

Now in the lines quoted above, Nagel seems to argue that even if we suppose that this gap has successfully been bridged, i.e. that we have successfully accommodated conscious phenomena within an objective worldview, it would still say nothing about the fact that, for example, I happen to be Tim Klaassen. So it seems then that even if we bridge this initial gap and solve the so-called *Hard Problem* of consciousness, there is still another gap that also needs to be bridged.⁸ And this is the gap between the existence of conscious phenomena in general and the fact that they are distributed in a way such that some of these conscious phenomena belong to me instead of someone else. And so accounting for the fact that I am me and not someone else might be considered to be even *harder* than the conventional hard problem of consciousness.⁹

Moreover, it seems that this problem is quite independent from the specific metaphysical commitments that we make, such as the commitment to physicalism. For even if we admit that the mind is an altogether different substance from the physical, there still remains the problem of why I am *this* mental substance rather than another. Of course, this may cause the suspicion that there is something wrong with the problem itself; i.e. that there might in fact be no problem at all. However, I shall dismiss this thesis for the time being because I think there are a lot more interesting things left to explore in connection to our problem.

3 Changing Perspectives

In the previous section I indicated that to the question ‘why am I me and not someone else’ corresponds a relatively simple answer: I am me and not someone else because *otherwise* I would not be me but someone else. The answer mentions a *counter-factual* situation (indicated by the word ‘otherwise’) in which I am not me but someone else. And therefore the question really comes down to why it is that this counter-factual situation

the same idea see e.g. [1], [2], [3], and [16]. For a criticism see e.g. [10], [11], [12], [33] and [34]

⁷The term ‘explanatory gap’ was first coined by Joseph Levine in his article ‘Materialism and Qualia: The Explanatory Gap’, [19]

⁸David Chalmers was the first to introduce a distinction between the *easy problems* and the *hard problems* of consciousness. See his article ‘Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness’, [4]

⁹I was happy to see that at least someone else shares my intuition that here we are dealing with an even harder problem. See Tim Roberts’ article ‘The Even Harder Problem of Consciousness’, [31].

does not in actual fact obtain. However, as soon as we think about what is involved in this supposedly counter-factual situation we seem to be faced with certain perplexities.

As we have seen there is a close connection between the particular being that we are and the particular first-person perspective that accompanies it. Let us suppose that who I am is *identical* with the first-person perspective that I occupy; i.e. my being is defined by my particular first-person perspective.¹⁰ Now let us think about the counter-factual situation in which I am not me but someone else. It seems that in such a counter-factual world I would occupy a different first-person perspective than the one I occupy in the actual world. Also, in the counter-factual world that we want to describe, someone else would occupy the first-person perspective that I currently have (or rather am). Moreover, every human being that exists in the actual world also exists in our hypothetical world, the only difference being a kind of shuffling of first-person perspectives.

Now let us again take the complete objective description of the world that Nagel envisaged. It seems that to our counter-factual world, in which each of us occupies an alternative first-person perspective, there would also correspond such a complete objective description. But how would such a description look like? It seems that such a description would be wholly *identical* to the objective description of our actual world! After all it would consist of the same set of human beings and the specific first-person perspectives that belong to them. So although for us individually being another first-person perspective would *seem* to make *all the difference in the world*, objectively everything would remain exactly the same. Moreover, in the counter-factual world that we are trying to describe, the human being that is Tim Klaassen would also at a certain point be thinking and worrying about this peculiar problem of first-person perspectives in the exact same way as I am doing now! But then how do I know that this supposedly counter-factual situation does not in actual fact obtain after all?

Of course if you think about it, the whole idea of switching identities (i.e. switching first-person perspectives), seems already very dubious in the first place. For what could it possibly mean to switch identities? Normally when we think about switching identities we envisage something along the lines of what happens in movies such as *Face/Off*. In this movie, FBI Special Agent Sean Archer (John Travolta) undergoes a face-transplant, adopting the face of the terrorist Castor Troy (Nicolas Cage) which he tries to capture. In this situation we might say that Special Agent Archer takes on the identity of the terrorist Troy. But one could also say that already by being movie-actors Travolta and Cage take on different identities. There are many more examples, such as for example a spy that takes on a different identity. And in the case of people that have multiple personality disorder we might also

¹⁰See also [24]

think there is a switching of (personal) identities. But in all such cases there is a self-same entity involved that undergoes the change. However, when we think of changing identities in an absolute sense, it is a lot more difficult to understand what exactly it is that such change would consist in. This has to do with the fact that in case of changing identities absolutely, there seems to be no room for anything undergoing that change. This difficulty is illustrated by the fact that the objective world descriptions of the actual world and the counter-factual world from the previous paragraph are wholly identical.

Be that as it may, it is an indubitable fact that my first-person perspective is different from the first-person perspective of any other human being, and it seems there *would* be a change in the world if all of a sudden my first-person perspective would be replaced by another one. The difficulty is understanding what this would involve given the assumption that my identity is entirely *constituted* by my particular first-person perspective. It may seem that the whole issue would be less difficult if we proceed from the assumption that, in addition to our first-person perspective, each of us really is a kind of distinct subject capable of being attached to other first-person perspectives. But then again, as I have already shown, in that case we would still be left with the problem of why one is *this* particular subject rather than another.

In the thought experiment that we just conducted I posited the difficulty that, in case our counter-factual world actually became a reality, we might not be able to notice any difference even from our own point of view. After all, in the counter-factual situation someone else would come to occupy my current first-person perspective, and it seems that the other person would be having the exact same experiences as I am having right now; the other person would be sitting behind my desk writing this essay at this very moment, having the exact same thoughts, feelings, and emotions that I am having now. So in case our counter-factual world would become actual, not only would there be no change *objectively*, the world would also be, from our own point of view, wholly indistinguishable *subjectively*. Could it be that a metaphysical change in the distribution of first-person perspectives is simply epistemologically *inaccessible* to us?

4 The spatio-temporal properties of the first-person perspective

In *The View From Nowhere* Nagel contends that the two propositions ‘I am Tim Klaassen’ and ‘Tim Klaassen is Tim Klaassen’ have essentially different *contents*. The idea is that ‘I am Tim Klaassen’ contains epistemic data that is not captured by the seemingly identical statement ‘Tim Klaassen

is Tim Klaassen'. And because only the latter kind of propositions seem to constitute a third-person description of the world, we can expect such a description to be incomplete. However, although he will eventually refute it, Nagel also considers an objection to the idea that 'I am Tim Klaassen' and 'Tim Klaassen is Tim Klaassen' express different truths:

The objection is this. Only someone who misunderstands the logic of the first person can believe that "I am TN" states an important truth that cannot be stated without the first person. When we look at the actual use of that form of words, we see that although it is a special kind of statement, it states no special kind of truth—for it is governed by truth-conditions that are entirely expressible without indexicals.¹¹

However, Nagel dismisses this objection by pointing out a very interesting analogy:

My objection to this semantic diagnosis is that it doesn't make the problem go away.

It should be a sign of something wrong with the argument that the corresponding semantic point about "now" would not defuse someone's puzzlement about what kind of fact it is that a particular time is the present. The truth-conditions of tensed statements can be given in tenseless terms, but that does not remove the sense that a tenseless description of the history of the world (including the description of people's tensed statements and their truth values) is fundamentally incomplete, because it cannot tell us which time *is* the present.¹²

Just as from a complete objective description of the world I cannot deduce which particular human being I am, I also cannot deduce from such a description which time it is that is the actual present.¹³ Could it be that these two problems are in fact related to each other?

Taking up the world from a certain point of view always seem to take place within the here and now of the present moment. In *Being No-One* Thomas Metzinger even considers this one of the very essential features by which the first-person perspectives is constituted. He even writes that "*One may even go so far as to say that, at its core, phenomenal consciousness is precisely this: the generation of an island of presence in the continuous flow of physical time.*"¹⁴

¹¹ *The View From Nowhere*, [28, p. 58]

¹² *The View From Nowhere*, [28, p. 59]

¹³ For some articles on this problem of time see e.g. [23], [13], and [25]

¹⁴ *Being No-One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*, [26, p.126]

Of course not only is our first-person perspective always accompanied by the temporal present; it is also always centered around a spatial *here*. And indeed, I think that the problems of the first-person perspective that we have been dealing with are in fact closely related to certain philosophical problems surrounding space and time. As a matter of fact, this relation has already been investigated by several other authors as well. In John Smythies' article 'Space, Time, and Consciousness' for example, considerable attention is paid to the possible role of consciousness in generating phenomenal time in the block-universe that is described by the theory of special relativity.¹⁵ Moreover, as early as the 17th century the intimate connection between space, time and consciousness was also already ingeniously set out by Leibniz.¹⁶

In fact, Leibniz may provide us with a lot of interesting material to work with when dealing with the problems that surround the first-person perspective. This is because according to Leibniz's metaphysical conception of the world, reality consists solely of individual points of view and their perceptions (so-called '*Monads*'). Moreover, Leibniz presents us with problems about the nature of space and time (which according to him are really types of relations that hold between the monads) that are very similar to the problems that we saw with the supposedly counter-factual worlds that, on closer inspection, seem objectively and subjectively indistinguishable from the actual world.

According to Leibniz space and time are really relations that hold *between* the totality of points of view that make up the universe. This is contrary to the Newtonian absolute conception of space and time according to which the spatio-temporal location of a particular body is absolutely determined independent of all other existing things. This means that a Leibnizian spatio-temporal order can only be altered by changing the relations that internally exist between the things that constitute that order. So according to Leibniz, we might initially naively imagine that a counter-factual world in which the spatio-temporal order of our actual world is rotated by 180 degrees and in which the moment of the big bang occurs one million years earlier, is really an altogether different world from our own. However, in this supposedly counter-factual world the spatio-temporal relations that exist between the things that constitute it would remain identical to those of our actual world. And therefore, according to Leibniz, this supposedly counter-factual world would not be different at all from our actual world; i.e. it would suppose "*a change without any change*".¹⁷ Does this not seem very similar to our own counter-factual thought experiment in which

¹⁵*Space, Time, and Consciousness*, [35]. For other articles that concern themselves with the relationship between first-personal consciousness and spatio-temporality see e.g. [36], [38], [22], and [30]

¹⁶See especially his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, [17, p. 35-68], and the famous *Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, [18]

¹⁷*The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondance*, [17, p. 38]

a supposed shuffle of first-person perspectives also does not amount to any change, either objectively or subjectively?

Of course, Leibniz's account seems to be facing similar problems when it comes to the fact that I happen to be Tim Klaassen and that *this* time happens to be the present. But with Leibniz's metaphysics, which I have only touched upon very superficially, the interesting thing is that both of these facts get metaphysically combined into one.¹⁸

5 Back to the sense of contingency

The issues we have come across in the previous sections all seem to indicate that, given the way the world is, it is an inescapable fact that I am experiencing the world from this particular point of view. That is, it seems *necessary* that I am having *this* particular point of view rather than an other. And on the face of it, this should have been expected all along: if 'Tim Klaassen is Tim Klaassen' is necessarily true, then whomever is Tim Klaassen is *necessarily* Tim Klaassen. And because I in fact am Tim Klaassen, I am Tim Klaassen necessarily.

On the other hand, I simply cannot rid myself entirely of the sense that somehow there is a kind of contingency involved in all this. But how can we account for this?

When I imagine a world in which I occupy another first-person perspective, I imagine myself to be conscious in a different place and a different time. In such an alternative universe a whole different corner of the world presents itself to me. Moreover, I am a different being with a different history. In short, I am a different organism altogether.

¹⁸A speculative remark: if I understand Einstein's Theory of Relativity correctly, it seems that the Einsteinian world-view can be seen as providing us with our own contemporary counterpart of these issues. As far as I understand, Einstein, in his short work *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, seems to say that the results of spatio-temporal measurements depend on the reference frame from which the scientific *observer* is doing his measurements, [14, p. 27-30]. And so it seems that the particular here and now from which the scientist operates, has a substantial impact on the facts that he comes up with. So here again we see a close relationship between space-time and the first-person perspective. If my interpretation is correct, then the very notion of a complete objective description of the world – according to Nagel a description that is essentially *centerless* – may itself even become somewhat problematic. The reason for this is that such a supposedly centerless conception seems in the end thoroughly shaped by the point of view from which it is conceived. The following quote from the physicist Paul Davies may provide some support for this claim: "The essential element injected into physics by the theory of relativity is subjectivity. Fundamental things like duration, length, past, present and future can no longer be regarded as a dependable framework within which to live our lives. Instead, they are flexible, elastic qualities, and their values depend on precisely who is measuring them. In this sense the observer is beginning to play a rather central role in the nature of the world. It has become meaningless to ask whose clock is "really" right, or what is the "real" distance between two places, or what is happening on Mars "now." There is no "real" duration, extension or common present." [8, p. 42]

Now, the sense of contingency that befalls me when I think of the idea that I might have been someone else, seems to be caused by the idea that I remain the same entity relative to this change of the first-person perspective. I imagine that, if right now my current point of view were to be replaced by another one, I would still retain some memory of myself occupying my former point of view; I would think by myself “*Hé, I have become the person occupying this other point of view!*” In other words, I would notice a difference, contrary to what we have argued for in the previous sections.

The sense of contingency, in this case, seems to be brought about by the dualistic intuition that apart from the presentational content that constitutes my particular first-person perspective, I also am a separate perceiving subject that is able to “*consider itself as itself*” apart from that presentational content.¹⁹ There is the sense that I, as this particular perceiving subject, am only contingently related to the perceptions that happen to constitute my view of the world. Or to put it in a different way, I seem to think of myself as a person inhabiting this body as a matter of mere contingency.²⁰ In this way, it does seem to make sense to ask oneself ‘why am I me and not someone else?’ if this is taken to mean ‘why am I, as this particular subject, occupying this body and not some other subject?’ Again however, it seems that it would still remain somewhat of a mystery why I am the particular subject that I am rather than another.

Because we are talking about points of view here, it is not at all strange to think that occupying one of those points of view in particular comes across as a matter of contingency. After all, talk about points of view seem to involve a distinction between the view and the viewer. Or to put it in more traditional terms; a point of view really is composed of a set of perceived *objects* and a *subject* that is perceiving them. Furthermore, thinking of a point of view as being *occupied* also generates the sense that there is in addition *something* that is occupying it. And because we seem to be dealing here with two separate things, we understand their union as merely optional.

This dual aspect is also phenomenologically obvious from the perspective of our own individual point of view as well. From within my point of view there is always a world that presents itself to me. Moreover, it presents the world to me as *being a certain way*; the world that I take up from my point of view is defined by certain *presentational contents*. However, not only is it the *world* that is consciously taken in as a fact, but also the fact that it is taken in from *this* point of view by *me*. So every time that *x* is visually presented to me, I also see that it is *me* to whom *x* is visually presented. So

¹⁹ *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, [21, p. 204]

²⁰ In ‘Counterparts of Persons and their Bodies’ David Lewis puts forward an argument for the idea that persons and bodies indeed are in fact only contingently identical. I have to confess however, that I am not quite sure if I understand the argument that is put forth in the article. However, given the thesis that is spelled out by Lewis, it seems appropriate to put a reference to it here.[20]

an essential part of the presentational content that constitutes my point of view is the circumstance that I am the subject of that content.²¹

The sense of contingency is furnished by the apparent subject-object division that forms the general structure of the presentational content that makes up my point of view. Through our perspective of the world we are not only made aware of the world, but we also become aware of the fact that *we are there* to perceive it. In fact, and this is related to Shoemaker's notion of *immunity to error* that I already mentioned at the beginning, it is absolutely self-evident that, in my own case, it is me who is doing the observing.

Because I, as the subject, am also part of the presentational content that constitutes my point of view, I am at once subject and object to myself. So in addition to my thoughts, emotions, and my perceptions of the external world, I myself am also presented as an object within the confines of my particular point of view. And this further adds to the sense of contingency that is involved in grasping the fact that I happen to be Tim Klaassen.

When I think about myself as the subject of my perceptions, I become a kind of object to myself. But in this act of cognizing myself there seems to occur yet another kind of subject/object distinction. And this makes it that not only I can imagine that I could have had different perceptions from the ones I currently have, but also that this object, that I conceive of when I think about myself as subject, could have been different.

However, if the presentational contents of a particular point of view are wholly *defined* not only by the objects that appear in it, but also by the particular subject that is perceiving them, it is not difficult to see that no two subjects could ever have access to the *same* point of view. For even if it is metaphysically possible for two subjects to occupy each other's point of view, the very presentational contents by which these points of view are defined, would immediately be *altered*. And consequently, I could never enter another subject's point of view without changing the contents of that point of view. The only way in which I could experience another one's point of view is to *become* the other one. But in this case, it would not be *me* who is experiencing that point of view, but the other. And thus, we would suppose a change in perspective *without any change*.

It seems then that the sense of contingency that accompanies the fact that I am Tim Klaassen is really *illusory*. Wherever there exists the self-conscious human being that is Tim Klaassen, *I* am necessarily there, present to his point of view. And this gives my existence a very real and robust quality. No matter what, as long as Tim Klaassen is alive, I am here and no one else. It could not be otherwise.

²¹See also e.g. [7], [26], and [21]. For a criticism see [6], [10], and [9]

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