Selfless Persons: Goodness in an Impersonal World?

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Abstract
Mark Johnston takes reality to be wholly objective or impersonal, and aims to show that the inevitability of death does not obliterate goodness in such a naturalistic world. Crucial to his argument is the claim that there are no persisting selves. After critically discussing Johnston's arguments, I set out a view of persons that shares Johnston's view that there are no selves, but disagrees about the prospects of goodness in a wholly impersonal world. On my view, a wholly objective world is ontologically incomplete: Persons have irreducible first-person properties. My aim is to show that we can (and should) reject selves, but that we can (and should) retain persons and their essential first-person properties as ontologically significant.

In a fascinating – indeed, mesmerizing – book, *Surviving Death*, Mark Johnston aims to secure the ideal of goodness in a naturalistic world. According to the worldview of naturalism that Johnston endorses, reality is wholly objective and impersonal: there are no irreducible first-personal facts. Johnston wants to show that the ideal of goodness – which he takes to be radical or impersonal altruism – can survive in such a naturalistic world.

Here's the problem that Johnston poses: Naturalism seems to make reality indifferent to the distinction between the good and the bad. Death, the great leveler, engenders the threat that, since everyone – the good and the bad alike – goes down to oblivion, the good never get their just deserts. Hence, 'the distinction between the good and the bad is less important. So, goodness is less important.'[1] Johnston aims to ward off this threat to goodness from naturalism. His argument for goodness in a naturalistic world moves from a denial that persons have selves to the conclusion that the good survive death in the 'onward rush of humankind' by forsaking their egocentric concerns and re-making themselves in light of impersonal altruism.[2]

Although I agree with Johnston that there are no selves (distinct from whole embodied persons), I disagree with his supposition that

[1] Mark Johnston, *Surviving Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.
[2] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 49.

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reality is wholly objective or impersonal.[3] My goal here is twofold: first, to show both that what Johnston takes to be impersonal altruism, in fact, presupposes that the world is *not* wholly objective or impersonal; and second, to show that Johnston's conception of goodness is anemic. The upshot is that, while rejecting selves, we can (and should) retain persons and their first-personal properties as ontologically significant. First, let us turn to Johnston.

1. Johnston's Project

Johnston aims to show, without recourse to any supernatural means, that, as Socrates hoped, 'there is something in death that is better for the good than for the bad'.[4] Although I cannot hope to do justice to Johnston's extremely complex view, I want to discuss three arguments that lend support to his central claim. Let me apologize in advance for the rather rigid way that I introduce Johnston's ideas by means of deductive arguments. The reason that I approach his discussion this way is that I find it extremely complicated, with multiple ideas in play at once, and I want to extract a single continuous strand of thought from them.

2. For Impersonal Altruism

The first part of the continuous strand is an argument for impersonal altruism. Its first premise is that there are no persisting selves worth caring about.[5] Selves are supposed to provide independent justification for seeking premium treatment for oneself. Johnston defines a

[3] Also, I do not follow neo-Lockeans, who take persons not to be substances, but rather to be 'cross-time bundles' (Johnston's term), 'which do not have all their essences present at each moment the exist'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 53–54).

[4] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 13.

[5] Selves, according to Johnston, are to provide independent justification for seeking premium treatment. Johnston takes Kant's claim that we are radically evil to be the manifestly true claim 'that there is something at the root of human nature that disposes each one of us to favor himself or herself over the others'. This is why his thinking of 'Johnston as me, as the one at the center of this arena, makes him appear privileged, even if he is actually just one human being among the others'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 158) In contrast to Johnston, I think of the asymmetry between myself and others to be a matter of the first-person perspective, not a matter of thinking of myself as the center of an arena. And I think of exemplifying

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self as the center of an arena of presence, an all-inclusive psychological field, a sort of container for all your conscious experiences, a bed for your stream of consciousness. But, he argues, it is indeterminate whether an arena of presence considered at one time is identical to an arena of presence considered at a different time. There is no fact of the matter about whether someone '*continue*[s] to be at the center of this arena of presence'.[6] Johnston says: 'There need be no determinate content to the prospective subjective question, the question of whether such and such a human being in the future *will* be me.'[7] So, an arena of presence, in terms of which a self is defined as its center, is only an intentional object, like Macbeth's dagger.[8] And 'given that the identity over time of a merely intentional object is a matter of how things strike the subject, so too is the identity over time of a self!' Hence, there are no persisting selves.[9]

Johnston goes on to argue that, in the absence of selves, all reasons for doing anything derive from impersonal reasons: If there are no selves, he argues, all first-personal reasons depend on impersonal reasons applied to one's own case.[10]

The way that he puts this point is to say there are no non-derivative or basic de se practical reasons.[11] (Since 'de se' is a technical term, I'll

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the robust first-person perspective as having ontological import, not moral import.

[6] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 168.

[7] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 175. This question seems to me to be rooted in Johnston's discussions with Parfit. I myself *never* pick out a person in the future and ask if it will be me. Never.

[8] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 169

[9] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 231. Johnston's aim in denying that there are persistent selves is to show that self-concern is irrational. Here is an argument:

1. What really matters is to be me, not to be this human being.
2. To be me is to be at center of this arena of presence, self.
3. I – this self – am defined only relative to this arena of presence.
4. This center of presence is an intentional item, a virtual item at which perspectival modes of presentations appear to converge – and not a feature of the world.

∴5. This self is not a feature of the world.

∴6. It's irrational to care about this self.

[10] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 238.

[11] Johnston also calls the first-personal reasons '*de se*' reasons. Johnston characterizes de se thought as 'thought about oneself *as oneself*', thought that one typically expresses in the first person. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 189)

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replace it with 'first-personal'.) Johnston agrees that we *have* first-personal reasons for acting; they are just derivative from impersonal reasons. For example, John Perry's messy shopper does not look into his shopping cart to find the leaking sugar until he realizes, 'Oh, it's me who's making a mess!' At that point, he may have implicitly reasoned, 'It's my mess, so I should clean it up.'[12] If so, his first-personal reason is derived from an impersonal reason, perhaps derived from 'Everyone has reason to see that the mess he makes in public places is cleaned up.'[13] Johnston explicitly includes not only moral and prudential reasons in the category of practical reasons, but also reasons of etiquette.[14]

Johnston says that basic first-personal practical reasons – reasons that derive only from one's own interests – have 'no force because they depend for their coherence on the persistence of a self worth caring about'.[15] If there is no persisting self worth caring about, there is nothing (no self) that that can be 'a rational object of special concern'.[16] So, all practical reasons 'are derived simply from the structure of impersonal reasons'.[17] In that case, 'the premium or excess that self-concern expects...cannot represent a reasonable demand or expectation'. So, impersonal altruism – the disposition to absorb the legitimate interests of others – is required by the structure of reason.[18]

[12] I should mention that Johnston distinguishes between two forms of 'I' thought: one merely indexical to register information about the person who tokens it, and the other truly subjective, 'mediated by thinking of oneself as some person or other *qua* at the center of an immediately given arena of consciousness'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 193) On his view, however, the second form of 'I' thought is illusory. I make no such distinction between merely indexical 'I' thoughts and truly *de se* 'I' thoughts. A child, who uses 'I' in a merely indexical way (if there are such), simply hasn't completely mastered the use of the first-person pronoun.

[13] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 189.

[14] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 9. Even my special attachment to friends and family, because they are *my* friends and family derives 'from an objective point of view, *anyway* owed to family members, friends and others'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 191).

[15] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 236.

[16] Ibid., 48.

[17] Ibid., 235.

[18] Nevertheless, self-concern may be bequeathed to us by natural selection. If survival and reproduction are built-in goals, then when I can conceive of the difference between *my* survival and *others'* survival, I seem to have a reason to seek premium treatment for myself.

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Here's a sketch of Johnston's argument from the structure of reasons as I understand it:

(1) There are no persisting selves worth caring about.[19]
(2) If (1), then there is no ME (in the relevant subjective sense) that could be 'a rational object of self-concern'.[20]
(3) If (2b), then there are no first-personal (de se) practical reasons that derive only from one's own interests.[21]
(4) If (3b), then all practical reasons 'are derived simply from the structure of impersonal reasons'.[22]
(5) If (4b), then impersonal altruism is required by the structure of reason.[23]
∴(C1) Impersonal altruism – the disposition to absorb legitimate interests of others – is required by the structure of reasons.

If Johnston is right, the command to cease considering oneself as an entity of special concern is the command of agape – the New Testament command of universal love. The command of agape is not merely a moral command;[24] it is rather the command 'to live in accord with the practical reasons that there actually are. And that is all "goodness" in the practical realm can reasonably be to taken to mean.'[25]

This argument from the structure of practical reasons, to which I'll turn critically later, paves the way for the discussion of how to become a good person, an impersonal altruist.

3. How We Can Become Good

The discussion of how to become good shifts the focus from the self, which depends on a merely intentional object (an arena of presence), to 'the person I presently find myself to be'.[26] This person is an embodied human being, with an individual personality. Johnston offers a 'radical reversal' of the idea of personal identity over time.

[19] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 178.
[20] Ibid., 48.
[21] Ibid., 48, 179.
[22] Ibid., 235.
[23] Ibid., 238.
[24] Self-regard, Johnston argues, is not rational. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 49) Johnston has Kantian overtones throughout: The impersonality of nonderivative reason, goodness as a good will.
[25] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 296.
[26] Ibid., 241.

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The naive intuitive view that Johnston wants to reverse is that 'the relation of personal identity independently justifies certain future-directed dispositions'.[27] According to the radical reversal, personal identity does not justify certain future-oriented dispositions, but rather the reverse. The radical reversal is that personal identity itself is determined by a certain future-directed disposition that we can alter, thereby altering the changes we can survive.[28] That is, we can change the conditions under which we can survive.

How is it that we can change our conditions of survival? Well, we are Protean.[29] The 'essence-characterizing kind for [you and me]', says Johnston, 'is the kind Protean Person'.[30] He continues, 'The fact that we are *Protean*, namely, *that the terms of our survival depend on our dispositions*, is an independent and essential fact about our natures as persons.'[31] To be Protean implies that if 'we could refigure our identity-determining dispositions then what we are… *capable of surviving* would change'.[32] The way in which we implement personal identity is response-dependent. The identity-determining disposition 'determines what kind of thing, with what temporal extent, counts as the person in question'.[33]

The good person is disposed to regard the legitimate interests of all present and future persons as on a par with her own. She acquires the disposition to 'absorb the anticipatable interests of future persons into [her] present practical outlook, so that [she is] now disposed to promote those interests'.[34] How might the disposition to be impersonally altruistic be acquired? '[O]ne's basic practical dispositions can change as a result of self-examination, modeling, and training. The process is more like becoming an extraordinary pianist than like choosing to see things a different way.'[35]

By refiguring my dispositions to identify with the interests of others, I see that there is nothing special about my individual personality, or anyone else's. Each of us is just one person among many. We simply 'implement personal identity in such a way that we would

[27] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 274.
[28] Ibid., 272.
[29] The term 'Protean' pertains to the shape-changing god Proteus. A Protean entity is extremely variable, like an actor play who has multiple roles in a play.
[30] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 284.
[31] Ibid., 285.
[32] Ibid., 284.
[33] Ibid., 278.
[34] Ibid., 275.
[35] Ibid., 327.

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survive wherever and whenever interests are to be found. We would, quite literally, live on in the onward rush of humankind.'[36] In a naturalistic world, if one gives up seeking 'premium treatment', one encounters herself objectively as just another person and arrives at a 'thoroughly objective relationship with the human being [she] finds [herself] to be'.[37]

Here is a reconstruction of of Johnston's argument How to Become Good:

(1) We are Protean persons – i.e., the terms of our survival depend on our dispositions.

(2) If we are Protean, then we can re-figure our identity-determining dispositions in a way that makes us good persons – i.e., we can become disposed to absorb the legitimate interests of persons at all times at which we take them to exist.[38]

∴(C2) We can become good persons – i.e., we can become disposed to absorb the legitimate interests of persons at all times at which we take them to exist.

4. How the Good Literally Survive Death in a Naturalistic World

A good person – at least an extremely good person – alters her identity-constituting dispositions by giving up concern with any individual personality and becoming impersonally altruistic.[39] In *any* naturalistic world, 'death obliterates one's individual personality'. Nevertheless, 'if there are extremely good people, they are not only able to face down death, that is, face the obliteration of their own individual personality without feeling it to be a tragic loss, they are also able literally to survive death'.[40] '[I]n identifying fundamentally with the interests of the arbitrary other', Johnston says, 'you will have become something that is present whenever and wherever individual personality is present.'[41]

[36] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 296.
[37] Ibid., 14.
[38] Ibid., 284, 295, 296.
[39] Ibid., 49.
[40] Ibid., 318.
[41] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 350. To *identify with* someone is to be disposed to 'take [certain] anticipated future interests as default starting points in our practical reasoning'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 295) Earlier, Johnston explained 'identification with' as 'caring for [the good of

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The good can live on in the lives of countless others because they are Protean. Johnston offers an analogy: Protean people are higher-order individuals like species – e.g., The tiger is a sub-kind of the kind *Panthera*. The species, constituted by a succession of organisms, admits not only variable constitution but also multiple constitution.[42] (That is, a species is constituted by different organisms at different times, and by many organisms at once.) If a Protean person becomes good, then 'he becomes generally embodied; his constitution is made up of the constitution of all present and future beings with interests'. This 'shared embodiment'[43] is how, when death brings the destruction of his initial individual personality, he continues in the onward rush of humanity – or, more precisely 'as living on with those that are not closed to goodness'.[44] On the other hand, a Protean person who 'firmly sticks to selfishness', and does not become good, 'will cease to exist when the human organism that embodies [him] dies'.[45]

When a good person survives death, Johnston insists, it is not 'merely a surrogate or spectral form of survival without consciousness, deliberation or action'.[46] If persons are Protean, then 'a person is conscious at a time if at that time he is constituted by a body that is then a site of consciousness'.[47] After death, when you become partly constituted by numerous conscious people, you will be conscious without realizing that you are conscious. (Similarly for deliberating and acting.) In this way, 'One quite literally lives on in the onward rush of humankind.'[48]

This, Johnston says, is the 'reward' of *agape*.[49] Noting that '*anastasis*' is the Greek word that the Apostle Paul used for resurrection, Johnston says, '*[A]gape* constitutes the *anastasis* of the good, their rising up to acquire a higher-order identity, an identity as a thing that is present wherever and whenever others are present.'[50] 'If we are Protean', says Johnston, 'then *agape* is identity-constituting in a

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people] in a non-derivative way'. (Johnston, 'Human Concerns Without Superlative Selves', in *Reading Parfit*, Jonathan Dancy, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers (1997), 149–179. Quotation is on 157.)

42 Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 319.
43 Ibid., 336.
44 Ibid., 335.
45 Ibid., 331.
46 Ibid., 350.
47 Ibid., 350.
48 Ibid., 49.
49 Ibid., 350.
50 Ibid., 351.

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way that makes for survival in the onward rush of humankind'.[51] In this way, Johnston says that he vindicates Socrates' hope that 'there is something for us in death [that is...] better for the good than...for the bad'.[52]

Here is a sketch of how the good literally survive death in a naturalistic universe:

(1) Good persons alter their identity-constituting dispositions by 'identifying fundamentally with the interests of the arbitrary other', and become disposed to absorb the legitimate interests of other persons (who are not closed to goodness) in the present and in the future.[53]
(2) If (1), then the good are (and will be) present wherever and whenever good people are present.[54]
(3) If (2b), then the good can be multiply constituted by the bodies of others whenever and wherever they are.[55]
(4) If (3b), then the good survive death (in the onrush of humankind).[56]
∴(C3) The good survive death.

To sum up my reconstruction of the three arguments: The thread of the argument moves from 'no self' to 'no basic de se [or first-personal] practical reasons' to impersonal altruism as a rational requirement. Then, on a revisionary conception of personal identity and a Protean view of persons, personal identity is a matter of our identity-determining disposition. An extremely good person, whose identity is determined by her identifying herself with personality as such, survives her own death. If these are Johnston's three conclusions – (C1), C2), and (C3) – then his overall argument lacks only the conditional premise: If (C1), (C2), and C3), then in a naturalistic world, the ideal of goodness is not obliterated.

5. A Critical Look at Johnston's Arguments

Still, I do not believe that Johnston has shown that the ideal of goodness is not obliterated in a naturalistic world. Let's look at the arguments again.

[51] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 49.
[52] Ibid., 361.
[53] Ibid., 275, 335.
[54] Ibid., 350.
[55] Ibid., 13, 351.
[56] Ibid., 350.

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Is the argument for (C1) – the argument from 'no self' to impersonal altruism sound? The argument is valid, but, I think, unsound. I'll not challenge the first premise, that there is no persisting self worth caring about. However, there seems to be a dialectical oddity in Johnston's 'no-self' strategy. In order for the illusoriness of the self to play its intended role, Johnston must first characterize a self in such a way that there *seem* to be selves as well as persons: Johnston must assume that many or most of us take selves to exist.[57]

The self is supposed to be something with a subjective principle of unity: same arena of presence, same self. But there are no selves for the reason that there is no sense to the notion of 'same arena of presence'. Johnston introduced the distinction between selves and persons only to discredit the reality of selves.[58] However, if my view – which we'll consider later – is correct, we are no more committed to centers of arenas of presence than we are to Dennett's Cartesian Theatre. Such a Cartesian approach is a nonstarter. Nevertheless, I agree that there are no selves in addition to persons – despite the dialectical oddity.

The premise of the argument for (C1) that I want to challenge is premise (3): While I agree that there are no selves (albeit on different

[57] Johnston distinguishes self-identity from personal identity. 'Self-identity, the identity that guarantees the coninuation of one's immediately available arena of presence over time, is more basic in its importance than personal identity, the identity over time of the public person who happens now to be at the center of one's arena of presence.' Johnston picks out his (hylomorphic) self as 'the self that I am is constituted by a potential succession of persons united by the following cross-time unity condition – that they be successively at the center of this arena of presence'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 204) This self is 'presently constituted by Johnston. Johnston presently has the property of being me'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 206) There's *prima facie* evidence that we trace selves, he says, 'by bringing to bear a salient subjective unity conditions, rather than tracking persons by offloading onto the most salient substance in the vicinity'. We're haunted by thoughts of an afterlife in which we come to be things different from human beings, or we come back as another person. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 212).

[58] It is only because Johnston equates *being me* with being at the center of this arena of presence and action that he can say that 'the idea that there is nothing real to being *you*, when properly grasped, is even more terrifying than death'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 164) 'Perhaps the key to deathlessness is the realization that YOU, in the relevant sense, could not possibly be real – are anyway, not *real enough* to justify a temporally extended pattern of self-concern, which manifests itself in your everyday egocentrism and in your special fear of your own(most) death.' (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 179).

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grounds from Johnston's), and hence no 'rational object of special self-concern', I also believe that there are non-derivative first-personal practical reasons. So, let me propose four candidates for basic first-personal practical reasons – that is, for reasons for acting that derive only from one's own interests and not from impersonal reasons:

First, there are free-rider cases. If I break in line, because I don't want to waste my time waiting, I am thinking of myself as a whole person, standing there, not a self that I agree is nonexistent. The absence of a self seems irrelevant to my reason for breaking in line, which seems not irrational, even if immoral.

Second, suppose that the reason that I'm wearing widow's weeds is that my dear husband died and I want to mourn him this way. (Not everyone whose dear husband dies does or should wear widow's weeds; it's not part of our culture to wear them.) Johnston himself says that it would be 'ham-fisted and obscene' to interfere with someone's mourning the death of a beloved other.[59] Well, yes – although that opinion seems to me completely at odds with impersonal altruism. (The mourner is not treating the dead beloved as an arbitrary other.) It seems otiose to insist that the reason that one grieves in one way rather than another must be derived from the structure of impersonal practical reasons.

Third, suppose that I'm in a spy ring and I want to alert my contact that I'm now in the vicinity without alerting anyone else. Suppose that I habitually wear an unusual shade of lipstick, and that I know that my contact is familiar with my lipstick preference. I dab a bit of the lipstick on a tissue and drop it beside my contact's car. The reason that I left the lipstick-dabbed tissue beside that car is that I wanted my contact to know that I was there without tipping off anyone else. This reason depends only on my knowledge of another person's knowledge of my use of a shade of lipstick; it seems not to derive from any impersonal structure of reasons.

Fourth, the phenomena associated with love for another person seem to be rife with basic first-personal reasons for acting. Suppose that I give my loved one a deliberately mismatched pair of socks. I reason, 'I love him deeply, and want to give him something that always reminds him of me. That's why I gave him the unusual pair of socks.' This seems like a totally idiosyncratic reason to give mismatched socks, untethered to the structure of impersonal reasons.

I submit that all four of these examples give basic first-personal (or *de se*) reasons for acting – reasons that do not derive from impersonal reasons. Johnston may object: 'Baker is talking about self-concern of

[59] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 50.

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persons; I, Johnston, am talking about self-concern of selves; so, the counterexamples are irrelevant.' I would respond that there is no non-question-begging reason to suppose that my special self-concern pertains to my nonexisting self rather than to *this* existing person. So, I stick by the counterexamples, each of which provides a rational motivation for acting.

It would just be a contrivance, a work-around, to look for impersonal rules from which to derive these reasons. Even if all *moral de se* (or first-personal) reasons are derivative from impersonal moral rules, it is not the case that all *practical* reasons – reasons for acting – are moral reasons. (Johnston seemed to agree that not all reasons are moral reasons when he mentioned rules of etiquette as reasons for acting.[60] So, I conclude that Johnston's argument that we are called to impersonal altruism by the very structure of reasons is not sound. In that case, Johnston has not succeeded in showing that the ideal of goodness fits into a wholly impersonal ontology.

Now turn to the argument for (C2) – for How We Can Become Good. Is it sound? I think that Johnston's argument is bold and stunning. But I cannot endorse it. I am unconvinced by Johnston's radical reversal of the notion of personal identity. It is difficult to see how a good person can change her persistence conditions, in effect, by changing her dispositions. This picture of goodness challenges credulity.

Be that as it may, there is also a more direct criticism of the argument for (C2). I do not believe that Johnston's view of goodness can be implemented in a wholly objective world as pictured by naturalists. To be good, Johnston says, is to identify 'fundamentally with the interests of the arbitrary other'.[61] However, to identify with the interests of the arbitrary others is to 'take [their] anticipated future interests as default starting points in our practical reasoning'.[62] I cannot take someone else's anticipated future interests as a starting point in my practical reasoning in a wholly objective and impersonal world.

This is so, for two reasons: (1) I cannot even consider another person's future interests as a starting point in *my* practical reasoning unless I can conceptually distinguish myself from others, and distinguishing myself from others requires a first-person perspective. It's not just a matter of distinguishing this from that; it's a matter of distinguishing me (in the first person) from others. (2) I cannot attempt to change my own dispositions unless I have a *robust* first-person perspective. I have a robust first-person perspective if and only if I have a

[60] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 9.
[61] Ibid., 350.
[62] Ibid., 295.

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capacity to conceive of myself and know that it is myself I am conceiving of, without any informative criterion for being me.[63]

The closest that Johnston comes to discussing a robust first-person perspective is to mention in passing 'a person's....capacity to take him- or herself as a topic of thought and talk'.[64] But this is equivocal, because there are two distinct ways to make oneself the topic of thought and talk. One can conceive of oneself in the first-person or in the third-person.[65] And it is only when one conceives of oneself in the first-person that she manifests a robust first-person perspective.

Suppose that I want to become a good person by becoming disposed to absorb the future interests of other people. In that case, I want myself (conceived of as myself in the first person) to become disposed to absorb the interests of others; I don't just want Baker to become so disposed. So, it's difficult to see how in a wholly impersonal world, anyone could become a good person in Johnston's sense. To become good, in Johnston's sense, I really must manifest a robust first-person perspective – that is, I must exercise a capacity to conceive of myself as myself in the first person in order even to try to align my interests with the interests of an arbitrary other. So, the premises of the argument for (C2), if true, presuppose that robust first-person perspectives are exemplified.

Ontologically speaking, there is no place in a wholly objective world for a robust first-person perspective. So, either one of the premises in the argument for (C2) is false, or the universe is not wholly objective. Either way, Johnston has not shown that his conception of goodness can be realized in a wholly impersonal and objective universe.[66] A similar argument holds for the first premise of the argument for (C3).

[63] Trenton Merricks, 'There are no Criteria of Identity Over Time', Noûs **32** (1998), 106–124.

[64] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 268.

[65] I am relying here on the important work of Hector-Neri Castañeda (Castañeda, 'Indicators and Quasi-Indicators', *American Philosophical Quarterly* **4** (1967), 85–100; Castañeda, 'He: A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness', *Ratio* **8** (1966), 130–157.

[66] And even when Johnston makes no obvious first-person reference, what he says presupposes first-person perspectives. For example: Johnston says that a good will 'is a disposition to absorb the legitimate interests of any present or future individual personality into one's present practical outlook, so that those interests count as much as one's own'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 332) No one can count the interests of others as much as her own unless she can conceive of herself as herself in the first

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As impressive as I think Johnston's argument is, I do not think that it succeeds in showing how the ideal of goodness can survive in a wholly objective and impersonal world.

Now, let me turn briefly to my own account of persons that also denies the existence of selves, but still holds to irreducible first-personal properties.

6. Persons and the First-Person Perspective

My view is similar to Johnston's up to a point: Persons are essentially embodied but they do not essentially have the bodies that they in fact have.[67] Rather, persons are constituted by bodies with which they are not identical.[68]

Here is where I part ways with Johnston: I don't think that persons can be scattered objects, as Johnston's Protean persons seem to be. Moreover – and central to my view – persons essentially have first-person perspectives, which have two stages, rudimentary and robust. At the rudimentary stage, a first-person perspective is a non-conceptual capacity shared by human infants and (some) nonhuman animals. It is the capacity of a conscious subject to perceive of and interact with entities in the world from a first-personal 'origin'. At the robust stage, a first-person perspective is a conceptual capacity displayed by language-users; it is the capacity to conceive of oneself as oneself from the first person.[69]

Born with a rudimentary first-person perspective and a remote (or second-order) capacity to acquire a robust first-person perspective, a human person gets to the robust stage in the natural course of development. As she learns a language, a person acquires numerous

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person. A world with such first-person perspectives is not the wholly objective and impersonal world of naturalism.

[67] I also agree with Johnston that we do not use any sufficient conditions for personal identity over time to reidentify people. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 59; Lynne Rudder Baker, 'Three-Dimensionalism Rescued: A Brief Reply to Michael Della Rocca', *Journal of Philosophy* **110** (2013), 167)).

[68] I use the word 'constitution' somewhat differently from Johnston; see, for example, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life*. (Lynne Rudder Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life: An Essay in Practical Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[69] And a first-person perspective has nothing to do with justifying 'a certain temporally extended pattern of special self-concern'. (Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 176).

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concepts, among which is a self-concept that she can use to conceive of herself as herself in the first person. On acquiring a self-concept, a person gains a robust first-person perspective – an in-hand capacity to conceive of herself as herself in the first person, without identifying herself by a name, description or third-person demonstrative. This capacity is exhibited throughout one's life in characteristically human activities – from making contracts to celebrating anniversaries to seeking fame by entering beauty contests.

Metaphysically speaking, to have a first-person perspective (rudimentary or robust) is to exemplify a dispositional, non-qualitative property. A human infant, with only a rudimentary first-person perspective, exemplifies a dispositional property that she continues to exemplify in different ways as she learns a language and gets to the robust stage of the first-person perspective, and indeed, exemplifies as long as she exists. What makes you the same person that you were when you were an infant is that there is a single exemplification of the dispositional property of having a first-person perspective both then and now – regardless of the vast differences in its manifestations over the years.

Let me emphasize that a first-person perspective is not something that 'exists only when it is experienced'.[70] It is a property – a dispositional property that is not manifested at every moment that it is exemplified. (You continue to have a first-person perspective even when you are sleeping soundly.)

Johnston suggests that 'a perspective, as understood by Baker, is not a property but an individual item of some sort, and a perspective is first-personal just when the one that occupies the perspective thinks of herself as occupying that perspective'.[71] That is not my view. In the first place, on my view, a perspective is not something that one occupies. To have a first-person perspective is to exemplify a dispositional property – a property that I exemplify or instantiate, and in virtue of exemplifying it, I (essentially a person) exist. I do not occupy a property; I exemplify it, and my exemplification of this property is unique.[72]

[70] This expression is John Searle's characterization of subjective phenomena. (John R. Searle, 'Consciousness', *Annual Review of Neuroscience* **23** (2000), 561).

[71] Johnston, *Surviving Death*, 221.

[72] The property of being a person is the property of exemplifying a first-person perspective essentially. The property of being me is the property of being this exemplifier of a first-person perspective essentially. There is no informative noncircular definition of 'x and y have the same first-person

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So, I do not first exist and then come to have a first-person perspective. I (the person) cannot exist *without* exemplifying a first-person perspective: I came into existence when the fetus that came to constitute me could support a first-person perspective. In short, the first-person perspective is not thought of as a 'center of presence' that can be illusory. Hence, a first-person perspective is not a Johnstonian self or any other 'individual item'.

In contrast to Johnston, for me, there are no Protean persons, only individual persons, who are seats of individual personality. Persons have their persistence conditions – continued exemplification of a first-person perspective – essentially, and they survive (or not) individually.

7. A Last Word on Goodness

I'd like to finish by suggesting that Johnston's conception of goodness cannot stand on its own. As I argued earlier, Johnston's strategy for becoming a good person seems to violate his view that the world is wholly objective. Indeed, is goodness, as construed by Johnston, even desirable? If Johnston is right, then if I were a truly good person, it seems that I would not love my husband for himself in his particularity, but only as representative of humanity. No good person would love anyone, in his or her particularity, for being the person he or she is. This seems to me a rather bleak view of reality.

One last thought: The people whose legitimate interests we are supposed to align ourselves with are all the human beings who are not permanently closed to goodness. It seems possible to not be permanently closed to goodness while believing that, say, the entire bourgeoisie should be eliminated – even if one included oneself in that group. That is, one need not be permanently closed to goodness to believe that the entire bourgeoisie (including oneself) should be eliminated. If so, then, for all that's been said, we should align

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perspective' inasmuch as any such definition must characterize persons in nonpersonal terms. Since I believe that we are not reducible to nonpersonal or subpersonal items, of course I can not give a definition of what makes us persons in nonpersonal terms. Persons are fundamentally different kinds of beings from anything else in the natural world. If this metaphysical claim is correct, then what I say about human persons does not – cannot – be a noncircular informative definition. (I think that this meets van Inwagen's objection.)

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ourselves with that person's legitimate interests. Ah, but no, you might object. Eliminating the bourgeoisie is not a *legitimate* interest. I agree, but then you need a more substantive view of goodness to rule out eliminating the bourgeoisie as a legitimate interest. If so, then Johnston's conception of goodness as it stands is anemic.

Conclusion

I agree with Johnston that there are no selves.[73] But eliminating selves does not leave us ontologically with only objective and impersonal reality. On my view, there are persons, constituted by bodies, who have first-person perspectives essentially. I applaud Johnston's aiming to show that nobody deserves special treatment – religious people of many persuasions officially agree – but I do not think that seeking special treatment depends on any illusions about mental substances. Moreover, a robust first-person perspective is not tied to seeking special treatment, but is a capacity whose exercise is presupposed by a great variety of human activities.

Ontologically, we all are selfless persons: there are no selves, but there are persons with first-person perspectives. Morally, only those few who never seek special treatment are selfless. To be selfless in either sense entails that first-person perspectives, first-person dispositional properties, are exemplified. If I am right, then the very existence of selfless persons insures that reality is not wholly objective. And if reality is not wholly objective, where does that leave naturalism?

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[73] But I strenuously disagree with Johnston that there are no subjects of experience, that there are only modes of presentation and mental acts of accessing them. If x is accessed, then there is a y who accesses x. The human brain makes accessing possible, but it is not the accessor. The accessor is a subject of experience (a human person) Where there are acts, there are agents. But there are no arenas.

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