Critical Notice/Étude critique

No Reference? No Owner? No Way*

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I came to John Canfield's *Becoming Human, The Development of Language, Self, and Self-Consciousness* expecting to praise it. Professor Canfield is a noted interpreter, scholar, and champion of Wittgenstein — "whose later philosophy provides the conceptual underpinning for this book" (p. 4) — and this prejudiced me in its favour. Alas, I now rather find myself looking for a shovel.

In "Setting Out," his first of ten chapters, Canfield states his, if not overweening at least *somewhat* weening, ambition, viz. "to map out … our place in the universe" (p. 4), and in pursuance of this announces: "I shall take up six topics: (1) Eden itself, understood as a stage in human history prior to the development of language, (2) the nature and origin of language and (3) of the self, (4) consciousness, (5) self-awareness, and (6) the possibility of a return to some religiously significant Eden-like state" (p. 4). In order better to see how

* John Canfield, *Becoming Human, The Development of Language, Self, and Self-Consciousness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Page references are to this work.

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these six topics are supposed to yield a single continuous philosophical narrative or storyline it will help to consider them in the same order, but grouped such that topics (1) and (2) are "scenes" from what I will name Act I, topics (3), (4), and (5) "scenes" from Act II, and topic (6) Act III. The three-act scenario is then as follows:

Act I. At one time in our past we humans had no language or only a very rudimentary one. From this condition developed language. Canfield takes issue with certain inevitably speculative accounts of how this development took place and he proposes his own inevitably speculative account which is thoroughly informed by certain of the later Wittgenstein's views on language and meaning, and in particular by what may be called Wittgenstein's "anti-mentalism." By "anti-mentalism" is meant (with equal roughness) "anti-Cartesianism," as exemplified in the later Wittgenstein's animus against construing consciousness and the mental as comprising *inner* or — in a synonymous terminology that I will sometimes use — "intramental" entities or realities.[1] Though Wittgenstein does not venture much in the direction of how language or speech originated phylogenetically, he offers more on how language, meaning, and understanding might plausibly be thought to develop in the individual child, and Canfield ventures much on this topic also. He does indeed think that, in part at least, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny (p. 35), and brings Wittgenstein's broadly anti-mentalist account of individual language-acquisition to "the task of developing a custom-oriented understanding of language acquisition" (p. 12) historically in the species.[2]

So Act I. With Canfield"s treatment of his first two topics we have an anti-mentalist account of how language phylo-developed and onto-develops and thus an anti-mentalist account of Eden.

Act II. But when we fall we really fall, and as irony would have it the departure from Eden constituted by the development of language, though requiring no powers, processes, or entities of a Cartesio-mentalistic nature, brings with it, says Canfield, the illusion of such inner realities, among various other misunderstandings attending the next three topics (the self, consciousness, and self-consciousness). Canfield's treatment of the diagnosed misunderstandings makes up the second act of the over-arching story-line.

Act III. The disillusioning enlightenment concerning the self, consciousness, and self-consciousness provided by his own analysis reveals, Canfield suggests, a path back to a "secular" yet "mystical" Edenic existence, and thus do we get back to where we once belonged.

Thus — but not so.

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To begin at the end, and to get, in some sense, personal, I must recuse myself as a potential proselyte, a fellow traveller, or in any way a customer for Canfield's return to Eden. One has to be of a certain mindset (one deeply alien to

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me) to find any such Promised Land promising, and all the more so given the unclarity of Canfield's prescriptive vision. By his final chapter (10, "Back to Eden") Canfield has argued that as language-havers, human beings engage in various sorts of delusions of "the Self," at least one variety of which is truly a sort of self-delusion. Canfield proposes (in his chapter 7, "The Further Adventures of a Nobody") that in the exercise of "inner speech" one concocts stories with oneself as the protagonist. But they are just stories, broadly of the Horatio Alger sort:[3] "[We] live in story; *my* story, the story of the I. We each create and to some degree enact stories about ourselves, and the fact that we do is an essential feature of human life" (p. 98). Essential, that is, in the bad and contingent sense, for ceasing to live "in story" is part and parcel of the return to Eden.

To return to my unsympathetic mindset, even if it is conceded that we engage in a delusion called living in story, the cure, to one of my mindset, is, if not worse than the alleged diseases, utterly uncompelling.

"To return to Eden," says Canfield, "would be to cease to live in story" (p. 156). Let it be, if Canfield says so. What is Eden? What is it to cease to live in story? Living in story is certainly a bad thing insofar as to do so is to be beset by a certain "illusion of self" (there are others, to which I will come) and "when the illusion is firmly in place we are no longer in Eden. As our species did in the past, we pass gradually from creatures of innocence and oneness to the split and conflicted being each of us is" (p. 120). But what is it to be split and conflicted? Canfield doesn't really say, but it can't be good, no less than innocence and oneness *must* be good. As "oneness" rhetorically suggests (I hesitate to grant it full and bona fide meaning), ceasing to live in story/returning to Eden is a mystical thing, but then one must wonder whether that provides or precludes explanation and understanding: "The busy tumult of I-centered narrative is absent. Subject and object have collapsed into one. What is left is the world of oneness, a thing beyond the intellect's grasp. … Those who carry on their everyday lives, chopping wood and hauling water, doing what life demands but moving in oneness, illuminated, dwell in Eden. … To be human is to live in oneness" (p. 168). No doubt I should not be asking questions beyond the intellect's grasp, but I won't let that stop me.

Canfield characterizes the return to Eden as "a mystical but nonetheless secular and non-supernatural return" (p. 159). And moreover, secular while nonetheless "religiously significant" (p. 161). But again one has to be of a certain mindset or philosophical temperament to find the notion of the "religiously significant" significant, i.e., to discern so much as the contrast it putatively marks. This is not assisted by the evident detachability (necessary detachability?) of religious significance from linguistic significance. Canfield imagines "a religion without words" (p. 159). The model or inspiration here is, of course, Zen Buddhism, and in Canfield's "imagined variant of Zen. … the basic content would be the quest for enlightenment" (p. 160). Such an enlightening religion would answer "our existential need" (p. 161). What need is that?

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Canfield won't say, or, I suppose, can't say: "Enlightenment cannot be captured in a description. … Our ordinary vocabulary cannot touch it. … Enlightened people in attempting to describe their state must have recourse to uses of words that are stretched beyond the normal" (p. 164). But what Canfield proposes — "a religious faith *sans* words. Let us call this imagined entity 'silent Zen' " (p. 160) — comes across, withal, as merely piety for piety's sake (for pity's sake).

Examples, as we all know, are the go-carts of the imagination, and Canfield does better (though not much better) in conveying the goal as "the possibility that there is, or can be, should we manage to return to Eden, a transcendent glory in being an animal on this earth. On that view of things, our everyday actions constitute — or can be brought to do so — a Zen-like lifeway where chopping wood and carrying water are mundane miracles"(p. 77). This is pure Oprah territory, more fuzzy than warm, but what adolescent of the sixties (such as I) can fail to warm up to the promise that "the most significant manifestation of enlightenment is the opening-up of the person to compassion. Enlightenment brings love, not of the romantic kind but something deeper" (p. 166)? Yet when Canfield goes on to say that "there are a number of transformations that have a similarity to that one, most notably the conversion experience, in which someone suddenly awakes to Jesus" (p. 166), I don't know whether to laugh, cry, or curse.

To the degree that I must, if only by temperament and mindset, find the telos of *Becoming Human* — the Act III return to Eden — a non-starter or a dead-ender, the rest of the book is rather undermined, even if not wholly and unsalvageably so, insofar as Act I on the phylo- and onto-development of language is persuasive, interesting, and salutary.[4] But there is more and worse at stake than the return to Eden being a disappointing payoff in a philosophical narrative.

Notwithstanding that, by anatidaen principles of parity, Canfield's hopeful vision of a return to Eden will be a matter of temperament no less than my unresponsiveness to it, I believe that the return to Eden of Act III is not merely something Canfield is drawn to temperamentally. Act III is not just uncompelling as it strikes me; it is, by telic or final causative force or rationale, pernicious in bringing about the philosophical disaster that is Act II — Canfield's account of self, consciousness, and self-consciousness; a disaster which is, in its low-stakes way, as tragic and exquisitely ironic as anything in Sophocles.

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Canfield holds that the return to Eden — oneness, enlightenment, and all that miraculous wood-chopping — is impeded by one's having a false notion of self. This false notion of self is ipso facto a notion of a false self which, notion or self, is an amalgam (p. 116) of three distinct notions. Even though one of the notions is legitimate, two are illegitimate, and by the arithmetic of notions of selves two false notions plus a true notion yields a false notion (and a false self: "This anomolous creature I call the false self" [p. 82]). The legitimate

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notion of the self is the ordinary notion of a "person, one of us, creatures like those we stand behind in bus queues" (p. 86). One of the false notions is the "narrative self," reported above, by which we "live in story." The other false notion of a self, Canfield calls "a grammatical fiction." As we have seen, the attainment of enlightenment requires abandoning the obsessive if silent chattering of the narrative self. But that gets us only halfway from perdition. We must still get ourselves disillusioned about the self or "I" that is a grammatical fiction. And it is here that Canfield's philosophical narrative implodes and his Edenic aspirations, insofar as they are philosophical, come a cropper.

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Our species' acquisition of language Canfield characterizes as a departure from Eden and thereby, *inter alia,* a departure from our earlier animal existence. This departure from Eden and the other animals, Canfield says, may be conceived in terms of "self-consciousness":

> Indeed it is easy to believe that awareness of self makes the crucial difference between us and lesser beasts, and that our species' attainment of self-consciousness constitutes *the* giant step out of Eden. But self-awareness requires a self — the thing one is aware of. The two seem inseparably linked; self-consciousness requires self; self is by its nature self-reflective. In this chapter and the next I look at the "self" part of that duo. My aim is to establish the illusory nature of the I. If development of self is one of the crucial passages out from Eden, it is a step into delusion. (p. 78)

Thus begins a careless exercise whereby the baby is thrown out with the straw man.

What Canfield asserts above is a very flimsy pretext for charging anyone, let alone all of us (English speakers) (who are not Buddhists), with a delusional notion of self. We can put aside, for the purposes of Canfield's present discussion, the narrative self, and consider the two remaining selves: the grammatically non-fictitious and ontologically reputable ordinary persons or human beings and the grammatically fictitious and ontologically/philosophically disreputable and delusive self or I. Remember that in the calculus of the Fall, a notion of the illusory self trumps the notion of a person or human being such that if one believes in an illusory self one believes in and/or is a false self even if one believes, as one is bound to, in human beings (fickle though they are!). But do people, by and large and *hoi* and *polloi,* really believe in Canfield's delusive self? Nothing he has said makes it plausible to think so.

I am inclined to think or hold that the only grammatically legitimate or sanctioned use of "self" in English is the reflexive construction, as in (the lately used) "self-consciousness" and "self-awareness," or (soon to be very much to the fore) "self-ascription"; and otherwise where the object of the verb is designated with a reflexive pronoun — "myself," "herself," "oneself," etc. Here

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"self" is only ever a prefix or suffix, never a self-standing noun or pronoun (as it tries to be with "the self," "a self," or just "self" — a grammatical abuse Canfield blithely indulges in throughout his book, starting with its subtitle, and which I, being in Rome, succumbed to above). The point of the construction — its "reflexivity" — resides, of course, in actor and recipient or target of the action being one and the same. Thus, in self-ascription, ascriber is ascribee. There is nothing in this to suggest anything about the nature of the actor in a reflexive construction, not even that it is conscious, let alone of a Cartesian persuasion, since dead turkeys can be self-basting in ovens that are self-cleaning. And there are no pretend uses of the de-affixed "self" which are not replaceable (as they should quickly be) by "himself," "yourself," "myself," "oneself," and their kin. And finally there is no reason whatever, ever, to take oneself to be anything other than a person or human being. Of course some few people may so do, and that's unfortunate, but don't blame the reflexive construction. Even if we accept Canfield's "self-consciousness requires self" as some form of ESL, all it could imply is that by self-consciousness a person is conscious of a person — to wit, oneself! No grammatical fictions here, even with Canfield's gratuitously fictitious grammar which finds "self" cut loose from verbs and pronouns, and "I" definitely and indefinitely "articled."

Nevertheless, for his critical and debunking (as well as mystical and therapeutic) purposes Canfield is determined that self-consciousness — which after all is just a conscious being's consciousness of itself — be a (false) consciousness of a strange and illusory thing: self, a self, the self, the I. But so far as anyone does suppose that that (and not simply a person) is what a conscious being (oneself for example) is, such a supposition is a further and completely gratuitous step supported by nothing in ordinary language or its grammar. Likewise for the supposition that anyone, besides some philosophers and those temporarily in "metaphysical mode" (e.g., when in the church pew rather than the bus queue), much or seriously takes that gratuitous step. But Canfield has it that a self or I, which is not a person or human being, is something which "virtually everyone" (p. 79) believes in "and at a gut level" (p. 79) ("our picture of the I is both simple and universally held, or virtually so" [p. 83]; "[it] is the error definitive of human kind" [p. 97]). Anyone making such an extravagant claim will be hard-pressed to provide empirical support for it in explicit testimony or implicit practice and all the more so for Canfield, who concedes that we do all believe in ordinary human beings. Thus any case of self-reference will naturally be intended and understood as, at least, a case of reference to a human being. And then Canfield will have to argue that we all intend and understand it to be a reference to something *else also*. Canfield's way of supporting this improbable claim is to double down and argue for something yet more incredible, viz., that in some cases of self-reference one not only mistakenly believes that one is referring to a non-human "self," but that one equally mistakenly believes that one *is* referring to a human being, viz., to oneself (the person one is). For in those cases, Canfield says, despite all grammatical appearances — to say nothing of linguistic intentions — one sometimes does not refer to anything by use of (the pronoun) "I."

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Canfield holds "I" to be equivocal, if that — "equivocal" — is the right word to describe his (by no means unique) view. Perhaps a new coinage ("semivocal"?) is called for. He says,

> I do not claim that no uses of "I" refer, but only that a major subset of them do not. These non-referring uses are restricted to present tense psychological utterances, such as "I think … ," "I am happy … ," "I intend (to do so and so) … ," and so on. When I say what I felt yesterday or will feel tomorrow, or when I speak of my body, then I do refer. It is only when my utterances concern my present experience, as we might say, that my "I" does not refer, and these cases are in the minority. So the uses of "I" break in two parts; in one, "I" refers, in the other it does not. (p. 87)

Canfield of course wants to deny that in present-tense psychological cases, "I" refers to "the Self," the non-human, only too literally Descartes-minded, something or other that he (surely rightly) holds not to exist but (surely dubiously) holds everyone else (except himself and the Buddhists) to believe in at a gut level.

However, though "I" certainly never (so far) has ever referred to a non-human, nor thus to a non-physical "Self," if, as Canfield holds, it does not refer at all in "I am in pain" or "I think … " or "I intend to … " (and if not in these cases of avowal, then why not also not in "I believe … ," "I expect … ," "I disagree … ," where equally there are no criteria in play?) Then "I" in those cases, he says, does not refer either to a human being. I disagree.

I hold that "I" is univocal and that it always refers to a human being unless spoken by other animals or non-human persons or conscious beings. I hold further that Canfield's reasons for holding that "I" in present-tense psychological utterances is not a referring word (a singular term, a demonstrative, or indeed a pronoun), or does not have a referring use, or does not make or have a reference, are not persuasive reasons and that, moreover, that unpersuasive negative claim has further philosophically disastrous consequences. For it is with this maneuver that the ironic forces of Pyrrhic victory, if not those of self-defeat, are set afoot.

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Canfield cites the Wittgenstein of the *Blue Book* as well as certain eminent Wittgensteinians (more about whom below) on behalf of the view that "I" has no reference in present-tense psychological cases and that to suppose that it does is to introduce a "grammatical fiction" as the putative referent. Apart from, though in line with, the citation of these authorities, Canfield provides an analogy and an argument in support of the view that "I" in the relevant cases has no real referent but, as a kind of illusion of grammar, only appears to have a referent. Neither the analogy nor the argument is compelling.

First the analogy, famously suggested by Lichtenberg and aimed at Descartes. Descartes takes himself to have proved the existence of something with his argument, "I think, therefore I am." Of this Canfield says:

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> This argument only works if one takes it for granted that the "I" in "I think" (the suffix "o" in "Cogito") refers. Descartes simply assumed that it does; and naturally enough, since we all unthinkingly make that assumption day in and day out. Descartes sought certainty, but is it certain that "I" is a referring expression? That we are dealing with what is a dubious assumption begins to emerge when we contemplate a famous remark the eighteenth-century aphorist Lichtenberg made about the Cogito:We should say, "It thinks," just as we say, "It thunders… ." (p. 85)

Note first that if, as Canfield says, Descartes's argument works only if one takes it for granted that the "I" in "I think" refers, then the argument surely does work, since one can take it for granted that the "I" refers to oneself — woman or man, boy or girl, and anything in between. Canfield just assumes (dubiously) that if one takes it for granted that "I" refers, one takes it for granted that it refers to some non-physical, non-human "Self." But why suppose that anyone, besides Descartes and those in temporary metaphysical mode, ever takes oneself to be referring to such a thing and *not* to oneself — a human being, a person — whenever one says "I am in pain" or "I think such-and-such"? Descartes's pretending not to know what it is that thinks, even as it is certain that he thinks, is, as we know, of a piece with pretending that he possibly is deceived by an Evil Genius, something that one could *only* pretend to believe possible (protestations about logical possibility notwithstanding). Apart from the make-believe — and there is no reason for us or anyone else to be engaging in the Evil Genius pretense — it is perfectly obvious that when Descartes says "I think, therefore I am," the "I"s have it: they refer to Descartes, a Frenchman, standing in the bus queue, with Sartre. That there may be people who think or pretend to think that "I" sometimes refers to a non-human, non-physical "self" is no reason to suppose that all or most people think such, and no reason to think anyone ever thinks that "I" doesn't at least refer to a human being whenever spoken by such. One no less refers to, and takes oneself to be referring to, *oneself* — a man, a person, etc. — when one says "I am in pain" or "I think" — or more likely, "I"m *thinking*," said impatiently for example, in response to some urging as to what to do — than when one says "I'm hit" or "I have a broken arm."

The obviousness of "a human being" as the correct answer to the question "What is the thing that thinks?" brings with it the obvious incorrectness of any answer such as Descartes or other Self-mongers would monger. It is simply a gratuitous non-starter (as non-starters tend to be) as a serious answer to the question who or what it is that thinks. Equally gratuitous — and every bit as fatuous — is the non-starter Lichtenberg pipes up with. More perennial than venerable, Lichtenberg's famous suggestion is understood by Canfield to be making a point only about how language can mislead. "It" usually refers to something, but here — self-evidently, evidently — it does not. Likewise "I," in "I" think, "is a mere empty place holder" (p. 85) and "[i]n those cases" Canfield says, "where 'I' does not refer, the I or self is a

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grammatical fiction" (Canfield's italics) (p. 84). But why suppose there *are* any such cases?

Even if one grants that the "It" of "It's snowing" does not refer to anything which is snowing[5] and that to suppose that it does refer is to be hoodwinked into believing in the actuality of what is only a grammatical fiction, what reason is there to suppose that "I am in pain" is the same sort of case? The failure of understanding involved in asking for a more precise specification of the referent of "it," on being told that it is snowing, is a failure to understand an idiom. But "I am in pain" is in no way idiomatic or some sort of turn of phrase. Moreover, unlike the "It" of "It's snowing," which lacks an obvious candidate for referent, the "I" of "I'm in pain" *has* an obvious candidate: me, the human being, etc. Consequently, the main reason Canfield proffers for the claim that it is wrong to suppose that the relevant "I" refers to anything or anyone bears little relation to the alleged corresponding illusion concerning the weather. I shall (as a good Canadian) be returning to that topic (the weather) and to the real relevance of Lichtenberg. Let us presently consider Canfield's argument for the non-referentiality of present-tense psychological uses of "I."

Canfield's central consideration in holding that "I" in present-tense psychological assertions does not refer to anyone or anything whatever is that such cases differ from past-tense cases, where it does refer, in the following respect. In the latter case, such as in "I was angry," I "pick out" (p. 88) someone (myself, of course), while in "I am angry" or "I am in pain," "I do not pick anything out" (p. 95); "I don't pick out some subject and attribute being in pain to it" (p. 88); "one who says 'I am in pain' … does not refer, in this sense: … [he] does not use 'I' to pick out an individual" (pp. 93–4); "[s]omething essential to denoting is missing, namely a picking out of one thing from among many, and a reference to it" (p. 93). Much thus turns on what it is exactly "to pick something out."

From this last quotation, on what is essential to denoting, it is not clear whether Canfield does or does not wish to identify referring and picking out. But it would simply beg the question to define "pick out" as "refer" and then say that I don't refer to anything when I say "I am in pain" because I don't pick out anything. (Of course, posing the issue as one of whether I pick out "anything" rather than "anyone" is itself already tendentious since it is clear that no such alien *thing* as a Cartesian self is ever picked out.) "Picking out" must indicate some sort of cognitive exercise,[6] often characterized by Wittgenstein as "the application of criteria." So let it be that I apply no criteria in my correct use of "I" in "I am in pain." It does not follow that I do not refer to anyone (a man, a human being, myself) in such a case.

Indeed, what does follow is that it is possible, if only in this sort of case, i.e., *one's own case*, to refer to something — oneself — *without* applying criteria. And why not? Why should the case of present-tense psychological self-ascription be a grammatico-cognitive replication of past-tense and/or non-psychological self-ascription, and/or any-tense other-ascription, in order to be a case of reference and, no less, of ascription? What is true is that if there were no uses of "I" which did

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involve the application of criteria, there could be no cases of a criterion-less use of "I," and by the same token if there were no criteria-governed ascriptions of pain to *others*, there could be no criterion-less ascriptions of pain to oneself (more about which below). From none of this does it follow that "I" ever fails to refer to someone or that "pain" ever fails to mean an ascribable state of someone (and the Wittgenstein of *Philosophical Investigations* never suggests that any such follows).

Only if it could be shown that the application of criteria is, so to say, "criterial" for reference, i.e., for something's counting as reference, would it follow that where there is no application of criteria in a given case (though there be in general such a thing as criteria-governed reference), there is, in such a case, no reference. Canfield simply declares that "The presence of such a criterion is necessary for reference, but in 'I am in pain' and similar instances no criterion is in play" (p. 191), offering no argument for criteria being criterial for reference. It is a dogma[7] and evidently a false one, for were it true, various philosophical misadventures, lesser and greater, would ensue.

To move then from auguring to arguing, among the minor ills is what we are to make of copulative tenses on this view. I may, on this view, in a logico-grammatically legitimate way, say that I was in pain or that I will be in pain but not that I am in pain – no thought is expressed or predication made by the use of the words "I am in pain" (nor, presumably, by the words "that I am in pain" as in "That I am in pain is plain to see" or in "He knows that I am in pain"). In this grammar the peculiar power of the predicate "pain" is such as to strip "am" of its copulative powers no less than it strips "I" of its referential power, though it leaves "was" and "will be" with full copulative stamina and only so copulated will "I" achieve reference. Can this really grammatically be? Would anyone ever so explain the use of these words? Moreover, on Canfield's view single utterances of "I" will be equivocal (or, again, "semi-vocal"). Canfield says that "I" refers in "I have a broken arm" but not in "I am in pain." What about in "I have a broken arm and am in pain" or "I was and still am in pain"? And in response to "I am in pain," someone who understands me may ask, "Why are you in pain?" But how so for Canfield who has it that with "I am in pain" I really only bleat pitifully? Does the single utterance of "I" fail to refer out of my mouth but manage to refer in my auditor's ear? Or are we really to say in such a case that you have not been *informed* by me that I am in pain and can only *infer* it from the oddly articulate bleating?

This point, as I shall discuss below, has been expanded upon by a philosopher who, though rather studiously ignored by Canfield and the neo-Wittgensteinians,[8] sets out several other and worse difficulties that must attend their view. I refer to P. F. Strawson.

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A no-reference theorist such as Canfield (or Anscombe, or Malcolm, or early to middle Wittgenstein) must perforce be what Strawson, in *Individuals* (Methuen:

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London, 1959), calls a "no-ownership theorist." Strawson is writing prior to the neo-Wittgensteinians and thinks that the no-ownership theory of consciousness is rare and only uncertainly attributable ("Over the attribution of the second type of view I am more hesitant but there is some evidence that it was held, at one period, by Wittgenstein and possibly also by Schlick" [p. 94]). For Wittgenstein as a no-ownership theorist he cites Moore's *Mind* articles on "Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930–33" (*Mind*, Vol. LXIV, pp.13–14), and notes that Wittgenstein there approvingly cites Lichtenberg (as does, he also notes, Schlick). But I fear it has not been so rare a view as Strawson thinks, even apart from the no-reference theorists like Canfield. There are shades of it (to understate things) in Hume (someone Canfield cites approvingly, pp. 7, 94, 153), and in Locke on "persons," and in any philosopher who finds a so-called "stream of consciousness" or "mental reality" to be things conceivable as basic realities, at most only contingently related to the conception of an animal or person or conscious being. Its philosophical heritage/legacy is Solipsism, more about which below.[9]

Descartes thinks that the stream of consciousness is conceivable apart from any animal (or "its body") but he does not think that it is unowned. It is owned by a soul or what Canfield calls "a Self." It is such a Self that Canfield, like Hume, dismisses as a fiction. So it is. But Canfield does not dismiss the consciousness.[10] How could he? The "haver" or owner — the subject – of the pain may not exist, but the pain must. To deny the pain along with its sufferer would be sheer nihilism. What Strawson examines is the dialectic by which the putative rejection of Cartesianism by No-ownershipism becomes, in fact, a death embrace.

Strawson comes to consider Cartesianism and No-ownershipism by way of how, for all their mutual enmity, they are equally at odds with our ordinary concept of a person. The three positions differ in various ways in their response to two questions: "Why are one's states of consciousness ascribed to anything at all?" and "Why are they ascribed to the very same thing as certain corporeal characteristics, a certain physical situation, etc.?" Though Cartesianism and No-ownershipism differ in their responses to the first question, "on both views, it is only a linguistic illusion that both kinds of predicate are properly ascribed to one and the same thing, that there is a common owner, or subject, of both types of predicate" (*Individuals*, p. 94).The ordinary concept of a person is inimical to and precludes both Cartesianism and No-ownershipism. If we accept the ordinary concept of a person, "then, the word 'I' never refers to … the pure subject. But this does not mean, as the no-ownership theorist must think, that 'I' in some cases does not refer at all. It refers because I am a person among others, and the predicates that would *per impossibile* belong to the pure subject if it could be referred to, belong properly to the person to which 'I' does refer" (*Individuals*, p. 103). Let me set out Strawson's reasons for why this last is the only one tenable of the three positions, and why the other two positions are doppelgängers joined at the hip as they jump from the frying pan into the fire.

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Strawson puts the point tellingly in addressing the ground on which a no-ownership theorist like Canfield rests his claim for the equivocality of "I," viz. that no criterion, no picking out – in effect, no verification – is in play in first-person present-tense self-ascriptions, as they are in other cases:

> How could the sense be the same when the method of verification was so different in the two cases — or , rather, when there was a method of verification in the one case (the case of others) and not properly speaking, in the other case (the case of oneself)? Or, again — a more sophisticated scruple — how can it be right to talk of ascribing in the case of oneself? For surely there can be a question of ascribing only if there is or could be a question of identifying that to which the ascription is made; and though there may be a question of identifying the one who is in pain when that one is another, how can there be such a question when that one is oneself? But this query answers itself as soon as we remember that we *speak* primarily to others, for the information of others. In one sense, indeed, there is no question of my having to *tell who it is* who is in pain, when I am. In another sense however, I may have to *tell who it is*, i.e. to let others know who it is. (*Individuals*, pp. 99–100)

In referring to myself, I do not have to pick myself out in order that others may pick me out by my self-reference.

But No-ownershipism is not just a non-sequitur, more gross than numbing, sliding from "no criterion of reference" to "no reference." It is, ultimately, absurd. No-ownershipism must fail simply insofar as it cannot retain the baby of consciousness while dismissing the alleged bathwater which is an owner. The Cheshire cat cannot disappear leaving behind only its states or experiences, and to speak identifyingly of states or experiences (or smiles!) is to ascribe or predicate such things to or of a subject — a bearer, an "owner" in this figurative sense — who "has" them in this predicative sense of "have":

> States, or experiences, one might say, *owe* their identity as particulars to the identity of the person whose states or experiences they are. From this it follows immediately that if they can be identified as particular states or experiences at all, they must be possessed or ascribable in just that way which the no ownership theorist ridicules; i.e. in such a way that it is logically impossible that a particular state or experience in fact possessed by someone should have been possessed by anyone else. The requirements of identity rule out logical transferability of ownership.[11] So the theorist could maintain his position only by denying that we could ever refer to particular states or experiences at all; and this position is ridiculous. (*Individuals*, p. 97)

But the ownership of Cartesianism is no better and, ultimately, really no different than No-ownershipism.

Strawson notes "that if we try to think of that to which one's states of consciousness are ascribed as something utterly different from that to which

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certain corporeal characteristics are ascribed, then, indeed it becomes difficult to see why states of consciousness should be ascribed to, thought of as belonging to, anything at all" (p. 98). The attempt to think of something utterly different from that to which certain corporeal characteristics are ascribed is, of course, the attempt to think of a something we know not what. There is nothing intelligible for the states and experiences to belong to if what they must belong to is an immaterial substance; they are as good as unowned. But the lesson is not that we then must find intelligible the notion of an unascribed, unowned "bundle"[12] of mental states, any more than, generalizing with the good Berkeley, we can make sense of the notion that an apple is a mere "collection" of properties (try taking that up as a hobby!).

It is then more than just difficult to keep Cartesianism from transmuting into No-ownershipism; it is impossible:

> [W]hen we ask ourselves how we come to frame, to get a use for, the concept of this compound of two subjects, the picture — if we are honest and careful – is apt to change from the picture of two subjects to the picture of one subject and one non-subject. For it becomes impossible to see how we could come by the idea of different, distinguishable, identifiable subjects of experience — different consciousnesses — *if this idea is thought of as logically primitive,* as a logical ingredient in the compound-idea of a person, the latter being composed of two subjects. For there could never be any question of assigning an experience, as such, to any subject other than oneself; and therefore never any question of assigning it to oneself either, never any question of ascribing it to a subject all. (p. 102)

The idea that "mental" states differ from "physical" states in being, by virtue of their essential "privacy" and "innerness," ascribable *only* by me and *only* to myself may, as a hallmark of "Cartesianism," seem tailor-made for the other hallmark Cartesian doctrine, that of the non-physical substance of which no one else can really know and justifiably predicate something. But in fact these notions are at odds with one another. If a state is ascribable *only* to me and only *by* me then no genuine ascribing can occur — what seems right to me will be right; how shall I go wrong? — and, more to the present point, I shall be no genuine subject of predication. "Cartesian privacy" must lead to No-ownershipism and if this betokens a (further) incoherence in Descartes's doctrine, then amen. There is no rest for the wicked. But by the obverse token, embracing No-ownershipism is not a way out of "mentalism" or the fantasy of private, inner — intra-mental — objects. This is Canfield's tragic mistake. No-ownership theory — what he calls the "No self theory" (p. 78) — must take him deeper into "the mentalist view of mind" (p. 134).

He, or at least a part of him, certainly doesn't want to go there. In his chapter 8, "Consciousness," he set himself against "the Cartesian worldview" (p. 121) whereby "mind, the realm of consciousness, is categorically distinct from body, or from matter in general" (p. 121) and comprises "a rich set of

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mental objects like sights, sounds, pains, and pleasures" (p. 121). His mistake is to some degree symptomatic of the hazards of Wittgenstein scholarship and in particular of what to make of the transitional, "middle Wittgenstein" of the early and middle 1930s. One should not assume that everything Wittgenstein said after 1929 is "later Wittgenstein" and of a piece, nor that *Philosophical Investigations* is not the product of refinement and "precipitation" (*PI* p. ix) out of views prior to 1945. The example of Hume alone shows that a no-ownership view is no impediment to intra-mental objects galore and that the anti-mentalism of the later Wittgenstein — the campaign against "private objects" — is not to be confused or conflated with the anti-Self musings which extend from *Notebooks 1914–16*, through the *Tractatus*, until they peter out in the middle 1930s.

I believe Wittgenstein began to free himself of his no-ownership views as he began to see that they nourish and are nourished by Cartesian notions of privacy.[13] In *The Big Typescript, TS 213* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 2005) from 1933–7, while still toying with neo-No-ownershipism, he notes that "What is essentially private, or seems that way, doesn't have an owner" (p. 358). Here the scales begin to drop. The dialectical connection between Cartesian privacy and no-ownership is then more fully set out in section 398 of *Philosophical Investigations*. It begins:

> "But when I imagine something, or even actually *see* objects, I have *got* something which my neighbour has not." — I understand you. You want to look about you and say: "At any rate only I have got THIS" — What are these words for? They serve no purpose. — Can one not add: "There is no question of a 'seeing'" — and therefore none of a "having"— nor of a subject, nor therefore of "I" either? Might I not ask: In what sense have you got what you are talking about and saying that only you have got it? Do you possess it? You do not even see it. Must you not really say that no one has got it? And this too is clear: if as a matter of logic you exclude other people's having something, it loses its sense to say that you have it.

Wittgenstein here is not, of course, espousing the no-ownership view according to which "there is no question. … of a subject, nor therefore of 'I' either." Rather, if one holds that consciousness is in its nature "private," a reality which *only I* can have in the manner of "accessing," then, reducing now to absurdity, one must "really say that no one has got it."

Section 398 continues:

> But what is the thing you are speaking of? It is true I said that I know within myself what you meant. But that meant that I knew how one thinks to conceive this object, to see it, to make one's looking and pointing mean it. I know how one stares ahead and looks about one in this case — and the rest. I think we can say: you are talking (if, for example, you are sitting in a room) of the "visual room." The "visual room" is the one that has no owner. In as much as it cannot be anyone else's it is not mine either.

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Again, Wittgenstein is not asserting that the "visual room" exists but as unowned and unascribed; rather, if the visual room is the sort of thing that cannot be ascribed to anyone else then "it is not mine either." But states of consciousness *can* be ascribed to others if the others are persons and, perforce, "public" beings.

The criteria for ascribing inner states to others will then be "outer" criteria. Given that — and Strawson (and perhaps quite late Wittgenstein) would say *only* given that, i.e., only given my capacity to ascribe inner states to others on the basis of public criteria — I may ascribe inner states to myself on no criterial basis whatever.[14] That self-ascription of mental states presupposes ascription of such states to others is, of course, very bad news for Solipsism as a philosophical thesis about the existence of "other minds." But Solipsism is thereby also a thesis about, or better, a conception of one's own mind or consciousness as itself constituting a reality or realm, as Canfield puts the Cartesian view. The conceptual incoherence of Solipsism notwithstanding, it is, Wittgenstein thinks, fostered by a certain experience alluded to in *Investigations* section 398 above, viz., staring. He returns to the point at *Investigations* 412 in discussing "the feeling of an unbridgeable gulf between consciousness and brain-process." He writes:

> When does this feeling occur in the present case? It is when I, for example, turn my attention in a particular way on to my own consciousness, and, astonished, say to myself: THIS is supposed to be produced by a process in the brain! — as it were clutching my forehead. — But what can it mean to speak of "turning my attention on to my own consciousness"? This is surely the queerest thing there could be! It was a particular act of gazing that I called doing this. I stared fixedly in front of me — but *not* at any particular point or object. My eyes were wide open, the brows not contracted (as they mostly are when I am interested in a particular object). No such interest preceded this gazing. My glance was vacant; or again *like* that of someone admiring the illumination of the sky and drinking in the light.

Here, I believe, lies the real significance of Lichtenberg's aphorism for those whom it impresses.

Not to make overly heavy weather of Lichtenberg's proposal that "I think" should be likened to "It is thundering," I believe it intends more than a likeness of grammatical form. The suggestion, I think, is that one should think of consciousness as one thinks of the weather, that is as some kind of general condition or environment or atmosphere which obtains or occurs and which one observes or endures – especially while staring! — but which otherwise has nothing to do with oneself. It is unowned. This is not a good or felicitous thought but it is, I believe, the thought or picture or model, unhappy as it is, which no-ownership theorists perforce purvey, and it is in no way inimical to the Cartesian notion of "mental reality"; it is its very element, as, Sir, the elements follow you about. Having drawn from the deep Cartesian wells of privacy, the no-ownership theorist cannot but suffer complete Solipsistic

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dissipation. How is an unowned mental state to be distinguished from a non-mental state, and who is to do the distinguishing could they but be distinguished (for the Solipsist account must itself, poor thing, effectively be unowned)? If there is no distinction between me, the owner, and my mental states, there can be no distinction between the mental states and any reality they would be of. "Just so," says the Solipsist; "Precisely," purrs the Idealist; while the Neutral Monist[15] nods knowingly.

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That in pursuing his overall goal — Eden, enlightenment, oneness — Canfield is drawn to rather more mystical, if only vestigially, of the episodes in Wittgenstein's career, does not surprise. That the Canfield way of knowing promotes a no-ownership view leading to the very thing he would eschew is a painful irony. It began with a claim about self-consciousness. Two different varieties of self-consciousness precipitated the Fall and the path back to Eden would be by exorcism, philosophical or otherwise, of the two sorts of selves alleged to be sustained, in all their falseness, by the two sorts of false self-consciousness. Of the necessity of ridding the race of a virtually universal belief in "selves" others than persons, I have expressed my doubts. Of the desirability of delivering philosophers from the metaphysics of mentalism I would concur, but not with Canfield's self-defeating methods. As to the goal of ceasing to live "in story," I am ambivalent. Certainly, as a general proposition, people talk too much, both aloud and, no doubt, silently. But would we really want a world bereft of individuals who could say of themselves that that their lives became "like an endless moving picture in which one was an actor. On the whole Great Fun!",[16] or that "Nearly all my writings are private conversations with myself. Things that I say to myself tête-à-tête."?[17]

Notes

1 When discussing language development in the species, language development in the individual, and consciousness, the views Canfield targets are variously characterized as "mentalist" (p. 16), "mentalistic" (p. 34), and "the mentalist view of the mind" (p. 134), by contrast with his "anti-mentalist position" (p. 134). Likewise the name "Descartes" and the label "Cartesian" occur throughout in bad odour only.

2 Canfield cites approvingly Condillac's speculations about the origin of language. Condillac's affinities with Wittgenstein are discussed in Hans Aarsleff's introduction to Condillac's *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* of 1746, trans. and ed. H. A. Aarsleff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and in Aarsleff's "Philosophy of Language" in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth Century Philosophy,* Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 468. In that essay Aarsleff notes the place assigned to a literal Eden in

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seventeenth-century accounts of the origin of language (p. 458) and, after the Fall, in Condillac (p. 467).

3 Canfield, however, cites Stendahl rather than Alger for his literary reference. His claim otherwise seems to fall somewhere between Daniel Dennett (e.g., *Consciousness Explained* [Toronto: Little, Brown, and Co., 1991]) and Eckhart Tolle (e.g., *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* [New York: New World Library, 2004]).

4 I have quoted above the final sentence of *Becoming Human* – "To be human is to live in oneness" – which signals the third sense of Canfield's triple-entendre title. Thus, while endorsing the first two senses – how the human species got language and how the human individual gets language – I am rejecting, or anyway failing to respond to, the third mystico-redemptive sense of "becoming human."

5 Yet the song says "The snow is snowing." See "I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm," I. Berlin.

6 As Canfield seems to indicate when he says, " … in learning to use 'I' in such cases the child does not have to learn to identify or pick out anyone or anything to whom or to which he attributes the property of being in pain" (p. 90), and, just saying "no" to ecstasy, "We do not stand outside ourselves and pick out the one we want to say is in pain" (p. 93). However, even if one does say that all reference, predication, and general "talking about" are sorts of "picking out," then one should distinguish "linguistic picking out" from other properly cognitive – or, better, recognitional – pickings out. After all, even in second-person reference one can refer to someone without realizing it, but there should be no proper sense of "pick out" where one picks something out (cf. Canfield's "identify") without realizing it.

7 The dogma seems to be traceable to Frege, or Frege as he struck Anscombe. Anscombe's case for holding that "I" does not refer seems to rest entirely on the joint supposition that "We seem to need a sense to be specified for this quasi-name 'I'" ("The First Person" in *Mind and Language,* ed. S. Guttenplan [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975] p. 48), and since there is no available sense for "I" it lacks a reference. Anscombe gives no argument in support of this last conclusion, appearing to find it enthymematically obvious. Canfield and the other neo-Wittgensteinians evidently follow this dictum: no sense, no reference (no criteria for reference, no reference). Whether or not Frege himself held something this strong, it is, to repeat, a mistake. It is the fallacy of supposing that what cannot always happen can never happen. No doubt if there were no "sense" in general (no such thing as sense) there would be no "reference" (ever). But that does not mean there can never be a reference without a sense. So: no reference if never a sense – yes; never a reference if no sense – no.

8 To say nothing of the neglect by determinedly non-Wittgensteinian philosophers such as Barry Dainton (*Stream of Consciousness* [London: Routledge, 2000]) or (Sir Peter's own flesh and blood!) Galen Strawson (*Mental Reality* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994]), and other philosophical sons and daughters of William James ("streamers," I call them). To his claim that "The treatment of I as a grammatical fiction comes from Wittgenstein" (p. 84), Canfield attaches this note:

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"See Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book,* pp. 66, 67, and *PI*, sec. 404 ff. See also G. E. M. Anscombe, 'The first person'. In S. Guttenplan ed. *Mind and Language.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975; Anthony Kenny, 'The First Person.' In Cora Diamond and Jenny Teichman, eds, *Intention and Intentionality,[Essays in honour of G. E. M. Anscombe],* Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979; Norman Malcolm, 'Whether "I" is a referring expression.' In *Intention and Intentionality*; Hans Sluga, '"Whose house is that?" Wittgenstein on the Self.' In Hans Sluga and David G. Stern, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein.* Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1996" (sic). There is not the faintest acknowledgement of P. F. Strawson, good or bad, by Canfield or of any of the philosophers he cites, all of whom (with the likely exception of Wittgenstein) had to be acquainted with Strawson's argument. I believe they must be *repressing* their memories of Strawson *pere's* argument (and that without the bona fide Oedipal excuse of Strawson *fils*!).

9 See Dainton and G. Strawson cited in n. 8 above. Lockean "persons" are owned streams of consciousness at any given time, but their ownedness is held to be irrelevant to their integrity and identity as "persons." In his *Self, Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), Richard Sorabji argues against doctrines of "ownerless streams of consciousness" which he finds championed by Derek Parfit and (no surprise here) certain ancient Buddhist figures, as well as by Anscombe and Malcolm.

10 "Consciousness seems obviously real and indeed ever-present when one is awake and alert." (p. 125); "No one can deny, for example, that fear is an inner state; in some sense my fear-utterance describes a mental phenomenon." (p. 131); "That is not to say that Wittgenstein is a behaviorist. The person is speaking of (signaling about) his pain, not his pain behavior. What he does is paradigmatically a case of referring to pain." (p. 144)

11 Here Strawson deftly dispatches the worry that owned mental states, if "logically non-transferable," will be "private." Indeed, mental states, like any predicable and thus non-basic particular, will be "logically non-transferable," but not as a metaphysical matter of their "innerness," nor as an epistemological matter of their "privacy," but as a logical matter of their *identity*: you can't have my states – be they mental, physical, or financial – insofar as my states, as particulars, can't be your states. That of course turns on the logical truth that I can't be you and gotta be me and not another thing. Nothing is private. See also n. 14 below for Strawson's further exposing of the farce which is "the privacy of experience."

12 The "bundle" fancy, as found in Hume, has, of course, as its entire raison d'etre, the suggestion of "no owner," its cognate bit of philosophical silliness.

13 In a case of ramifying ironies Anthony Kenny, in his article "The First Person" (see n. 8 above), declares his allegiance to the no-reference view — "For myself, I am wholly persuaded that 'I' is not a referring expression" (p. 6) — while going on to take Anscombe to task: "Astonishingly, it seems to me, she falls into the Cartesian trap from which Wittgenstein showed us the way out" (p. 7). But, as I am arguing, Anscombe's recessive Cartesianism is not astonishing; it is to be expected given

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her no-reference/no-ownership views. What is astonishing is that Kenny should (rightly) insist that "I" has "a clear sense" when and only when it is clear which "person … utters it as its primary utterer" (p. 12) and then deny that it has or makes a reference to its utterer.

14 "To put it briefly. One can ascribe states of consciousness to oneself only if one can ascribe them to others. One can ascribe them to others only if one can identify other subjects of experience. And one cannot identify others if one can identify them *only* as subjects of experience, possessors of states of consciousness" (*Individuals,* p. 100).

15 Oh yes, there are still a few out there.

16 Winston Churchill, quoted in Carlo D'Este, *Warlord* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), p. xi.

17 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 77.

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