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Substantialisation and the plurality of the self

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This paper focuses on two broad categories of amenders of the classical self, namely Kenneth Gergen's abolition of the self and Charles Taylor's transformation of the self. After the heyday of behaviourism it became fashionable again to speak of "intentions" as a cause of human action. Recent manifestations of this sometimes emphasise a holistic view and more often posit a coreless pluralism as the self. In the case of Gergen, this attempt lapses into a monistic substantialisation of the relational side of the self; in the case of Taylor, into a moderate dualism with the interpretative capacity of the self taking the substantialised position. As an alternative I propose a dimensional anthropology that sees the self as consisting of a coherent plurality of dimensions of equal agency.

Versubstansialisering en pluraliteit van die self

Hierdie artikel fokus op twee breë kategorieë van amendeerders van die klassieke self naamlik Kenneth Gergen (afskaffing van die self) en Charles Taylor (transformasie van die self). Na die val van behaviourisme in die menswetenskappe het dit weer mode geword om "bedoelings" as oorsaak van menslike gedrag te sien. Onlangse manifestasies hiervan beklemtoon soms 'n holistiese mensbeeld en, meer gereeld, 'n kernlose pluralisme wat die self genoem word. Hierdie poging verval egter in die geval van Gergen in 'n monistiese versubstansialisering van die relasionele kant van die self, of, in die geval van Taylor, in 'n gematigde dualisme met die interpretatiewe vermoë van die self in die versubstansialiseerde posisie. As alternatief stel ek 'n dimensionele antropologie voor wat die self sien as 'n samehangende pluraliteit van gelyke agentsdimensies.

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Until the 1950s the explanation of human behaviour was dominated by the “double-aspect” theory.¹ The mental and the physical were supposed to be two different and unconnected dimensions. Anyone who tried to connect them was thought to be committing a category mistake. Ouweneel (1984: 69-70) and Taylor (1974: 17) explain that although this metaphysics is often seen as a dualism, it is more correctly a “neutral monism”, which means that the core substance of humans is supposedly unknown and thus neither spiritual nor physical but nevertheless present in both aspects. According to Glas (1996: 91) and Scarrow (1981: 13) this means in practice that when behaviour is explained in terms of reasons or intentions, that behaviour is labelled action. When behaviour is explained in terms of causes, it is understood as physical or bodily movement. Importantly, according to behaviourism, “causes”, and thus observable bodily movement, are seen as the core of any worthwhile scientific explanation. Because of the dominance of the natural science paradigm, behaviourism was destined to become the dominant type of explanation.

However, during the 1960s opinion shifted towards a critique of the double aspect theory, its unknown substance, and behaviourism. The problem with behaviourism, say critics,² is that it contradicts our ordinary understanding that intentions do make a difference to what happens in the physical world. An arsonist’s desire to see a building burning and his ideas about how to accomplish this end can bring about a devastating inferno. A consensus therefore arose according to which a person’s reasons for his actions are seen as causes of that action. Analysts³ argue that this critique brought about a move from a substantialist to an actualist view. Classical substance theory looked for an essence inside or behind observable behaviour while actualism refers rather to “happenings”.

1 This article is an expanded version of a presentation delivered at the International Conference on Language — Communication — Culture, 27-30 November 2002, at the University of Evora, Portugal.

2 Cf the critique of Scarrow 1981: 13-4, Landesman 1966: 339-40 and Taylor 1985a: 166-7.

3 Cf the remarks of Ouweneel 1984: 67-68, 70 and Taylor 1967: 210-1.

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One may nevertheless ask whether this shift represents a really meaningful move away from the idea of a core substance. The current trend is supposed to imagine the self as a centre-less (ie substance-less) plural entity. Because this view leads in many instances to a fragmented, pluralistic perspective, there are those who add that the plurality must be unified.⁴ But the idea of unity once again opens the door for strategies to reduce the self to some substance to create the desired unity. The challenge is thus to imagine a plural but coherent self that also side-steps substantialisation.

This article will focus on two clearly different kinds of current thinking about the self, namely the radical abolition of the self of the American psychologist Kenneth Gergen and the moderate transformation of the classical self proposed by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. Although I shall focus on their views on explaining behaviour, my aim is to get behind this to their metaphysics of human identity. In the process I will challenge what seem to me to be the current obsessions about the human being, namely interpretative capacity and being a product of interpersonal relations.

1. Substantialisation

It is, however, necessary to explain the notion of substantialisation. Related to this concept are terms like reductionism, reification, monism and dualism, all of which indicate an intra-self relationship in which one dimension of the self is seen as primary and the others as dependent on this core or substance. According to analysts,⁵ “substance” as an object of definition began with Aristotle. He used the word first as an indication of any concrete thing — his so-called “primary substance”. However, his idea of a “secondary substance” took popular predominance. This is the idea of a “universal form”

4 Krippner (1991: 133, 139), for instance, argues that the modern worldview was still in the grip of a fragmented view of the human being. He sees a “corrective” to this situation in what he calls “post-modern’ or ‘holistic’ thought”. In this holistic paradigm, he predicts, the “current dichotomies between ‘brain’ and ‘mind’, between ‘body’ and ‘psyche’, and between ‘matter’ and ‘spirit’ may be resolved in favour of a systems-oriented interactionist model of consciousness”.

5 Cf Lacey 1990: 234; Moore 1960: 612-3; O’Connor 1972: 36-7, and Simons 1995: 480.

that makes the concrete thing the thing it is — thus giving substance the sense of essence as distinguished from accident. The latter popular meaning is probably determined by the pre-Socratic idea that reality must be one and that anything real must exist universally. One of the prominent senses of substance therefore became that of a universal reality that is present in the variety of particular things.

But many questioned the idea that we can reduce everything that exists to the same underlying substance, arguing that the different existents are different because they are thoroughly different. This critique doubts that what is called a substance can be more than a mere bundle of attributes (Lacey 1990: 235). The substantialist answer⁶ to this critique affirmed the original Greek and Latin words (ie *hypostasis*, *hypokeimenon*, *substantia*) which mean “standing under” and “that which underlies something”; the notion of a substratum that underlies and supports its qualities. Importantly, substances are seen as capable of an independent existence while qualities and relations cannot exist independently of the substance. Most modern philosophers, however, saw the independence of substances as on a scale of relativity. Aristotle’s critics had already pointed out that it is no more possible for a substance to exist without qualities than for qualities to exist without a substance. Modern philosophers like Spinoza and Leibnitz also stated that, strictly speaking, only God could be seen as completely independent. O’Connor (1972: 39) therefore concludes quite rightly that it “may well be that nothing in the universe is independent of all conditions”.

The postmodernist Mark Taylor explains the substantialist self as typically that of Descartes’ *cogito*. This *cogito* emerges as a “‘thing’ that thinks”. This makes the subject “a substance in which attributes inhere”. This, Taylor (1987: 132) says, moulds the subject into a “discrete ‘thing-in-itself’ that is only extrinsically and accidentally associated with other subjects and entities”. He rejects this substantialism as a metaphysical illusion because there is no such thing as a primary substance that harbours the secondary traits; the “content of the subject and the predicates is the same”. It is simply impossible to indicate the self separately from its predicates.

6 Cf Flew 1984: 344; Lacey 1990: 235; Moore 1960: 613; O’Conner 1972: 37-40; Simons 1995: 482, 484, and Strauss 1978: 31.

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Substantialisation is strongly related to and probably the cause of most popular monisms and dualisms. Olthuis (1990: 24-5, 27-8) sees both dualism and monism as being generated by one of the most basic concerns of human beings, namely the question about “the ultimate origin, unity and basis of human life”. He explains that “the different types of monism and dualism result because different dimensions or modes of reality are fixed on as crucial and decisive”. This leads to dualisms that conceive “of a particular mode and its attendant dimensions as being highest and the remaining dimensions as comprising a lower reality”. Monisms, on the other hand, “choose a certain mode as elemental and conceive of reality diverging and bifurcating into higher and lower dimensions from out of this primordial unity”. The point is that monisms identify one and dualisms two aspects as basic to all other aspects.

This can indeed be explained by means of the concept of substantialisation, or the view that a basic or core reality exists independently of other lesser and peripheral entities or modes of existence, are nevertheless dependent on the substantive (underlying) reality. In dualism two basic entities or modes of reality that exist independently of each other, and also independently of everything else, are identified. One of the entities or modes is nevertheless identified as more basic than the other. In the case of anthropological dualism, it is usually the mind/self that is seen as more basic than the body or the physical mode of human life. In the case of monism, all human aspects are seen as emanations of the substantive mind/self. Clouser (1991: 146-7) takes this analysis of monisms and dualisms further by rejecting the underlying substantialisation when he argues that “we never experience anything which is an exclusively physical body or an exclusively nonphysical mind”. The implication of Clouser’s intuition is that we cannot ascribe substance status to any aspect of the human being. Moreover, if no aspect plays the role of a substratum, all aspects are equally important in their qualification of the human being and no permanent hierarchy can be discerned.

According to Simons (1995: 480-1) “substance” was the most important concept for much of the history of metaphysics. The main connotation throughout was that of a primary underlying reality (entity or mode of existence) that could exist independently. With em-

piricist criticism since Hume, as well as the “apparent irrelevance” of the concept for modern science, substance has lost its central position in metaphysics.⁷ However, Simons warns, while “ostensibly destroying the last remnants of traditional substance, Hume in effect shifted it to perceptions — in his philosophy the independently existing components of the universe”.

This return of substance, as I will argue shortly, is not an isolated instance at all. Since substance is precisely what was criticised, one can assume that it will now manifest itself in a less traditional way. The traditional idea of substance ostensibly tends towards a reified mode or dimension of reality that is seen as the primary component; it is a “thing” that underlies everything else. Gergen’s obsession with relations, and the prominence which Taylor gives to interpretation, represent a more sophisticated substantialisation in the sense of not altering the status of some mode or dimension of reality into some reified object. However, the following five characteristics of the idea of a substance remain. First, the core of everything that exists is reduced to the same element or mode. Secondly, the substance is the origin or producer of all existents. Thirdly, the substance can exist independently of other modes of existence while the others remain dependent on it. Fourthly and fifthly, the substance is the constant and universal element in everything else.

2. Anti-substantialisation and social constructionism

Overcoming the tendency towards substantialisation should be one of the priorities of the transformation of the concept of the self, as in the postmodern meta-psychological theory of Kenneth Gergen.

Gergen (1990: 51-9) is critical of traditional monistic approaches. Materialists, for instance, acknowledge only concrete material substances as real, which means that only observable, sensory causes of behaviour count as legitimate objects of science. But, Gergen complains, there is no clarity about what that “matter” is. Sophisticated materialists posit the idea of an atom as the basic unit of matter. But this is a hypothetical, indivisible and “beyond experience” entity, which “has no purchase; it fails to inform”. For mentalists, on the

7 Cf also O’Connor 1972: 39-4); Lacey 1990: 236, and Simon 1995: 483-4.

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other hand, only inner experiences are real. Here, solipsism is probably the biggest stumbling block: how can the mind cause physical behaviour? The third monistic alternative is that of an unknown basic substance that can be known only inferentially, with the material and mental world being seen as emanations of this basic reality. However, the problem of the basic causal substance remains unresolved. What causes the causal substance? Once this question is posed, an unsolvable process of infinite regression is set in motion.

Gergen (1990: 59-62) thus questions the ultimate superiority, or even the possibility of appointing one substantial reality as the base for all others. Logically monism implies that if all is, for instance, matter, then there is nothing that is not matter. But if there is no difference between matter and non-matter, the concept "matter" does not carry any weight. Thus, for matter to be the underlying substance demands a corresponding recognition of non-matter that is derivative of or different from this substance. But such a derivative or opposite reality cannot be recognised because this would negate the fundamental notion that all is matter. Gergen therefore concludes that one cannot give serious credence to the attempt to appoint a basic reality or substance — he rejects the substantialisation of the self. Moreover, he seems to favour a structural plurality for the self. He explains that all attempts to posit a substance are merely moves in the sphere of social discourse. He therefore wants to affirm all substantialist discourses because they are all "embedded in various social practices" and to abandon any discourse would destroy its practice. One nevertheless gets the impression that "social discourse" takes a pivotal role in his view of constituting the self. He says, for instance, that the important question is not whether any notion of substance is correct or incorrect. It is important to ask about the social practices sustained by a particular discourse and whether we should continue to encourage such practices via that discourse.

For Gergen (1991: 6-7, 19, 49, 140, 145-6; 1992: 61) this emphasis on social discourse is the core of a postmodern condition that confronts people with a multitude of relations and therefore with the identities and life-styles of the people with whom they have relations. This condition is supposed to come about because of the twentieth-century technologies of communication and transportation, which

enabled people to connect with and relate to many more others than before, and much more frequently. This process of “populating the self with others” means that today a wide array of different concepts of the self is available to all. However, the more rivals there are for the identity of the self, the more the borders of one’s own identity are permeated. The idea of an “authentic self” recedes from view to become a “no self at all”. Postmodern pluralism, says Gergen, throws the “very concept of personal essences” into doubt and makes people products of social construction.

However, by making a person the product of social construction, Gergen’s apparent pluralism and non-substantialism turn substantialistic because he implies that being human depends completely on relations that construct the human being (relationism). The plurality which Gergen has in mind is that of a constant (albeit changing) array of relations. This, however, is not a plurality of modes of life able to produce the self. For the latter purpose he seems to resort to a relational monism. But human beings are, after all, not only or even primarily created by their social surroundings. People also produce themselves by engaging in dialogue with their environment. Moreover, this dialogue also takes place with a plurality, that of the modes of life that structure their lives. The influence of society is only one of these modes, and cannot be reduced to others (like the physical, biological, ethical and so on).

3. The roots and shortcomings of “social constructionism”

The substantialisation of the relational mode has deeper roots than Gergen’s reference to postmodern circumstances indicates, and in fact seems to be a radicalisation of Enlightenment naturalism. Gergen (1991: 6, 20, 38, 41, 47; 1992: 60-1) describes the Romantic self as “largely inborn, inherent in the natural instincts of the individual” which gives each person “characteristics of personal depth: passion, soul, creativity, and moral fiber”. Enlightenment modernism (Gergen’s idea of the dominant view of the twentieth century) rejected this deep self in favour of a “rational, well-ordered, and accessible” self. In fact, it is a self “just slightly below the surface of his actions”. From

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this perspective human behaviour is “largely the result of external input”. Gergen (1991: 13, 44) claims that although the Enlightenment self was still believed to be “self-directing”, its direction (being inner-directed) is given to it in an other-directed fashion very early in life by elders and kept in line by this inner implant. We cannot escape the fact that we are the “products of a certain culture at a certain point in its history”. The difference between postmodern times and Enlightenment modernism, Gergen (1991: 7, 139, 145-6) suggests, is that in the postmodern condition this construction by others is hastened. In the postmodern world “persons exist in a state of continuous construction and reconstruction”.

However, Gergen’s fundamental assumption seems already to have been outlined by the other-directed environmentalism and naturalism of behaviourism,⁸ which is still part of the scientism of the Enlightenment.⁹ This makes Gergen’s root-paradigm of the non-self older than postmodern relationism, or even the consciousness of a postmodern condition. Gergen’s account is furthermore coloured by an anti-atomist assumption which is also older than the postmodern outlook and condition. He claims that modernism thinks that the individual, as an autonomous agent, creates himself (Gerger 1987: 61-3; 1991: 139, 146, 156-7; 1994b: 212, 214; 1999: 10, 11). Enlightenment modernists see individuals as the “fundamental units of society”, which means that “relationships are secondary or artificial, a byproduct of interacting individuals”. Gergen questions this assumption because individualism “naturalizes alienation, self-absorption,

8 The behaviourist B F Skinner (1972a: 200-1, 211; 1972b: 51-2) has argued that the autonomous agent is rooted in the illusion of “the inner man, the homunculus”. The homunculus, he says, is a “device used to explain what we cannot explain in any other way”. However, says Skinner, “as our understanding increases, the very stuff of which he is composed vanishes”. Then we can turn “from the inferred to the observed, from the miraculous to the natural, from the inaccessible to the manipulable”.

9 Russell & Gaubatz (1995: 389) also think Gergen’s dismissal of the Cartesian self is older than postmodernism. Psychologies like behaviourism, cognitive science and systems theory “all seriously contest the content and usefulness of the Cartesian construct of the self”. These theories are labelled “scientific”, which is another way of saying that they harbour the sentiments of Enlightenment modernism.

and a conflict of all against all". He therefore reiterates his relationist ontology, which sees personal identity as something that is "created and re-created in relationships". If there is "no self outside a system of meaning, it may be said that relations precede and are more fundamental than self". But this collectivist idea of the self is not the invention of twentieth-century postmodernism.¹⁰ Gergen's account of the postmodern condition as the primary cause of the end of the individual self thus to an extent begs the question. He departs from a relationist assumption that foreshadows the conclusion of his analysis of the postmodern condition, namely that the postmodern self is a social construct.

The important message that Gergen underlines is that the individual cannot be seen as the product of his own creation (ie the substantialisation of human individuality). Moreover, he makes us aware that the current self is at least partially a "construction" peculiar to the technological age. However, the standard critique¹¹ of views (such as Gergen's), which restrict the study of the human being to outer conditions, is against their substantialisation in the human condition of causal conditions that leave no room for personal components or abilities such as thoughts, feelings, purposes and perceptions.

We may go even further to get the substantialisation of Gergen into sharper focus. Clouser (1991: 143, 151, 153) refers to two kinds of popular reductionism in psychology, namely those which explain all behaviour "by biology or physics", and those which explain it "sociologically".¹² We can locate Gergen's thought in the latter category. The argument of social monists is that although we have a genetic make-up and other biological givens, the kind of society we live in determines how we use these capacities. In fact, "the needs of society are to be regarded as paramount, and the individual must adjust to them".

10 Gergen (1999: 10) indeed acknowledges that "attempts to conceptualize the individual as a social actor have long been fixtures on the intellectual landscape".

11 Cf the critique of Botha 1990: 132; Clouser 1991: 144-6; Evans 1979: 25-7, and Stevenson 1981: 97, 102.

12 It should be mentioned here that B F Skinner's (1972a: 198-9) rejection of the self was not only due to naturalistic motives. He also professed a kind of social constructivism and even saw the pluralism of the human condition as contributing to the demise of the self.

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However, these kinds of “environmentalist” monisms are, according to Clouser (1991: 149), riddled with inconsistency. For instance, behaviourists take conditioning by the environment to be a universal or transcendental condition. Yet for this law to continue, there must be something like “an enduring disposition or tendency” in the human being. But this would be to ascribe the very “inner state” that behaviourists “wanted to ban from psychology”. In fact, all of modernism harbours within itself this dialectic between the personality ideal and scientism.¹³ The problem with behaviourism, says Taylor (1985a: 125-6), is that it “could not cope with the purposeful, intelligent behaviour even of rats, let alone men”. When faced with the “insightful and innovative behaviour of some mammals”, behaviourism starts to use “ad hoc hypotheses”, which “include the dimensions of purpose and cognition they were meant to exclude”. For Taylor, this is a clear sign that behaviourism was “on the wrong track”.

Gergen also suggests that the social monism of the older generation is still riddled with relics of the inner self. Like Taylor, he remarks on behaviourism that “the strong presumption prevails that the individual is endowed with certain psychological structures or processes”, which means that the “mental fundament” is not really “extinguished or transformed” (Gergen 1987: 60; 1999: 11-4), but that there is a return of the self in behaviourism. A radical transformation, Gergen claims, is especially the trademark of his “social reconstitution” of the self. In his social constructionism, “all that may be said about mental process is derived from relational process”. Here the “self-other” and the “individual/culture” dualisms are “virtually destroyed”. This view says that the “social process serves as the essential fulcrum of explanation” and “we may envision the elimination of psychological states and conditions as explanations for action”.¹⁴

13 Even a personality theorist and forerunner of existential humanism like Gordon Allport, who was criticised for “being unscientific”, and for “stressing internal causes of behavior at the expense of external causes” (Hergenhahn 1980: 162-3) to some degree rejected the idea of an inner self because it cannot be observed (Allport 1968: 25, 32).

14 Gergen’s (1991: 146-57) distinction between the “strategic manipulator”, the “pastiche personality”, and the “relational self” also portrays the gradual development into a postmodern non-self.

Ironically, however, relational monism or relationism is a description that Gergen does not readily agree to as he still feels somewhat guilty about not giving a place to concepts of mind. At one point Gergen (1999: 6-8) says that the "critical voice of the constructionist should not be viewed as liquidating" but that it only tries to establish functions that assume no truth "beyond culture and history". He therefore agrees that "the construction of new meanings must draw from extant traditions" like the humanist tradition. He acknowledges that "while problematic in its dualism and its individualism, the demise of the humanist language of intention serves as a threat to cherished cultural institutions (eg democracy, ethics)". Furthermore, he welcomes all non-mechanist theories of human behaviour that, despite "their realist predilections", still "sustain and enrich languages that invest persons with special gifts, potential and powers".

Gergen's ploy to incorporate mental concepts into his social monism neatly fits Olthuis's (1990: 25-7) and Ouweneel's (1984: 68) observation that "monists do not deny diversity and multidimensionality, but that they account for diversity in terms of an original and basic unity". The strategic problem of monists is that of diversity, which assumes the following question: "how, beginning with an original oneness, can we account for difference, division and diversity?" Indeed, despite positive remarks about the humanist tradition and the value of mind-concepts, Gergen (1987: 63) maintains that there "is good reason to press on toward a language of relationships". He finds it overwhelmingly problematic that the explanation of behaviour in terms of individual selves and their intentions "help[s] to sustain institutions in which competition, alienation, and isolation are central features". Moreover, he finds individualism politically unacceptable because it leads us "to differentiate ourselves from other selves, to cast the world in terms of us versus them". For Gergen, this is enough reason to push forward with relationism. However, the strong moral stance behind this argument against disengagement presupposes a kind of Romantic belief in a deep self endowed with moral capabilities and a given normativity. But this is precisely what his relativistic relationism tries to undermine. The point is that Gergen himself does not manage to go beyond the return of the self and adherence to an inner morality that his monism claims.

4. Anti-substantialisation and interpretation

In distinction from Gergen's monism, Charles Taylor's explanation of behaviour represents, according to some of his critics, a definite step back towards dualism. They accuse him of the usual sins of dualism, namely being unable to connect an illusionary human core (substance) with the natural bodily existence of the human self and failing to give natural existence a determining influence on human behaviour.¹⁵ However, Taylor's naturalist critics are themselves not really in a position to solve the dilemma of connecting body and mind because they argue from a monism that recognises only mechanistic explanations of behaviour. They thus make agency a mere outgrowth of the physical condition.¹⁶

The way to test Taylor on these issues is to ask whether he makes use of the usual dualist strategies. In this regard Olthuis's (1990: 25-7) description of dualism¹⁷ is again functional. Dualists do not totally ignore the notion of unity; rather, they account for it by trying to relate "mutually irreducible and independent entities or processes". They therefore try to articulate a plausible interactionist or parallel-list co-ordination between the parts of the human being. Although

15 De Sousa (1988: 431) argues that he finds himself "wondering whether Taylor's real motive for resisting naturalism is not itself a kind of dualism after all: a deep-seated conviction that human beings are entirely different sorts of things altogether from any other natural thing: that they are not part of nature at all". Landesman (1966: 342) seems to hold a similar position when he argues that although Taylor's argument "rejects the ghost in the machine, it often comes close to positing some unique and mysterious connection between actions and the desires which are reasons for actions".

16 De Sousa (1988: 423, 431) states his materialistic monism when he says that for agency to emerge "it is axiomatic that the same stuff is in our brain as elsewhere, but put together differently". He nevertheless acknowledges the "many levels in our multi-layered understanding of the physical world" and argues that there are "bridge laws" that make it possible for the "capacity for agency" to "be emergent". Landesman's (1966: 345) critique also has the materialist bias with intentionality still in the background. He states that "provided that such things as desires and beliefs can be plausibly identified with certain physical states and dispositions of animal organisms, there is no reason why physicalism cannot employ teleological explanations".

17 Cf also Ouweneel (1984: 69) for the same explanation.

dualists believe “that there is an ultimate split or division in reality”, their strategic aim is to relate “what is lower to what is higher in life”, that is “to achieve a measure of cooperation and integration between the disparate elements”. This can indeed be seen as Taylor’s (1968: 128-7; 1970b: 89-91; 1985a: 174, 182) strategy when he argues that “the realms of mind and matter [...] must be coordinated”, implying that we need a “systematic relation” or a “conceptual convergence” between intentional and mechanistic explanations. This statement at least seems to confirm the existence of two fundamentally and completely independent substances.¹⁸

Taylor, however, is seeking a way out of this *cul-de-sac*. Three broad categories are currently visible with regard to the human being, namely Cartesian dualism, materialism (monism), and a view that rejects both.¹⁹ The first option, Cartesian dualism or interactionism, is not viable in any significant sense because it is not very credible in today’s *Zeitgeist*, says Taylor. The assumption of two kinds of events that are in principle able to exist next to one another but unconnected is to assume the unacceptable notion that disembodied thinking and feeling are indeed possible (Taylor 1967: 203-5; 1985b: 181-2). The second alternative, materialism or mechanistic theory, still has a huge following in current academia. Although these naturalists cannot avoid talking about mental processes, they maintain that the mind should be reduced to the behaviour of the human body (the brain). For Taylor (1967: 201-3) this theory is unacceptable because it assumes that mental events are simply “nomological danglers” which play no role in the explanation of behaviour. This leaves a third group, to which Taylor belongs, which rejects both classical dualism and naturalistic physicalism. In its early years this was not so much a uniform or self-conscious school of thought as the result of a “wide-spread dissatisfaction with materialism” (Landesman 1966: 332).

According to Taylor (1970a: 60-2; 1967: 204, 210-2) naturalists display a “strong resistance to explanation by purpose” because “it

18 According to Clouser (1991: 147) dualism amounts to reducing the human being to only two of its aspects; usually “the physical and the logical”. All other human aspects are then dependent on these two. In fact, the “remaining aspects can then be seen as generated by the interaction of minds and bodies”.

19 Cf the analyses of Scarrow (1981: 14) and Landesman (1966: 329).

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seems to involve having recourse to the unobservable". But this fear of the unobservable is, according to Taylor, parasitic on the "dualistic notion of body and mind as in causal interaction". Dualism, he argues, gives support to the "view that the mental could not be directly observed; it could only be inferred from physical external behaviour". This implies that "once we have a dualist notion of body-mind interaction, we only need to suppress one term and we have behaviourism". This suppression is necessary for naturalists because "there is no room for a mysterious agent". However, Taylor believes that this is to create a false dilemma: dualism is "the only other ontological hypothesis which is admitted, which by its very absurdity gives behaviourism its unchallengeable metaphysical credentials". It is to have a choice between a "machine with and one without a ghost". Taylor envisions a third alternative whereby we acknowledge the inevitability of the embodiment of thoughts, emotions and so on. His alternative sees embodiments as "vehicles of the thoughts and feelings concerned". Mind and body are not simply in interaction; they are vehicles for each other. For Taylor this is not a dualism because dualism assumes a mind with the possibility of functioning without the body.

Anti-independentism (and thus anti-substantialism) in relation to human aspects also becomes clear in Taylor's plurality of levels of behaviour. His objection to the reductionism of naturalistic theory correctly senses the monistic strategy as reducing everything to an underlying substance: the "neuro-physiological" or the "physico-chemical" (Taylor 1970a: 73-4; 1985a: 182, 186). This level is seen by naturalists as "more basic" and its laws are seen to apply to a "wider range of phenomena". This means that the mental can be seen as a secondary level, whose "explanations must represent special cases" of the lower level. In his rejection of this notion, Taylor argues that his own conception "would, of course, involve an ontology with more than one level". He nevertheless claims that a dualism which "involves non-interference between the two realms of mind and matter" is "particularly implausible". The important difference from dualism, he argues, is that "there is no clear-cut demarcation between the levels"; there is plainly "a continuation between behaviours which are more 'automatic' and those which are more flexible".

Taylor clearly does not choose an independentist dualism or a monistic reductionism, both of which are the result of substantialisation. There is nevertheless a serious downside to Taylor's view in that he emphasises the human capacity for interpretation. In one of his earliest studies Taylor (1980a: 54-8) remarks that a human activity needs "something more" to identify it as action. This "something more" is to be found in the "'direction' of an action" which can be identified "independently of its antecedent condition". This implies that in systems that act, "agents", or "directors" can be identified and seen as "[loci] of responsibility". He also identifies the locus of responsibility with the capacity for interpretation. Taylor acknowledges that this "locus of responsibility" is linked to "a deep-seated and pervasive metaphor, that of the 'inside'". He agrees that this "inner" can be seen as "another substance, different in kind to the observable 'outer' body and behaviour". This would mean the "difference between those beings which are capable and those which are incapable of action thus lies in the former having an additional entity over and above their corporeal nature which the latter do not possess". Taylor does not agree with this substantialist interpretation and would rather concentrate on the metaphor of "inside" as merely the locus of responsibility.

The problem with this locus of responsibility/interpretation is not so much the fact that Taylor gives some kind of existence to this form of agency but that it tends in the direction of becoming the ultimate origin of behaviour. He does not seem to think that a person's biological instincts, social circumstances, and so on can serve as equal loci for directing behaviour in the appropriate circumstances and instances.

5. Holism and interpretation

Taylor is not a mere pluralist either. He tries to hold on to the idea that the distinction between the different levels of human behaviour is merely a case of distinctions and not of separations. He adds to this a suggestion of a mutual dependency between the various levels. However, because he wants to escape naturalistic monism and also dislikes a dualism of disconnectedness, his notion of co-ordinating different levels of behaviour will remain a display of disengagement

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if he is unable to show in any plausible way how the self and the extra-self, intentions and mechanistic determinations inescapably inter-relate. Taylor tries to do so with his claim that the explanation of behaviour should take into account two additional elements (as distinct from the stimulus-response scheme of behaviourism) namely the *telos* (goal) of the behaviour and the meaning which a situation has for the agent.

Taylor (1980a: 5-9) rejects the straight intentionalist notion that purposive explanations invoke a “separate” non-empirical or metaphysical entity as the cause of any human behaviour.²⁰ Taylor thinks that the goal of any behaviour must be empirical and therefore appoints the “state of affairs” of both the system (the human agent) and the outer environment to bring about the end in question. This means, for instance, that the conditions of “an animal stalking his prey, are (1) that the animal be hungry, and (2) that this be the ‘required’ action, ie the action in his repertoire which will achieve the result — catching his next meal”. This description of the teleological explanation of behaviour rests on the assumption that behaviour has a strong holistic nature,²¹ in that Taylor thinks that extra-self and inner-self circumstances can be woven together as the reason or cause of behaviour.

Where then does the belief come from in the purpose of an agent involving some independent entity, asks Taylor (1980a: 10-5)? This, he says, is a relic of the empiricist tradition and assumes that “the ultimate evidence for any laws we frame about the world is in the form of discrete units of information”; that is, units “which [are] separably identifiable from their connexions with any of the others”. Atomists ask us to make “empirical connexions” between these separate units. The problem of atomism is that it rules out “the possibility of construing purposiveness as a feature of the whole system”. If

20 He formulates this intentionalist view as follows: it sees the behaviour of a given system as explained by “laws of the form $x=f(P)$, where ‘x’ is the behaviour and ‘P’ is the Purpose considered as a separate entity which is the cause or antecedent of x”. In other words, behaviour is the function (f) of a particular purpose. The problem with this picture, Taylor says, is that “no single proposition about P is open to empirical confirmation or infirmation”.

21 Lemmens (1997:13) calls this a “socio-holistic view of human behaviour”.

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“laws hold between discrete entities”, then “to invoke a purpose must be to postulate some new discrete entity as a causal antecedent”. In teleological laws, however, the

element of ‘purposiveness’ in a given system [...] cannot be identified as a special entity which directs the behaviour from within, but consists rather in the fact that in beings with a purpose an event’s being required for a given end is a sufficient condition of its occurrence.

Purposiveness is not the result of a “separable feature”, but a “property of the whole system”.²² Taylor thus reiterates his belief that the various dimensions of the human condition cannot be substantialised; that they are fundamentally dependent on each other in generating human behaviour, and that they therefore also mutually define one another.

However, Taylor still needs to explain the co-operation of inner states with outer states in establishing the goals of human agents. On this point his explanations remain problematic. Taylor (1980a: 9-10; 1970a: 55) summarises his viewpoint as follows:

[The] condition of an event B [behaviour] occurring is, then, not a certain state of P [purpose], but that the state of the system S and the environment E be such that B is required for the end G, by which the system’s purpose is defined.

This formulation leads Borger (1970: 83-5) to argue that Taylor’s teleological antecedents seem to coincide with the behaviourist explanation that attempts “to explain goal-directed behaviour as a product of the stimulus situation”. It seems that for Taylor the one “clue to” the explanation of goal-directed behaviour “is to be found in, rather than outside the agent and has to do with his having intentions, views, objectives”. But it also seems as if

Taylor wants to put part of the burden of explanation on special teleological properties of situations because, like S-R theorists, he

22 Taylor (1985b:22-23) argues elsewhere that “things only have meaning in a field, that is, in relation to the meanings of other things”, which means that “there is no such thing as a single, unrelated meaningful element”. The meaning that contributes to an action is thus generated first because “a meaning is for a subject”, secondly because “meaning is of something”, and thirdly because things have meaning because they are interrelated.

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feels the need for explanation in terms of antecedent conditions, yet like them is not prepared to regard views and intentions as constituting such conditions.

Taylor (1980a: 62; 1970a: 56-7) anticipates the critique that his teleological explanation of behaviour does not really offer an alternative to the mechanistic description of behaviourism. But he argues that this would be a fallacious assumption because there are “features of the situation which are causally irrelevant”. Thus the important cause needs to be identified which, in turn, means that the situation needs to be interpreted; we are dealing with a “situation as seen by the agent”. He gives the following example:

An accident occurs because the driver is drunk. However, the state of affairs where the driver is drunk is also the state of affairs where he is talking too much. But this does not mean that the state of affairs where he is talking too much is the antecedent of the accident.

It can furthermore be said that “not all characterizations of an antecedent which pick out its causally relevant aspects are on the same footing”. For instance, it can be said that the antecedent was that the driver had “imbibed the greater parts of the contents of a bottle with a label marked ‘Canadian Club’”. However, this description is not as basic as “the original description in terms of drunkenness” because “other men get drunk and have accidents after drinking gin or scotch”. Taylor (1970a: 59-60; 1970b: 91) thus adds that the situation in goal-directed behaviour also assumes the intervention of the agent who interprets the situation. It is essential that “we have to take account of the way that the agent sees the situation”. This means that “an important part of our explanations of human behaviour consists in making actions intelligible by showing how the agent saw the situation, what meaning it had for him”.

However, this addition (interpretation) is again criticised for not overcoming the disconnectedness between intentional and mechanistic explanations of behaviour. In defending himself against the critique that he seems like a behaviourist, Taylor is accused by some critics of simply jumping to the other side of the divide. Sher (1975: 30-2) argues that the interpretative addition cannot be seen as “conjunctive” to the ordinary goal-directed explanation because the “determining condition for B [behaviour] is that B is seen to be required

for G [goal]”; the determining condition is not “that B actually is required for G”. Sher therefore argues that “explicability in terms of ordinary teleological laws will turn out to play no part in the analysis of purpose”.

Taylor (1980a: 62) acknowledges that “the condition of an action occurring is that it be believed to be adequate to the goal, and not simply that it is in fact adequate”. Even more startlingly, he concedes that “the two may not go together”; that the “situation as it really is may differ from the situation under its intentional description for the agent, that is, the intentional description may not in fact hold of it”. Sher therefore suggests that we should see Taylor’s interpretative addition (the agent’s view of the situation) as the authentic Taylorian position.²³ This is in any case what Taylor (1970a: 58-69) seems to say when he remarks that the human being is “limited in some way”; that “there may be some more efficient way of getting G, but B is the way of getting it which lies within the capacities of the being in question”. Taylor initially warned that the goal of the agent’s behaviour should not be only a function of his mental capacity, his intention. However, he now seems in danger of making the goal fundamentally a function of the agent’s interpretation of the situation. Both the inner and the outer conditions that are supposed to determine the goal are to a great extent the products of interpretation.

This critique suggests that Taylor finds it difficult to uphold his holistic or systemic assumption about the interconnectedness of the various aspects of the human condition.²⁴ This in turn means that he runs the risk of substantialising the human capacity for interpretation. In other words, the place he gives to interpretation in originating behaviour makes it possible for interpretation to stand on its own (not

23 Lemmens (1997: 13, 21) agrees that the hermeneutic concept of the self is central to his holistic view of human behaviour. And Baier (1988: 589) sees in this a return of dualism: “As persons we are claimed to exist only in self interpretation, and our personhood is sharply dissociated from ‘our organic being’, which can be understood scientifically”.

24 Slote (1988: 585) has the same problem when he says that he finds it “perplexing” that Taylor “frees attributions of mentality to persons from context-relativity in a way that is quite surprising for someone otherwise so Hegelian in his approach to philosophical issues”.

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necessarily being dependent on the situation) while it remains the one element on which everything else is dependent because interpretation seems to be decisive in determining the goal of behaviour.

6. The dimensional self

As an alternative to Gergen and Taylor's lapses into neo-substantialisation one could consider the idea of a dimensional anthropology, which would see the self as consisting of a (structural) plurality of agency dimensions that explain the variety in the behaviour of human beings. The benefit of this idea is that it escapes the disengagement between aspects or sides of the self caused by any substantialised aspect of the self-substantialisation, which is of course one of the fundamental problems of all dualisms and monisms. A dimensional anthropology, however, sees the human being as consisting of a variety of dimensions, sides, aspects and functions comparable to the sides of a coin. It is impossible for a coin to consist of only one side — a one-dimensional coin is unimaginable. It is equally clear that no one side can be considered as basic to or even as more important than the others.

This, of course, is also a plural view of the self that may seem to fit the spirit of postmodern pluralism which Gergen reflects in his idea of a self saturated with the investments of a multitude of values and lifestyles of others. It nevertheless deviates from Gergen's postmodernism in the sense that its emphasis would also be on a plurality of life-dimensions while Gergen seems restricted to a structural one-dimensionality (relationism) despite his emphasis on the plurality of styles, values and so on. Relationism means that the self is confined to only one of its many sides, namely the relations it has with other selves. In fact, relationism actually makes us captives of the values and life-styles of others without the ability (dimension) to resist or creatively initiate and maintain our own life-style. In other words, relationism makes it difficult for typical intra-individual traits like reason, free will, creativity, instinct, and so on, to contribute to the style, values and views of an individual. Relationism sees us as errants between relations, doomed to live every new style imposed on us by high-tech transportation and communication. The monism of relationism may weave the human unity of "being ready to accept every

new style” — but this is the quick fix of homogenisation, which in the end defeats the notion of plurality.

Of course, Gergen’s strong emphasis on the influence of others on our identities is not without its value. The downside of individualism and its dominating position within the modern version of the classical view of the self is its tendency not to recognise the social dimension as an “equal” one within what can be called the “human condition”. In other words, postmodern relationism has the value of once again “adding” the relational dimension. This can be a quite valuable move in the transformation of the classical view of the self in the sense that the “human condition” is once again open for extra-individual dimensions neglected or even oppressed by the modern self. Taylor, for instance, is a theist with a tendency to add the religious to his holistic view of the self. For this, he is severely criticised by true modernists. But within the perspective of a dimensional anthropology, greater sensitivity to what is sometimes also called the spiritual dimension of human life will once again be possible.

It nevertheless remains difficult to “think” the coherence of the plurality of dimensions. Even Taylor, with his strong emphasis on engagement, finds it difficult to envision a truly holistic system of equal human aspects because of the undue emphasis he puts on the interpretational. However, the idea of a human being as a holistic system opens up the possibility of seeing the human being as a plurality of dimensions that prevents any single one from becoming the sole originator and controller of the whole system. Of course, if one believes in the teleological nature of this system, one will need some concept of direction. It is, however, questionable to appoint one of the dimensions as the fixed or sole director of human life. If this were the case, the teleological system would lose its holistic character and function according to the notion of an underlying substance from where everything originates.

However, in place of a directionless self, we should consider all aspects to have agency (an initiating capacity). Thus, depending on the circumstances, an aspect can temporarily take a leading role in the human system. This is something that Taylor (with his concept of direction to a self) must endorse if his idea of the equal relation between the agent and his environment is taken into account.

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By using the concept of a dimensional anthropology I assume that plurality consists of the dimensions of a unity and not of a fragmented array of substances. But unity is not always visible, which makes it hard to visualise. We should therefore settle for a “regulative idea” of the unity of the self. This is not to resort to a metaphysical transcendental self (the Cartesian version of the substantialisation of the self) but to let the idea of unity hover on the borders of our thinking to guide us in the search for avenues of engagement among the dimensions of our humanity.

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