

The Place of Persons in Nature
Eunice Belgum Memorial Lecture #1
April 11, 2013

I. Question and Answer

- A. The Question: How can we both be connected to the animal world—which is a seamless whole, with no break between human and nonhuman animals—and be morally and ontologically unique, importantly unlike anything else in the material world?
- B. Answer: Constitutionalism
 - 1. No biological discontinuity, and ontological uniqueness of persons
 - 2. Rejection of Animalism and Mind-Body Dualism

II. Constitutionalism

- A. Persons
 - 1. Relation of person to body: constitution, not identity
 - 2. Distinction between person and body: Person has first-person perspective—rudimentary or robust—essentially.
- B. First-Person Perspective (dispositional property)
 - 1. Rudimentary (what connects us to the seamless animal kingdom—where the animal kingdom includes person-constituting human organisms)
 - a. Ability to perceive and act on environment from a particular spatiotemporal location. (Requires consciousness and intentionality)
 - b. Certain animals (human and nonhuman) have rudimentary first-person perspectives contingently
 - c. A person (a new entity) comes into existence when a human organism develops to the point of being able to support a rudimentary first-person perspective.
 - d. At birth, a person: (i) **essentially** has first-person perspective (rudimentary) and (ii) **essentially** has remote capacity to develop a robust first-person perspective.
 - 2. Robust (what makes persons ontologically unique)
 - a. Ability to conceive of oneself as oneself in the first person (Requires self-concept; language)
 - b. NonCartesian

III. How Constitutionalism Answers The Question:

- A. Biology does not determine ontology: We are on a continuum with animals with respect to our origin (natural selection), but are ontologically unique in our essential properties.
- B. What makes robust first-person perspective an **ontological** difference? Why not just suppose that some animals develop robust first-person perspectives?
 - 1. First-Person perspective (especially robust stage) makes enormous difference in our causal powers. Examples.
 - 2. If persons were essentially animals, then persons could not survive large-scale bionic replacement of organs by inorganic devices. But biotechnology....

IV. Our Place in Nature:

- A. We are part of the natural world; we came into existence in same way as the rest of nature.
- B. Ontological Uniqueness: We have different essential properties from **everything else**: Robust first-person perspective or remote capacity to develop robust first-person perspective.
- C. The robust first-person perspective ties what is distinctive about us and what matters most deeply to us to what we most fundamentally are.