



# We Are Not Self Made

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## Abstract

Most philosophers who have addressed the topics of personal ontology or personal identity have thought that our existence in and through time is objective, non-relative, invariant, and totally independent of what we take ourselves to be. However, an opposing view is becoming more popular—one whereby what we are in and through time depends on, and is determined by, what we take ourselves to be. This latter view is intriguing, but I will argue that it has a fatal defect—one that applies to *any* view (whether actual or merely potential) whereby what we are is determined by what we take ourselves to be. This defect has to do with what might constitute a “take” on ourselves. I will argue that there is no way of construing a “take” such that we (either individually or corporately) have a take on what we are that can do the work defenders of any take-dependent view need it to do. Thus, I will conclude that what we are is *not* determined by what we take ourselves to be. In this sense, we are not self-made.

In some ways, the world is what we make it. We create things, destroy things, modify and amend things, move and arrange things; and, in so doing, we shape the world around us. Another way we do this is by making certain things *what they are*. We determine their identities. Not necessarily by any forceful procedure, transformation, manipulation, or other intervention. We make some things what they are simply by taking them to be that way. Examples include corporations, clubs, and countries. We think these things up, take them to be some ways and not others—whether in word, thought, or deed—and so they are.

This isn’t true of everything though. Trees, sharks, and electrons, for example, existed long before us and they may very well exist long after us. And what they are isn’t determined by what we take them to be.

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Thus we have two categories: take-dependent things, and take-independent things. In recent years, a lot of philosophers have attempted to better understand these categories and the entities that fall within them. In the process, they have drawn attention to all sorts of important questions about things around us.

But that spotlight can also be turned around. We can ask: To which category do *we* belong? Historically, most philosophers who have addressed the topics of personal ontology or personal identity have thought that we are in the latter category—that our existence in and through time, as well as our essential nature, is objective, non-relative, invariant, and totally independent of what we take ourselves to be. However, an opposing view is becoming more popular. There has been a surge of interest in and defense of the claim that what we are in and through time depends on, and is determined by, what we take ourselves to be. On this view, we belong in the take-dependent category—we are in this sense more like corporations, clubs, and countries than trees, sharks, and electrons. For we are what we take ourselves to be.

This latter view is intriguing, but in what follows I'll argue that it has a fatal defect—one that applies to *any* view (whether actual or merely potential) whereby what we are is determined by what we take ourselves to be. This defect has to do with what might constitute a “take” on ourselves. I'll argue that there are no such “takes” that can do the work defenders of take-dependent views need them to do. Thus, I'll conclude that what we are is *not* determined by what we take ourselves to be. In this sense, we are not self-made.

## 1 Self-Maker

The view I'm describing is actually a family of views. For, as we'll see, its adherents differ on certain details. However, it will be useful to have a general gloss of the view. So here's what I'll call “Self-Maker”:

Self-Maker: Within certain limits, what we are in and/or through time is determined by what we take ourselves to be.<sup>1</sup>

Self-Maker is a *metaphysical* claim—i.e., a claim about what we *are* in and/or through time; or, more precisely, it is a claim about what *determines* what we are in and/or through time. It's not a *semantic* claim about the meaning of words like ‘person’ or ‘I’. Some Self-Maker theorists do draw on semantic considerations to *defend* their view, but Self-Maker *itself* is not a semantic claim. So, for example, it's not the (clearly true) claim that the meaning of our words—including ‘person’ and ‘I’—is determined by us. Nor is it the claim that we each mean different things by these words, or that we can *revise* the meaning of our words or contents of our concepts. Nor is it any other semantic claim. Self-Maker is a claim about *us*—those things that

<sup>1</sup> Versions of this view also go by ‘conventionalism’ and ‘conativism’ about personal identity. Those who defend it (or at least treat it sympathetically) include Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, 2004, 2020a, b; Braddon-Mitchell and West, (2001); Johnston (1989); Kovacs, 2016, 2020, 2022; Kurtstal (2022); Longenecker, 2022, 2023; Miller (2013); Sidelle (1999); White (1989); Zimmerman (2013).

we in fact refer to with ‘person’ and ‘I’. And Self-Maker is the claim that, within certain limits, what those things are—their identities—is determined by what we take them to be. So if the relevant take is that I’m an F, then I’m an F; if instead it’s that I’m a G, then I’m a G; and so on.

As I said, Self-Maker theorists differ on certain details. Some focus on *synchronic* identity (what we are *at* a time) (e.g., Kovacs, 2016; Kurtsal, 2022; Longenecker, 2023), while others focus on *diachronic* identity (what we are *through* time) (e.g. Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, 2004, 2020a; Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2001; Longenecker, 2022; Kovacs, 2020).<sup>2</sup> They also differ on which “takes” on ourselves determine what we are. Some say it’s our I-beliefs (e.g., “I am a biological continuer,” “I would survive teletransportation,” etc.) (e.g., Kovacs, 2016, 2020). Others say attitudes like desires, hopes, fears, dread, etc., are also relevant (e.g. Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, 2004, 2020a, b; Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2001; Johnston, 1989; Longenecker, 2022, 2023; Miller, 2013; White, 1989). Some say our behavior is relevant too (e.g., Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2001, p. 61 Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, 2004, 2020b; Kurtsal, 2022; Miller, 2013; White, 1989). Self-Maker theorists also differ on *whose* takes matter. Most endorse a *private* Self-Maker view whereby it’s *our own* takes on ourselves that determine what we are, but some say *others’* takes, especially ones that bear on our shared legal, moral, and other conventions, are also relevant (e.g., Longenecker, 2022; White, 1989). Finally, Self-Maker theorists differ on what the *limits* of or *constraints* on self-making are (more on this later).<sup>3</sup>

I’ll have a lot more to say about these differences in the next sections—particularly about how to construe a “take” on oneself. But for now I want to focus on the family of views. We can get a better feel for Self-Maker in general by considering what its adherents say about certain well-known cases. For example, suppose two people—Asher and Thomas—are about to get into a teletransporter. Asher thinks he’ll survive, Thomas thinks he won’t. On traditional theories of personal identity, one of them is right, the other is wrong. On animalism, for example, Thomas is right and Asher is wrong, for neither will survive teletransportation. On certain psychological continuity theories, Asher is right and Thomas is wrong, for both will survive. However, on some private, diachronic versions of Self-Maker, Asher and Thomas are *both right*—Asher will survive because he thinks he will, and Thomas won’t survive because he thinks he won’t.

The same general story goes for other cases. Pick a well-known case (e.g., brain transplant, body swap, amnesia, etc.). On traditional theories of personal identity, our

<sup>2</sup> Also, some Self-Maker theorists want to leave it open whether questions about what we are in and through time should be analyzed in some way other than strict numerical identity—such as some other kind of *sameness* relation (see, e.g. Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, 2020a, b, p. 132). This won’t make a difference to my arguments, so I’ll ignore it.

<sup>3</sup> Self-Maker theorists also adopt different underlying ontologies. For example, some adopt a plenitude ontology and say that we are the “best candidate” object among the many objects in our vicinity, which is determined by what we take ourselves to be (e.g., Kovacs, 2016, 2020; Zimmerman, 2013). Others adopt a sparser ontology and say that the identities of the objects we are are determined by what we take ourselves to be (e.g., Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, 2004, 2020a; Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2001). Some Self-Maker theorists adopt other ontological theses as well (e.g., perdurantism, worm theory, stage theory, etc.). Thus, Self-Maker is consistent with a wide range of ontological theses (Kovacs, 2020, § 2). These theses will not bear on my arguments to follow. So I won’t address them further.

fates align—we're all the same kind of thing, we all survive the same kinds of events, and when there's disagreement about which ones we survive someone is right, someone is wrong. On Self-Maker theories, however, the verdict varies—we are (at least potentially) different kinds of things who survive different kinds of events, depending on what our takes on ourselves are. So two of us could disagree about a case (or seem to) and both be right.

Now, what I've said so far is consistent with another view—one that's different from Self-Maker and that I won't address here. It's the view that we are each some default kind of thing (e.g., an animal) unless we take ourselves to be something different, in which case we are. Call this 'Self-Changer'. Self-Changer permits the variation described above, but without self-takes necessarily doing all the identity-determining. Self-Changer is a curious view.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps there's something to be said for it. Perhaps a case could be made that, although we start out as a certain kind of thing, there's something about the (adult) human mind that allows us to change what we are. Perhaps Self-Changer deserves further attention. However, no one (who I know of) defends it, and it's different from Self-Maker as defended in the literature. So I'll set it aside. And I'll assume that, on Self-Maker theories, there's no default position and no back up—that, within certain limits, what we are in and/or through time is determined just by what we take ourselves to be.

What's the motivation for such a view? Some Self-Maker theorists' strategy is to describe the version of Self-Maker that they find most plausible and then defend it against objections—to show that the view isn't as crazy as it may sound. Others argue that Self-Maker solves certain philosophical puzzles or helps rationalize differing reactions to problem cases. Some also report finding Self-Maker verdicts on those cases intuitive. Some argue that Self-Maker is more parsimonious than alternatives—since it doesn't require positing mind-independent metaphysical facts about how much physical or mental continuity is required for people to persist. And some draw on conceptual analyses of 'I' or 'person' to support Self-Maker. It's beyond the scope of this paper to delve further into the motivations for Self-Maker, but there's no denying that it has a certain, powerful appeal, as evidenced by its increasing popularity.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> To illustrate, consider some questions that a Self-Changer theorist would want to answer: How does it work? What's the mechanism by which we convert something seemingly take-independent, like an animal, into something potentially very different? Corporations, clubs, and countries are necessarily social entities and, as such, their identities are *always* constituted by our takes/activities. On Self-Changer, our identities aren't like that. They're also not like the identities of trees, sharks, and electrons, which are *never* determined by our takes. So what's this middle ground? And how did we come to occupy it? Also, what's the default kind of thing we are? Why Fs and not Gs? And if there are reasons to think that by default we're Fs not Gs, why not consider these reasons to forget takes and just think we're Fs objectively?

Here's yet another view: By default, we each are a disjunction of things—an F or a G or an H or... etc.—unless we take ourselves to be one kind of thing, in which case we are. There's a way to make this view consistent with Self-Maker: If the disjunction is big enough, constrained only by Self-Maker theorists' "certain limits," then this is a merely verbal variant of Self-Maker. However, if the disjunction is limited to only a few kinds of things, then this is a different view (call it 'Self-Decider'). This too is a curious view, for some of the same reasons as above—one would like to know how we came to be such unusual things and why the disjunction contains some kinds of things and not others.

<sup>5</sup> For overviews of some of the main motivations for Self-Maker, see Braddon-Mitchell and Miller (2020a, b; Longenecker, (2023); Kovacs (2020), 2022).

You might be skeptical. For example, you might think that we're more similar in relevant ways to take-independent things like trees, sharks, and electrons than we are to take-dependent things like corporations, clubs, and countries. Furthermore, you might doubt that we have the power to make concrete, spatiotemporal things (like us, you might think) one way or another just by believing them to be that way, wanting them to be that way, or hoping they're that way. You might think, "That's just not how things work."

But Self-Maker theorists have responses. For example, they may say that there are some key respects in which we are similar to corporations, clubs, and countries—perhaps emphasizing our unique minds and social embeddedness. And they may say that if we can make those kinds of things what they are, why not us? So we need more. There are some reasons to accept Self-Maker and some reasons to be skeptical of it. And, at this point in the dialectic, reasonable people may disagree on which way the balance tilts.

My aim in this paper is not just to tip the balance against Self-Maker by providing another consideration against it, but to reveal a deep, insurmountable problem for Self-Maker that keeps it from getting off of the ground. But before doing that, I need to draw out some further commitments of Self-Maker theorists that aren't all entailed by Self-Maker but that are nonetheless crucial to the view. That's where I'll turn now.

## 2 Self-Maker Theorists' Commitments

Call a take on a person's identity in or through time a "self-take." In one sense we each have many takes on what we are—takes about ourselves and others—corresponding to our many different person-involving attitudes and activities. But I'll use "self-take" in a *cumulative* sense to refer to an overall, at-the-end-of-the-day take that, if some version of Self-Maker is true, determines the identity of one or more of us.

For Self-Maker to get off the ground, the following must be true:

SELF-TAKES: There are self-takes.

SELF-TAKES isn't strictly entailed by Self-Maker. For, as stated, Self-Maker is consistent with there being no self-takes and no determinate way that we are in or through time. Also, given the ambiguity of its "certain limits" clause, Self-Maker is consistent with the limits on self-making being so severe that self-takes do no actual work in determining what we are and thus are dispensable. However, Self-Maker theorists all assume that there is some way that we are in or through time, and they all assume that self-takes do actual work in determining what we are. Thus, they're all committed to there being self-takes.

There's of course a lot more to say about what self-takes are. That will be the focus of the next section. Depending on the version of Self-Maker, self-takes may include

beliefs, other attitudes, other representational states, behaviors, or social practices. For now I'll leave open which states or activities constitute self-takes.<sup>6</sup>

Here's another commitment of Self-Maker theorists:

INCLUSIVITY: Self-takes make most of us.

In other words, most human people's identities in or through time are determined by self-takes. Maybe Self-Maker theorists don't need to say that *all* of us are self-made. However, it would be strange to hold—and I don't think any Self-Maker theorist does hold—that the self-made are a select group of, say, metaphysicians, or some such. I take it that Self-Maker theorists want the view to be more inclusive than that.<sup>7</sup>

One way INCLUSIVITY could be false is if SELF-TAKES is false—if there are no self-takes, then none of us are self-made. Another important way INCLUSIVITY could be false is if there are self-takes but those self-takes *radically underdetermine* what many of us are in and through time—in the sense that they don't settle what we are from among the many possible options, or even narrow it down much, because they're consistent with us being many different kinds of things. To see why, imagine that the only self-take bearing on my identity is my belief that I am a concrete object. This self-take doesn't pick out one kind of thing versus innumerable many others.<sup>8</sup> So in no substantial sense could it *determine* my identity. So if this is my self-take, then I'm not self-made—either my identity is determined by something else, or it isn't determined at all. The same goes for any other potential self-take—even ones that include many attitudes or activities—that radically underdetermines what I am, or any other person is. Thus, if self-takes radically underdetermine what many of us are, then many of us are not self-made. In which case INCLUSIVITY is false.

Most Self-Maker theorists do want to allow for *some* indeterminacy in self-takes and, thus, in what we are (see, e.g., Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, 2020b, p. 154; Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2001, p. 78; Kovacs, 2016, 2020). Fair enough. I myself think that facts about whether I exist and what I am are always determinate—for example, I agree with Parfit (1984) when he says that “in any conceivable case, the question ‘Am I about to die?’ must have an answer” and that “this answer must be either, and quite simply, Yes or No” (p. 214). However, I grant that if Self-Maker is true then it is natural to expect some indeterminacy in what we are. Still, I do assume that, for Self-Maker to get off the ground, that indeterminacy must be somewhat limited. Exactly

<sup>6</sup> However, one thing I will assume (along with all Self-Maker theorists) is that self-takes, whatever they are, are reflective of our attitudes and/or activities in a more-or-less straightforward way—i.e., that they're not obscure functions of irrelevant seeming attitudes or activities. So, for example, it's not the case that my self-take is that I'm an animal if and only if I like chocolate ice cream. My self-take that I'm an animal is rather a function of my attitudes or activities concerning me and animals. Thanks to John Hawthorne for raising this point.

<sup>7</sup> Kovacs (2016) goes so far as to adopt “the Person Constraint” which, when combined with his version of Self-Maker, implies that self-takes determine the identities of *all* of us.

<sup>8</sup> This is immediately clear regarding *synchronic* identity. That I am a concrete object at some time doesn't settle whether I am a brain, animal, immaterial soul, torso, or any number of other things. This applies to *diachronic* identity as well given the assumption that the persistence conditions of concrete objects vary—i.e., that not all concrete objects have the exact same persistence conditions. All diachronic Self-Maker theorists accept this assumption. After all, if the persistence conditions of concrete objects don't vary, then there's no work to be done by self-takes in determining our persistence conditions.

how much indeterminacy is allowable is impossible to answer—we'll have to assess each case as it comes up. But just note that this is one way for INCLUSIVITY to be false.

Another reason to think that Self-Maker theorists are committed to INCLUSIVITY as I've construed it derives from the nature of the project they are engaged in. Self-Maker is a theory (or family of theories) about personal ontology or identity. It's a view about what we are in or through time. As such, Self-Maker theorists assume that there is some way that we are in and through time. To say that our identities in or through time are radically indeterminate is to adopt a kind of *pessimism* about this domain of inquiry. Other philosophers defended such pessimism (e.g., Sider, 2001). But this is not what Self-Maker theorists are defending or promoting. Thus, given this, and given that Self-Maker theorists say it's self-takes that determine our identities, I assume that Self-Maker theorists are committed to INCLUSIVITY.

Another commitment of Self-Maker theorists is:

NON-ABSURDITY: We are not absurd things.

Here's where the "certain limits" come in. Self-Maker theorists want to avoid absurd results. No Self-Maker theorist wants to allow that, if I take myself to be a jelly donut, or a toenail, or both P and not-P, then I am. So they need limits on which takes can determine our identities. Self-Maker theorists differ on what those limits are. For example, Kovacs (2020) says that our self-takes can't be based on "misleading empirical evidence" or "inappropriate responses to your empirical evidence" (p. 8). Zimmerman (2013) says that our self-takes must be organized around something that is "at least somewhat natural and important" (p. 99). And Braddon-Mitchell and Miller (2020b) say that our self-takes must be "compatible with (but not entailed by) ideal rationality and relevant knowledge" (p. 136). So while Self-Maker theorists differ on what the limits on self-takes are, they agree that, to avoid absurd results, there must be limits on self-takes.

This leads to another commitment. There need to be limits on self-takes, but, on the other hand, those limits cannot be highly arbitrary. Suppose, for example, that you say that all self-takes are a function of the attitudes of native Oregonians. That would be objectionably arbitrary. Or suppose you say that all self-takes must match your own personal intuitions. That would be objectionably arbitrary. No theory with such arbitrariness is plausible. The limits on self-takes must be principled.<sup>9</sup> So here's another commitment:

NON-ARBITRARINESS: The limits on self-takes are not highly arbitrary.

You might think that the limits on self-takes mentioned above—from Kovacs, Zimmerman, and Braddon-Mitchell and Miller—already violate NON-ARBITRARINESS. For you might wonder: How could it be that our minds have the power to determine what we are and yet are also limited by our getting all the empirical facts right, or being ideally rational, or caring about things that are natural and important? This isn't

<sup>9</sup> Various Self-Maker theorists are explicit about this, including Braddon-Mitchell and West (2001, pp. 65–67) Braddon-Mitchell and Miller (2020b, p. 153), and Johnston (1989).

how it is with other take-dependent things. If some empirical error is what led people to treat the city of Vientiane as part Laos, not Thailand, that doesn't matter—as long as the relevant conventions treat it as part of Laos, it's part of Laos. Or if Rose joined Alcoholics Anonymous despite not being an alcoholic, she's still in—what matters is she's treated as part of the group. Or if a club is organized around something unnatural and unimportant—like “Keeping up with the Kardashians”—it's still a club. So perhaps it's a bit unusual and arbitrary to say that our self-takes are limited in the ways Self-Maker theorists say they are.

But set that aside. Moving forward I'll assume that the aforementioned limits on self-takes are not arbitrary—that the arbitrariness must be more egregious than that to count as a violation of NON-ARBITRARINESS.

The above are four commitments of Self-Maker theorists. They're not all strictly entailed by Self-Maker. But they're essential to the spirit of the view and accepted by all Self-Maker theorists who comment on them. Thus, I will assume that if Self-Maker is true, then SELF-TAKES, INCLUSIVITY, NON-ABSURDITY, and NON-ARBITRARINESS are all true. Conversely, if any one of these claims is false, then Self-Maker is false. Thus, any version of Self-Maker that runs afoul of any of them must be adjusted or else discarded.

### 3 What's a Self-Take?

Now the question is: Are there any versions of Self-Maker—whether actual or potential—that satisfy all of the above commitments, or that can be adjusted to do so? In this section I'll argue that the answer is: No.

The reason why no actual or potential version of Self-Maker can satisfy those commitments is because there is no way to construe a *self-take* in line with them. Or so I'll argue in this section. I'll consider various ways Self-Maker theorists have construed self-takes, or might construe self-takes, and argue that they all fail to satisfy one or more of SELF-TAKES, INCLUSIVITY, NON-ABSURDITY, or NON-ARBITRARINESS. Thus, I'll argue that there is no way that self-takes can do the work Self-Maker theorists need them to do.

#### 3.1 Beliefs

Let's start with the most popular versions of Self-Maker: *private* versions, whereby it is *our own* takes that determine what we are. Within these theories, a natural idea as to what constitutes our self-takes is *our beliefs*.

This raises the question: Which beliefs? All of them? Or just some of them? Presumably not all of them. After all, not all of our beliefs are relevant to what we are. My belief that Canberra is the capital of Australia, for example, is irrelevant to what I am. So the class of beliefs that constitute self-takes must be limited.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A Self-Maker theorist might say that one's self-take is constituted by the entire set of one's beliefs but then just admit that not all of those beliefs will be operative in determining what one is. This difference



Some limit it to our *I*-beliefs—that is, our beliefs *about ourselves* (see Kovacs, 2016, 2020, 2022). This is an improvement, but still not enough. For not all of our *I*-beliefs are relevant to what we are. My belief that I’m cool, for example, is irrelevant to what I am—that is, to my identity. I suppose one *could* say that beliefs like this contribute to my self-take (perhaps then coolness would be part of my essence or persistence conditions), but Self-Maker theorists are likely to shy from this. So the beliefs must be limited further.

A natural next step is to limit it to beliefs about what we are *essentially* or *most fundamentally*. These beliefs are clearly relevant to what we are—to our identities in and through time. So maybe this is a good option.

However, the problem with construing self-takes this way is it runs afoul of INCLUSIVITY. For not everyone has beliefs about what they are essentially or most fundamentally. Nor is it the case that *almost* everyone, or most people, have such beliefs. Indeed, in the most recent PhilPapers survey, roughly 18% of *philosophers* reported not having a view about personal identity.<sup>11</sup> So this construal of self-takes is too restrictive.

Luckily, there are other, more common beliefs that bear *indirectly* on what we are essentially or most fundamentally. For example, if Clara believes that she would survive teletransportation, that’s not a belief directly about her essential nature, but it does imply things about her essential nature—e.g., that she’s not essentially a particular animal. So maybe beliefs like this—about what would happen to us in various problem cases—can supplement beliefs more directly about what we are essentially or most fundamentally.

Maybe. But this still doesn’t satisfy INCLUSIVITY. For it’s not the case that most people in the world have beliefs about whether they would survive teletransportation, a brain transplant, or other problem cases. After all, a lot of people haven’t even heard about these scenarios, much less formed beliefs about them.

Another way to state this problem regarding INCLUSIVITY is that, if self-takes are constituted only by our direct and indirect beliefs about what we are essentially, or what scenarios we would and wouldn’t survive, then many of our self-takes radically underdetermine what we are. For, given that many people don’t have a lot of beliefs about personal identity or relevant problem cases, their beliefs on the subject will not provide enough content to determine that they are one particular way versus innumerable many others.

This will be a recurring problem. So here’s a more general way of putting it:

The Problem of Underdetermination: Our self-takes radically underdetermine what many of us are in and through time.<sup>12</sup>

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may be largely verbal. However, this approach does worsen a problem that will arise below—namely, that many subjects have inconsistent beliefs.

<sup>11</sup> This number is the sum of the following responses: “Agnostic/undecided” (8.5%), “Insufficiently familiar with the issue” (6.2%), and “The question is too unclear to answer” (2.8%). See Bourget and Chalmers (ms) for more.

<sup>12</sup> Recall the reasons that I gave in the last section for why radical underdetermination implies a violation of INCLUSIVITY and a failure of Self-Maker. First, if someone’s self-take radically underdetermines their identity, then either their identity is determined by something else, or it isn’t determined at all. Either way,

In light of The Problem of Underdetermination—which entails a failure of INCLUSIVITY and thus undermines Self-Maker—further adjustment is needed. Specifically, Self-Maker theorists need to construe self-takes as including more than just beliefs (whether direct or indirect) about personal identity cases.

One option is to say that *implicit* beliefs also count. That is, Self-Maker theorists might construe self-takes as constituted by what people *would* judge, if asked, about whether they would survive in problem cases.

However, this raises another problem. When people are *actually asked* about such cases, they tend to report self-takes that are *inconsistent*. Shaun Nichols and Michael Bruno (2010) surveyed folk intuitions about personal identity and found that many subjects' intuitions were inconsistent and varied depending on how cases were framed.<sup>13</sup> Why is this a problem? Because of Self-Maker theorists' commitment to NON-ABSURDITY. If people's self-takes are constituted by their implicit beliefs about problem cases, then many people's self-takes are inconsistent. And if these self-takes determine what they are, then what they are is inconsistent. For example, if I take myself to be both P and not-P, and that self-take determines what I am, then I am both P and not-P. But no one could possibly be both P and not-P. Hence the absurdity.

This too will be a recurring problem. So here's a more general way to put it:

The Problem of Inconsistency: Many self-takes are internally inconsistent.

The Problem of Inconsistency entails a failure of the conjunction of NON-ABSURDITY and INCLUSIVITY. Inconsistent self-takes are absurd. So, by NON-ABSURDITY, inconsistent self-takes are not self-makers. So if many of our self-takes are inconsistent—which appears to be the case if self-takes are construed as implicit beliefs about personal identity—then many of us are not self-made. So INCLUSIVITY fails.

Further adjustment is thus needed. Self-Maker theorists who construe self-takes as beliefs need to iron out inconsistencies. How? One option is to say that, for any (relevant) proposition P, if subject S believes both P and not-P, then neither P nor not-P are part of S's self-take. However, by discounting all of these beliefs, this option re-raises The Problem of Underdetermination (and thus a conflict with INCLUSIVITY). If many people's beliefs about personal identity cases are inconsistent, as the data from Nichols and Bruno (2010) seem to show, then, on the present option, many (perhaps most) of their beliefs about personal identity cases will have to go. Which will leave them little to go on in determining their identities.

Another option when faced with a believer in both P and not-P is to say that their self-take contains only one of these beliefs. Which one? As we'll see, this ends up

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they are not self-made. Thus, if self-takes radically underdetermine what many of us are, then many of us are not self-made. In which case INCLUSIVITY is false. Second, Self-Maker is a view about what we are in or through time—or, more precisely, about what *determines* what we are in or through time—and, as such, it implies that there is some more-or-less determinate way that we are in or through time. Third, the claim that what we are in or through time is radically indeterminate is a kind of pessimism about personal identity/ontology, which I take to be a position that is distinct from Self-Maker. Finally, Self-Maker theorists themselves don't generally allow that what we are in or through time is radically indeterminate.

<sup>13</sup> Sider (2001) and Williams (1970) also discuss inconsistencies in people's judgments about personal identity cases and the upshots thereof.

being a tricky question. Just on the face of it, discounting one belief but not the other threatens a violation of NON-ARBITRARINESS, since, for all I've said so far, there's no obvious, principled reason for discounting one belief but not the other.

One way of avoiding this worry is to say that, if someone believes both P and not-P about themselves, the belief that is part of their self-take is the one that better "fits" with their other I-beliefs. This is in line with a proposal by Kovacs (2020). He says that, when there's inconsistency in a person's I-beliefs, the I-beliefs that determine what they are is the "largest coherent subset" of their I-beliefs (p. 11).

This solution may be non-arbitrary, but it raises further questions. For example, since Kovacs' account doesn't exclude irrelevant-seeming I-beliefs, we might ask: What if the largest coherent subset of my I-beliefs is composed mostly of beliefs like "I'm cool," "I'm going to play video games today," or "I'm from California"—that is, beliefs that are irrelevant to my identity? Then, on the present proposal, my self-take wouldn't have enough content to determine what I am. The Problem of Underdetermination looms.

Perhaps we can exclude irrelevant I-beliefs, as before. But then here's another question: Is my self-take really just the *biggest* coherent subset of I-beliefs—the one with the largest number of beliefs in it? What if some of the I-beliefs in other, smaller coherent subsets are more deeply held? Shouldn't they count for more? For example, what if I am a deeply committed psychological continuity theorist, but I have a bunch of very weakly held animalist-friendly beliefs? Could the latter swamp the former with sheer numbers?

Kovacs (2020) does allow that more "central" beliefs count for more, where he understands centrality as a matter of how many other beliefs depend on the target belief. There are other potential ways to weight I-beliefs. Or it could be done in terms of credences.<sup>14</sup> However it's done, this is perhaps the best way to navigate through The Problem of Inconsistency for the belief-based approach to self-takes—that is, to come up with a formula for determining the "best" or "weightiest" consistent set of identity-relevant I-beliefs. This doesn't fully settle the matter, since it's easy enough to imagine a person with two or more consistent sets of I-beliefs of equal weight. However, perhaps some indeterminacy here is tolerable.

So there's some progress. But we're not done. One issue worth flagging again is The Problem of Underdetermination. If we start with just our I-beliefs, then filter out inconsistencies and irrelevant beliefs, do most of us have I-beliefs sufficient to settle, with some reasonable degree of determinacy, what we are in or through time? That isn't obvious.

But set that issue aside for now. I want to raise another issue: *mistaken* beliefs. Boanthropy is a rare disorder in which a person believes that they are a cow or ox. If this is part of their weightiest consistent subset of I-beliefs, are they in fact a cow or ox? Those with Cotard's Syndrome believe they are dead. Are they?

<sup>14</sup> Or one could stick with the inconsistent set of I-beliefs and say that one's self-take is whatever proposition(s) best rationalize that set. This would allow each belief (i.e., in both P and not-P) to potentially bear on what one's self-take is without there being any inconsistencies in that self-take at the end of the day, since the best rationalization of these beliefs will include at most one of P and not-P. The differences between this strategy and Kovacs' (2020) strategy (or variants thereof) won't affect the arguments to follow. So I will set it aside.

As I mentioned above, most if not all Self-Maker theorists will say: No. They accept NON-ABSURDITY and so place limits on self-takes that rule out people being cows or corpses. For example, Kovacs (2020) says that one's self-take can't be based on "misleading empirical evidence" or "inappropriate responses to [one's] empirical evidence" (p. 8). Presumably any belief that one is a cow or a corpse will be based on misleading empirical evidence or inappropriate responses to that evidence. Zimmerman (2013) says that one's self-take must be organized around something that is "at least somewhat natural and important" (p. 99). Perhaps cows and corpses don't fit that bill. And Braddon-Mitchell and Miller (2020b) say that self-takes must be compatible with "ideal rationality and relevant knowledge" (p. 136). They may deny that believing one is a cow or dead is consistent with ideal rationality and relevant knowledge.

So far, so good. But consider a case. Suppose Neb has a very deeply held belief that he is a cow, and most of his other I-beliefs are based on this belief. Given NON-ABSURDITY, Self-Maker theorists will say that these beliefs are not part of Neb's self-take. But then which I-beliefs *are* part of his self-take? Perhaps Neb has some other, more weakly held I-beliefs that support his being something other than a cow—a psychological continuer, for example. Perhaps he watched some sci-fi movies and found it plausible that people survive teletransportation. So then maybe Neb's self-take is constituted by these more weakly-held beliefs. One striking result of this option is that Neb ends up having a self-take that is very different from what he believes it to be, and he ends up being something very different from what he believes himself to be. He believes himself to be a cow; and, as such, he believes himself to be a certain kind of animal, a physical organism. But if these beliefs are excluded, and the I-beliefs that remain are his self-take, then he ends up being something very different—a psychological continuer.<sup>15</sup>

Another option—what some Self-Maker theorists might say—is that Neb's self-take radically underdetermines what he is. After all, if most of Neb's I-beliefs really are organized around his being a cow, then he may not have enough secondary beliefs to make him anything as determinate as a psychological continuer. So maybe the best thing to say is that it's indeterminate what Neb is. Of course, if there are a lot of people like Neb, then this would violate INCLUSIVITY. But there are not a lot of people like Neb.

Now a different case. Elie is religious. He firmly believes that he's identical to an immaterial soul, and a lot of his other I-beliefs depend on this belief. But suppose there are no such things as immaterial souls. Then, by the lights of Kovacs, Zimmerman, Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, and other Self-Maker theorists, Elie is not a soul, and his beliefs to that effect aren't part of his self-take. What is his self-take, then? Self-Maker theorists might say that Elie's next weightiest consistent set of I-beliefs is his self-take. But then Elie's self-take may be very different from what he believes it is, and what he *is* may be very different from what he believes himself to be. Also,

<sup>15</sup> This raises a question (and potential worry) about whether "meta-self-takes"—that is, takes about what one's self-take is—are part of one's self-take. There seems to be no non-arbitrary reason to exclude them. In fact, they seem like especially important parts of self-takes. But then it's all the more problematic for Self-Maker theorists that the self-takes of people like Neb end up being very different from what they take their self-takes to be. Thanks to Jack Spencer for raising this point.

as before, his secondary set of I-beliefs is unlikely to be determinate enough to pick out one kind of thing over innumerable many others. So perhaps the best option for Self-Maker theorists is to say that, as with Neb, Elie's identity in and through time is radically indeterminate.

The problem, of course, is that, unlike Neb, there *are* a lot of people like Elie. Thus, if Elie's identity is radically indeterminate, so are the identities of a lot of people. In which case INCLUSIVITY fails, as does Self-Maker.

One might respond that, while substance dualism may be false, it's not *absurd*. Thus, one might respond that beliefs in an immaterial soul needn't conflict with NON-ABSURDITY, and so needn't be excluded from Elie's self-take, and so needn't threaten INCLUSIVITY. However, it's enough that immaterial souls don't exist. For, if there are no souls, then there are no souls for Elie to be. Elie can't make himself into a non-existent immaterial soul any more than convention can make a nonexistent river part of a country.

Another potential response is that, if there are no souls for Elie to be, then what his self-take picks out, and so what he *is*, is the *closest existing thing* to a soul. What would that be? What's the "closest" existing thing to a soul (assuming again that souls don't exist)? It's not obvious. There aren't a lot of immaterial alternatives lying around. Should we rather key into the fact that souls are essentially *mental*? In which case we should think Elie is a psychological continuer of some sort? Or should we instead key into the fact that souls are *substances*? In which case we should think Elie is a non-soul substance? If so, which one? Maybe a brain—since brains are both mental and substances? But what if Elie ardently disavows materialism? What then? All sorts of inconsistencies and indeterminacies loom. And, as before, what Elie's self-take implies, and thus what he *is*, ends up being very different from what he believes himself to be.

This response also opens up other difficulties. If Elie is the closest existing thing to what he believes himself to be, is Neb the closest existing thing to a cow, since that's what he believes himself to be? Is someone who believes they're a jelly donut, or a toenail, or both P and not-P, the closest existing thing? There's a reason why Self-Maker theorists deny that self-takes are constituted by mistakes like this (see, e.g., Kovacs, 2020, p. 8; Zimmerman, 2013, p. 99; Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, 2020b, p. 136). Self-Maker theorists should exclude, not only Elie's mistaken beliefs, but any beliefs based on those beliefs.

However, the problem is, if they do that, then Elie's self-take will not have enough content to pick out one kind of thing over innumerable many others. So, given Self-Maker, Elie's identity will be radically indeterminate. And, again, unlike Neb, there are a lot of people like Elie. Thus, if Elie's identity is radically indeterminate, so are the identities of a lot of people. In which case INCLUSIVITY fails, as does Self-Maker.

The only way out of this problem for Self-Maker theorists who think that self-takes are constituted solely by I-beliefs is to hold that people like Elie actually do have enough secondary I-beliefs—that is, I-beliefs left over after beliefs like "I am a soul" are excluded—to avoid radical indeterminacy. This strategy still implies that Elie's self-take is, unbeknownst to him, very different from what he believes it to be. Which is strange. But this strategy would at least address The Problem of Underdetermination.

What would these secondary I-beliefs be? They would have to extend beyond beliefs about personal identity, since people like Elie are likely to organize their beliefs about personal identity around their belief that they are souls. So Self-Maker theorists need other I-beliefs to fill in the content of their self-take.

Some Self-Maker theorists suggest that more pedestrian I-beliefs contribute to our self-takes. For example, Kovacs (2016) suggests that beliefs like “I have two hands and two legs” support a self-take whereby one is a humanoid-shaped thing and not, say, a brain or a leg-complement (a humanoid minus legs) (p. 10). So maybe such beliefs—which Elie no doubt has—can fill out Elie’s self-take in the absence of soul beliefs.

One issue with this proposal is that beliefs like “I have two hands and two legs” may very well express *contingent* propositions—and be taken that way by their subject—and thus may be on a par, metaphysically, with beliefs like “I am a teacher” or “I am indoors right now.” I have these beliefs about me, but they’re not obviously relevant to *what I am*—to my identity. This is especially clear for *diachronic* identity. That I have two hands does not imply that I *necessarily* have two hands, that I cannot survive without two hands, or that my hands are in any way relevant to my persistence conditions. Indeed, most people would deny such implications. Thus, it’s not obvious that beliefs like this are suitable contributors to a self-take.

Perhaps this is too quick. For a Self-Maker theorist might reason as follows. Elie believes that he has two hands. Elie’s identity is determined by his self-take (which doesn’t include his soul beliefs). Thus, he has two hands. Brains don’t have hands. Thus, Elie is not a brain. Perhaps Elie also believes that he has a humanoid shape. Thus, he does. And perhaps he has enough other beliefs to whittle down the options as to what he is at the present time. Perhaps it’s something like: A human body. Thus, Elie is a human body. Human bodies have certain persistence conditions (and perhaps Elie’s take doesn’t bear on that; Kovacs, 2020). Thus, Elie has those persistence conditions. He may not be what he thinks he is (i.e., a soul); nonetheless, he is self-made.

There’s a lot to take issue with here. But one very basic problem with the above reasoning is that it relies on an overly metaphysically loaded interpretation of “have” in “I have hands.” “Have” is ambiguous. In sentences of the form “I have x,” “have” can mean various things (e.g., *own, possess, am the parent of, am sick with, am related to*). The above reasoning presupposes, and requires, a specific metaphysical *parthood* reading of “have”—one that implies that Elie’s hands are literal metaphysical parts of him and, thus, partly constitute what he is. But this is too literal an interpretation of many people’s belief that they have hands. After all, substance dualists like Elie believe that they have hands, and will say “I have hands,” without meaning that their hands are literal, metaphysical parts of them. They believe that they are identical to naught but immaterial souls, but also believe that they are related to their hands in some other, important—perhaps unique—way such that it is appropriate to say, “I have hands.” Indeed, given that people like Elie espouse substance dualism, this is a better way to interpret their belief that they have hands. But if that’s right, then Elie’s belief that he has hands does not entail that his hands are metaphysical parts of him—parts of what he is. In which case beliefs like “I have two hands” cannot fill out the content of Elie’s self-take, or the self-takes of the many people like Elie, so as to yield more-or-less determinate overall self-takes in the absence of their beliefs about

souls. Thus, these more pedestrian beliefs cannot do the work Self-Maker theorists would need it to do to stave off The Problem of Underdetermination.<sup>16</sup>

Maybe Self-Maker theorists will get lucky and substance dualism will turn out to be true. Then Elie et al. can be souls. But hopefully it's clear that the problem runs deeper than this. Given their commitment to NON-ABSURDITY, Self-Maker theorists need to rule out self-takes based on mistakes. But people make mistakes. Whatever the basic empirical facts about us turn out to be, a substantial portion of the human population will end being wrong about them. And if these mistakes don't count toward self-takes, then many self-takes will be radically underdetermined. This violates INCLUSIVITY and thus undermines Self-Maker.<sup>17</sup>

So beliefs aren't up to the job—not by themselves. Too many of us lack the beliefs about ourselves that would be needed to yield a more-or-less determinate self-take. So we need to look beyond I-beliefs.

### 3.2 Other Attitudes

One alternative is: *other attitudes*.<sup>18</sup> These may include desires, hopes, fears, intentions, blame, anticipation, dread, or other attitudes. And there are two options here: Say that self-takes are *wholly* constituted by these other, non-belief attitudes, or say that self-takes are only *partly* constituted by these other attitudes—perhaps with I-beliefs filling in the rest, or maybe with other states or activities also playing a role.

<sup>16</sup> Here's another option: Condition Elie's credence function on there being no souls and see where his credences *move to*. Then say that's what Elie's self-take is—i.e., what his credence function *would be* on that condition. Of course, if we do this for mistakes about souls, we should also do it for other mistakes Elie makes. So, in effect, this makes Elie's—and everyone else's—self-take a function of what they *would* believe with more complete knowledge. This is an interesting view worthy of further discussion, but it is a departure from Self-Maker (both as I stated it and as it's defended in the literature), which again says that what we are is determined by what we *take* ourselves to be, not what we *would* take ourselves to be in different circumstances. There are also a number of issues with this view that would need to be addressed. For example, we would need to know how far to go with the idealization. Should we go all the way—conditioning our credence functions on *complete* knowledge and *ideal* rationality? No one actually has complete knowledge or is ideally rational. So, if this is the view, then it may be that almost everyone's self-take ends up being very different from what they actually think it is and with content that's very different from what they actually believe about themselves. This further distances the view from Self-Maker as I've stated it and how it is defended in the literature, and it also threatens one of the main motivations for Self-Maker—i.e., rationalizing disagreement about personal identity cases by making differing judgments about them come out true—since if our self-takes diverge from what we think they are, then our judgments about personal identity cases may indeed end up being wrong. So one may wish to limit the idealization. But it's not clear how this can be done non-arbitrarily. Thanks to Jack Spencer for raising this possibility.

<sup>17</sup> At this point a Self-Maker theorist might be tempted to give up on INCLUSIVITY and grant that many of our identities are radically underdetermined. But as I said before, the problem with this is that it is an abandonment of the very project Self-Maker theorists take themselves to be engaging in—i.e., giving a theory of personal ontology or identity. This project presupposes that there is a fact of the matter about what we are in or through time. But to say that many of our identities are radically underdetermined is to say that there is no determinate fact of the matter as to what we are. This is to abandon Self-Maker and adopt *pessimism* about debates over personal ontology and identity.

<sup>18</sup> Self-Maker theorists who say that non-belief attitudes are part of self-takes include Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, (2004, 2020a, b; Braddon-Mitchell and West, (2001); Johnston (1989); Longenecker, (2022), (2023); Miller (2013); White (1989).



The first option faces various difficulties. It's hard to see how our non-belief attitudes, on their own, sans beliefs, could determine our identities. This is especially clear in cases where non-belief attitudes lack corresponding beliefs. For example, suppose I'm about to be ground to pulp by falling boulders, and I really desire to survive, but, of course, I don't believe that I will. Self-Maker theorists won't want to say that only the non-belief attitudes determine my identity. For, other problems aside, it would run afoul of NON-ABSURDITY (I assume it's absurd to think that I could survive as pulp).<sup>19</sup> This speaks against the first option—whereby non-belief attitudes wholly constitute self-takes. So I'll set it aside—partly for the reason above, partly because no actual Self-Maker theorist defends it. So I'll now focus on the view that self-takes are only *partly* constituted by non-belief attitudes and that they also include the I-beliefs discussed earlier.

Now the question is: *Which* non-belief attitudes? That is, which non-belief attitudes partly constitute self-takes? Above I mentioned several *types* of attitudes—desires, hopes, fears, intentions, blame, anticipation, and dread. Other non-belief attitudes may also contribute to self-takes on this proposal. No Self-Maker theorist gives a precise list of exactly which attitude types contribute to self-takes. So I too will leave this open.

There's also a question of which attitude *contents* count. Like before, not all contents are relevant. My desire for world peace, for example, has nothing to do with anyone's identity. The same goes for "I-attitudes" like my desire to be cool and my hope that I'm a good person. So, like before, there are limits.

Some Self-Maker theorists suggest that the only I-attitudes (including beliefs) that count are those that concern personal identity—that is, explicit attitudes about being, say, a psychological continuer over a biological continuer (see, e.g., Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, 2020a). However, as I've noted, many people haven't thought much about personal identity or the relevant problem cases, so they're unlikely to have more-or-less determinate I-attitudes about the topic. Thus, to avoid The Problem of Underdetermination (and a violation of INCLUSIVITY), Self-Maker theorists will have to include either *implicit* I-attitudes—that is, attitudes one *would* have if presented with personal identity cases—or more pedestrian I-attitudes.

But this move faces the same difficulties as in the previous section. In general, pedestrian I-attitudes (e.g., I anticipate having hands tomorrow) shouldn't be interpreted in a metaphysically loaded way. So they're not suited to be parts of self-takes. Then there's The Problem of Inconsistency. Even if we iron out the aforementioned

<sup>19</sup> You might think that the belief that I won't survive being ground to pulp, or that I won't be identical to the pulp, will typically—if not always—shape my desires and other attitudes, including those beyond the desire to survive. For example, while I may desire to survive, to continue in my life plans, to maintain my close personal relationships, etc., I wouldn't desire for *the pulp* to have these things. So you might think my attitudes-based self-take would *not* imply that I survive as pulp. But, if that's right, it would just show that non-belief attitudes are tied to beliefs in important ways and thus aren't easily separated out. Which would reinforce my point that an attitudes-based self-talk ought to include beliefs. Think about it this way: Either one's beliefs can be separated from, and in tension with, one's non-belief attitudes, or they can't. If they can't, then an attitudes-based self-take will have to include beliefs. If one's beliefs can be separated from and in tension with one's non-beliefs attitudes, then a self-take that included only the non-belief attitudes would yield absurd results (e.g., that I could survive as pulp). Either way, a Self-Maker theorist who says self-takes are constituted by attitudes should include beliefs (and perhaps other states) among them.



inconsistencies in I-beliefs by saying that it's the weightiest *consistent* set of relevant I-beliefs that contributes to self-takes, there's a new problem—a new version of The Problem of Inconsistency. For while the I-beliefs that contribute to a given self-take may be consistent with each other, those I-beliefs may not be consistent with the other I-attitudes that form self-takes. Furthermore, those other I-attitudes may not be consistent with each other (see Shoemaker, 2007; Sider, 2001). Suppose, for example, that I'm about to be forced into a teletransporter. I don't want to go in because I *believe* that I won't survive. However, I *desire* to survive—to be the person who comes out the other end. I also *hope* the psychological continuity theory is true, but I *anticipate* not surviving. If these attitudes are all construed as representing something determinative of my identity through time, then they are inconsistent in what they represent.<sup>20</sup>

This also leads to another worry with appealing to implicit I-attitudes about personal identity cases. Consider a case. Fret is a worrier. He dreads suffering and is deeply afraid of dying. Whenever he is confronted with a personal identity problem case, he can't help but feel like he would not survive it. When asked about teletransportation, for example, he's sure he'd die. However, when the case is changed just a bit to involve suffering on the other end—say, the person who comes out of the teletransporter will be tortured—Fret's attitudes suggest something else. He *anticipates* the torture, he *dreads* it—he worries that it would be *him* who suffered. So Fret's I-attitudes imply *both* that he will die *and* that he will survive and suffer. This case illustrates two points. First, it illustrates and amplifies The Problem of Inconsistency. Second, it illustrates that I-attitudes—especially implicit ones—are *noisy*. They are heavily influenced by emotions, moods, personality traits, and other factors that do not seem relevant to self-takes or suitable to determine one's identity.

To resolve these issues, Self-Maker theorists may run a gambit from the previous section, saying that a given self-take is constituted by the weightiest consistent set of relevant I-attitudes. But, as before, The Problem of Underdetermination looms. For it's not obvious that, once inconsistent and irrelevant I-attitudes are excluded, enough of us have I-attitudes sufficient to form more-or-less determinate self-takes.

There's also a new problem. For the notion of a weightiest consistent set of I-attitudes is not as straightforward as it is for beliefs. If I believe both P and not-P about myself, but more of my I-beliefs depend on my belief that P, or I believe P more strongly, or my belief that P is weightier in some other sense, then it's reasonable, and non-arbitrary, to say that not-P isn't part of my self-take. Assuming that beliefs

<sup>20</sup> In response to similar worries Braddon-Mitchell and Miller (2020b) endorse “person pluralism,” the view that for each of us there are multiple different kinds of persons corresponding to our different self-takes (p. 152–153). This may help with The Problem of Inconsistency, since it relieves the pressure to find a single consistent self-take for each of us. But it raises other worries. For example, Schechtman (2014) argues that person pluralism is in tension with the fact that we each live a single life that coordinate between our various takes and concerns. There's also a familiar epistemic problem having to do with a person knowing which person they are. Furthermore, and more relevant for my purposes, person pluralism does not help at all with the problems that I will discuss below. First, it does not help with The Problem of Underdetermination, for if the weightiest consistent set of relevant I-attitudes radically underdetermines what a given person is, then it's no help that there are also persons associated with other sets—which, presumably, also radically underdetermine what that person is. Person pluralism also doesn't help with The Problem of Incommensurability, which I introduce and discuss below.

are weighted along a uniform dimension—perhaps by strength of belief, or credence level—it’s possible (at least in principle) for there to be a weightiest consistent set of I-beliefs. However, it’s far less obvious that this is true for a set that contains various different types of attitudes. How does a desire about personal identity weigh against a contrary belief about personal identity? Or hope, anticipation, or dread? And how does the *strength* of each of these attitudes weigh against the others? What it is for a desire to be strong, or hope or dread to be strong, is very different from what it is for a belief to be strong. So there doesn’t seem to be a way for these states to be weighed against each other. And if that’s right, then there couldn’t be a weightiest consistent set of I-attitudes. For there’s no single property it could have that would make it the weightiest. In which case any construal of a set of I-attitudes as the “weightiest” would be arbitrary.

The problem here isn’t that Self-Maker theorists haven’t *given us* a non-arbitrary algorithm for determining the weightiest consistent set of I-attitudes—perhaps because they don’t know how to, or because it’s too complicated to state. That burden would be unfair to saddle them with. The problem is rather that *in principle* there is no way to weigh I-attitudes against each other, because the ways different I-attitudes are “stronger” or “weaker” are incommensurable. So, in principle, there couldn’t be a “weightiest” consistent set of them in any single sense—which is what would be needed for there to be a single, identity-determining self-take.

Once again, this will be a recurring problem. So here’s a more general way to put it:

The Problem of Incommensurability: The weights of the constituents of self-takes are incommensurable.

The Problem of Incommensurability is a problem at present because of the combination of NON-ABSURDITY, INCLUSIVITY, and NON-ARBITRARINESS. Many people’s I-attitudes are internally inconsistent. So if our I-attitudes constitute our self-takes, and our self-takes determine our identities, then many people are inconsistent things. Which is absurd. So, given NON-ABSURDITY and INCLUSIVITY, Self Maker theorists who say that self-takes are constituted by I-attitudes must accept that these self-takes are limited—they don’t include *all* of our I-attitudes. Given NON-ARBITRARINESS, those limits must be non-arbitrary—that is, it must be non-arbitrary which set of one’s relevant I-attitudes constitute one’s self-take. But it doesn’t look like there’s any way that could be the case, given The Problem of Incommensurability. For different attitudes are incomparable—one type of attitude cannot be weighed against others. Thus, given The Problem of Incommensurability, the limits on self-takes required by NON-ABSURDITY and INCLUSIVITY will inevitably lead to a violation of NON-ARBITRARINESS. Hence the problem.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Another way to understand The Problem of Incommensurability is as a violation of SELF-TAKES. On the present view, and given NON-ABSURDITY and INCLUSIVITY, self-takes are constituted by the weightiest consistent set of one’s relevant I-attitudes. But there is no such set. For there isn’t—and couldn’t be—a *weightiest* set of such diverse attitudes. Therefore, on the present view, there are no self-takes. Thus, SELF-TAKES fails and Self-Maker is undermined.

The present version of Self-Maker also has some of the same problems as the previous version. People like Neb who believe they are cows and people like Elie who believe they are souls may very well align their other attitudes with these beliefs. But if attitudes like this are based on empirical mistakes, incomplete knowledge, or non-ideal rationality, then, according to Self-Maker theorists, and given NON-ABSURDITY, they are not part of our self-takes. In which case many people will not have enough I-attitudes to constitute a more-or-less determine self-take. And thus The Problem of Underdetermination returns.

So much for non-belief attitudes. They also come up short. That is, adding them to I-beliefs to make sense of self-takes fails to solve problems, and it generates new ones. So we need to look beyond attitudes.

### 3.3 Perception

Some Self-Maker theorists say self-takes are constituted by I-beliefs. Others say self-takes are constituted by I-attitudes. None say that self-takes are constituted—either in part or whole—by perceptual states.

It's not clear why. Beliefs and other attitudes are mental states. So are perceptual states. Beliefs and other attitudes represent the world—including ourselves—as being a certain way. So do perceptual states.<sup>22</sup> These states are all parts of our perspectives. So it's unclear why perception should be left out of self-takes.

In fact, given the relevant similarities between perceptual states and other attitudes (including beliefs), you might think that Self-Maker theorists *must* include perceptual states in our self-takes. For you might think that it would be objectionably arbitrary—and, thus, a violation of NON-ARBITRARINESS—if they were excluded from our self-takes. Unless, that is, there is some principled reason for excluding them.

One potential reason for excluding them from self-takes would be because perception doesn't have a lot to say about what we are—about our identities. If perceptual states only represent low-level features of our environments—e.g., colors, shapes, textures, odors, sounds, etc.—and, as such, don't have anything to say about the identities of objects, including us, then it would be principled to exclude them from self-takes.

But perceptual states arguably *do* say something about our identities. It's true that perception, by itself, does not offer anything like a comprehensive, determinate take on what we are, and thus it's true that self-takes cannot be *wholly* constituted by perceptual states (given INCLUSIVITY). However, there is good evidence that perception does say *some* things that are relevant to our identities in and through time and so could *partly* constitute self-takes. For example, there is good evidence that visual perception “tracks” objects by representing the same object at different times in accordance with certain computational rules. Subjects in a wide range of studies were asked to track some number of objects across time through various changes—in

<sup>22</sup> Here (and below) I'm assuming representationalism about perceptual experience, which is the most popular view of perceptual experience. However, the main points that I will make in this section could be adapted to apply to other views as well (e.g., naïve realism, the sense-datum theory, adverbialism). These points don't require that perception is representational. All they require is that information gained from perception is part of one's take on the world.

some cases objects moved, became partly or wholly occluded, changed color, shape, or size, or changed in other ways—and whether subjects identified those objects as the same over time varied depending on which type of changes occurred (Feldman & Tremoulet, 2006; Flombaum et al., 2009; Flombaum & Scholl, 2006; Kahneman et al., 1992; Scholl & Pylyshyn, 1999). There is some controversy about which properties guide this visual “reference locking”—that is, which perceived properties determine whether perception represents an object as the same over time. However, most agree that *spatiotemporal continuity* plays an especially important role in visual reference locking (see Quilty-Dunn and Green (2021) for an overview). Regardless, what’s relevant for our purposes is just that visual perception represents objects as the same over time in some cases—under some conditions—but not others.<sup>23</sup> In other words, perception *does* have something to say about objects’ identities.<sup>24</sup> Of course, we are among the objects we perceive (just look down). Thus, perception has something to say about *our* identities—it represents people as the same over time in some conditions but not others.

Another way that perception or perception-like mental states say something about our identities is, not via external perception—while looking in a mirror or down at our toes, for example—but rather *from the inside*, so to speak. We are *first-personally* aware of ourselves in and through time. Part of this is *bodily* awareness—we’re aware of our bodies and how they are positioned, and we’re aware of them *as our own*.<sup>25</sup> First-personal self-awareness may go beyond bodily awareness.<sup>26</sup> But, whether or not it does, this is another way that perception or perception-like mental states say something about what we are in and through time. Hence, such states can’t be excluded from self-takes because they don’t say anything about our identities.

One might still think that there is a relevant difference between perception and attitudes that warrants excluding perception from self-takes. For example, one might think that, unlike attitudes, perceptual states are formed *passively*—in perception we just “take in” what’s around us—and because, unlike attitudes, what we perceive is not up to us, rationally adjustable, or under our control in some other relevant sense.

However, the idea that perception is passive while beliefs and other attitudes are active and under our control is at best an oversimplification and at worst completely false. As Siegel (2017) points out, many of our beliefs are formed passively (e.g.,

<sup>23</sup> By this I do not mean to suggest that perception explicitly represents *identity*—all I mean, and all that is required for my purposes, is that perception represents and re-identifies objects across time; that is, for a given object O, perception represents O at multiple distinct times. And the consensus (among philosophers and cognitive scientists) is that it’s *perception* that represents these facts (rather than cognition). One reason for thinking this is that visual reference locking occurs even when it is at odds with what subjects think are the persistence conditions of perceived objects (see Carey, 2009, Ch. 3, for some relevant studies).

<sup>24</sup> The evidence I’ve given concerns objects’ identity *through time*. More relevant to identity at a time is the debate over whether perception represents object kinds (see Siegel, 2010; Block, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> For an overview of recent and historical work on bodily awareness, see de Vignemont (2025).

<sup>26</sup> For overviews of different views of self-awareness, see Gertler (2024) and Smith (2024). Some philosophers argue that our experiences include *self-experiences*, and some argue that this provides evidence about what we are in and through time (e.g., Duncan, 2015, 2020a). If this is correct, then Self-Maker theorists must include *introspective* states in self-takes as well. This would only make the above problems worse. However, I will not linger on this point, since the claim that we have introspective self-experiences is more controversial than the claim that we perceive people.

my belief that I'm now typing), and some of our beliefs are not under our control or rationally adjustable (e.g., delusions). The same goes for other attitudes—what we desire, fear, dread, etc., is not generally under our control (which is a point that some Self-Maker theorists themselves make—see Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, 2020b, p. 138). What's more, how we perceive the world often *is* rationally adjustable and, in many respects, under our control. We can choose what to look at or attend to, adjust background assumptions that affect how we perceive things, disavow experiences (e.g., illusions), and shape our perceptual experiences through learning and habituation, for example (Siegel, 2017, § 3.1). Thus, perception and attitudes are more similar in these respects than you might've thought. So this is not a good reason to exclude perceptual states from self-takes.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, there doesn't seem to be any principled reason for Self-Maker theorists to allow that attitudes but not perceptual states are parts of self-takes. And if that's right, then, given NON-ARBITRARINESS, Self-Maker theorists who include attitudes in self-takes must also include perceptual states in self-takes.

You might think this is a helpful suggestion—that adding perceptual states to self-takes may help with The Problem of Underdetermination, for example. But it's not at all. For it's not obvious that adding perceptual states to self-takes adds enough content to our self-takes to make a radically indeterminate self-take sufficiently determinate. So it's not obvious that it helps with The Problem of Underdetermination. And it makes the other problems—i.e., The Problem of Inconsistency and The Problem of Incommensurability—worse. For the deliverances of perception may be inconsistent with one's I-attitudes. For example, if I look down at myself as much of my psychology is erased without disturbance to my body, I may perceive myself as the same object over time even if I am a psychological continuity theorist and thus believe that I'm not the same thing. There are real world cases too. People who encounter loved ones pass away may perceive them as the same thing over time even when they believe that they are no more. Or someone with anarchic hand syndrome or who is undergoing the rubber hand illusion may perceive parts of their body as theirs or not theirs in a way that's out of step with what they believe. There are even mundane cases. A cleverly edited video of me may involve spatiotemporal discontinuities such that I don't perceive myself as a single persisting object even though I firmly believe otherwise.

The Problem of Incommensurability is also worse. For there's no principled way to weigh the strength of a perceptual state against the strengths of attitudes. For what makes a perceptual state weightier than others—factors such as the closeness and

<sup>27</sup> A related thought might be that attitudes but not perceptual states are *products of deliberation*. If self-takes are constituted only by states that we arrive at through reason and reflection, then perception may not count. But then, of course, neither would a lot of our attitudes. For a lot of our attitudes—beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, etc.—are not products of deliberation. But Self-Maker theorists can't exclude all such states from self-takes—lest they violate INCLUSIVITY—since a lot of people haven't deliberated about matters relevant to what they are. Perhaps the thought is that attitudes are at least states that we *can* deliberate with—they can enter into our reasoning processes. However, the same is true of perceptual states. We reason with and about the contents of perception all the time—about what we see, hear, feel, etc. Some even argue that some perceptual states are the *product* of reasoning (see Siegel, 2017) or the *bases* of reasoning (see Duncan, 2020b, 2023). But you needn't go that far to appreciate that perception is heavily integrated into our reasoning.

centrality of a perceived object, perhaps, as well as the clarity and vividness of the perception—is incommensurable with what makes some attitudes weightier than others. So there’s no non-arbitrary way to construe the weightiest consistent set of relevant attitudes plus perceptual states. Thus, in principle, there’s no non-arbitrary way to construe self-takes along these lines.

So perception is no boon for Self-Maker theorists. It’s a problem. And it’s not a problem with an easy remedy. For, given NON-ARBITRARINESS, it seems that Self-Maker theorists *must* allow that perceptual states are parts of our self-takes. But this makes The Problems of Inconsistency and Incommensurability worse. Which threatens the combination of NON-ABSURDITY, INCLUSIVITY, and NON-ARBITRARINESS. So perception puts Self-Maker theorists in a bind—one that ties them whether or not they recognize it.

### 3.4 Behavior

Some Self-Maker theorists invoke *behavior* when talking about self-takes—that is, how we behave, or would behave, in certain relevant circumstances. Would I enter into a teletransporter? Would I praise or blame someone for something “they” did pre-teletransportation? Would you undergo a brain transplant? If so, would you behave as if your body with its new brain is *you*? According to some Self-Maker theorists, behaviors like this are relevant to self-making.<sup>28</sup> So perhaps they bear on self-takes.

Now, as before, many behaviors don’t reflect takes on ourselves (in any sense). Some behaviors are simply irrelevant to our identities. Set those aside. Other behaviors may be relevant but are done out of reflex or coercion, and thus don’t reflect our takes on what we are. Set those aside too. Perhaps the idea, then, is that there is some subset of our freely-chosen behaviors that reflect our takes on ourselves.

Presumably it’s not just our *actual* behaviors. No one has actually decided whether to get a brain transplant or enter a teletransporter. Some people have made other life-in-the-balance decisions, but many people haven’t. So actual behavior is not going to say a lot about many of our identities. So presumably what Self-Maker theorists are after are *dispositions* to behave—how we *would* behave in certain circumstances.

This may sound plausible enough. The only issue with the view that (relevant) dispositions to behave determine self-takes is that it likely comes to the same thing as an I-attitudes view of self-takes—at least, in terms of the verdicts on identity that it renders. For attitudes are (perhaps by definition) what dispose us to the kinds of behaviors described above. We may have some dispositions to behave that go beyond or are even out of step with our I-attitudes—e.g., reflexes, coerced behavior—but, again, Self-Maker theorists are unlikely to say that those bear on our self-takes. The dispositions to behave that are potentially relevant to our self-takes are the ones that are reflective of our (relevant) I-attitudes (see, e.g., Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, 2020b, p. 131; Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2001, p. 61). So then what our dispositions to behave say about our identities will be the same as what our I-attitudes say about

<sup>28</sup> They include Braddon-Mitchell and West (2001, p. 61) Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, 2004, 2020b; Kurt-sal, (2022); Miller (2013).

our identities. In which case a behavior-driven self-take will be functionally equivalent to an I-attitude-driven self-take.

But perhaps behavior can play a different role for Self-Maker theorists. Perhaps it can help with The Problem of Incommensurability. Recall that this problem arises when the weights of (alleged) constituents of self-takes are incommensurable. What makes some I-beliefs “weightier” than others is very different from what makes some other I-attitudes and perceptual states “weightier” than others. So it doesn’t look like there could be a non-arbitrary weightiest consistent set of those states in combination. Hence the problem. But, again, perhaps behavior can help. Want to know what is the weightiest consistent set of one’s I-states (including beliefs, other attitudes, and perceptual states)? Just look at what one *does*, or would do, in certain relevant circumstances. If a consistent set of one’s I-states disposes one to do A, another disposes one to do B, and one ends up doing A—or one *would* do A in the relevant circumstances—then the set that disposes one to do A is the weightier one. If this can be done for every consistent set of most people’s I-states, then perhaps The Problem of Incommensurability can be solved.

The problem is that this is unlikely to yield a plausible verdict on what one’s self-take is. For, as with I-attitudes, behavior is *noisy*. Recall Fret, the worrier. Fret is so afraid of death that he may not do *anything* that has even a remote chance of ending his life. If this extreme caution determines his self-take, which determines what he is, then Fret is an implausibly frail creature indeed. This behavior may also be out of step with his more considered view on what he is. In which case it does not seem to reflect his self-take.<sup>29</sup>

Or consider a more common case. Suppose someone signs a “Do Not Resuscitate” (DNR) order that applies to a rather wide range of circumstances. And suppose that this person thinks she would *survive* in some of these circumstances but is only signing the order because she doesn’t want to be a burden on her family. Here again some behavior—which actually occurs—seems to be out of step with one’s self-take.

A Self-Maker theorist may limit the relevant behavior to that which has the proper *motivation*—what’s done in order to extend one’s life, for example. But this will still generate odd results. Fret, for example, is strongly motivated to extend his life, but this causes him to engage in very cautious behavior that does not reflect his more considered self-take. Or consider a different case. Imagine Hedgewig, who really wants to extend her life. Her strategy is to cover her bases by making all sorts of different arrangements—she signs up to have her body cryogenically frozen at death, has her mind uploaded to a computer, and converts to a religion that promises her an afterlife. She is well aware that these arrangements can’t *all* work—they can’t all be the means by which she survives—and indeed she believes that some of them won’t work (sup-

<sup>29</sup> You might think that if behavior can fail to reflect one’s “more considered view” on what one is—which is constituted by one’s attitudes—then, contrary to what I said earlier, a behavior-driven self-take may not always come to the same thing as an attitude-driven self-take. However, Fret’s behavior still does reflect (and is grounded in) his attitudes—just a subset of them. And what I am suggesting here is just that Fret’s behavior may not reflect *the most plausible subset* of his attitudes—that is, the subset that most plausibly constitutes his self-take. So I still maintain that a behavior-driven self-take will come to the same thing as an attitude-driven self-take; it’s just that a behavior-driven self-take may not even be the best version of an attitude-driven self-take, since it will yield especially absurd results.

pose, for example, that she's an animalist and so doesn't think a mind upload will ensure her survival). Nonetheless, she hedges her bets. Why? So that she has the best chance of survival. This behavior is rational insofar as she is motivated to extend her life. But it does not plausibly reflect Hedgewig's self-take.

So it doesn't look like appealing to the behaviors—or dispositions to behave—of individuals is going to be of use to Self-Maker theorists. For doing so does not help to advance an account of self-takes beyond that of an I-attitudes account, nor does it help with The Problem of Incommensurability. Thus, as before, if we are to make sense of self-takes, we need to look beyond the behavior of individuals.

### 3.5 Community Behavior

Thus far I have been considering potential self-takes for *private* versions of Self-Maker, since these are the most popular versions of the view. However, one way behavior may reenter the picture is via *public* versions of Self-Maker whereby self-takes are determined, not by *our own* takes on ourselves, but by *others'* takes—specifically, our communities' takes—on our identities. What one's "community" is is an open question, but, whatever it turns out to be, it's the *behavior* of this community that will be relevant to self-takes—specifically, the behavior around laws, practices of praise and blame, and other moral and social norms. The many diverse I-beliefs, other I-attitudes, and perceptual states within a given community are likely to be all over the place and thus unhelpful. But communal behavior is a more tractable ground for self-takes.<sup>30</sup>

It may be more tractable, but the view that self-takes are determined by communal behavior suffers from the same problems as other views we've considered (though, as we'll see, those problems show up in different ways). One immediate worry is that this view violates SELF-TAKES, because communal behaviors like law making and enforcement are explicitly meant to be *neutral* on questions of personal identity. One reason why this might be so is because many people's views about personal identity are bound up with their religious beliefs—beliefs about whether there's an afterlife, or souls, for example—and yet many countries have a legal "separation of church and state" that prevents the state from having an official stance on these beliefs. So for this and other reasons you might think that many of the relevant communal behaviors *couldn't*, by design, yield self-takes. In which case, the present view would violate SELF-TAKES.

But set that aside for now. Suppose that communal behaviors such as law making and enforcement and other behaviors *do* speak to our identities, even if they are not meant to. Another problem arises: The Problem of Inconsistency. Consider U.S. laws. According to the Uniform Determination of Death Act (UDDA), which has been adopted by most U.S. states, "An individual who has sustained either (1) irreversible cessation of circulatory and respiratory functions, or (2) irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem, is dead." The most natural

<sup>30</sup> Longenecker (2022) and White (1989) defend public versions of Self-Maker. Braddon-Mitchell and Miller (2020b) state that they prefer a private version of Self-Maker, but they also appeal to public behavior when talking about self-takes (also see Braddon-Mitchell & Miller, 2004, 2020a).



way to read this statement is as a conditional: If (1) or (2), then so-and-so is dead. However, the *enforcement* of this law—in terms of when someone is declared dead, has their assets transferred to others, and so on—supports a bi-conditional reading: A person is dead if and only if (1) or (2). But there are complications. In most cases, “irreversible cessation of circulatory functions” is determined by whether or not a medical professional could (or believes they could) restart a person’s stopped heart. However, if that person signed a DNR, then a person with a stopped heart may be declared dead even if a medical professional could restart it. Furthermore, a person may be declared dead if they have been *missing* for a certain amount of time, which of course could happen (and has happened) even when a person’s heart and brain are in tiptop shape.

On its face, this legal behavior appears to be inconsistent insofar as it is taken to reflect a take on what we are. Read in a metaphysically committal way, the UDDA suggests that we persist if and only if our brains, hearts, and lungs are functioning or could function with medical intervention. But other laws (or enforcement) suggest that we may *fail* to persist in such circumstances. The metaphysical interpretation of these laws could be made consistent—for example, by adding DNR and missing person clauses to (1) and (2). But self-takes based on such an interpretation would be absurd. For they would imply that *what we are* in and through time are: non-missing beings with functioning brains, hearts, and lungs, or potentially functioning brains, hearts, and lungs (unless a DNR was signed). This is a highly gerrymandered type of thing. And it’s a type of thing that could suddenly cease to be just because others can’t find it. Which is an absurd take on us.

This problem is further compounded by other U.S. laws—for example, abortion laws, which you might think don’t cohere very well with the potential metaphysics of the UDDA, or insanity laws, which withhold blame from people who, by the lights of the UDDA, did commit crimes. But we don’t need to go further into these weeds to appreciate that *some* relevant laws, or other practices, in *some* places, are, and certainly could be, inconsistent concerning what we are. In which case The Problem of Inconsistency looms.

As before, a public Self-Maker theorist might address this problem by saying that self-takes are determined by the weightiest consistent set of relevant communal behaviors. However, there is a question of whether most communities have such sets with enough content to avoid The Problem of Underdetermination. There’s also another familiar problem: The Problem of Incommensurability. How are different laws weighed against each other? And how are they weighed against other social behaviors—such as attributions of praise or blame, or other social and moral practices? There may be a principled way to do this for communities with mostly consistent behaviors around these issues. But, as we’ve seen, many communities are not like this when it comes to personal identity—they’re much messier and inconsistent. So it doesn’t look like there is a non-arbitrary way to construe the weightiest consistent set of relevant communal behaviors for many people. In which case there is no non-arbitrary way to construe self-takes along these lines.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> One might wonder, doesn’t the same apply to conventions *in general*—including around corporations, clubs, countries, etc.? And, if so, don’t my arguments prove too much—by implying that conventions in

So the same problems that afflict private versions of Self-Maker afflict public versions of Self-Maker. The Problem of Inconsistency puts these views at odds with NON-ABSURDITY. Attempts to resolve this problem lead to The Problem of Incommensurability, which puts these views at odds with NON-ARBITRARINESS. And The Problem of Underdetermination—which entails a violation of INCLUSIVITY—looms as well. Thus, given the commitments of Self-Maker theorists, communal behavior cannot constitute self-takes.

Nor can anything else. I've now considered every remotely plausible actual or potential view about what self-takes consist in. None work. All fail. They all violate one or more essential commitment of Self-Maker theorists. Thus, I conclude that there is no way to construe self-takes in line with those commitments.

## 4 Conclusion

Self-Maker is an increasingly popular set of views about personal ontology and identity. Yet no Self-Maker theorist—not one—has spelled out in adequate detail what self-takes consist in and how their take on self-takes satisfies the essential commitments of Self-Maker theorists. They've all punted on this task.<sup>32</sup>

In this paper, I've argued that it can't be done. I've argued that there is no way to construe self-takes that can do the work Self-Maker theorists need them to do. The

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general are not take-dependent? I don't think so. For there are crucial differences between people and things like countries, clubs, and corporations. First, the communal attitudes and behaviors relevant to the formation of many conventions are more clear-cut—they are fairly well established, widely shared and known, and often explicitly codified. Charters, constitutions, laws, deeds, and so on minimize indeterminacy concerning what many of these things are. Second, there is not as diverse a set of potential candidates for what these conventional things are as there is for people (e.g., biological continuer, psychological continuer, brain, soul, etc.). Thus, the potential for indeterminacy is greater for people. Third, when there is indeterminacy in conventional objects, it's not as problematic. Almost everyone (including Self-Maker theorists) agrees that what people are in and through time is more-or-less determinate (there's of course disagreement about what does the determining—and, in particular, whether it's a matter of convention—and also some have argued that our *conception* of 'person' is indeterminate (e.g., Eklund, 2004; Johnston, 1989), but very few claim that, at the end of the day, what people *are* in or through time is radically indeterminate. Sider (2001) is an exception.). But that some loosely defined conventional object may be highly indeterminate is more plausible and less worrisome. So, in sum, The Problem of Underdetermination doesn't apply to conventional objects like it does to people, and The Problems of Inconsistency and Incommensurability can be addressed for conventional objects through appeal to a more settled set of communal attitudes and behaviors.

<sup>32</sup> Self-Maker theorists coin terms like "I-beliefs" (Kovacs, 2016, 2020), "p-attitudes" (attitudes concerning what people are) (Longenecker, 2022), "conventions of identity" (Braddon-Mitchell and Miller, 2013), or "person-directed attitudes" (Zimmerman, 2013, p. 123), give a few examples, then simply assume that there is some more detailed story that can be told that will satisfy their essential commitments. Sometimes they are explicit that this is an assumption. Zimmerman (2013), for example, says "I shall follow Johnston in assuming that there is a family of 'person-directed attitudes' that are especially relevant to determination of the kinds of events one could or could not survive" (p. 123). Some Self-Maker theorists also talk about that which people "organize their person-directed practices" around (Braddon-Mitchell & West, 2001, p. 67), or "organize one's life" around (Zimmerman, 2013, p. 123), but do not say what exactly that means. They just assume that our person-directed practices or lives are indeed organized in a determinate way around some univocal conception of what we are.

Problems of Inconsistency, Underdetermination, and Incommensurability render the essential commitments of Self-Maker theorists untenable.

If I'm right about this, then Self-Maker is a non-starter and must be abandoned. On the other hand, if I'm wrong—if there *is* a way to construe self-takes that can get Self-Maker off the ground—then this paper still serves a useful function: To motivate Self-Maker theorists to run with the ball they've previously punted—to give a more detailed account of self-takes and show how it supports rather than conflicts with their essential commitments. Either way—whether I'm right or wrong about self-takes—this paper serves a purpose.

With that said, I think I'm right about self-takes—there's no viable way to construe them. So I maintain that the correct conclusion, and the primary upshot of this paper, is that Self-Maker is false. We are not self-made.

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