

Conceiving of Conscious States

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For a wide range of concepts, a thinker's understanding of what it is for a thing to fall under the concept plausibly involves knowledge of an identity. It involves knowledge that the thing has to have the same property as is exemplified in instantiation of the concept in some distinguished, basic instance. This paper addresses the question: can we apply this general model of the role of identity in understanding to the case of subjective, conscious states? In particular, can we explain our understanding of what it is for someone else to be in a particular conscious state in terms of our knowledge of the relation of identity which that state bears to some of our own states?¹

This is a large issue, with many ramifications both within and beyond the philosophy of mind; so let me give a map for the route I aim to take. We first need to consider the features of explanations of concepts in terms of identity in domains outside the mental. There are substantial constraints on legitimate explanation of concepts in terms of identity. There are also reasons that it is harder to meet these constraints in the case of concepts of conscious states than it is in other cases.

I will go on to suggest a way in which we can overcome the special difficulties of the conscious case, and to try to elaborate the nature both of our understanding of first person applications of concepts of conscious states, and of our grasp of an identity relation applied to these states. A positive account of understanding in this area, as in any other, has to dovetail with a credible epistemology of conscious states in oneself and in

¹ This paper presents, in self-contained form, the material that constitutes the chapter of the same name in my book *Truly Understood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). I was working on the final version of that chapter while preparing the paper for the UCSC Conference in 2007 on Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Mind. The final version of the paper and the chapter benefited from Bill Child's comments at the conference; and I have also learned from John Campbell's extensive comments on an earlier draft. I have been helped too by the comments of Nicholas Asher, Jerry Fodor, Benj Hellie, Philip Kitcher, Carol Rovane, Diana Raffman, Mark Sainsbury, and Crispin Wright.

others. I will offer something under that head, and say how the resulting position steers a middle way distinct from each of the two classic rival positions on conscious states of the later Wittgenstein on the one hand, and of Frege on the other.

1. Understanding and Identity in Other Cases

Here are some other examples of concepts for which an explanation of understanding in terms of identity is plausible.

To possess an observational concept, such as the concept *oval*, is to have tacit knowledge that for an unperceived thing to be oval is for it to be of the same shape as things one perceives to be oval. That a given object is oval, is, according to some theorists, something that can be in the nonconceptual content of a perceptual experience. But as far as I can see, this instance of the model of identity in understanding is equally available to theorists who hold that the content of perceptual experience is entirely conceptual. Either kind of theorist can tie a general grasp of what it is for something to be oval to the distinguished case in which something is perceived to be oval.

A second example of the model concerns our understanding of predications of places and times other than our current location and time. It seems that our understanding of what it is for it to be sunny at some arbitrary place-time consists in our tacit knowledge that the place-time has to have the same property as our current place-time has to have for it to be sunny here. If we were in the mood to be strict, we would with greater accuracy speak of knowledge of what is involved in the truth of an arbitrary predication of a 'here'-thought, wherever it is thought. The tacit knowledge in question involves the demonstrative *here* type, rather than uses of it on a particular occasion.

These instances of the model of identity in understanding are to be construed as ones in which the grasp of the identity in question is explanatory and constitutive of understanding. The mere truth of this biconditional is trivial:

It is raining in London iff London has the same property as this place here has when it is raining here.

This biconditional holds as a matter of logic and identity (given the ontology of properties). Correspondingly, mere acceptance of the biconditional by a rational thinker is not by itself something explanatory of the thinker's understanding or grasp of the contents.

The examples of the role of identity in understanding observational concepts, and concepts of other places and times, aim to say more than the corresponding logical truths. Wittgenstein was precisely setting aside these trivialities when he ended §350 of his *Philosophical Investigations* with the comment "one will say that the stove has the same experience as I, if one says: it is pain and I am in pain". Wittgenstein's own view was that sameness of experience in such a case is to be explained in terms of my being in pain and something or someone else being in pain. He was right that the important issue is the order of philosophical explanation, not the mere truth of the identity in any case in which I am in pain and some other subject is in pain. The mere truth of the identity can be explained consistently with Wittgenstein's own position on understanding sensation-predications, a position that certainly does not rely on an explanation of meaning in terms of an identity relation. The position I will develop agrees with Wittgenstein that more is at stake than simply the logical truths themselves, even though the remainder of this paper opposes Wittgenstein's views on these matters - including the remainder of his text in that §350.

There are three important attractions of identity-involving explanations of concept-possession.

1. The first is that they supply an explanation of the uniformity of concepts and meaning across occurrences of a concept or expression in different thoughts or sentences. It is an immediate consequence of the identity-involving explanation of grasp of a concept that one and the same property is predicated both in the distinguished case and the case understanding of which is explained by grasp of the identity. Other theories, and especially some forms of 'criterial' accounts favoured by some neo-Wittgensteinians, have famously had difficulties in explaining how the same thing is meant in, for instance, first person and third person psychological ascriptions. It seems to me a non-negotiable requirement that it be a consequence of a theory of meaning and understanding in the area

that uniformity hold. Without it, we would be unable to validate the most basic inferences of identity of state across different predications of a concept, and all that rests upon such identities.

As is particularly evident at this point, I am operating with a now widely accepted distinction between concepts and properties.² One and the same property may be thought about in indefinitely many ways, in perceptual-demonstrative ways, in recognitional ways, in theoretical ways, in descriptive ways. If we use an ontology of properties, it is natural, in the spirit though certainly not in the letter of Frege, to take one-place first-level concepts as Fregean modes of presentation of properties. The objects falling under the concept are in turn those objects that possess the property.

The required uniformity of a concept as applied in first person and in third person cases seems to me best formulated at the level of properties. It is necessary, but not sufficient, for a treatment of the concept to respect the concept's uniformity in first- and third person combinations that, under the account, if a third person ascription to a person *He's in pain* is correct, then a first person ascription *I'm in pain* by the same person will also, under the account be correct. If that consequence follows only in the presence of information that need neither be known to, nor presupposed, by the users of the concept, this will not be a single, unified concept. It will be analogous to a suggested concept *R* which is applied on the basis of perception when the object in question is perceptibly red, and applied in other circumstances when the object reflects light in certain range of wavelengths in given conditions. That suggestion about *R* would not treat it as a unified concept. The required uniformity seems better formulated as the demand that it follow from the account of the concept itself that it is the same property both in the first person and the third person (or in the perceived and the non-perceived case for observational concepts). What the nature of the properties in question may be, what forms of relation and theoretical role they are capable of sustaining, will of course be part of the issue needing discussion in any account of particular concepts of those properties.

² Hilary Putnam was one of the first to be clear on the distinction and its applicability to a range of philosophical issues. See his 'On Properties', repr. in his collection *Mathematics, Matter and Method: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

2. The second attraction of identity-involving accounts is that they respect the Fregean idea that a concept (a sense, in Frege) is determined by the fundamental condition for something to fall under the concept – the condition for being the concept’s semantic value. An identity condition grasped in understanding is something that concerns objects, events, or states at the level of reference. It contributes to the determination of reference, and explains how the concept for which it is given is a way of thinking of a property. This is an advantage of a more theoretical character than the highly intuitive requirement that we explain uniformity. But this more theoretical attraction will speak to anyone for whom it is a nontrivial demand that concepts must have a certain relation to the world. Satisfaction of the demand also arguably helps to explain the epistemic dimension of specific concepts, insofar as epistemic norms can be explained by the fundamental condition for something to be the reference of a concept.

3. For a concept grasp of which is explained in terms of an identity-component, we have an explanation of how it is that a thinker can grasp certain complete contents containing that content without yet knowing what might be independently specifiable evidence for the truth of that content. ‘Independently specifiable’ here means evidence that is not specified simply by mentioning the content p in question, as in the characterization ‘evidence in favour of the content p ’. If existentialists are allowed to summarize their views in the slogan ‘Existence precedes Essence’, we could summarize this point by saying that for the contents in question, ‘Understanding precedes Evidence’. What would be evidence that some tiny array identified in nanotechnology is oval in shape? What would be evidence that some hitherto unexplored underground lake, not all visible from any one angle, is oval in shape? These are entirely empirical matters, and the answers to the questions do not have to be known to someone just because he has the observational concept *oval*. We grasp the content that the array or the lake is oval because we know that for it to be true, the array or the lake has to have the same shape as things we perceive to be oval. For any concept for which Understanding does precede Evidence, the model of tacit grasp of an identity relation offers an explanation of this feature. Grasping the content in question involves knowledge that a certain identity has to hold for the content to be true. Knowing what would be evidence for or against the holding of

this identity is a further matter, requiring empirical evidence and further thought that goes beyond this understanding.

It matters that the point is one concerning specific complete contents. The point I have just been making is, in slightly more formal terms: there exist some concepts C and some complete contents $\Sigma(C)$ containing C such that one can grasp $\Sigma(C)$ without knowing what would be independently specifiable evidence for or against it. This is entirely consistent with the view that: for every concept C (or perhaps for some favoured subclass of concepts C) there exist some complete contents $\Sigma(C)$ such that possessing C requires knowing what would be independently specifiable evidence for or against $\Sigma(C)$. Our grasp of some contents containing a concept can go beyond such independently specifiable evidence and consequences.

With these attractions of sometimes explaining understanding in terms of identity in mind, I turn to address the question of whether your understanding of, for example, what it is for someone else to be in pain consists in your tacit knowledge that another is in pain just in case: that person is in the same state you are in when you are in pain. Since this account of understanding will be the focus of so much of the subsequent discussion, I label it ‘the Target Account’.

2. Constraints on Legitimate Explanations in Terms of Identity

Suppose we are attempting to give an explanation of possession of the concept F in terms of grasp of an identity. We say that a thinker’s understanding of what it is for an arbitrary thing to be F consists in his grasp of this condition: that for it to be F is for it to be in the same state as some object b , of a certain kind, when b is F . We can call b ’s being F , when b is of the relevant kind, ‘the base case’. Then there are three requirements for this explanation of grasp of the concept F to be correct. The identity condition applied to the base case must meet the following conditions, given here in increasing order of strength:

- (a) the identity condition must be capable of determining a reference for the concept in question;
- (b) it must give the correct truth-condition for an arbitrary thing to be F; and
- (c) it must supply the truth-condition in (b) unambiguously.

There are clearly possible attempts at explanation of meaning in terms of identity that fail condition (a). Suppose someone says that the following is what it is for a number x to be $n/0$, where n is a positive number:

It is for x to stand in the same relation to n and to 0 as:
 a number m has to stand in to n and k for m to be n/k , where k is a positive number.

The displayed condition is not capable of determining any number as the reference of the concept $n/0$. For m to be identical with n/k , where k is positive, is for mk to equal n . But this is a relation in which x , n and 0 cannot stand. Because n is a positive number, there is no number x such that $x0 = n$. So the displayed condition fails to determine a reference for the term or concept ' $n/0$ ', where n is positive. The purported explanation of meaning of this term fails requirement (a) on explications in terms of identity.

There are several famous points in Wittgenstein's writings at which he objects to explications of understanding of certain specific concepts in terms of identity. Some of these objections can be regarded as based on an insistence that the wholly legitimate requirements (a) through (c) are fulfilled. The objections take the form of an argument that a particular attempted explication in terms of identity fails one or other of these three conditions.

Wittgenstein objects, for example, to what we have called the Target Account that it is no better than a corresponding identity-based attempt to explain the sense of 'It's five o'clock on the sun'. One natural reading of his point is that for it to be five o'clock at a given place on the earth at an arbitrary time t is for the sun to be at a certain angle in the

sky at that place at t . Since the sun is never in its own sky, this is a condition that cannot be met by any place ever at the sun. If the condition was meant to pick out a time at a given place on the sun, it fails to do so. The condition does not determine a reference of that sort.

Again, when Wittgenstein objects that I cannot imagine someone else's pain on the model of imagining pain in his foot, because that would still be *my* pain, now felt in someone else's foot, that can be seen as an example of appeal to failure of one or the other of requirements (b) and (c). His objection is that if a truth-condition is determined by the Target Account, it is the wrong one. It does not concern someone else being in pain, as is required. If we regard the correct truth-condition as just one correctness-condition supplied by the Target Account, the very fact that Wittgenstein's point seems to show that it is not the only one is enough to establish that the requirement of unambiguous determination, condition (c), is not met. The right truth-condition is not unambiguously determined. That, if correct, would already be enough to show that at the very least, the Target Account cannot be the full account of understanding. There must be some further component of the understanding that rules out the unwanted truth-condition.

If an attempted particular explication of concept-possession in terms of grasp of an identity fails because one of these requirements (a) - (c) is violated, it does not follow that no such explication of the concept is possible. We always have to ask: have we identified the *right* identity-condition?

I will argue that while (a) - (c) are obviously correct requirements, there are explications of concepts of conscious states in terms of grasp of identity that respect these requirements. They are different explications from those criticized by Wittgenstein. They have the three advantages over explications that do not involve identity that we noted.

3. Why is the Subjective Case Different?

Why do explanations in terms of identity apparently work smoothly and successfully in the cases we noted, yet seem to fail for ambiguity or worse in the subjective case? Why are the cases so different? Consider an observational shape concept for purposes of

comparison. In the base case for an observational concept like *oval*, the thinker has an experience of something as oval. The thinker's perceptual experience has a content that is itself given in part by reference to a spatial type itself – what I called scenario content in earlier work.³ The intentional, nonconceptual content already concerns objective, and consequently public, properties and states of affairs. The identity account specifies that for something else to be oval is for it to be of the same shape as is employed in specifying the content of the thinker's experience in the base case. This condition concerns a spatial property itself, and, modulo vagueness, there is nothing indeterminate or ambiguous about whether some object meets that spatial condition at a given time. (Any vagueness is also implicit in the content *a is oval* itself, so that is a desirable feature of the account.) There is no substantial, undesirable indeterminacy of truth-condition in this account.

It will be helpful for future purposes to divide up this account of understanding in the spatial case into three components.

(a) In the base case, the thinker can be regarded as employing a recognitional concept C_d of a spatial kind (subscripted with 'd' for the distinguished case), which concept is intuitively something like *perceived-by-me-now-to-be-oval*. The concept C_d is not really structured, of course. The hyphenation in the italics is just to indicate the fundamental condition for something to be the concept's reference. C_d is true of an object at a time just in case the object is perceived by the thinker to be oval at that time.

(b) C_d also picks out a certain shape property, the shape property P things must have when they fall under this concept C_d . This picking out is not done by some further concept employed by the thinker. The concept C_d is individuated by its connection with perception of things as oval. The shape property itself is used in the individuation of the scenario content of the perceptions that make it rational to apply the concept C_d (and of course too the observational concept we are in the course of elucidating). Correct and rational application of C_d registers the instantiation of a property itself.

(c) The thinker's identity-involving understanding of the general concept *oval* is then given by his grasp of the following condition: for something to be oval is for it to have the same shape property P as things must have if they are to fall under the local

³ See chapter 3 of my book *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

observational concept C_d in the distinguished, base case. For the avoidance of doubt, as the lawyers say, we can make explicit the logical form of this condition thus:

$\exists P$ (P is the shape property things must have to fall under the local observational concept C_d & $\forall x$ (x falls under the concept *oval* iff x has the same shape as things having property P)).

Only an identity at the level of properties will serve the purpose of this account of understanding. This is a point of some significance for the ontological commitments of identity-involving accounts of understanding. Identities at the level of concepts, on the one hand, or at the level of objects and events, on the other, will not serve the purpose.

Take the level of concepts first. At the level of concepts, consider the proposal that grasp consists in appreciation of the fact that for an unperceived object to be oval is for it to fall under the same concept *oval* that is applied by the thinker in a perceptual judgement of an object (perceptually given) that it is oval. This identity is true – but to use it, the thinker must already possess the concept *oval* whose application in the base case is mentioned in the proposed possession-condition. It fails to provide any philosophical explanation of what it is to possess the concept *oval*.

Consider on the other hand the level of individual objects and events. Can we say that unperceived instances that fall under the concept *oval* are the same objects as fall under the perceptual-recognitional concept C_d ? Evidently not: the unperceived oval things are in general distinct from the perceived oval things. Only the level of properties gives the right kind of bridge to connect the local case – the perceived case, for the concept *oval* – with the non-local case.

What happens when we try to apply this three-component account to the case of the concept *pain*? We encounter a problem. The first two components are unproblematic. In the base case, a thinker employs a recognitional concept which is intuitively something like *pain-experienced-by-me-now*, but is unstructured, exactly as in (a) above. The unstructured concept is true at any given time of events that are pains of the thinker at that time. This unstructured concept picks out a certain property P of sensations that is instantiated when this recognitional concept is correctly applied in the base case. It picks

out the property not by some further concept or description, but rather by the fact that pain is the property of the sensation to which the thinker is rationally and causally sensitive in his application of the unstructured concept. It is the property to which a thinker is rationally responding when he exercises a recognitional capacity for his own pains. So there is an analogue of (b) too.

As in the observational case, it is important that this is formulated at the level of properties. If we tried to build an elaboration of the Target Account solely at the level of concepts, we would have a dilemma structurally quite analogous to the mentioned a few paragraphs back for the case of observational concepts. An unstructured recognitional concept true at any time only of pains experienced by me at that time will, in the nature of the case, be inapplicable to the pains of others. No identity-condition using this concept will satisfactorily explain understanding of pain in others, since this concept does not apply to the pain of others. On the other hand, if we were restricted to the level of concepts in elucidating a Target Account, and tried instead to use the general concept *pain* as possessed by the subject in the base case, we would be presupposing what was to be elucidated, to wit, the subject's grasp of a concept of pain applicable to pains other than his own. The level of properties is as important in the case of concepts of conscious states as it is in the case of observational concepts.

It is, however, the third component that is problematic if we try to apply this three-component account naively. Can we say that the thinker's identity-involving understanding of the general concept *pain* is that for something to fall under it is for some event involving an arbitrary body, and bodily location, at some arbitrary time, to have the same property as is picked out by the unstructured local concept that corresponds in the way indicated to *pain-experienced-by-me-now*? The problem is that this proposal does not distinguish between two radically different cases.

The first is the case in which you have pain in another body, at that bodily location, at another time. This first case subdivides into that in which that body is your only body; and into that subcase in which, if it is possible, you have your actual body, but are also capable, by some setup, of feeling pain in another body too. In either of these subcases, the pain is yours.

The second case is that in which someone else has pain in that body, at that bodily location, at the time in question.

The three-component exposition of identity-involving understanding has failed to distinguish these two cases. Because that exposition is consistent with only the former case being the proposed condition for an arbitrary event to be a pain-event, a case in which the pain is still yours, the account is wrong.

This point applies quite generally, whether we conceive of pain as a partially or fully intentional state, conceptualized or not conceptualized, or conceive of it as merely a sensational property of individual events. Whether it is a simple sensational property that is in question, or a more or less complex intentional property, to say that that property is instantiated at a given time, by someone with a given body, with the pain apparently or really located at a particular place in that body, still leaves open whether the subject of the pain is you or is someone else. That is why there is ambiguity in the subjective case even though there is determinacy in the observational case.

In short, imagining the same state in someone else's body - a pain in someone else's foot - is the wrong identity to which to appeal in an account of understanding of attributions of conscious states to others, as Wittgenstein himself rightly said or implied (*Philosophical Investigations* §302).

The present point about ambiguity can also be used in support of the idea that the faculty of imagination cannot itself be used to explain our understanding of what it is for something to be a pain, when pain is something that many different subjects may have. Discussions of imagination have emphasized the distinction between what is in the content of the image when one imagines, and what is merely suppositionally imagined to be the case, and is not part of the image itself.⁴ When I imagine Philosophy Hall from the outside, some of its perceptible features are represented in my mental image. I also imagine that the building has rooms and walls inside it, and is not an empty shell. But these imaginings about the inside of the building are merely suppositional imaginings, and are not in the content of the mental image itself. (The same mental image could be present when I am just imaging the façade of the building.) When I imagine from the

⁴ See my paper 'Imagination, Possibility and Experience', in J. Foster and H. Robinson, *Essays on Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

inside pain in a different body from my own, what is given in the mental image of the pain from the inside is still a first person content such as ‘this elbow is hurting me’. It may be that what I suppositionally imagine is that I am someone else, not CP. Since what is distinctive of imagination is the image, and its content is first personal, its content is giving me no leverage at all on the possibility that a third person pain-ascription may be true. The suppositional content of an imagining, on the other hand, we know is something that may not even be possibly true. It follows that imagination is not a resource that can be used in the explanation of grasp of concepts of others’ conscious states.⁵

If we think that the Target Account still has something to be said for it, it follows that we must develop an identity-involving model for the case of conscious states that takes account of this difference from the observational and other cases. We need to step back and consider what makes identity-explanations of concepts work in the cases in which they do work.

It is a single, unified space which makes intelligible the idea of something elsewhere being same shape as something you currently perceive. We have taken that conception for granted in expounding the identity-involving account of understanding in the observational and other cases in which it works relatively straightforwardly. It is a single, unified space that prevents there being any ambiguity or indeterminacy of a fatal sort in the identity-account of concepts like *oval*. There is no such thing as a thinker perceiving something to be in an oval-shaped region of space independently of that region’s being part of a single, unified larger space. What makes the content of the thinker’s experiences spatial is that their content can contribute to his conception of the layout of things and events in the larger space of which the region he perceives is part. Experiences are intelligible as having representational content concerning space only if they are capable of playing that role in the thinker’s psychology. Correspondingly, there is no such thing as a concept *oval in my perceived space* that picks out a different shape

⁵ For remarks on the application of the distinction between what is in the image and what is S-imagined to our understanding of other minds, see again ‘Imagination, Possibility and Experience’. The points of this paragraph may involve a minor difference from Thomas Nagel, who in *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), at p. 21, appears to give a central role to imagination in understanding the attribution of conscious states to others like us.

from *oval (and of the right size)* period. This is why there is no analogue in the spatial case of the ambiguity that we have been identifying in the naïve development of the identity-involving model for thought about conscious states. The point is not merely that the spatial property that is perceived to be instantiated is already mind-independent and subject-independent (though that is true). The point is rather that this independence is already involved in various ways in the content of experience itself: scenario content itself involves it. But there is, apparently, nothing in a subject's own pains, or what is involved in having such experiences, that involves or grounds the possibility or even the conception of other subjects having such experiences. We need then to look more closely at the analogue of space in the problematic case of conscious states.

It is the conception of multiple subjects of experience that makes intelligible the idea of there existing conscious states and events other than your own.⁶

There is a metaphysical interdependence between conscious states and their subjects. This metaphysical interdependence is captured in two principles that aim to state what makes something conscious, and aim to state what makes something a subject:

(E) Conscious states are states such that there is something it is like to be in that state, more specifically something it is like for the subject of that state.

(S) Subjects are things capable of being in conscious states.

The latter dependence of mental states and events on subjects was famously and sharply formulated by Frege: “Secondly: ideas are something we have. [...] Thirdly: ideas need an owner. Things of the outer world are on the contrary independent”.⁷

⁶ Compare the discussion in Nagel's *The View from Nowhere*: “The first stage of objectification of the mental is for each of us to be able to grasp the idea of all human perspectives, including his own, without depriving them of their character as perspectives. It is the analogue for minds of a centerless conception of space for physical objects, in which no point has a privileged position” (p. 20). Modulo the apparent divergence over the role of imagination recorded in the preceding footnote, the position I develop in this chapter can be regarded as a detailed elaboration of a realism about the mental, and of the corresponding nature of thought about it, which, if correct, substantiates the general character Nagel attributes to them.

Precisely because of this metaphysical duality, this interdependence, of experience and subjects, we have to treat two identities simultaneously in explaining the role of identity in a thinker's understanding of conscious states and of multiple conscious subjects. We have to treat grasp of conscious states and grasp of a potential multiplicity of subjects in a single principle, a principle that treats them as interlocking notions. We can say:

For x , distinct from me, to be in pain, is both:
for x to be something of the same kind as me (a subject); and is also
for x to be in the same state I'm in when I'm in pain.

We can call this 'the Interlocking Account'. Under the Interlocking Account, subjects are conceived of as things of the same kind as me. This is why "I'm a subject" is not informative. Under this account, there is a first person element in the notion of being a subject, as well as in canonical concepts of conscious states.

A way to avoid the problematic ambiguity that bedevilled the naïve application of the identity model to the case of thought about conscious states is for the understanding-condition to mention difference of subject also. It does not suffice for the understanding-condition to deal only with subjective kind of experience, body, and bodily location. Under the Interlocking Account, we specify other-attribution as the case in which we have: same state, another subject, where the subject is thought of as a thing of the same kind as oneself.

Those who accept the Interlocking Account will say that there is a nonsequitur to be avoided here, that of moving from the correct point

(i) that conceiving of pain in another's leg is not the same as conceiving of another person's being in pain

⁷ Frege, 'Thoughts', in *Logical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), p. 14. See also Galen Strawson's discussion in his *Mental Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 129-34.

to the conclusion that

(ii) identity is not involved in the understanding of another's being in pain.

On the Interlocking View, conceiving of another person's being in pain is conceiving of the case: same state as one experiences when one experiences pain in a leg, but with instantiation of this state in a subject distinct from oneself. By contrast, simply conceiving of pain in another's leg at best leaves open whether the subject of the pain is oneself or someone else. So (i) is true on the Interlocking View. But identity evidently still plays a central and ineliminable role in this account of understanding, so (ii) is false on the Interlocking View. Those who do make the fallacious transition from (i) to (ii) may go on to conclude that some kind of criterial or other model of understanding is required.

One wonders whether Wittgenstein, even if he did not actually make the transition from (i) to (ii), nevertheless intended (i) to be evidence for his view. In any case, the genuine insight that (i) is true should not be used as support for the view that identity is not involved in understanding what it is for another person to be in pain.

4. Attractions of the Interlocking Account

In its use of an identity relation, the Interlocking Account inherits the attractions of any identity-involving account. An explanation of the uniformity of sense in the predicates of first- and third person predications, and the required connection with the level of reference, were the first two of these attractions. The third, 'Understanding precedes Evidence', also seems to apply to conscious states. Simply from grasping what it is for another to be in pain, one does not thereby know what would be evidence that someone else is in pain. It is this that makes intelligible the Plantinga/Albritton question: 'I wonder

what people do these days when they're in pain?'⁸ The proponent of this Interlocking Account will, then, be in disagreement with Dummett when he writes that understanding 'John is in pain' involves

knowing that pain-behaviour, or the presence of an ordinarily painful stimulus, is normally a sufficient ground for an ascription of pain, but one that can be rebutted, in the former case by the clues that betray the shammer or by subsequent disclaimer; learning the symptoms of inhibiting the natural manifestation of pain, and the limits beyond which this is impossible; knowing the usual connection between pain and bodily conditions, and the sort of cases in which the connection may be broken; and so on.⁹

You can understand 'John is in pain' without knowing any of these things, provided that 'pain-behaviour' is characterized independently of the notion of pain (and if it is not, there is no full account of understanding here). The conditions Dummett cites here are all empirical information about the conditions under which third person ascriptions are true, but they are not constitutive of, nor required for, understanding of 'pain'. In short, the principle 'Understanding Precedes Evidence' applies here too under the Interlocking Account.

It is also, incidentally, not plausible that the conditions Dummett cites are sufficient for grasping third person predications of the concept *pain*. Consider a subject who suffers from CIPA, which involves a congenital insensitivity to conditions that in normal subject cause pain. This subject never feels pain, and does not know what it would be like to experience pain. He could nevertheless know the empirical facts listed by Dummett. He would not have a full grasp of what it is for someone else to be in pain, any more than the colour-blind subject fully understands colour vocabulary.

To say that your understanding of another's being in pain is that he is in the same state you are in when you are in pain is not to imply that he could be in pain only if you

⁸ See R. Albritton, 'On Wittgenstein's Use of the Term "Criterion": Postscript (1966)' in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations* ed. G. Pitcher (London: Macmillan, 1968).

⁹ M. Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London: Duckworth, 1978), p. xxxv.

exist. The Interlocking Account gives a way of latching onto a property, the property of being in pain. In evaluating a content containing the concept *pain* with respect to some non-actual state of affairs w , we consider which things in w have the property of being in pain, rather than which things in w stand in the relation to you that make available a distinctive way of thinking of the property. As David Kaplan would say, in evaluating a sentence ‘a is in pain’ with respect to another possible world, we carry with us the property P of being in pain, and evaluate the sentence as true with respect to that other world according as the referent of ‘a’ with respect to that other world has the property P in that world. We do not have to consider what in that other world falls under a particular mode of presentation of P; we have only to consider what has, in that world, the property P itself of being in pain. The challenges posed by the Interlocking Account have to do with understanding, rather than the modal.

Someone may object to the Interlocking Account that it can work only if identity of state between different subjects is given some further elaboration, in terms of functional role, or at least something else. I disagree. There cannot be any such abstract general requirement that identity should be reduced to something else. The example of the treatment of the spatial observational concept *oval* suggests that tacit knowledge of identity of shape is a component of our grasp of such concepts. Attempts to elucidate the holding of identity of shape between observed and unobserved objects in terms of evidential or consequence relations are not correct. What is evidence for sameness of shape between an observed and an unobserved object is an empirical matter. The same applies to the consequences of identity of shape.¹⁰ No such analysis in terms of evidence or consequences, or in any other terms, is required. Identity of shape is a notion in good standing, and graspable as such by a thinker capable of spatial perception and with a conception of the space in which he is located, without any need for a reduction to something else. I say the same about identity of conscious states between different subjects. Identity of state is a notion in good standing, and as such is graspable by a thinker capable of being in conscious states and with a conception of multiple subjects of experience, without any need for a reduction to something else.

¹⁰ There is further discussion of this point in Chapter 1 of *Truly Understood*.

The component of the Interlocking Account that speaks of identity of state is essential to determining the property of pain as the property picked out by the concept *pain*, and correspondingly as the property picked out by the word “pain” in the linguistic case. If a thinker sincerely utters “I’m W” in rational response to his own pain, that is consistent with three quite different hypotheses about the meaning of the predicate W:

(a) it may mean something that is true of himself when he is in pain, and is false of anyone else (the self-restriction case);

(b) it may mean something that is true of the thinker himself when he is in pain, and it is left completely unsettled whether it can be true of anyone else (the case of indeterminacy);

(c) it may mean the same as our predicate “is in pain”, and so can be true of others (the case of genuine other-ascription).

Each of (a) - (c) is consistent with the thinker’s self-ascription “I’m W” being causally and rationally explained by one of his sensations having the property of being a pain. The generality of the property of being a pain does not by itself resolve the matter at the level of concepts and meaning of which of (a) through (c) is correct. That issue is resolved only by the content of the tacit knowledge involved in understanding the predicate W. In the self-restriction case, (a), understanding involves tacit knowledge that W, as uttered by oneself, is true only of oneself and not of anyone else. In the case of indeterminacy, case (b), there is no knowledge of conditions under which W is true of anyone distinct from oneself. In the case of genuine other-ascription, understanding W involves tacit knowledge that W is true of a subject *x* distinct from oneself just in case *x* is in the same subjective state one is in oneself that makes it rational to accept “I’m W”.

This point that an identity component in understanding is needed to fix the correct property as reference of a predicate is not at all restricted to concepts of conscious psychological states. It applies equally to the observational concepts we considered earlier. A word U that is rationally applied in response to perceptions of things as oval might apply only to things that are perceived as oval; or it might be indeterminate whether U applies to things that are too small, too large, or made of the wrong kind of stuff (e.g. dark matter) to be perceived as oval; or U might mean the same as our ‘oval’.

Again, the issue is resolved only by the nature of the identity component, if any, involved in understanding U.

There is a background presupposition in these remarks of a certain irreducible realism about the spatial and material properties picked out in the observational case, and a corresponding realism about the mental properties picked out in the psychological case. If there really are spatial and material properties in their own right, and there exists a space in which objects possessing them are located, and if a thinker is related to a spatial or material property in the distinctive way he is when he perceives it to be instantiated, then thoughts about whether that same property is instantiated in objects in other places must make sense. The same applies, *pari passu*, in the mental case. If the states of either domain had to be reduced to something else, then grasp of identity would involve grasp of the reducing condition in question. Correspondingly more would be required for mastery of the conception of an objective world, and a world of many mental subjects. But I doubt that any such reduction is required or possible, in either the objective case or the case of the mental.

What is true is that when the Interlocking Account speaks of “same state I’m in when I’m in pain”, sameness of state here must mean: same conscious state. There are physiological states I am in when I am in pain, but sameness of those physiological states is not what I mean when I think someone else is in pain. This is one of many points in this paper, and in much other contemporary work in the philosophy of mind and thought, at which we simply use the notion of consciousness, and some representation of it, without at all having a full understanding of what it involves.

More generally, when an account of understanding involves tacit knowledge of an identity, the property or state whose identity is mentioned will be a property or state of a certain kind. In the case we have just been discussing, it is identity of conscious state; in the case of observational shape concepts, it is identity of shape property; and so forth. This should not be at all surprising if we accept a natural generalization of principle concerning identity that David Wiggins identified and labels ‘**D**’: that x is identical with y iff there is some sortal F such that x is the same F as y .¹¹ The generalization of this

¹¹ D. Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance Renewed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.56 ff.

principle to all categories, including properties, seems to me equally plausible. P is the same property as Q iff there is some substantive kind K such that P is the same property of kind K as Q . Grasp of identity of objects of a given sort involves either some tacit appreciation that they have a sortal kind. Similarly grasp of identity of properties of a given sort involves some tacit appreciation of their possession of a substantive kind. This is yet another point at which a theory of understanding and a metaphysics of the objects and entities thought about intersect.

The first person plays a double role in the Interlocking Account, a role not played by any other way of thinking of a person or a subject. It enters the base case both for the concept of a subject and for the concept of a given conscious state. The Interlocking Account gives a legitimate undergirding to the intuitive claim that one knows from one's own case what it is for someone else to be in pain, or in some other given conscious state. It gives a corresponding undergirding for the intuitive claim that one knows from one's own case what it is to be a subject. In abstract structure and in their source, these claims should be thought of as no more problematic in principle than the idea that one knows from perceptual experience what it is for something to fall under an observational concept; or knows what it is for it to be raining from the case in which it is raining at one's own location.

Knowing what it is from one's own case has a special place in the account of concepts of subjects and conscious states just because the first person features in the base case in concepts of conscious states. The distinctive characteristics of the base case always have consequences for the nature of any concept which is individuated by tacit knowledge of an identity-condition applied to a base case. This is not to deny that the phenomenon of knowing from one's own case raises special epistemological issues (to which we will turn in section 5 of this paper). It is only to emphasize that the source of the phenomenon, if it exists, is not something without precedent and without a more general explanation.

There may well remain a residual worry about this account, to the effect that there is something impossible in the attempt to extract a general understanding of the concept of pain from one's own case. "How could *this* property be experienced by anyone else?" the doubter may think. This need not be a confused thought about mental particulars,

which are indeed individuated by the subject who is enjoying (or suffering) them. It may rather be a thought referring to the conscious property of pain he is experiencing, a type of event. Is there anything right in this thought, and if so, what is it, and what does it show?

What is right in the thought - or at least in a nearby thought - is this. The state of affairs that obtains when the subject is in pain is a state of affairs that is experienced by him in a way that no one else can experience it. This truth does not imply that the property he has, when such states of affairs obtain, cannot be experienced in exactly the same way by others when they have that property. It can be and is so experienced. It is fallacious to move from a truth about how a state of affairs involving oneself could be presented to others to a conclusion about the impossibility of the property involved in that state of affairs being instantiated by others. Precisely what one has, once one possesses the conception of oneself as one subject amongst others, is a conception of oneself as having conscious properties that other subjects may also have.

It may be of interest to compare this reaction to the person who says “How could *this* property be experienced by anyone else?” with Wittgenstein’s reaction to the person he envisages who says the almost synonymous “But surely another person can’t have THIS pain!” (*Philosophical Investigations* §253). Wittgenstein’s reaction is: “The answer to this is that one does not define a criterion of identity by emphatic stressing of the word “this”. Rather, what the emphasis does is to suggest the case in which we are conversant with such a criterion of identity, but have to be reminded of it” (§253). The reply I offered differs from Wittgenstein’s in two respects: it found something true (though by no means a full justification) underlying the remark; and the positive response does not invoke the notion of a criterion of identity. Theories that invoke grasp of identity itself, of the sort I have been advocating in this chapter, and earlier for the observational case, are distinct from theories that rely on some ‘criterion of identity’. Here I just note this as a marker. Later, in section 5 of this paper, I will be arguing that properties, and identity of properties, themselves can play part of the controlling and constitutive role played by the notion of a criterion of identity in Wittgenstein’s position, insofar as we really have an understanding of his position.

There are at this point two fundamental tasks for the Interlocking Account. We have so far taken for granted several notions that need some philosophical elaboration. If the Interlocking Account is to be acceptable, we ought

(A) to explain what it is to think of oneself as a subject; and

(B) to explain what it is to have the conception of a possible range of subjects, one of which is oneself.

I attempt some preliminary elucidation of each of these in turn.

(A) Subject-Involving Thought

There is a form of thinking of oneself as a subject which does not involve already having the general concept of a subject of conscious states - the concept whose possession we aim to elucidate – nor even some restriction of the general concept of a subject, such as *person* or *friend*. This form of thinking can be described as subject-involving thought. Intuitively, it is thought about oneself that, in its nature, is thought about a subject of conscious states. We have something here which is intermediate between merely referring to something which is in fact a subject - as in ‘the thing mentioned on page 17 of such-and-such book’ – and possession of the general concept of a subject.

It is a substantive, non-definitional, but highly plausible thesis that subject-involving thought about oneself is thought that essentially employs the first person concept. Why should this be so? Any answer to this question is committed to taking a stand on which theory, or at least which class of theories, of the first person concept is correct. I will just state a view without here giving arguments against rival theories. In my view, the first person concept is, like any other, individuated by the fundamental rule that determines its reference on a given occasion of use. For the first person, the rule is that any particular use of the first person concept in a thought refers to the thinker of the

thought.¹² Since the thinker of a thought is certainly a subject, this explains why any use of the first person in thought refers, by the nature of the concept, to a subject.

This fundamental reference-rule also explains why the Thought ‘I am F’ differs from the Thought ‘This body is F’. The reference of ‘this body’ is not required by its sense to be a subject. Even if a case can be made that in certain special circumstances it is a subject, it is not guaranteed in all circumstances to be the same subject as actually thinks the thought ‘I am F’.

To say that the fundamental rule for the reference of *I* in a thought is that it refers to the thinker of the thought is not at all to imply that ‘I’ is equivalent to something like the complex descriptive-cum-demonstrative ‘the thinker of this thought’. The fundamental rule for a use of the perceptual-demonstrative ‘that F’ tied to a certain perception is that it refers to the F given in that perception. It by no means follows that the perceptual demonstrative ‘that F’ is equivalent to ‘the F perceived in this perception’. It is definitely not so equivalent. Both the reference rule for the first person concept, and the reference rule for perceptual demonstratives, should rather be considered as specifying what relation an object has to bear to the use of the relevant concept in order to be its reference.¹³

The two points we need to carry forward from this discussion are that subject-involving thought - thought that by its nature involves a subject as its reference - is possible without yet involving the general concept of a subject (or restrictions thereof); and that it is plausible that such thought is first person thought.

(B) Having a Conception of a Range of Subjects

Here is what I call the ‘thin’ account of what it is to have the conception of a range of subjects that includes oneself:

¹² This general view of concepts, and the particular treatment of the first person concept, are defended in chapters 2 and 3 of *Truly Understood*.

¹³ See again chapter 2 of *Truly Understood*.

A range of subjects is conceived of as a range of things of the same kind as me, standing in the same kinds of relations to the world, events, objects and actions as are required for me to exist.

The first person as it occurs in this specification of the content of the conception can be construed as minimal subject-involving thought of the sort we have just been discussing. If minimal subject-involving thought does exist, then the use of the first person in this thin account need not already presuppose that the thinker has a conception of many subjects. It requires only subject-involving thought.

If, for one reason or another, you are sceptical of the existence of an intermediate level of minimal subject-involving thought, you could still consistently accept this thin account. You would just be committed to a more holistic understanding of the specification of the content of the thin account, an understanding according to which the first person and the conception of a range of subjects are explained simultaneously.

The thin account has these consequences.

(a) This thin account explains why the Thought ‘I am a subject’ is uninformative. Subjects in general are thought of as things of the same kind as me. What that kind is may need further investigation by the thinker. Its nature need not be immediately obvious simply from the general concept of a subject, or the ability to have subject-involving thoughts about oneself.

(b) The thin account permits other subjects to look unlike and to be very unlike me. It suffices, under the thin account, that they stand to the world in the same kinds of relations that make me a subject. That an octopus or a sting ray should potentially be a subject is straightforward on this view. Organisms that are very different from humans are not, under this account, required to be subjects in some merely derivative or courtesy sense.

(c) Similarly, under the thin account, another subject’s actions may look and be quite different from one’s own. Another subject may perceive quite different events, properties, relations and magnitudes in the environment than are perceived by me. I may not even

know about the events, properties and the rest that it perceives. This and the preceding consequence are respects in which this account of the conception of many subjects can be described as thin.

It is, arguably, a general thesis in metaphysics that any real event in time, and any spatio-temporal object's having a property or standing in a relation, will in some circumstances have causal effects. This principle applies as much to mental events and mental properties and relations as it does to the non-mental realm. If the principle is correct, then the mental events and states of other subjects will in some circumstances have effects. It follows that they can then potentially be thought about in a third person way. What these third person ways are may need to be worked out. A further respect in which the present account is thin is, then, that it does not require, for a conception of a range of subjects, that one know what these third person ways of thinking of others' mental states are simply in order to have the conception.

Mature, normal humans in fact have an extensive range of third personal ways in which they can think of others' mental states, ways of thinking made available by their ability to perceive another as sad, to see a facial expression as one of anger, to perceive a wince as an expression of pain, to see someone as looking at an object in the common environment. Such perceptual abilities are enormously important in our lives. They facilitate our ability to know about others' mental states. They make possible all sorts of close interpersonal relations. They provide a special way into possession of the conception of many subjects. ("*He's* a subject", "*You* are a subject" may play a special role in way we reach and master the conception). These perceptual abilities, their nature and ramifications, deserve much more attention than they have received hitherto from the philosophical community. But the ability to be in such states involving perception of expressions of others' mental states is not, according to the thin account, actually required for possession of the conception of a range of subjects, however poorer we would be without the ability to enjoy such states.

There is yet a further respect in which this account is thin. *Prima facie*, the earlier account of thinking of oneself as a subject is one a thinker can satisfy without yet meeting these conditions for having the general conception of a range of subjects. If this is correct,

it further highlights the importance of not identifying the property of thinking of oneself as a subject with the property of employing the general concept *subject* and applying it to oneself. Judging contents about oneself that, of their very nature as contents, require one to be a subject is not yet to have the general concept *subject*.

5. *Tacit Knowledge, and Externalism about the Internal*

Tacit knowledge of the identity in the Target Account is, like any other case of tacit knowledge, essentially an explanatory state. This tacit knowledge explains properties and relations of events and states involving the thinker which would not otherwise be explained. Attribution of tacit knowledge is justified if there is reason to think that there are such properties and relations that would not otherwise be explained. Tacit knowledge of a definition of a concept can explain a thinker's application of the concept in actual and counterfactual circumstances, applications that could not be equally well explained without it. Tacit knowledge of a grammatical rule can explain why all the sentences a subject finds to be grammatical have a certain common property; and so forth.¹⁴

This account applies straightforwardly to tacit knowledge of the identities involved in understanding, including the identity in the Target Account. Tacit knowledge of an identity, in the case in which it really is involved in the grasp of a concept, can, when combined with the thinker's other beliefs and hypotheses, explain why the thinker applies that concept, or rejects its application, in various actual and counterfactual circumstances. The thinker's application of the concept, outright or in the course of one or another kind of inference, involves his tacitly drawing on the information that constitutes the content of the tacit knowledge.

¹⁴ For further discussion of tacit knowledge, see N. Chomsky, *Rules and Representations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), and his *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin and Use* (New York: Praeger, 1986); M. Davies *Meaning, Quantification, Necessity: Themes in Philosophical Logic* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), chs III and IV; and his 'Tacit Knowledge and Semantic Theory: Can a Five Per Cent Difference Matter?', *Mind* 96 (1987) 441-62.

Precisely because it is an empirical matter what would be evidence that another place, or another time, or another person, has certain kinds of property, there is correspondingly no specific, independently characterized kind of evidence about other places, times and persons that a thinker must be sensitive to in grasping such contents about other places, times and persons. The only characterization of the evidence to which a thinker must be sensitive is given parasitically on the identities themselves. It is evidence that the other place, time or person has the same property as here, or as now, or as the subject himself possesses, when these respective objects have the property in question.

The presence of tacit knowledge of an identity in understanding contributes to the explanation of a thinker's judgements, or pattern of judgements, only in the presence of various other states. In this, tacit knowledge of identities in understanding resembles virtually every other interesting case of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge of a particular syntactic or semantic rule explains facts about the thinker's appreciation of language only in the presence of his tacit knowledge of other syntactic or semantic facts. This is not intrinsically more problematic than any other case of explanation by theoretical truths in an empirical science. It means that the evidence for the attribution of any specific piece of tacit knowledge is, in the nature of the case and not merely contingently, holistic. Two states of tacit knowledge that differ in their content – for instance, in respect of the property in the base case to which identity is applied, or in the relation applied to the base case – will in some circumstances or other have different explanatory consequences. The different states will have those different consequences only in the presence of additional conditions.

These points apply to all cases of identities that are involved in understanding. But the identity involved in the target case of subjective states is also of special significance for positions that have been held in the philosophy of mind. The identity condition involved in understanding that another person is in pain implies that the state the other has to be in for that content to be true is identical with the state one is in oneself when one is in pain. I have emphasized that on the account I am defending, this identity is not a mere *façon de parler* for some other condition that does not involve identity. Since a thinker refers to a certain kind of mental state in attributing pain to another, it follows that

if the Target Account is correct, when a thinker judges “I’m in pain” he must also be referring to the same mental state. A non-referential view of thought and language about one’s own pain and other conscious states and events is not an option under the Target Account.

The question then arises: how are we to conceive of thought about pain and other subjective states in the first person case if we are committed to a referential account of such thought?

What makes a thinker’s thought involve the concept *pain* is in part that his application of the concept is causally and rationally sensitive to the occurrence of pain itself in him. That is the very close connection between the concept *pain* and the property of being a pain that exists on the present account. We have here what we can call, without genuine paradox, “Externalism about the Internal”. There is no paradox, because the point of the doctrine can be formulated thus. In the case of thought about the external world, if we draw a boundary around the body, it has become clear both from multiple examples, and from theoretical considerations about explanation and rationality, that mental states with content do not supervene only on what is going on inside that boundary. A precisely corresponding point applies even to mental states like pain. A thinker’s judgements involving the concept *pain* possess that conceptual content only because they stand in certain relations to pains themselves (or to recognitional capacities whose nature is to be explained in relation to pains themselves). Though the concept *pain* is not an observational concept, and a perceptual model should not be applied to it, nonetheless *pain* is a concept individuated in part by the relations of certain judgements involving it to instances of that very concept.

The concept is analogous in this respect to experiences that are instance-individuated, in the sense of *The Realm of Reason*.¹⁵ If we draw an imaginary boundary around those of the subject’s brain states that involve his exercise of concepts, but leave outside the boundary which of his subjective mental states rationally cause these exercises, the intentional content of his mental states will not supervene on what is inside

¹⁵ C. Peacocke *The Realm of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). For an independent statement of similar views, see T. Burge, ‘Perceptual Entitlement’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67 (2003), 503-48.

this imaginary boundary. In this sense, to mimic Evans on a different point, idealism is false even as a theory of thought about the mind itself, and even in its most subjective aspects.¹⁶ Even for the thoroughly subjective, how something is thought about is not independent of what it really is that is thought about.

It is not only a fact about the concept *pain*, but a fact about the nature of the state of being in pain itself, that gives the first person a special status in grasp of the concept *pain*. Because there is something it is like to be in pain, and because conscious states can give reasons for making judgements, there is a distinctive way of thinking about the state of being in pain available to those who know what it is like to be in pain. This is an instance of a more general phenomenon familiar from many other cases. Quite generally, a subject can think of an object, event or state in a distinctive way because he stands in a certain corresponding conscious relation to that object, event or state. Each subject stands in a certain conscious relation to this own pains, a relation in which he does not stand to anyone else's pains. It is this relation that makes it possible for a thinker to think of his own pains as pains.

Under this treatment, an event's having the property of being a pain contributes to the causal and rational explanation of a thinker's self-application of the concept *pain*. The objectivity and constancy of the thinker's use of the concept *pain* does not, on this view, come merely from the subject's thinking that he is applying it correctly. The objectivity comes from his first person present tense use being keyed to whether an event really is a pain or not.

Suppose, in the spirit of a famous paragraph of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (§258) that the thinker's concept *pain* is expressed in a symbol "S" and suppose too that the question arises of whether our thinker has, unbeknownst to himself, misremembered what this symbol means. On the present view, the distinction between the case in which there is undetected misremembering and the case in which there is correct remembering is simply that between the case in which his use of the symbol "S" was not in the past explained by an event's being a pain, and that in which it is still so explained.

¹⁶ G. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 256: "Therefore we are not Idealists about ourselves".

The distinction between correct use and merely apparently correct use is here elucidated consistently with others being able to know, on occasion, that our subject is in pain. There is no commitment to privacy in this view. Nor is there any implied need for the thinker to have a further ‘criterion’ for whether he is in pain.

I do not at all mean to imply that the model of judgements made rationally in response to the instantiation of a property, and caused by that property, provides a full answer to the rule-following considerations. A full answer to the rule-following considerations must explicate the notion of a thinker’s making a judgement rationally in the light of his understanding of the concepts involved. Such an explication must use resources beyond those outlined here. My point at present is only that, even if it is far from the whole story, the notion of a judgement being causally explained by one property rather than another is an essential component of an answer to the rule-following considerations.

This form of Externalism about the Internal does not, or does not obviously, tie first person present tense ascriptions of pain to any particular bodily expression of the sensation by the thinker. Bodily expression may change, or even become nonexistent, consistently with the thinker’s first person present tense applications being explained by an event’s being a pain event. When a person suffering intense pain takes morphine, the initial effect of the drug is not that the pain disappears. The pain can continue to exist, but the patient no longer minds it. In these circumstances, the patient is not disposed to any particular bodily expression of his pain. His bodily expressions will certainly be quite different from those to which he was disposed prior to taking the morphine. But his use of the concept *pain* is still keyed to instances in him of the property of being a pain.¹⁷

Wittgenstein wrote “if I assume the abrogation of the normal language-game with the expression of a sensation, I need a criterion of identity for the sensation; and then the possibility of error also exists” (end of §288 in the *Investigations*). I would dispute both of these claims. No criterion of identity, beyond sensitivity to instances of the property of pain, is required in the morphine cases. Yet there is still an explanation under the present approach of the impossibility of error of the sort Wittgenstein has in mind. If having the

¹⁷ The significance of these cases was emphasized by D. Dennett, *Brainstorms* (Montgomery, Vt.: Bradford Books, 1978), pp. 208-11.

concept *pain* requires one to judge that one is in pain in the presence of one of one's own pain-events, then in central cases it will indeed not be possible for a subject with the concept *pain* coherently to think, in Wittgenstein's words, "Oh, I know what 'pain' means; what I don't know is whether *this*, that I have now, is pain" (also §288).

How then might a neo-Wittgensteinian respond to the account I have offered? Crispin Wright suggested to me that the response would be that there simply is no property of being in pain that has all the characteristics needed by the Interlocking Account.¹⁸ Under this response, it is legitimate to speak of the property of being a pain, but this property of a mental event must be regarded as a construct out of human conceptual reactions and expressive capacities, in a way that is incompatible with its being causally and rationally explanatory of thinkers' first person judgements that they are in pain.

Pain is a property that can be instantiated by events in the life of an octopus, a dolphin or a whale. The neo-Wittgensteinian account of the property of being a pain needs to accommodate this fact. How can it capture the application of the property in non-human cases? No doubt it is in fact sufficient for a creature of another species to be in pain if its brain is in the same relevant neurophysiological state of that of a human who is in pain. But what entitles the neo-Wittgensteinian to accept that principle about neurophysiological states? What captures the cases in which the underlying physiological states are realizations of pain? The neo-Wittgensteinian is regarding the property of being in pain as a construct out of human conceptual reactions and expressive dispositions. But the dolphin and the octopus have no such distinctively human reactions and expressive dispositions. No neurophysiological state of a dolphin is the realizing state for a role that involves what is distinctively human.

Could our neo-Wittgensteinian say that a role in human conceptual and expressive life allows us to fix on the conscious mental property of being in pain, but add that what is involved here is just a kind of reference-fixing, so that the very same conscious property could be instantiated by creatures for which it does not have that role? That seems like an unstable middle position. If there is such a real conscious property that has a nature independently of human conceptual reactions and expressions, then that property

¹⁸ Personal conversation.

can play a causal role in making first person judgements rational. It could then after all have the role it is assigned in the Interlocking Account.

There are many variant epicycles on a neo-Wittgensteinian position that could be formulated at this point. The variants known to me seem to be vulnerable to problems of the kind already discussed. I myself doubt that there is a neo-Wittgensteinian treatment of the property of being in pain that both classifies all the cases correctly, and which is also a genuine alternative to the Interlocking Account.

6. Is This the Myth of the Given?

Is the treatment I have offered of first person attributions of conscious states open to the objection that it is an instance of the objectionable and refuted Myth of the Given? The Myth has received various formulations in the literature, and these formulations are sometimes dependent upon acceptance of ancillary controversial theses. The central idea of attacks on the Myth is that there cannot be a state that both justifies you in making a judgement with a certain content, and yet is also a state that lacks representational content.

It is an additional thesis, incorporated into the formulation of the Myth of the Given in Sellars, McDowell and Brandom, that all representational content is conceptual content.¹⁹ If that additional thesis is accepted, then the Myth can be formulated as the idea that there can exist states that justify making a judgement with a certain content, where the justifying states lack conceptual content. But even without acceptance of that additional thesis, the Myth can still be formulated. There are still good reasons for thinking that the Myth is indeed a myth, and that the errors highlighted by identifying it as such have been committed in some parts of twentieth-century epistemology.

Part of the core idea behind the identification of the Myth, an idea one can accept even if one believes in non-conceptual representational content, is that a state cannot give

¹⁹ See W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Brandom's 'Study Guide' in that 1997 edition; and J. McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

reasons for making a judgement about the world beyond that state unless the state has representational content. To make such a judgement on the basis of such an alleged state would not be an exercise of rationality. Such states, as McDowell puts it, would give us “exculpations where we wanted justifications”.²⁰ To move to a judgement about the world because one is in a state that does not represent anything about the world beyond that state as being the case is simply to make an irrational leap into the dark. I accept this point, in the qualified formulation given here. I also accept its importance.

So does the treatment of first person ascription of conscious states given here conflict even with this qualified formulation? To assess this, we first have to consider whether the conscious states in question do have representational content with a pertinent correctness condition. Some obviously do, and I will return to them: but let us take first a case where it is less plausible that they do (though there are certainly some who hold that they do²¹). I myself hold that when a subject *s* is in pain apparently in a part of his body, a perspicuous representation of this fact is given simply by the condition

$$\text{Pain}(e, s, t, \beta).$$

This says that token event *e* is a pain of subject *s* at occurring at time *t* in apparent body-part *β*. *β* is in italics because it is a singular intentional component. A subject can experience pain in a phantom limb. *β* is a way it seems some bodily part is given in the subject’s experience. Everyone should agree that this component of an experience of pain exists. Your pain-experience does represent you as having the bodily part in which the pain seems to occur. So it is wrong to say that pain-experience has no representational content whatever. But it is clear that this particular component is quite inadequate to avoiding the Myth of the Given as squarely as one would in the case of perceptual experience of the outer world. The content of the pain experience cannot be just that one has a bodily part of a certain kind. On the treatment captured by the displayed condition, pain is a relational property of an event. The event *e* does not represent oneself as being

²⁰ *Mind and World*, p. 8.

²¹ For instance, M. Tye, ‘A Representational Theory of Pains and their Phenomenal Character’, in *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates* eds. N. Block, O. Flanagan, G. Güzeldere (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

in pain. The pain event e itself will have many other properties too, some of them intrinsic to the conscious experience itself.

So this conception of pain seems squarely within the target area at which the objections framed in terms of the Myth of the Given are aimed. Yet it is very hard to see how a thinker s making a judgement that he is in pain, because and for the reason that $\text{Pain}(e, s, t, \beta)$ holds for suitable e, t and β , is just making an irrational leap in the dark. Our thinker is judging no more than that he is in a state, and his reason (noninferential) is his being in that very state. The state seems to be the best possible justification for his judgement, rather than an exculpation for making it. If the judgement concerned the world other than his state, there would indeed be a problem. But it does not. We can even, if we so wish, insist that our thinker is rationally responding to the fact that $\text{Pain}(e, s, t, \beta)$. In this respect, his mind is embracing the (mental) world he is thinking about. His judgement, under this account, does not fall short of knowledge.

It is true that some formulations of the Myth of the Given seem drafted in such a way as to preclude even justification of such mental self-knowledge by the mental states thought about. Any formulation of the Myth that requires any reason-giving state to have a conceptual content will certainly preclude an account under which an occurrence of pain itself, understood as not having conceptual content, can justify a self-ascription of pain. But from the point of the argument of the preceding paragraph, these formulations do not inherit the argumentative force of the consideration that rational judgement cannot be a blind leap in the dark. Self-ascription of pain because one experiences a pain-event is not a blind leap in the dark.

McDowell offers a treatment under which pain experiences do have a representational content concerning mental states. He writes that pain “is an awareness of the circumstance that the subject is in pain”.²² As many have pointed out, it is very implausible that any creature that experiences pain also has to have the concept of pain. If McDowell's phrase “circumstance that the subject is in pain” is meant to identify a conceptual content the sufferer from pain must grasp, the account is too strong. We might attempt to save the position, albeit in a non-McDowellian fashion, by saying that the content here is at the level of reference, perhaps a Russellian proposition or, again, a fact.

²² *Mind and World*, p. 88.

I myself think that even this is too sophisticated. An animal that is in pain has an experience as of part of its body hurting. It seems to me that an animal, or even a child, does not even have to have an ontology of subjects who are in pain. A creature that thinks just about material objects, has mental states but does not think about mental states, can be in pain. This creature may think about its own body, and other bodies, and its body's place in the world. All of this can exist, and so can the pain, without our creature thinking about subjects.

What of first person ascription of mental states for which 'esse est percipi' is not true, for which illusions of being in the state are possible? I do want to apply the present model of first person psychological self-ascription to these too. For example, a thinker's making the transition from his

seeing that p

to the self-ascriptive judgement

I see that p

seems to me to be part of what is involved in having the concept *seeing that p* . Making this transition is a way of coming to know that one sees that p . Similarly, a thinker's having an

action-awareness of his ϕ -ing

can rationally lead him to judge, and to know

I am ϕ -ing.

In both these transitions, fact-involving states - seeing that p , having an action-awareness that one is ϕ -ing - are the reason-giving, justifying states. Precisely because they are fact-involving, the justifying state does not fall short of the content of the judgement that is

justified. Again, the justified judgement is not a blind leap. A thinker may of course mistakenly think he is in one of these justifying states when in fact he is not. But this is no more an objection to his having justification, and attaining knowledge, in favourable cases than it would be in the analogous cases of perceptual experience.²³

Here too we can, if we want, endorse a version of the mind embracing the very fact in question. A state can be factive even if its representational content is nonconceptual. A perceptual state with what in *A Study of Concepts* I called ‘scenario content’ can represent the layout of the world as being a certain way. For the state to be genuine perception, the world around the perceiver must really be that (nonconceptually individuated) way. If a subject has a nonconceptual awareness of itself as performing certain actions, either bodily or mental, that awareness too is factive, and requires that the subject really be performing those actions. Such factive states, as rationalizing states, permit the judgements they make rational to have justifications that reach out into the way the world is.

In all of these cases, I have endorsed a treatment of first person self-ascriptions without regarding the states or events that justify the self-ascriptions as perceived. There does not need to be a further level of perception of the pain, or perception of the seeing, or perception of the action-awareness, for this first person account to work. It suffices that the first-level mental states themselves are states of consciousness. That is also necessary, if the states and events are, from the thinker's own point of view, to make judgements about those mental states an exercise of the thinker's rationality.

7. Knowledge of Others' Conscious States

How do we have knowledge of others' conscious states if the Target Account is correct? There is a challenge here distinct from the usual forms of scepticism. Very often, we know that someone else is in pain, say, because the other person's bodily events express that pain, most notably in their facial expression. We see the other person's facial

²³ These views of the self-ascription of perceptions and actions are further developed in chapters 6 and 7 of *Truly Understood*.

expression as that of someone who is in pain. How do we reconcile the fact that this is a means of coming to know with the correctness of the Target Account? This is a challenge, because if the Target Account is correct, perceiving from someone's facial expression that they are in pain is not something written into grasp of *That person is in pain* as a means of coming to know that content. The understanding is just given by the identity-condition in the Target Account. Moreover it seems intuitively that someone could have the concept of pain without having the capacity to see someone else's facial expression as one of pain. Lacking that capacity, such a thinker can still know what it is for the other person to be in pain. This thinker is in the same position in relation to other persons as we are in relation to very different species. We know what it is for organisms of very different species from us to be in pain, even though we may have no idea of what would be a natural expression of pain in that species. There is no plausibility in the suggestion that we do not mean the same by the concept of pain when applied to members of these other species as we do when we apply it to humans. Nor would it be plausible, for a notion of sense that is tied to cognitive significance, to say that the thinker who cannot perceive facial expressions as expressions of pain must have a different concept of pain from our own.

This is one of several respects in which the relation between an observational concept, such as *round*, and the perceptions which immediately justify its application, differs from the relation between a perceptual experience of a facial expression as being one of pain, and the concept *pain*. Someone who is not capable of any perceptual experience of something as round, in any sense modality, does not have the concept *round* that is an observational concept. He may have some geometric concept of it, given by some equation; but that will be a different concept of the same property by the Fregean criterion of cognitive significance. When an object is thought of as falling under the observational concept *round*, it is tacitly conceived of as having the same shape as things perceived to be round. This is a conception that is simply unavailable to a thinker incapable of perceiving things as round (more strictly, to a thinker who does not know what it would be like to perceive something as round). But in the case of the concept *pain*, the Target Account does precisely give a thinker who does not know what it would be like to see something as an expression of pain a way of conceiving what it would be

for another person to be in pain. So experiences of expressions of pain as such do not stand in the same relation to the concept *pain* as experiences of things as round stand to the observational concept *round*.

We can distinguish a general challenge and a specific challenge presented by perceptual experiences of another's facial expression as one of pain. The general challenge is to say how these experiences provide a means of coming to know that another person is in pain, consistently with the Target Account. That challenge is general because it arises for anyone who thinks that perceiving such expressions is a way of coming to acquire the relevant knowledge, and who also accepts the Target Account.

For those whose epistemology is of a more rationalist stripe, and who reject pure reliabilism in epistemology, there is also a more specific, local challenge. Must acknowledgement of perception of facial expression as a means of coming to know of another's conscious states be some kind of concession to reliabilism? If not, why not? We have already said that the relation between perception of facial expression and the concept *pain* is not the relation characteristic of observational concepts. It follows that whatever the rationalist treatment of observational knowledge, it is not something applicable to knowledge of others' conscious states. If the content of an experience of another person's facial expression as one of pain is relevant to our entitlement to judge that the other is in pain, why is it so? We know that the basis of the entitlement cannot be the presence of that type of perception in the possession condition for the concept *pain*: for it is not mentioned in that possession condition. Does the case show that any rationalist conception of knowledge and entitlement in this area has to be abandoned?

I argue that there is a different, third, way in which an experience as of another's bodily or facial expression of pain can be epistemologically crucial in leading to knowledge without that experience-type being mentioned in the possession-condition for the concept *pain*, and without a reversion to pure reliabilism. The starting point for the argument is a consideration of some of the properties of a visual experience, say, of another's bodily or facial expression as one of pain. In having such an experience, one sees the other's action as of a type that one could make oneself. Asked to perform such an action oneself, when all is working properly no inference or further background information is needed before simply making the action oneself. The causal basis of this

ability is no doubt the set of ‘mirror’ neurons identified by Rizzolati, Gallese and their colleagues.²⁴ But the striking properties of the experience do not involve merely a mirroring of the action and its intentionality. At the level of phenomenology, one also sees the other subject’s action as one that would in oneself be an expression of pain.

The fact that the actions or movements of one creature are seen by a second as expressions of a mental state which would produce the same expressions in himself is a highly complex state of affairs. The occurrence of such states of affairs calls for explanation. Very likely the best explanation of the occurrence of such states of affairs is that the actions and movements in question really are expressions of pain, say, and their being perceived as such by a second conspecific is an instance of a kind of situation that is self-perpetuating in a species. It is as adaptive to be right, on the whole, about the mental states of one's conspecifics as it is adaptive for one's perceptual experiences about the non-mental world to be by-and-large correct. There will be selection of mechanisms, both individual and social, that perpetuate such correct perception.

This means that one of the forms of argument I developed in *The Realm of Reason* is applicable to the experience of another's action or movement as an expression of pain. You are default-entitled to judge that a condition obtains when it holds in the easiest, most likely way that such experiences come about (and where the status of a condition as such does not depend on a posteriori argument about the detailed nature of the mechanism).

In the case of genuinely observational concepts, I argued in *The Realm of Reason*, the experiences that entitle the thinker to apply those concepts have the content they do in part in virtue of interactions between things actually falling under those contents and the experiences produced by their so falling. Tyler Burge developed the same point.²⁵ I described such experiences as having ‘instance-individuated’ contents. An experience of the facial or other bodily movements of another person as expressions of pain does not

²⁴ G. Rizzolati et al., ‘Premotor Cortex and the Recognition of Motor Actions’, *Cognitive Brain Research* 3 (1996) 131-41; V. Gallese et al., ‘A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition’, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 8 (2004) 396-403. The phenomenon is crucial to the perception of depictions and sculpture: see D. Freedberg and V. Gallese, ‘Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience’, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11 (2007) 197-203.

²⁵ ‘Perceptual Entitlement’.

have an instance-individuated content. Its content is not directly inherited in part from its causation by pain itself. But nonetheless, the simplest, most likely explanation of the occurrence of such an experience does involve interaction between the experiencer and conspecifics who really have the conscious states the experience represents the conspecific as undergoing. This is offered as what I called a Level-3 explanation of entitlement in *The Realm of Reason*, explanations which explain why certain general truths about the entitlement relation hold. The particular explanation offered here supports only defeasible entitlement. Experiences as of another's action expressing pain can, and sometimes do, have other causal origins. The entitlement to take them at face value is merely prima facie; and it is a good feature of this explanation that it extends only as far as prima facie entitlement.

The explanation is not purely reliabilist. It is rational to make judgements that will be true in the easiest circumstances in which one's actual experiences can come about, and that it is so seems to be an a priori matter. The explanation also turns on the content of the intentional state. It thus conforms to a claim of *The Realm of Reason*, to the effect that all entitlement depends on the nature of the content of the states involved in the entitlement in question. In this way it aims to meet the more specific, local challenge to the rationalist position.

What the argument shows, if sound, is that there are ways in which the content of an entitling state can be crucial to the entitlement to make a judgement without that state entering the possession condition for any of the concepts in the content of the judgement in question. All the same, in the case in which the experiences as of expressions of pain have come about in the easiest way, the other person will be in pain. Hence he will be in the same state as the subject is in himself when he is in pain; and so the correctness condition implied by the Target Account of understanding for 'The other person is in pain' will be fulfilled.

There may be some doubt as to whether this account really supplies all we need for knowledge that someone else is in pain. In particular, its reliance on the knower and the other person being members of the same species in the case in which one experiences another's action as an expression of pain may seem to be something not found in other cases of knowledge. But it seems to me that knowledge of other aspects of another

person, besides knowledge of their conscious states, also relies on identity of underlying mental structures. A clear case, outside the domain of thought about conscious states, is perceiving, and coming to know, that the sentence uttered by another person has a certain syntactic structure. We hear the sentence as having one structure rather than another. We know from the work of Chomsky and of those influenced by him that this knowledge of the structure is substantially underdetermined by the evidence to which we are exposed early in life. An innate endowment common to all humans selects one grammar for a particular language rather than another on the basis of a small sample of evidence. Yet we do know what someone else means, when he utters a sentence we have never heard before. This knowledge is partially dependent upon our appreciation of the sentence as having one syntactic structure rather than another; and this appreciation is in turn undergirded by our common grammatical endowment we share with our conspecifics. An account of our knowledge of what someone else is saying, and of the role of our perceptual impression of syntactic structure in that knowledge, has at some point to draw on the fact that we are of the same species, with a common grammatical endowment. This parallels the reliance on shared mental structures in the preceding account of what makes possible knowledge that another human is in pain.

If an intelligent alien seemed to learn our language, and agreed with us on the syntactic construal of sentences hitherto encountered, but suddenly diverged in his construal of a new sentence, we could discover that fact. It would not be something unknowable. If some new being apparently used the word 'pain' in the same circumstances as us, but actually meant something different by it, could we discover that fact? It seems clear that such a discovery is possible only if there is supervenience of the mental on the physical facts about this new being (including his complex environmental relations). If supervenience failed, not even the most detailed knowledge of the subject's brain states would give us knowledge of what sensations he is experiencing; and so knowledge of what this being means by the word 'pain' would remain inaccessible. There is, then, a tacit commitment to some form of supervenience thesis in the position I have been endorsing. This is one of several points at which the account of understanding in this book involves commitments in metaphysics. If a supervenience thesis of the mental on the physical is true, we certainly do not have at present a full understanding of why it

is true, why mental properties supervene on the particular properties they do, and why such a thesis is necessary (if it is necessary). It follows that full understanding of understanding would require a grasp of issues about which we are at present ignorant. Here I am just pointing out the commitments and interconnections of the present account of understanding and a corresponding epistemology for the concept *pain*.

Not every case in which we come to know that someone else is in pain by interaction with that person is one in which we have an experience of some action or movement of his as an expression of pain. Sometimes we know that certain kinds of injury, damage or relations to other objects and events are painful to the subject without the perception of such states of affairs involving experience of an expression of pain. Under the Target Account, there is no obstacle to using some form of the classical argument from analogy to explain our knowledge in some of these cases. If the Target Account of understanding is correct, uses of the traditional argument from analogy can be legitimate cases of inductive or abductive reasoning, depending on the details of the application. The argument from analogy can never, however, provide an account of what it is to understand the proposition that someone else is in pain. Use of the argument from analogy presupposes that understanding.

Nor is it an option to say that for someone else to be in pain is for there to be such a proper use of the argument from analogy to the conclusion that the other person is in pain. That would be incompatible with our appreciation that abductive and inductive arguments are never conclusive. The fact that they are never conclusive, however strong, is an immediate consequence of - and is thus explained by - the Target Account. However strong the inductive and abductive arguments, their premisses never establish completely conclusively (in the manner of deductive arguments) that the other person is in pain. They never do so, because your understanding of what it is for the other to be in pain is that it is for her to be in the same state you are in when you are in pain. That is never conclusively established by the inductive and abductive arguments. But arguments from analogy can be used, nonconclusively, to explain our knowledge in some cases, consistently with the correctness of the Target Account.

So much for one form of epistemology available to the neo-rationalist that would reconcile our actual ways of coming to know of others' conscious states with the Target

Account of our understanding of what it is for them to be in those states. The Target Account is of course not the exclusive property of neo-rationalist treatments of concepts. It is neutral on rationalist issues, and can consistently be held by pure reliabilists and by many other positions in epistemology. A pure reliabilist in epistemology could consistently adopt the Target Account of understanding. The reliable mechanism of belief-formation would, for him, be enough for a thinker to come to know the holding of the condition that another is in pain. The knower's understanding of that condition can still be given by the Target Account.

Another position in epistemology consistent with the Target Account of understanding would be one which emphasizes the factive, and knowledge-sustaining, character of the mental state of seeing that the other person is in pain. On some views, a subject's being in this state is enough to explain how he acquires knowledge that the other person is in pain. No further account of how an experience as of the other's being in pain default-entitles one to the judgement that he is in pain is needed, on this view. Someone with these epistemological views could still hold, and accept for the reasons given earlier, the Target Account of the thinker's understanding of what it is for the other person to be in pain. The factive, knowledge-sustaining states are just one way of coming to know that the condition identified in the Target Account obtains.

This is not the place to discuss which one of these epistemological views is to be preferred, an issue primarily in epistemology rather than the theory of understanding. All I want to emphasize here is that the fate of the Target Account is not tied to a neo-rationalist view of entitlement. Its attractive features are available on several different epistemological views. It is available, without revisionism, to any epistemology that can offer an adequate account of how, under the terms of that epistemology, the correctness condition for "That person is in pain", as identified by the Target Account, can be known by the person who understands that condition.

8. Communicability: Between Frege and Wittgenstein

There has in many prominent writers been some tacit or explicit acceptance of the idea that if identity were to feature in our understanding of thoughts about conscious states in the way the Target Account proposes, that would imply the possibility of a private language for conscious states, a language that that only one person could understand. My position is just the opposite. The Target Account, as an explication of understanding, helps to explain how communication between different subjects about their respective conscious states is possible at all.²⁶

If you and I both have experiences of pain, and each of us understands what it is for another to be in pain in the terms given in the Target and Interlocking Accounts, it follows that we have the same understanding of what it is for the other to be in pain. Is it a good objection to this that our samples of pain are numerically distinct, and so our concepts must be distinct? If that were a good objection, one would have to say that you and I have distinct concepts of a tomato if we learn it from different instances; and this seems far too strong. There are plenty of metaphysical differences between tomatoes and mental events, but actual distinctness of samples that have been the basis of different thinkers' mastery of the concept is much too weak a basis to sustain distinctness of concept. The two thinkers can still be latching on to the same property; and that is exactly what I have been arguing that two thinkers can each do with the concept *pain*. It is identity of property that is important here, not identity of instances.

The fact that an account entails that distinct thinkers have the same concept of pain does not of course absolve it of the charge of privacy. If we are to explain why concepts of conscious states are not private concepts, we have to show how distinct thinkers not only share the same concept, but can also know that they do. Understanding and privacy are epistemological notions, and do not turn solely on identity of concept.

²⁶ A very straightforward endorsement of a link between what I have called the Target Account and commitment to the possibility of a private language is made in Dummett's Preface to *Truth and Other Enigmas*. After attributing to Peter Strawson acceptance of what is essentially the Target Account, Dummett writes, "Strawson here unblushingly rejects that whole polemic of Wittgenstein's that has come to be known as 'the private-language' argument" (xxxii). Actually we know from Strawson's other writings that he has doubts about the polemic anyway (and without blushing – see Strawson's Review of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in *Mind* 63 (1954) 70-99. My point is that the Target Account does not involve a commitment to the kind of privacy against the possibility of which Wittgenstein was arguing.

Understanding another's utterance involves knowing what is being said. That is why it was important, in the preceding section, to argue that the Target Account is consistent with the knowability of the Thought that another is in pain. If you can know that someone else is in pain, you can be in a position to know whether he means pain by "pain". It is highly plausible that if you cannot know whether another person is in pain, you also will be unable to know whether some word of his means *pain*. Your attempts to know what he means will in those circumstances be vulnerable to what I called 'switching' arguments, that many different assignments of these allegedly private states as the references of his words will equally be consistent with all your evidence, however extensive.²⁷ At this point, I am in agreement with the spirit, and even the letter of some of the later Wittgenstein's remarks.

The position I am advocating is then intermediate between that of Frege and Wittgenstein on sensation concepts. It seems they both held that any explication of concepts of conscious states that involves recognition of state-type and use of an identity relation would lead to incommunicability, privacy, and to no more than an individual understanding of expressions - a kind of understanding falling short of genuinely shared, public meaning. Frege concluded that some aspects of experience are incommunicable. As he concisely wrote, "What is purely intuitable is not communicable".²⁸ Wittgenstein concluded that the model of recognition and identity must be wrong, at least for the case of conscious states. I am proposing a middle way. The model of recognition and grasp of identity is right even in the case of concepts of conscious states; but it does not lead to privacy of meaning and incommunicability. To set out the positions in tabular form:

²⁷ C. Peacocke, 'The Limits of Intelligibility: A Post-Verificationist Proposal', *Philosophical Review* 97 (1988) 463-96.

²⁸ Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, tr. J. L. Austin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §26, p. 35. See also this passage: "Often... a colour word does not signify our subjective sensation, which we cannot know to agree with anyone else's..." (§26, p. 36). By the time, many years later, that he wrote *Thoughts*, Frege did not think that it even makes sense to say that different persons' sense-impressions are subjectively the same: "For when the word 'red' is meant not to state a property of things but to characterize sense-impressions belonging to my consciousness, it is only applicable within the realm of my consciousness" (pp. 14-15).

	Frege	Wittgenstein	Present Account
Understanding involves identity and Target Account	Yes	No	Yes
Private language is possible	Yes	No	No

9. *Conclusions and Significance*

If the Target Account gives a correct description of our ability to think about conscious states, it should not be surprising that we can make major errors of theory about our conscious states, consistently with our still thinking about them. What makes our thought about pain, or about visual experience, or about mental calculation, has nothing to do with any kind of theory we may have about any of those states or events. Albritton and Putnam emphasized that we may be bizarrely wrong about the nature of pencils, or other things in our environment, whilst still thinking about them.²⁹ The same goes for conscious mental events and states. Many people naively think we withdraw our hand from very hot radiators because of the pain caused. Yet we know it is a reflex, and we know that the causal line that ends up with the withdrawal of the hand does not involve the pain at all (which can occur after the hand's withdrawal has already begun). This should not make us think that those who do not know it is a reflex are not thinking about pain. The same goes for grander theories involving pain and other conscious states. Our thought about conscious states and events is not thought about whatever plays such-and-such role in a theory, whatever kind of theory might be proffered to play this part.

The other, much more general, conclusion concerns the role of reference in the theory of understanding and concept-possession. The account of understanding concepts for conscious states and events offered here can be seen as attributing to the thinker tacit

²⁹ The example is attributed to Albritton in H. Putnam's 'The Meaning of "Meaning"', in his *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 242-5. The case is in the spirit of the examples in Putnam's earlier 'It ain't necessarily so', repr. in his *Mathematics, Matter and Method*.

knowledge of the rule that *pain* is true of those events that feel to one a certain way now, and of those events at other times and in other subjects that are events of the same (subjective) kind as those that feel that way. The understanding involves knowledge of an identity of properties, something at the level of reference, not sense or concepts. I have tried to show how some of the epistemic and cognitive aspects of concepts of conscious states can be explained in accordance with tacit knowledge of this reference rule. The preceding discussion can therefore be seen as putting together one part of a larger jigsaw puzzle – the puzzle we need to complete if we are to argue successfully for the general thesis that the epistemic properties of an arbitrary concept are explicable from properties of its fundamental reference rule. If the pieces have been put together properly here for the case of concepts of conscious states, the present treatment offers some support for that general thesis about the relation between concepts and their reference-relations.