

Philosophical Reflections on the First Person, the Body, and Agency

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We can distinguish three degrees to which a subject's representation of itself may be involved in its conception of the way the world is (Peacocke 2014). For some subjects, who merely represent events, objects, and processes taking place around what is in fact a perceptual point of origin, there may be no such self-representation in what it represents to be the case. These are subjects who represent the layout of world in a region around them, and some of what is going on there, but who do not represent themselves as being there (or anywhere else). That is what in my book *The Mirror of the World* I called Degree 0 of involvement of self-representation in a subject's conception of the world. At Degree 1, a subject has mental states with first person content, but only of a nonconceptual kind. For those who admit the notion of nonconceptual intentional content at all, examples of mental states at Degree 1 would be hearing a noise to one's left, remembering climbing the stairs, being aware of raising one's hand. At Degree 2 of involvement of the first person, subjects enjoy mental states containing the first person concept. This paper addresses the question: what is required, as a constitutive matter, for a creature to be at Degree 1, to self-represent in a minimal nonconceptual way, as opposed to merely being at Degree 0?

There is a substantive question to be addressed here independently of the framework and commitments in which I have just formulated it. Even if you think, for one reason or another, there are no possible examples of cases at Degree 0, there is still a substantive constitutive question of what it is for a creature to self-represent. The question remains of characterizing Degree 1 cases correctly, in a philosophical manner. Similarly, if you think that all intentional content is conceptual, there is still a substantive constitutive question of what it is for a creature to self-represent, even if the conceptual cases are the only ones you admit.

I think there are aspects of this substantive question about Degree 1 that I did not address in *The Mirror of the World*. In that book, when giving examples of organisms at Grade 0, at which subjects have representational states but do not self-represent, I considered only actions that do not involve bodily movement, do not involve control of location, and do not involve the position of limbs in relation to the rest of the body. I mentioned actions such as change of color or creation of an electric charge around the body of the creature. Those examples still seem fine, but the restricted range of cases I mentioned carried the apparent conversational implicature that if we were to include bodily movement and spatial control of the organism's limbs, we would already be above Grade 0, and have self-representation at Grade 1 or above. But that would not be true. There can be spatial, bodily action that is merely at Grade 0, as was rightly emphasized in Susanna Schellenberg's (2016) contribution to a symposium on *The Mirror of the World*. So the book did not offer, or even suggest, any answer to the question of the nature of the distinction between creatures at Grade 0 that do not self-represent and creatures at higher Grades that do self-represent.

That is the question I will be addressing here. I aim to offer a fuller positive account of Degree 1, and to trace out some of the many consequences of the account offered for the philosophy of mind, for possibilities in the theory of intentional content, for a correct account of the place of the first person in relation to interpersonal phenomena, and of epistemological phenomena involving the first person.

1. The Problem of Avoiding Redundancy

We can introduce the problem by considering a subject who uses an expression "I", but for whom a complete account of what is involved in this use is that this subject accepts, for instance

I am in front of a window

when and only when he accepts

Here [the location of his perceptual point of view] is in front of a window.

Similarly he accepts

There is a tree in that direction from me

when and only when he accepts

There is a tree in that direction from here.

That is, in general he accepts something of the form

I stand in relation R to things and events that are F

when and only when he accepts

Here stands in relation R to things and events that are F.

In this case, the seeming first-person acceptance is just a stylistic variant on the content of the second sentence of each of these pairs. If this is the full account of this person's use of an expression, that expression is not the genuine first person. This use of the expression 'I' also does not give any new spatial content, a fortiori, not even by complex inference. It conservatively extends the subject's knowledge of propositions not involving 'I'. If we want to invoke the spirit of a Kantian point, we could say that this is a purely formal use of 'I', it is a "merely logical subject".

The force of the consideration for present purposes is that exactly the same point applies at the level of nonconceptual content. Suppose there is a component *c* of nonconceptual content for which it is a full account of the subject's grasp of it that

c stands in relation R to things and events that are F

is equivalent to

Here stands in relation R to things and events that are F.

For the same reasons of redundancy, such a nonconceptual component *c* would not be the genuine nonconceptual first person, what I called *i* in *The Mirror of the World*.

Exactly parallel points apply to a subject for whom a full account of its use of “I” in

I am lying down

is that it is equivalent to

This body is lying down,

and similarly for whom

My left arm is extended

is equivalent to

This body’s left arm is extended;

and more generally for whom it is a full account of their grasp that

I am F

is equivalent to

This body is F.

Again, the same points apply to a component *c* of nonconceptual content for which the above would be an exhaustive account of its role in a subject’s psychological economy. Such a *c* would not be *i*.

Such notions as *this body* and *this hand* may be made available by proprioception. There are also notions of the body and of limbs that are made available by the fact that the body or the hand in question is under the subject’s control in action. A creature can represent something as *this hand*, even when not perceiving it proprioceptively, if the creature can reliably act with the hand in question. It can plan actions with that hand, thus represented. But thinking of a body, or limb, even in an action-based way, still does not by itself involve first person content. Neither proprioception nor action-based modes of representation of the body

and its parts bring a subject into the truth-conditions of *this leg is bent* - into its content. The content *this leg is bent*, even based on proprioception and/or capacities for action with the leg, is not yet the content *my leg is bent*.

The combined effect of both of these points, about *here* and *this body*, means that it does not suffice for having states with first person content that one has both an atlas of a world around a body that's *here*, and a history of that same body over time. The atlas and the history do not require more than a *here*, appropriate temporal updating, and perception of a body that's normally at that point of view, with memory of its movements over time.

So the question become pressing: what more is required to make a nonconceptual content *c* the first person nonconceptual content *i* ?

This is equivalent to the question: what is it for an organism to be at Degree 1 of self-representation rather than Degree 0? It is also equivalent to the question: what minimally brings a subject into the (referential) content of a mental state?

A thinker brought up in the western philosophical tradition may be inclined to smile at this question, and to answer it, almost as a matter of reflex, by saying "Well, someone who is employing the genuine first person, and not merely something equivalent to *here* or to *this body*, will be able to make sense of the possibility that by some kind of brain transplant he might have had a different body; and similarly he might be representing himself in thought or imagination even when there is no perceptual *here* to get a grip, because the subject is not perceiving the world, but is still conscious". It is true that we can correctly entertain these possibilities and these kinds of thoughts and imaginings, and that using the first person is essential to doing so. But it is wholly implausible that the capacity to entertain these possibilities, thoughts, and imaginings has to be mentioned in a foundational, constitutive account of the nature of the grasp of the first person. Many creatures have mental states with a specifically first person content without the capacity for such sophisticated modal thought. Even when these capacities are present, it seems that their presence, and the genuine possibility of the modal contents entertained, rests on the nature of the first person component itself. There must be features of the first person component that make possible these distinctive capacities. Our task is to say what those features are.

2. *A Proposal about the Nature of the First Person*

It is uncontroversial that there are two different kinds of case in which a content

This body is moving

can be true. The body in question may be passively moved, as when one is on an elevator, escalator, or on a travelator at an airport. In the other case, the subject whose body it is is moving the body, in a case of agency.

I suggest that there are two conditions, each of them necessary, and together jointly sufficient, for a nonconceptual component *c* of intentional content employed by a creature to be the genuine first person *i* :

(1) there is a range of action-notions A for which the creature must be capable of being in mental states or of enjoying mental events with the content

c is A-ing

where the state or event is produced by the initiation of an A-ing by the reference of *c*; and

(2) there is a range of notions F of bodily properties, spatial properties, and past tense properties F such that the creature is capable of being in mental states or enjoying mental events with the content *c* is F; where in these attributions,

c is F

is accepted (in central basic cases) if and only if

this body is F

is also accepted.

The range of notions F of bodily and spatial properties in Condition (2) is to be understood as including the merely bodily and spatial properties involved in the creature's falling under one of the action notions A in Condition (1), such as the merely bodily property one has when one raises one's arm.

The range of action notions A in Condition (1) can include demonstrative notions of actions (*I am doing this*), as well as non-demonstrative notions such as *walking*, as in *I am*

walking. Condition (1) links transitory events (initiations, actions) with a continuant, persisting entity, a subject. Certain kinds of binding must be in place for this to be possible.

Condition (1) alone would not be sufficient for a content *c* to be *i*. In the absence of condition (2),

c is A-ing

would have as its correctness condition merely that there is an event of A-ing, or that some particular event is an event of A-ing, an event that is in the circumstances an A-ing by the creature itself. That would not be a predication of a continuing entity. States with contents governed only by Condition (1), and not by Condition (2), could be produced simply by an action-awareness, from the inside, of the relevant A-ing. A continuing entity would not be involved in the content itself; the earlier nonredundancy arguments would apply again.

The earlier arguments about nonredundancy already show that Condition (2) by itself would not be sufficient by itself for *c* to be *i*.

As I just implied, Condition (1) can be fulfilled by the creature enjoying a distinctive action-awareness, in phenomenal consciousness, of its own actions. But that is not the only way. Primitive first person nonconceptual content is possible for a creature that is not conscious at all. Such a creature may still be an agent (there are probably many such in the universe), and there can be unconscious states with a content *i am A-ing* that are produced in the creature by the events which cause the action. That content would still be distinct from a content, *i am being moved*, when for instance the creature is passively moved by a strong tide or current in its surrounding water.

If Conditions (1) and (2) are severally necessary and jointly sufficient for content *c* to be the first person, it should not be surprising that the capacity to represent spatial relations, certain bodily properties, and even a bodily and spatial history too, are not sufficient for first person representation. For none of these capacities involves the ability to represent something that has to have the capacity for agency.

All these considerations support the view that there is a much deeper role of agency in the first person than I indicated in previous writings. Henceforth I call the thesis that Conditions (1) and (2) are jointly sufficient for a notion (and corresponding concept) to be that of the first person, *i*, “the agency-involving account”.

The agency-involving account has implications for the correct characterization of the functional psychological organization of a creature that self-represents. In *The Mirror of the*

World, I argued that the identity of a subject over time depends on the identity of an integrating apparatus. At the subpersonal level, the integrating apparatus operates to produce a file that contains representations that underlie how the world seems to be to the subject whose integrating apparatus it is. The implication of the agency-involving thesis is that this file is properly labeled a 'self-file' only if it includes representations of actions of the subject, where the inclusion of the representation is, in central cases, produced by the subject initiating an action of the type represented. A self-representing subject, a creature at Level 1 rather than Level 0, must not only be capable of action, but at least some range of its actions must be connected to representations of action, and to the file that is the output of the integrating apparatus, in the way just described. This requirement was not included or discussed in *The Mirror of the World*.

It is natural to wonder how this agency-involving account is related to the claim, that I endorsed in *The Mirror of the World*, that the first person notion, like any other notion or indeed concept, is individuated by its fundamental reference rule. Does the argument above suggest that something more than the fundamental reference rule is involved in the individuation of the first person notion? And if not, what is the need for all this argument, for can we not answer the question of what it is to be using the first person notion by saying that it is the notion individuated by the fundamental reference rule that on any occasion of its occurrence in a mental state or mental event, it refers to the subject of that state or mental event?

We can indeed say that. The agency-involving account can rather be seen as an elaboration of what it is involved in the first person notion's referring to a subject, rather than something else. The discussion above is meant as a contribution to the conditions that have to be fulfilled for a reference rule that mentions a subject as the notion's reference, rather than something else. Supplying further background on what it is for the notion a creature is employing to have one fundamental reference rule rather than another is entirely consistent with the fundamental reference rule's fully individuating the notion. This is a matter of what is involved in attributing the notion with its individuating fundamental reference rule to actual creatures.

In advocating the agency-involving account, I am rejecting a rival kind of experience-involving account. This rival view holds that what makes something the first person notion *i* is that it is the *c* such that the subject represents it as being the case that

c has this experience

where ‘this experience’ refers to the subject’s current experience. There are at least two problems with this proposal. First, this cannot be a necessary condition for a notion to be the first person, because a subject can have representational states with a first person content without being able to represent its experiences as such at all. The representational states can, for instance, concern the relations in which the subject, represented in the first person way, stands to things and events around him, without the subject representing the experiences in which those things and events are presented. To be able to represent one’s own experiences as such is a much more sophisticated matter than employing representations with first person content. Second, organisms that do not have phenomenally conscious mental states and events at all - perhaps organisms that have only the older, faster, dorsal route that leads to perceptual states - can still have states with first person content. These two objections do not apply to the agency-involving account. A subject can be an agent without being able to represent experiences as such. An organism can be an agent even if it has only the older dorsal route that ends in the production of non-conscious perceptual states.

The agency-involving account of the first person is formulated in terms of the capacity for attributing bodily actions. A creature may find itself in circumstances in which it cannot engage in bodily actions, perhaps because its efferent nerves have been blocked. It may still have the capacity for bodily action and action self-ascription when properly connected to the world. But could there be a creature capable only of mental action, action of a kind not fundamentally parasitic on the possibility of bodily action? Though I doubt that is possible, the question of its possibility would require at least a further paper. If there could be such a creature, I think an account of the first person in terms of agency would still be correct. The account would just need not to require that the agency be bodily agency. The possibility of such a case would mean that the reference to bodily agency in the above formulation of the agency-involving account would have to be removed. Many of the consequences of the agency-involving account, including that of the next section, would still apply. Those consequences rather later below that concern bodily action would need to be restricted to those subject using the first person who also enjoy embodiment.¹

¹ Two writers who have emphasized the importance of agency in first person representation are Bill Brewer (1992) and Lucy O’Brien (2007, chapter 5). There are important insights in both these contributions. I may differ from Brewer in holding that there can be objective representation at Degree 0, and from O’Brien in holding that awareness is not required for first person representation.

3. *Instantiation-Dependence*

Under the agency-involving account, a subject's ability to think about itself using the first person is made available by its being a subject, capable of action. A creature is able to represent itself in the first person way only because it is suitably sensitive to the very events and states involving agency that make it a subject. This is not just a modal claim, but a constitutive claim. There is a way of representing, the first person way, that in its nature requires what is so represented to be of a certain type (a subject), and requires sensitivity on the part of its possessor to what makes it of that type.

Just as there are phenomenal concepts of phenomenal states made available to a subject by the subject's being in those states, the first person notion is made available by its user being a subject, capable of agency. Phenomenal concepts - *an experience of red, pain, joy* - have the characteristic that grasp of them requires the ability to apply them in response to a very instance of the property they pick out, an instance that is in the concept-user's own consciousness.

We can, in a similar spirit, introduce the idea of an *instantiation-dependent notion*. An instantiation-dependent notion is one whose fundamental reference rule requires its reference to be of a certain kind, and grasp of the notion, for constitutive reasons in the nature of the notion, is possible for a creature only if it is suitably sensitive to it itself being of that kind. In the present case, the kind is that of being a subject. If what I have said is correct, the first person notion is instantiation-dependent. It is only because the subject is an agent, and its action ascriptions are suitably sensitive to the events that are its actions, that it can meet the conditions for using the first person notion.

The ways of a thinking expressed by a person's use of personal proper name, such as "Napoleon", or a perceptual demonstrative *that person*, equally arguably require their references to be subjects. But they do not require, purely in virtue of the nature of these ways of thinking, that the subject who is employing them be suitably sensitive, in his representations *Napoleon is thus-and-so*, or *that person is thus-and-so*, to the conditions that make the thinker himself a subject. Suppose Napoleon himself is thinking of himself in the third personal way, as Napoleon (as such a person might well do). In that case, although Napoleon's representations of what Napoleon is doing are sensitive to what makes Napoleon, viz. himself, a subject, that is not so purely in virtue of his use of the third person notion

Napoleon. The sensitivity depends also on his being Napoleon. By contrast, concerning the sensitivity required of any user of the first person to the states and events that make the user a subject: there is no such dependence on the subject being identical with something given in a third personal way. The sensitivity to what makes the thinker himself a subject is required simply in virtue of the nature of the first person notion itself.

These points also illustrate my favourite general thesis in philosophy, the metaphysics-first view, which holds that the metaphysics of an arbitrary domain is prior, in the order of philosophical explanation, to a theory of meaning or theory of intentional contents about that domain. In the present case, the approach I am offering here is an example of a metaphysics-first thesis, here applied to the domain of subjects. The metaphysics of subjects, as agents, is explanatorily prior in philosophy to the nature of the first person notion, and to the nature of the corresponding concept. An account of the nature of the first person notion needs to refer to subjects as agents, and to the representational states that such agency makes available to subjects.

The case of the first person illustrates the metaphysics-first view in a particularly straightforward way. The basic argument for the metaphysics-first view proceeds in two steps. The first step is the principle that any notion or concept is individuated by the relation in which a subject must stand to something to be representing it under that notion or concept. The second step is that the relations in which a subject can stand to something is constrained by the correct metaphysics of that thing. If the agency-involving account of the first person is correct, the relations in which a thinker must stand to something to be representing it in the first person way involve a sensitivity of its action-ascriptions to the precursors of actions by that very thing. There is a level of action by a subject, the actions that are possible even at Degree 0, to which a subject's action-ascriptions can be so sensitive. It is because there is a genuine possibility of a subject that perceives and acts, but does not yet self-represent, that the metaphysics-first view can be shown to be applicable in the domain of subjects and the first person.²

² Here of course I am no longer giving answers to the opening question of this paper that are neutral on whether examples at Degree 0 are possible. *Prima facie*, for someone who rejects the possibility of examples at Degree 0, the case of subjects and the first person will be a case in which the metaphysics-first view is not correct. The general characterization of such cases is that they are ones in which a subject's relation to elements of an ontology is not explanatorily prior to intentional contents and meanings concerning that ontology. This general characterization of the cases in which the metaphysics-first view does not hold is implicit in the very argument, outlined in the text, for the metaphysics-first view.

Perhaps the fact that the first person notion and concept are instantiation-dependent can make understandable, and even partially justify, the idea of some writers that a special mode of acquaintance with its reference underlies the ability to employ the first person (see for example Kripke 2011). When acquaintance is construed as a causal notion, I have objected to that claim in *The Mirror of the World* (Chapter IV, Section 3, ‘Issues of Acquaintance’). The hapless Cartesian subject who is deceived by the evil demon may have many beliefs about himself that are not caused by his being as those beliefs represent him to be. This hapless subject can still be using the first person to think about himself, even though he cannot use perceptual demonstratives to refer to things. If, however, we construe the kind of relation a subject can have to his own actions as a mode of acquaintance, such a mode of acquaintance with oneself is, on the present view, involved in the capacity for first person representation. On the account I have been proposing, agency-based acquaintance does indeed have a special role to play in an account of first person representation. The point may be a resource for elaborating the ideas of some of those wanting to give a special place to acquaintance and to being a subject in an account of the first person.

4. Consequences of the Agency-Involving Thesis

Consequence 1: Predicative Transfer and its Ramifications

The agency-involving account implies a certain functional organization of a subject at Degree

1. Consider a subject at Degree 1 who represents it as being the case that

this body is next to a ravine

where ‘this body’ is a notion made available by proprioception, and refers to what is the subject’s own body (not represented as such, of course, by the notion ‘this body’). Unlike the subject at Degree 0, the subject at Degree 1 will make a transition from representation of the displayed content as holding to representing it as being the case that

i am next to a ravine.

This is a nontrivial transition, unlike the status it is accorded in the treatment considered at the outset of this article. It is nontrivial precisely because the first person component of the second content has agency-involving and hence subject-involving connections that are not implicated in the first content itself. Here we have what we can call predicative transfer from predications involving *this body* to those involving the nonconceptual first person *i*. There will equally, for subject at Degree 1, be predicative transfer for representations concerning *here*, where that refers to subject's perceptual point of view. From

here is in the shade

the subject at Degree 1 will make the transition to

i am in the shade.

Such transitions, both at the nonconceptual and at the conceptual level, thus connect spatial representations about the body with the subject's desires, emotions, and intention, when the subject also has the capacity to self-ascribe these mental states.

Consequence 1 opens up an explanation of the possibility of perceptual experiences with first person content in which the subject does not perceive herself. From Consequence 1, it follows that when a subject at Degree 1 has a perception with the content

that object is coming towards here

such a subject will also represent, and may perceive, it as being the case that

that object is coming towards me.

But of course a subject can perceive something as coming toward here without perceiving any part of her body at all, either in proprioception, or by ordinary external perception of her limbs and body parts. In such a case, the subject can perceive that something is coming towards her, without perceiving her body in any way at all.

Consequence 2: The Metaphysics of First Person Ownership

What makes a body mine is that it is, in normal circumstances and when all is functioning properly, the body whose movements I control. Some would elaborate this further by saying that it is the body controlled by my tryings.³ Whether elaborated in terms of tryings or not, this statement about what makes a body mine is in itself entirely neutral on the metaphysics of ownership. The statement simply links ownership itself - not representation of ownership - with the first person, and with tryings if the statement is so elaborated. When however this statement is combined with the agency-involving account of the first person, we have a metaphysics-first account of ownership. For under the agency-involving account, what makes something the first person notion can be explained in terms of a certain kind of sensitivity of the subject's first person representations to the precursors of action, where action and the precursors of action are not explained in terms of the first person notion. Actions and the precursors of action, and indeed in my view even the ownership of a body by a subject, can be present at Degree 0. They can all be elucidated without mention of the first person notion, without the subject whose actions they are possessing the first person notion at all.

Subjects who represent themselves, often reliably and knowledgeably, as agents of particular actions, and as owning body parts, succeed in doing so because of the systematic relation of their notions of themselves, of action, of ownership, to this metaphysically prior level of agency that does not need to involve the first person. Misrepresentations and illusions of ownership, as in the rubber hand illusions, are illusions that, for instance, the rubber hand is part of a body largely under one's own control.

Consequence 3: Individuation without Everyday Knowledge of What Individuates

We are faced with an interesting and potentially puzzling combination. What makes for the identity of a particular subject over time is identity of integrating apparatus (as I argued in *The Mirror of the World*), together, as I would now add, with an action-initiation apparatus. But of course the first person does not refer to this complex subpersonal apparatus. Nor does the ordinary user of the first person, whether their first person is nonconceptual or conceptual, need to have any conception or knowledge of this apparatus. Yet on the other hand, there must be something about the representing subject that makes it the case that in

³ For further discussion, see Shoemaker's important paper 'Embodiment and Behavior' (1984a).

perception, registration, knowledge, memory, and the rest, the representing subject is latching onto a subject or person, rather than a mere body, or a mere point of view in space.⁴

I suggest that what makes it so is the constitutive link of the first person with representation of its own actions, as outlined in the agency-involving account of the first person. Only a subject with an integrating apparatus and action-initiation component can be the producer of an action. A point of view in space cannot be the producer. Insofar as it makes sense to say that a body is the producer of the action, that can mean only that the subject whose body it is is the producer.

I suggest also that it is the constitutive link of the first person with the representation of agency that is the ultimate source of our temptation, mentioned earlier, to cite the possibility of brain transplants when we initially object to attempts to identify *i* and *this body*. Ordinary thinkers do not need to have contemplated or to have taken a stance on such possibilities for their first person notion to be distinct from notions like *this body*. Ordinary thinkers' use of the first person respects the constraints formulated in the agency-involving account. The agency-involving account is inextricably involved with the existence of a subpersonal action-initiation component. A subject's integration apparatus and action-initiation component are preserved if her brain is connected to a new body. The first person intelligibility of a subject's own persistence without persistence of what *this body* refers to something is founded in the agency-involving nature of subjects, and in the agency-involving nature of the first person, rather than having some kind of primitive modal intelligibility on its own.

Consequence 4: A constitutive account of the first person does not involve the intersubjective, the second person, or social matters.

The agency-involving account of the first person bears on the position of such diverse thinkers as G. H. Mead (1967) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1992) that there is no conception of self as object until a subject is involved social relations of one kind or another. Mead is in my view convincing in his insistence that thought and perception concerning the body is not yet representation that involves the first person. "The self has the characteristic that it is an object to itself, and that characteristic distinguishes it from other objects and from the body"

⁴ "So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp" (Rilke) - or at least by what in everyday life we do not need to grasp.

(1967:136). Mead's own positive view is that "it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside of social experience" (140), and that "the language process is essential for the development of the self" (135). The agency-involving conception of the first person suggests that the positive claims of Mead are much too strong. The agency-involving account employs materials that do not make any mention of either social relations or language.

Sartre says that uses of the first person that seem to be independent of a subject's involvement in relations with other persons can all be understood as really reference to the body - 'Body as illusory fulfillment of the I-concept' as he entitled one table in his book *The Transcendence of the Ego* (2004: 90). But as I argued above, uses of the first person in contents whose truth involves agency of the subject cannot be understood in purely bodily terms. There can be rich and extensive such attributions of agency without a subject participating in any social world at all.

The fact that there is no explicit mention of the social in the agency-involving account does not of course exclude the possibility that what it mentions does require, in less obvious ways, some relation to a social world. One claim for such less obvious involvement is that anyone capable of mental states with first person content must be capable of being corresponding states with third person content, states that attribute actions, for example. Gareth Evans' Generality Constraint (1982), with its Strawsonian origins, and perhaps considerations of recombability, might be cited in support of this claim. But those principles apply only to conceptualized content, not to nonconceptual content.⁵ Though it is also a matter for a different paper, the nature of nonconceptual content, and the attributional, quasi-predicative contents it involves, are answerable to explanatory roles that do not need to involve the generality and recombability that are distinctive of conceptual content, meaning, and judgement.

I am thus inclined to conclude that a full account of the nature of what is involved in possessing the notion of the first person at Level 1 undermines the thesis that interpersonal relations must be involved in first person representation. The Mead/Sartre arguments are but a small sample of the arguments that have actually been canvassed, and might plausibly be canvassed, for that thesis. All such arguments merit a detailed consideration that is not possible here. Nonetheless, I think that the agency-involving characterization of the nature of the first person tells against all of them.

⁵ Some of the arguments for recombability and generality are clearly restricted to judgement and to the level of nonconceptual content. See *A Study of Concepts* (Peacocke 1992), chapter 2.

This conclusion may make it seem that a good theory of the first person has nothing to contribute to a philosophical understanding of intersubjective relations and our conception of many minds. The very next consequence of the action-involving theory, Consequence 5, however, implies that that is not so.

Consequence 5: Despite Consequence 4, the agency-involving account of the first person connects it with resources that contribute to the explanation of our access to features of the minds of others; to the explanation of the character of our psychological ascriptions to others; and to the explanation of features of an agent's interaction with other subjects, once a subject does have a conception of other minds.

There are at least two ways in which the agency-involving account bears on the possession of the conception of multiple subjects. One point of contact concerns the range of predications made of other subjects, and the resources that aid in rationally making such predications that are available even in advance of possession of a conception of many subjects. The other point of contact concerns the conception of the nature of those other subjects themselves.

We can consider the first point of contact, on the range of predications made rationally of other subjects. Events that are the subject's own actions can be represented in ways that involve both action and perception, as in the phenomena so extensively discussed by the mirror-neuron theorists (for an overview, see Iacoboni 2008). A subject can perceive what is in fact the action of another subject, and knows exactly how to perform such an action himself, without inference at the personal level. Similarly, if the subject himself acts in a certain way, he can perceive whether some action on the part of another is of the same kind as he has just performed. When events are so represented in this unified action/perception way by a subject capable of first person representation, that subject will be capable of seeing events which are actions, but actions performed by others rather than himself, as actions, at least with a teleology. This subject may not yet possess a conception of many subjects, but has already made a crucial step towards it. If this subject wonders what unifies and explains these events over time, occurring in a given body, the answer will be the presence of a subject, of the same general kind as he is. In connecting grasp of the first person with agency, the agency-involving account contributes to an explanation of the significance of the resources available even in advance of possession of the conception of many minds for an explanation both of possible modes of acquisition of the conception of many minds, and of some of the relations between levels once the conception is acquired. In fact, in the case of

humans, there is extensive evidence that even quite young children expect events that are actions not merely to have a teleology - a goal - but also to be produced by an agent (Carey 2009, Chapter 5, 'Core Cognition: Agency'). What the present remarks imply is that when the subject does have the conception of many minds, events that are perceived in the unified action/perception way, available in advance of the conception of multiple subjects, can give reasons for making action-ascriptions to other minds.

The position I have just been outlining has a complex and interesting relation to Vittorio Gallese's important conception of a shared manifold of intersubjectivity, provided by the content of unified action/perception representations of events (2005). Gallese writes, "it is by means of this shared manifold that we recognize other human beings as similar to us" (2005, 115). I wholly agree; for Gallese's work can be seen as an elaboration of the underlying representational states and formats that can sustain the points of the previous paragraph. Gallese also says that the representational format underlying unified action/perception representation of events meets the condition that there be an "indifference of the representational format to the peculiar perspective spaces from which referents project their content; in other words, indifference to self-other distinctions" (2005, 107). It is true that representations underlying the unified action/perception way of representing an event can be applied both to one's own action and to those of others. We do, however, need to distinguish between the self/other distinction and the self/nonsel self distinction. To say that the shared intersubjective manifold contributes to our grasp and application of the self/other distinction is not to say that it contributes to our grasp and application of the self/nonsel self distinction. According to the agency-involving account of the first person, we do not need to invoke the shared manifold - the unified action/perception ways of representing events - in an account of first person representation. On the agency-involving account as I have developed it, a subject can enjoy self-representation without other-representation. In fact, one can, to use Gallese's language, recognize other human beings as similar to oneself only if one already has some grasp of the first person. The agency-involving account specifies the nature of that prior grasp of the first person.

Let us consider a subject who employs the first person, even the conceptual first person, in thought. This subject may employ predicative concepts, true or false of particular events, such as *is a raising of a hand*, *is a reaching for a cup*, and these concepts may have the unified action/perception character we mentioned. These predicative concepts may, however, require for their satisfaction only that the events in question have a certain teleology, a goal-directed explanation, and not require that they be produced by a continuant

agent, with a past and all the other structures normally involved in agency. For such concepts, we should not identify the contents *I'm A-ing* that the agency-involved account says are essential to the first person with the occurrence of such a merely teleologically-specified event of A-ing in the body of the subject. There can be such an event without it's being an action of A-ing on the part of the subject. The phenomena of anarchic hand, illustrated by Dr. Strangelove's Nazi salutes, exemplifies this possibility (for discussion and further references, see Marcel 2003). Real events of anarchic hand, such as undoing a series of buttons on the shirt the agent is wearing, contrary to the intentions - and to the immediately preceding actions of the subject in doing up the buttons - evidently have a teleology. The anarchic hand is a hand of the subject's body; but that does not make the undoing of the buttons one of the subject's actions. "*I'm not undoing the buttons, it's not under my control, this wretched hand is doing it on its own!*" would be a true utterance by the unhappy subject suffering from anarchic hand. The upshot of this point is that the sense in which a subject enters the truth conditions of the action-predication *I'm A-ing* goes far beyond the occurrence of an event with the characteristic teleology of A-ings occurring with the participation of the agent's body.

In one of the later chapters of *The Mirror of the World*, I emphasized that capacities for certain kinds of self-consciousness can combine with other capacities to explain a certain kind of intellectual achievement on the part of the subject.⁶ I suggest that a subject who has perspectival self-consciousness, and grasps the first person, already has the resources rationally to make other-ascriptions, even if he has not yet reached the point of marshaling those resources in that service. To oversimplify in ways that do not matter here, to be perspectively self-conscious is to be capable of thinking of oneself, as such, as someone who is given in a way that is also third personal. Such a person may see a subject who is fact himself acting, and not realize it is himself. When he does gain the further information that the person given in a third personal way is himself, he is in a position to see that he had a basis for ascribing a genuine action, of a subject, to someone presented in a third personal way. Since someone presented in that third personal way need not be him, this basis is a basis for genuine other-attributions of actions (and not merely events with a teleology). For a subject who is perspectively self-conscious, and who also enjoys the unified

⁶ See for instance the discussion of the way in which perspectival self-consciousness and reflective self-consciousness can combine to explain the operation of what Bernard Williams called 'the absolute conception' (Peacocke 2014, Chapter IX, section 4).

action/perception ways of representing events, the move from self-attribution to other-attribution is no huge leap.

The other point of contact of the agency-involving account with the conception of many subjects concerns our thought about the nature of those subjects. This contact exists both at the constitutive level, and as an epistemological matter. According to the constitutive account that I offered in *Truly Understood* (2008), to think of something as a subject is to think of that subject as something of fundamentally the same kind as oneself. To think of multiple subjects is to think of multiple entities of fundamentally the same kind as oneself. This gives the first person a constitutive place in the account of thought about other minds. Now if other subjects are conceived of the same general kind as me, and thinking of oneself involves conceiving of oneself as an agent, it follows that our thought about other subjects is thought about them as agents. This I would argue is indeed the basic form of perception of another as a subject, viz. as an agent. Our interaction with other subjects, in conversation, in contact attention, in joint activities and the formation of joint attitudes, is interaction with them as agents.

The constitutive role of the first person in thought about subject in general can help to explain why the first person has a special role to play in the epistemology of attribution of mental states and events to other subjects. The first person has a distinctive epistemological role under the ‘Like Me’ thesis of Andrew Meltzoff (2007), according to which a basic way of coming to know propositions about other subjects involves appreciating that they are like oneself. If to be a subject is to be of the same fundamental kind as me, then attributing mental states and events to others in accordance with an overarching principle that they are Like Me has a default reasonableness.

Consequence 6: The agency-involving account of the first person can explain and unify the epistemology of bodily and mental events involving the first person.

The epistemological phenomena in question pivot around what in earlier writing I called ‘the use of ‘I’ as agent’ (2007: 370). A use of ‘I’ as agent is a use in a self-ascription that is made simply by the thinker taking her apparent action-awareness, with its content *I’m A-ing now*, at face value. We need to explain why there is a use of the first person as agent in which, so used, it is immune to error through misidentification in essentially Shoemaker’s sense (1984b). (For the specialists, this is more strictly a case of immunity that is *de facto* and holds

in normal and nearby possible circumstances.) Judgements in which there is a use of the first person as agent are also cases of knowledge. We also need to explain how it can be that there is such a diversity of cases of use of the first person that display this immunity to error through misidentification. The diverse uses include cases of self-ascription of bodily action; self-predications of bodily posture and states; self-predications based on spatial and temporal perception of the layout of one's environment, with a content concerning the subject's relation to events and objects therein; and self-ascriptions of such mental actions as judgements, decisions, inferences, and calculations.

On the agency-involving account of the first person as developed here, self-ascription of bodily agency is constitutively involved in possession of the first person. Such bodily self-ascriptions are knowledge when they are made on the basis of action-awareness of the very bodily action self-ascribed. One way of explaining their status as knowledge is to cite the link between judging in accordance with the possession condition for a concept and knowledge of a content containing that concept. It is a plausible general principle, with a rationale in the theory of conceptual content, that coming to make a judgement in accordance with the possession condition for a concept in the content yields knowledge of that content (Peacocke 1992). One could equally argue for this epistemological point from the fundamental reference rule for the first person, once it is recognized that the subject to which the first person refers must be an agent.

It is also a motivated part of the agency-involving account that the subject at Degree 1 or above who employs the first person also makes bodily ascriptions not necessarily involving action using that very first person notion. As we said, the basis for such ascriptions are such matters as bodily perception that can be present even for a subject at Degree 0. The subject experiencing proprioceptive states, and making bodily ascriptions by the means of predicative transfer outlined above, will be the same subject that makes the action ascriptions mentioned in the agency-involving account. So it is certainly no accident that, under that account, there are knowledgeable self-ascriptions both of actions and of bodily postures that are immune to error through misidentification. A similar point applies to the immunity to error through misidentification of spatial predications such as *I am on a bridge*, given the sufficiency, again by transfer of predicates, of *here*-perceptions for first person predications.

If in general apparent action-awareness with a content *I'm A-ing* is normal circumstances sufficient entitlement to come to know that I'm A-ing, the point applies equally to the self-ascription of mental actions. When made on the basis of action-awareness, self-ascriptions of judgements, decisions, inferences, calculations, suppositions and other

mental events are similarly immune to error through misidentification. The agency-involving account of the first person unifies our epistemological access to our own bodily and mental actions.⁷

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⁷ The first version of this material was written in Copenhagen the day before its presentation at the workshop in December 2015 on the Body and the Self organized by Adrian Alsmith and Frederique de Vignemont. Frederique’s diplomatic, persistent, and effective prodding made me produce that first version. I learned from the general discussion, and in particular from the remarks of my commentator, Jose Luis Bermudez, and from the observations of Patrick Haggard and Frederique de Vignemont at the Copenhagen meeting. An expanded version was presented at the Harvard Workshop on Self-Knowledge in March 2016. At that meeting, I was helped by the comments of Matthew Boyle, Richard Moran, and Lucy O’Brien. At several meetings in London in the summer of 2016, I benefited from further comments from Patrick Haggard, Anthony Marcel, Michael Martin, and Hong Yu Wong. Issues very closely related to those addressed here are pursued in the Symposium on *The Mirror of the World* that is forthcoming in *Analysis*. The text above has been influenced by reflections on the contributions to that Symposium made by Naomi Eilan, Karen Neander, and Susanna Schellenberg. I thank also the editors and an anonymous referee for helpful suggestions.

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