



Inquiry

An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/sinq20>

Other I's, communication, and the second person

Naomi Eilan

To cite this article: Naomi Eilan (2020): Other I's, communication, and the second person, Inquiry, DOI: [10.1080/0020174X.2020.1788987](https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2020.1788987)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2020.1788987>



Published online: 12 Jul 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 58



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Other I's, communication, and the second person

Naomi Eilan

Department of Philosophy, University Of Warwick, Coventry, UK

ABSTRACT

Why do we think there are other self-conscious about, other thinkers of 'I' thoughts, other possessors of a first-person perspective? What is the most basic manifestation of our grip on their existence? This paper develops an answer to these questions summarised under the heading: Second Person Communication Claim (SPCC), which says: Our grip on the idea that other self-conscious subjects exist is rooted in our capacity to enter into particular kinds of communicative relations with others, in which we adopt attitudes of mutual address and think of each other as 'you'. If the SPCC is right, our grip on the existence and nature of other I's, and on their relation to ourselves, rests essentially on a practical capacity to treat others as partners in conversation, addressors and addressees, with all that this entails. This contrasts with the traditional approach to other minds, on which our knowledge and thought of others rests on observation and is essentially third personal and theoretical.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 26 February 2020; Accepted 2 May 2020

KEYWORDS Second person; other I's; communication; self consciousness; knowing other persons

1. Introduction

Why do we think there are other self-conscious creatures about, other thinkers of 'I' thoughts, other possessors of a first-person perspective? What is the most basic manifestation of our grip on their existence? And what capacities play an essential role in giving us this idea?

These are all versions of questions I label the 'Other I's Questions' (OIQ). The issues I will be discussing lie at the intersection of these questions and another set, which I label the 'Communication Questions' (CQ), examples of which include the following. What is the role, if any, of communication in grounding our idea of other minds? What difference would putting communication centre stage make to the way we formulate and address various versions of the so-called 'other minds problem'?

CONTACT Naomi Eilan  n.eilan@warwick.ac.uk; eilan.naomi@gmail.com

© 2020 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Neither the CQ or OIQ are much discussed in current mainstream debates about our knowledge and understanding of other minds, and as we progress, I will consider various reasons for this. The specific proposal I will be setting out says that putting communication centre stage in accounts of what gives us the idea of other minds like our own serves, first, to put the Other I's Question central stage, and, second, to deliver a distinctive answer to it, an answer that suggests a substantive and potentially radical corrective to what I take to be the standard, dominant framework for approaching other minds questions in general.

To set the scene for the issues that I will be discussing, it will help to have a sketch of this dominant framework before us. It can be summarised under the heading of the *Third Person Observation Claim (TPOC)*.

Our knowledge and understanding of other minds is based on observation, in one of the following two ways: either perception reveals other minds to us, directly, or it provides the basis for inferences about them. Knowledge and thought about others thus based are 'third personal', expressed in propositions such as: 'She (or this person) is in pain'.

Standard formulations of the 'other minds problem', epistemological and conceptual, take the TPOC as a given, and use it to point to *prima facie* epistemological asymmetries and conceptual gaps between third person thoughts and knowledge about others, and the kind of first personal thought and knowledge we have of ourselves, expressed in propositions such as 'I am in pain'. The challenge is to explain how knowledge about others is possible, and how the concepts we use have the same meaning in the first and third person cases, despite these asymmetries and gaps. Applying this third person framework to the OIQ, the challenge within this framework, to the extent that it is considered, is to explain how, through various combinations of observation, *a priori* reflection and inference, we can make sense of the idea that other self-conscious subjects, other thinkers of I thoughts, exist.

By way of motivating a switch to communication, consider the following scenario. Suppose I see someone looking sad, and think a third personal thought to myself such as 'she is sad'. I may wonder whether she really is. The most direct way to find out, in most cases, is to ask her. In so doing, in addressing her and engaging in conversation with her, I am, at least on the face of it, doing something quite different from arriving at a judgement on the basis of third person observation (and, possibly, inference).

Several *prima facie* key differences can be put initially as follows.

- (a) In asking her, I am, on the face of it, engaging directly with her own first personal take on how things are with her. On the face of it, we have here a direct and immediate engagement with another's 'I' thinking, in her own statement of how she is feeling.
- (b) My awareness of her, through address, is bound up with her awareness of me, through address, in contrast to the observation-based case which is 'uni-directional'.
- (c) The knowledge I gain is shared, or mutual.

The central thrust of the claim I want to oppose to the TPOC approach to the Other I's Question says we should take these *prima facie* differences seriously, and that developing and substantiating them should play a critical role both in rejecting the standard third person framework and in formulating an alternative to it.

The claim I will set out, in making first steps in this direction, is in two parts. The first says that we should locate our capacity to make sense of the existence of other 'I' thinkers in an account of what it is to treat others as *addressees* and *addressors*, i.e. partners in conversation, in the context of communicative exchanges. The second says that when we do treat others in this way, their first-person perspective is immediately given to us in virtue of our thinking of them in these contexts as *you*, rather than, say, 'she' or 'that person'.

These claims can be summarised under the heading of the following *Second Person Communication Claim (SPCC)*.

Our grip on the idea that other self-conscious subjects exist is rooted in our capacity to enter into particular kinds of communicative relations with them, in which we adopt attitudes of mutual address and think of each other as 'you'.

Such a claim faces a multitude of immediate challenges. One kind will put pressure on the idea that the SPCC provides a genuine alternative to the third person framework, as expressed in the TPOC. For example, the claim might be that when we communicate with others, their existence as thinkers of 'I' thoughts is inferred from the observed evidence provided by their utterances. Another claim might be that there is no such thing as an irreducible second person way of thinking of others: when we use the linguistic expression 'you' we deploy a combination of first and third person ways of thinking to single out our interlocutors. According to both objections, materials supplied by the TPOC can accommodate everything we want to say about the way we think of others when we communicate with them using the second person pronoun to address them. In

the next two sections I will set out what I take to be the minimal claims about communication and the second person respectively that we need to have in place to respond to such objections.

A second kind of challenge, which goes deeper, is this. Suppose we agree that the claims I set out about communication and the second person do provide a *genuine* alternative to the TPOC. Arguably a more important challenge is to show that they provide an *interesting* alternative, one that both reveals important aspects of our thought and knowledge of ourselves and others, and provides the materials for a convincing diagnosis of what the TPOC gets wrong.

Most of what follows will be devoted to the first kind of challenge. But in the last two sections, drawing on claims made earlier, I make first moves in addressing the second by sketching what I take to be the main ideas that need to be developed on behalf of the SPCC on this front. To anticipate: so far, I have said very little about how the third person perspective should be characterised. It is, in fact, striking how little is said about it explicitly in writings that formulate various versions of the ‘other minds problem’ by appealing to the third person nature of our thought about others. However, various characterisations are slipped in, in passing. Such thinking is variously described as providing us with an objective, and/or detached, and/or theoretical, and/or scientific perspective on others. These in turn tend to be contrasted with the first-person perspective one has on oneself, described as immersed and so forth.

The relation among these characterisations is worth separate examination. Here, though, I will focus for much of the time on the characterisation implied by a minimal reading of the TOPC – the third person perspective is a theoretical perspective, exercised on the basis of observation, the adoption of which aims at achieving theoretical knowledge. In the final two sections of the paper I sketch a proposal on which adopting the SPCC provides, potentially, a substantive alternative to this account by claiming that, at its core, thought and knowledge of others is essentially *practical*, in several respects, rather than observational and theoretical. If something along these lines is right, this can also begin to provide the materials for a diagnosis of a sense, which I believe many have, that there is something wrong, or off-key, about the way the ‘other minds problem’ is standardly formulated and addressed.

2. Communication and social acts of mind

Much if not most of what we learn about what other people feel, believe and so forth is acquired through verbal or nonverbal communication. It is

therefore *prima facie* surprising that communication is rarely referred to in discussions of our knowledge and understanding of other minds.¹ There is a dense network of interlocking presuppositions underlying this absence, in epistemology and the philosophy of mind. But my focus here will be on theories of communication. I suspect the most common and general reason from this perspective will turn on the idea that our knowledge and understanding of others through communication can and should be explained by material made available under the TPOC heading, so there is no need to single communication out for special attention; and no possibility of it providing an alternative, or a basic account of our knowledge of other minds. On such views, when someone tells me she is sad, say, I learn that she is sad on the basis of the evidence provided by the utterance I hear, where my most immediate thought will have the form: 'She is telling me that she is sad'. On this kind of account, there is nothing the TPOC can't accommodate when we turn to communication-based thought and knowledge.

The first step we need to take in making good the SPCC alternative to this approach, is to endorse Reid's claim that when we stand in communicative relations with others we are engaged in irreducibly 'social acts of mind'.²

I call those operations social, which necessarily imply social intercourse with some other intelligent being who bears a part in them. A man may see, and hear, and remember, and judge, and reason; he may deliberate and form purposes, and execute them, without the intervention of any other intelligent being. They are solitary acts. But when he asks a question for information, when he testifies a fact, when he gives a command to his servant, when he makes a promise, or enters into a contract, *these are social acts of mind, and can have no existence without the intervention of some other intelligent being, who acts a part in them.* (My emphasis. *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, Essay V, 'Of Morals', Chapter VI, 'Of the nature and obligation of a contract'. Reid 1788/2010)

To take the idea of social acts of mind seriously is to say, e.g. that when you tell me something, your act of mind is incomplete without my contribution, and the same holds for my acts of mind when I respond. These are acts of mind that 'take two', essentially. To think of these as acts of *mind* is to reject the picture on which the mental aspect of such acts is

¹For an account of scepticism-related objections to appealing to communication, and for suggestions as to how to overcome them, see Anil Gomes (2015).

²The most extended recent account of Reid's social acts of mind, to which I am greatly indebted, is to be found throughout the course of Richard Moran's 2018 *The Exchange of Words*.

complete and specifiable independently of appeal to the other's contribution. What we have here is, then, potentially, a deep socialisation of at least some mental acts. Our questions are: how exactly does this socialisation work, and how and why might it challenge the TOPC approach to communication?

One way to approach this is to ask how we should understand Austin's remarks to the effect that a mark of illocutionary acts such as telling is that their performance 'involves the securing of uptake' (Austin 1962, 116–117, his emphasis) – where it is this uptake condition that makes them essentially communicative. As this is usually understood, uptake is explained by appeal to the concept of 'recognition' – one's act is taken up in the required way when it is recognised or recognisable by the other. Correlatively, appeal to recognition of the act by the other would be one way to cash Reid's notion of completion of one's act of mind by another. Guy Longworth provides a very useful account of problems with this particular formulation, and a map of the options available for dealing with them (Longworth 2019). These turn, for example, on whether one demands *de facto* recognition or mere recognizability by others of the act produced by the speaker; whether recognition is deemed necessary or sufficient, and if necessary, necessary for attempted performance of the act or for fully successful performance, and more. From our perspective, though, the two most salient points, common, I believe, to all positions in these debates and accounts, are these.

First, they all give an account on which the acts performed are, in *some* sense, bound up with others' recognition, so some sense in which the satisfaction conditions for the successful performance of the illocutionary act are 'social'. Second, at the level of abstraction at which these debates are conducted, there are no explicit restrictions on how the speaker and hearer should think of each other for successful communication to take place, so no ruling out of a third person account. Nor do they rule out that observation and theory are the means whereby the hearer achieves uptake. So for all that has been said it is not clear why the TPOC can't accommodate the sociality of communicative acts as conceived by Reid.

Thus, to adopt a loosely Gricean formulation (though nothing much hangs on that), suppose Sam produces an utterance 'I am sad' with the intention that Sally form the belief that he is sad because she recognises his intention. So, for Sam's utterance 'I am sad' to count as an act of telling, on this kind of account, he may think of Sally as 'this person', 'she' or 'Sally' in formulating his communicative intention, for all the account explicitly says. Similarly, there is no restriction on how Sally must think of Sam in

order for the communicative act to succeed through her recognition of it. There is no reason, then, to rule out a third person formulation of the belief about the speaker that she arrives at when successful communication occurs. So, there is no reason to think the TOPC cannot cover our knowledge and thought about others' minds through communication, so no reason to single out communication for special attention. As far as I can tell, many rejections of Grice, on various grounds, such as rejection of the idea that the aim of an utterance is to induce belief, or rejection of the levels of iteration this account requires, do not obviously rule out the TPOC. Given this, it may seem that there really is no reason to single out communication as a distinctive source of knowledge or understanding.

If appeal to communication is to introduce a distinctive sense of sociality of mind, and a distinctive reading of Reid, not accountable for by the TPOC, we need an account of what it is in normal communication that is lacking in this kind of third-person information transmission. In this connection, two striking features of many accounts of illocutionary acts are worth noting. First, in most discussions of the kind of recognition involved in uptake there is, to my knowledge, no explicit requirement that the hearer make known to the speaker that the illocutionary act has been recognised. Thus, for all that is said, for Sam to have successfully told Sally that he is sad, it may suffice that Sally recognise the act of telling, to herself, and think, to herself, 'He's sad' without in any way *acknowledging to Sam*, that his illocutionary act of telling has been recognised by her.

A second striking feature of Grice-inspired accounts of illocutionary acts such as telling, but many others critical of Grice for various reasons as well, is that, for all they say on this matter, address is not treated as constitutive of, or internal to, the execution of a communicative act of telling. It is, at most, an independent activity facilitating one might engage in, a verbal or non-verbal 'hey you' the speaker might produce, for example, in order to attract attention, prior to performing an illocutionary act.

But when we think of what is less than ideal in the exchange just described, in particular, the absence of acknowledgement from Sally to Sam, another notion of address comes to the fore. On this other notion, 'address' qualifies an attitude internal to the basic activity of communicating, rather than a type of extrinsic, additional activity, where to make this attitude manifest is to make manifest to one's interlocutor that channels of communication are open. This is, intuitively at least, part of what seems to be missing in the exchange just described.

What we are after when we appeal to such attitudes of address is very familiar, if hard to define. The following example should help to bring the phenomenon into view. Imagine you are sitting at a pep talk organised by senior university administrators, in which the idea of your university's 'entrepreneurial gene', say, is being promoted. At some point, you raise your head from your doodling, and your eyes lock into those of a colleague sitting opposite you at the large table. This meeting of eyes may last a split second, and then you each return to whatever it is you were doing before. Here are four of many possible scenarios of what happens as your eyes meet.

- (a) A brief almost deadpan meeting of eyes suffices to establish you both feel and think exactly the same about the proceedings.
- (b) Your eyes meet. You expect an exchange of shared embarrassment/boredom, for example. Instead you encounter eyes shining with enthusiastic endorsement. This kind of exchange probably needs more time than the first, as each one of you registers the difference, before you return to your doodles and he resumes his rapt attention to the speaker.
- (c) Your eyes meet, but he looks at you questioningly, he doesn't, as we say, know what you are 'on about'. Or maybe he's just pretending not to. Slight embarrassment or frustration ensue and you resume your doodling.
- (d) Your eyes meet. But it is clear to you that his thoughts are elsewhere – he sees you, perhaps even has your eyes in focus, but fails to notice, and hence to respond to, the invitation to exchange views. (Which is different from someone deliberately 'looking though' you).

There is something common in the meeting of eyes in to a.-c. lacking in d., despite the vast difference in the nature of the non-verbal conversation that ensues. The meeting of eyes in the first three cases, but not the fourth, is of a kind that makes manifest a mutual registration that channels of communication are open, thereby establishing a kind of communicative connectedness. This is part of what I am calling making mutually manifest an attitude of address. And this is certainly lacking in the Sam and Sally exchange.

Should Sam's assertion count as a case of successful telling despite this absence? On many accounts of telling it would. But intuitions about telling are notoriously fluid. There is also a quite natural hearing of 'telling' on which this story does not suffice for treating Sam's act as one of telling.

On this reading, in the case described, we may imagine Sam treating his own utterance as an attempt at telling which failed and was, instead, merely a case of getting the information across, say. Similarly, on this way of treating telling, we may imagine that Sally doesn't treat Sam's saying what he does as an instance of telling either, but, rather, as an authoritative announcement about the state of Sam's psyche (which may as well, from her perspective, have been boomed out by a tannoy).

Not much can hang, in my view, solely on intuitions about how we should hear 'telling'. What matters, from our perspective, is just that this rich hearing exists, and that it is only by hearing it in the richer way, one that requires mutual address, that we are *en route* to formulating a notion of communication that the SPCC can appeal to in claiming that communication gives rise to an alternative way of understanding and knowing other minds, one not covered by the TPOC.

Or, rather, this is the first step needed. Making mutual address internal to the very activity of communicating in its most basic form has the potential for yielding a deeper socialisation of the mind, a deeper reading of Reid's idea of completion by the other than that allowed for by the TPOC, only if we take it that such attitudes of address involve ways of thinking of the other that (a) are only available to be thought when we adopt such attitudes, and, relatedly, (b) cannot be reduced to a combination of first and third person ways of thinking. This, in turn, is what is required if we are to treat 'you' thinking as primitive and irreducible, such that the materials available under the TPOC heading cannot capture it. As we shall see, it is when we consider the nature of 'you' thinking in this light that the link between appeal to communication as a distinctive source of knowledge and understanding of others and the Other I's Question makes an appearance. To be thinking of someone as 'you' is, in part, to be aware of them as a thinker of I thoughts.

In the next section I set out what I take to be the minimal claims about 'you' thinking we need to have in place if the SPCC is to provide a genuine alternative to the TPOC. Before doing so, it is worth briefly noting the following feature of the discussion so far. To the extent that we appeal to the concept of recognition in explaining such thinking, we are moving from making do with appeal to recognition of the *act*, as in most accounts of illocution, to embedding such recognition of the act, essentially, in recognition of the other as a *person* and as a *partner in conversation*, with all that that potentially entails. It is here that we have first glimmers of the deep alternative

to the third person perspective considered as objective or detached. Or so I will be suggesting in later sections.

3. The second person

Consider the indexical 'you'. As a matter of its standing meaning, an utterance of 'you' refers to the person addressed in that utterance. But in the sense that there is such a thing as a self-conscious, first person belief, there is no such thing as a second-person belief, or so it seems to me ... I mean to deny that there is any such thing as an essentially indexical second-person belief. The phenomenon of the second person is a linguistic one, bound up with the fact that utterances, as we make them, are typically directed to people, not just made to the cosmos ... The word 'you' has no correlate at the level of thought ... (Heck 2002, 12)

Thus, Heck in perhaps the most cited passage appealed to in support of claims to the effect that there is no such thing as a primitive, irreducible 'you' awareness. According to Heck, there is a kind of thought about oneself one can think only if one is the person thought about; and this precisely mirrors the conditions for the correct use of 'I' to refer to a person – one can only use it if one is that person. Such thinking is in this sense essentially indexical. Heck's claim about the second person is that, in contrast, there is no way of thinking about a person that can only be employed when conditions for the use of the second person pronoun in address are met. This is the sense in which there are no essentially indexical second person thoughts.³

The focus on the linguistic meaning of the indexical is something of a distraction for our purposes. What matters is whether there is a way of thinking that can only be employed when conditions for address are met. If there is, it will set the conditions for the paradigmatic, primary meaning-determining use of 'you'. Why then, does the idea that there are no such ways of thinking seem intuitively compelling, so compelling that Heck admits, and is not bothered by the fact, that he has no argument in its favour?

One reason might be that that when one is in a position to address someone in face- to-face communication, other ways of thinking of the person are available, ways of thinking that it is natural to appeal to. Consider, for example, the difference I signalled at the outset of the paper between judging that someone is sad on the basis of observing her and doing so in response to her telling me that she is. One *prima facie*

³For an extended critical examination of Heck, see Longworth (2014). See also Rödl (2014), Heal (2014/16), and Hasse (2014/16).

difference I noted was that in the latter but not the former case, awareness of the other is 'bound up', as I put it there, with being aware that she is aware of me. Christopher Peacocke calls awareness of the other as someone who is aware of oneself 'ascriptive interpersonal self-consciousness'. On Peacocke's own account, which rejects appeal to the second person, this requires three levels of embedding of the self-concept in the contents of your self-conscious thought (Peacocke 2014, 239). On his account, we need appeal to no more than a combination of first and third person ways of thinking in explaining such interpersonal self-consciousness. On such an account, there is nothing here that the TOPC cannot handle.

In the university meeting scenario, focusing for simplicity on the first three cases, Peacocke's ascriptive interpersonal self-consciousness is indeed available to both of you, as are perception-based demonstrative ways of thinking. This may make it seem that there is nothing left over for a 'you' way of thinking to do, it is superfluous. But to say various ways of thinking are available on a particular occasion is not to show that they are actually exploited in a particular activity or task, in this case that of establishing the kind of connection we have described as obtaining in the first three cases. It is not hard to imagine scenarios in which two people are demonstratively aware of each other and each also thinks of the other as someone who is aware of them, but they fail to engage in the kind of connecting that happens in the three cases in which, as I put, eyes lock.

Perhaps the central difference between such accounts and those that appeal to 'you' thinking to capture the phenomenon is that the former ways of thinking are not communicative, in that their employment does not depend on, and is not expressive of, standing in communicative relation with the person thought about; whereas as we have so far minimally defined it, 'you' thinking is. And it is here we reach what is perhaps the deepest reason underpinning reluctance to admit that 'you' is expressive of a *sui generis* way of thinking. It is a reluctance to allow, for reasons that will emerge, that standing in a communicative relation, of the kind that obtains when we adopt attitudes of mutual address, can be constitutive of individuals' ways of thinking.

Much has been written in recent years about second person thought as expressive of a distinctive way of thinking of others.⁴ Not all that is said would meet the requirements I am stipulating for distinguishing it from

⁴For two fairly recent collections see Conant and Rödl (2014), and Eilan (2014/16b).

accounts of thinking that are consistent with the TPOC. For the latter purposes, I will draw on Buber's famous distinction between the I-it and the I-you relation. I should note in advance that I am being selective. Buber was not consistent, and what he said varied with points he was trying to drive home, in different contexts, where this in turn is one, but certainly not the only, source of the great variability of what people say under the 'second person' heading about the nature of second person awareness. The stipulations I will be proposing answer to only some of the many concerns that inform these differing accounts.⁵ The following three (somewhat gnomic claims) give a flavour of the ideas I will be drawing on.

I "experience" the it. I bring back from the encounter with things "some knowledge of their condition." I experience "what there is to things."

But my relation to the You is different than this ... "The basic word I-You establishes the world of Relation. Whoever says You does not have something as his object ... he stands in a relation."

Relation is reciprocity. My you acts on me as I act on it ... "When one says You, the I of the You is said too." (Buber 1958)

There are (at least) three ideas here. The first can be illustrated as follows. Think back to our department meeting. I may look across at my colleague in order to acquire information about her, how she is taking the proceedings, say, and, seeing her glazed eyes acquire knowledge that she is bored witless. In so doing I stand in what Buber calls the 'I-it' relation to her; she enters into my 'world as experienced', or the world observed. Alternatively, I may look across at her in order, as we say, to catch her eye, to connect, and, perhaps, once connected, either to indicate by raised eyebrow or gesture that I want to know how she is taking it. In the latter case, I seek to establish a communicative, or dialogical relation with her. When that is the aim of my looking, and I succeed in fulfilling it, thereby 'establishing the world of relation', I am aware of my colleague as 'you'. Call this the *Communicative Relation Claim*.

The second point concerns the success conditions for 'you' awareness. Such awareness is, as Buber puts it, reciprocal, or mutual. Returning to the department meeting example – you may look across at your colleague in order to catch her eye, but fail to do so, say because she is looking elsewhere or, as in our case (d), because her mind is elsewhere though she

⁵On the general difficulty of distinguishing stipulation and discovery in debates about whether there is such a thing as second person thinking, and on different ways of motivating stipulations about what it is and what should count as paradigmatic cases see Eilan (2014/16a).

is in fact looking at you. You are only aware of her as 'you' when she reciprocates – 'you' thinking is a kind of thinking about a person you can only engage in when that person thinks about you in the same way. It exhibits a property I label 'mutual interdependence'. Call this the *Mutual Interdependence Claim*.⁶

To adopt this claim is to say that just as I may essay in a perception-based demonstrative thought about a person, but fail, say because there is no-one there to be perceived, so I may attempt a second person thought about a person, but fail, because she fails to think of me in the same way as I aim to be thinking of her. There is a kind of world-dependence here, but the world one is depending on is the world of the other thinking about me in the same way as I am of her. This dependence is unique to second person awareness and, on the account I propose, constitutive of it.

The final claim, which I label the *I-You Claim*, is expressed in the passage quoted above: 'When one says you, the I of the ... I-You is said, too.' Perhaps the best way of filling out this idea is to be found in Emile Benveniste's following passage.⁷

I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally I become *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*... Neither of the terms can be conceived of without the other; they are complementary [...] and, at the same time, they are reversible. (Benveniste 1966/1971, 224–225)

There is a great deal going on in this passage, some of which I return to later. For now, moving from language to thought, the three ideas I want to extract are these. First, 'I' thinking in the context of conversation is essentially relational – I-in-relation-to-you. Second, a condition on thinking in this way is that one grasp the bi-directionality of such thinking, that I am, at the same time, a You to the other's I. To say such thinking is essentially relational and bi-directional, when coupled with the Mutual Interdependence Claim, is to deny that we can divide up what is going on in conversation along the lines suggested by Peacocke, on which each of us thinks an interpersonally self-conscious thought, where our doing so

⁶Buber's distinction is close to a distinction made by the sociologist Georg Simmel between two ways of acquiring knowledge of others. The first employs 'simple sight and observation'. In the second, '[*by the same act in which the observer seeks to know the observed, he surrenders himself to be understood by the observer*... What occurs in this direct mutual glance represents the most perfect reciprocity in the entire field of 'human relationships'. ('Sociology of the Senses: visual interaction', 1969), 256).

⁷I am indebted to Moran 2018 for attention to Benveniste, and for his discussion of him and related issues in Chapter 6 'The Social Act and its Self-Consciousness'.

is independent of whether the other is as well. It is also to say that in thinking such thoughts I necessarily take the other to be an I-thinker. Thinking of someone as 'you' requires treating the other as both addressor and addressee, where to do so is to treat her as a thinker of I thoughts (I return to this idea in the next section).

Each of Buber's three claims, the *Communicative Relation Claim*, the *Mutual Interdependence Claim* and *I-You Claim* requires much defence and elaboration. But I will take it that they express the minimum needed for beginning to unpack and make good the SPCC which says, recall, the following.

Our grip on the idea that other self-conscious subjects exist is rooted in our capacity to enter into particular kinds of communicative relations with others, in which we adopt attitudes of mutual address and think of each other as 'you'.

These claims are also the minimum needed to show that appeal to communication and the second person, as in the SPCC, offers a genuine alternative to the TOPC. But these are stipulations, and even if they seem to capture what is distinctive about the kind of connectedness we establish when we adopt attitudes of mutual address, and even if the TPOC can't accommodate them, they will not carry weight unless we can show why appealing to them brings into view something interesting and important about the nature of our thought and knowledge of others, something missed if we restrict ourselves to the materials made available by TOPC. In the next two sections I make very preliminary moves in this direction.

4. Other I's and the practical turn

The Other I's Question has not loomed large, or at least not directly, in debates about the problem of other minds in the loosely analytic tradition. There are various reasons for this. Here I focus on one, which turns on a particular way of responding to Descartes' claim that 'I' refers to a mental ego.

This response rests on the idea captured in the following passages in Bernard Williams' critique of Descartes' cogito.

The Cartesian reflection merely presents, or, rather, invites us into, the perspective of consciousness. Descartes thinks that he can proceed from that to the existence of what is, from the third personal perspective, a substantial fact, the existence of a thinker ... [But] there is nothing in the pure Cartesian reflection to give us this [third personal] perspective ... (Williams 1978, 100)

Or, again,

Starting solely from the point of view of consciousness one cannot gain any objective conception of there being several such selves—nor, consequently, can one gain an objective conception of there being even one. (Williams 1978, 292)

The idea is that thought about oneself as a particular entity expressed using 'I' requires the capacity to think of oneself also from the third person, objective perspective, where it is the latter that provides for the idea of the possibility of there being more than one of us, and hence one. How does the third person objective perspective give us this? In a long tradition, captured for example by Strawson, it is our thought of ourselves as essentially embodied that does it, by providing us with criteria of individuation, where this very provision already makes room for the idea of others (Strawson 1974). One explanation for the absence of much discussion of the Other I's Question in traditions influenced by the kinds of thought that inform Strawson and Williams might lie in the idea that the essential link to third person thought of oneself in 'I' thinking gives us understanding of the existence of other I's for free, so to speak, because third person thought is exactly the kind of thought we have of others. On this view, then, the objective, third personal view is one we necessarily have of ourselves, and once we have that, we have the possibility of others.

An obvious response to this, though, is that this just presupposes that we can already make sense of the existence of other self-conscious perspectives; mere third person thinking based on observation of other entities does not give us that. The claim would be that this is getting things the wrong way round. I can think of myself and as one among others, from the third person perspective, only if I have something that gives me a prior grip on the very idea of other I's.

This is the kind of response we might imagine Husserl and some others writing in the Phenomenological tradition would have made. Certainly, the idea of other I's is a preoccupation in much Phenomenological writing about 'foreign centres of consciousness'. Thus, Merleau Ponty asks:

How can the word 'I' be put into plural, how can a general idea of the I be formed, how can I speak of an I other than my own, how can I know that there are other I's, how can consciousness which, by its nature, and as self-knowledge, is in the mode of the I, be grasped in the mode of Thou ... ? (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 400–401)

Much of the debate in this tradition turns on appeals to empathy and to debates about how empathy makes other I's immediately present to us. To put it very crudely indeed, a recurring oscillation in this debate is between accounts of empathy that somehow involve imagination, or projection of oneself onto the other, thereby making the kind of understanding of the other essentially first personal; or the postulation of empathy as a kind of primitive perceptual/experiential capacity which, by definition, perceptually presents another's centre of consciousness or first-person perspective, as such. The trouble with the first is that the other I either gets swallowed up in the empathizer's own I thinking, or is presupposed. The problem with the second is that the postulation of a brute capacity to empathetically perceive other I's begs the question unless we have an explanation of what it is that makes this possible.⁸

This, at lightning speed, is the dilemma to which the SPCC should be seen as a response. If we follow the route taken by, e.g. Williams and Strawson, others come into my grasp in virtue of the requirement that I think of myself objectively from the third person perspective – doing so is already meant to provide for the idea of being one I among others. But this leaves unexplained how we come by the idea of other self-conscious subjects in the first place, potentially undermining the idea that we have the idea of even one. Appeal to empathy in the Phenomenological tradition is meant to address just this issue, but fails because empathy either presupposes or swallows up the other, on one conception, or leaves the capacity to take it in unexplained, on the other.

Demonstrating the import and interest of the SPCC will turn, in part, on developing this very quick sketch of the dilemma, defending its key claims, and then showing the kind of route out provided by the SPCC. I end with pointers to the issues raised by this route and claims that need developing in elaborating it.

Abstracting from the many differences between them, there are two features the TPOC and the appeal to empathy have in common. For both, the most basic scenario for explaining my capacity for making sense of the existence of other for 'I' thinkers is (a) observational and (b) uni-directional, that is, independent of the other's awareness and knowledge and of me. The SPCC rejects both: contra (a), the basic scenario

⁸For an extended examination of Husserl on empathy, helpful for filling in this dialectic, see Zahavi (2014b). For an examination of Husserl's unpublished work on intersubjectivity which seems to give communication and I-you relations a constitutive role, for reasons not unrelated to those mooted here, see Zahavi (2016).

we should be appealing to in explaining our capacity for making sense of other I's is one of a particular kind of joint activity, that of having a conversation. Contra (b), having a conversation involves interdependent I-you thinking – the basic scenario is one of interdependence between one's own and the other's I thinking. What this means, in part, is that my I-thinking is dependent on the other's potential contribution to it – the other cannot get 'swallowed up' as it does in empathy because without such independent contributions, my own I-thinking, and hence communicative activities, wouldn't exist.

So one line of criticism offered by the SPCC will turn on the sense in which both the TPOC and the appeal to empathy treat the thinking of 'I' thoughts as a self-contained, independent activity, not requiring others' contribution. But the SPCC develops this critique in a particular way, which links the interdependence, essentially, to a practical context, which can be contrasted with the role given to others by Sartre. For Sartre, what is required for self-consciousness is grasp of myself as an *object*, where what gives me this is my internalisation of the other's perception of me as such – the gaze – where this provides for an objective (even alienated, as in shame) view of myself from the outside. We can see this as a kind of interactionist development of something we find in Williams and Strawson – actual interaction with others, in the form of registering others' third person, objective (and objectifying) perception of oneself is needed in order to get the idea of oneself, as object, off the ground.

But the appeal to I-you interdependence is quite different. The closest I see to Buber's take, and perhaps its origin, is to be found in Fichte's much earlier 'No thou, no I; No I, no thou' (SW 1:189). Here, the other is needed for getting I-as *subject* off the ground, where the latter is equated with the 'I-as-free-agent', and hence as moral agent. It is the other's 'summons' – perhaps best translated in this context as 'invitation' – rather than his objectifying stare, as with Sartre, that is essential. We have here, potentially, the materials for the most radical critique possible of Descartes' starting point.⁹

On the SPCC, the most basic manifestation of such mutual I-as-subject awareness is in the mutual treatment of each other as addressees and addressors, the issuing of mutual 'summons', if you like. But what is it to treat someone as addressor and addressee? As Buber himself developed this idea, fully registering the other's first-person perspective, her 'I',

⁹For the suggested translation of 'summons' see Wood (2006).

when I am aware of her as ‘you’, requires adopting an attitude of ‘confirmation’ towards her. There is much that goes into this notion, but it bears a close family resemblance to Cavell’s appeal to ‘acknowledgement’ and to others’, including Fichte’s and Hegel’s, appeal to ‘recognition’. In common with these, confirmation includes recognition of, and respect for the other’s autonomy, freedom and so forth. Given the reciprocity condition, my self-conscious registering of the other’s ‘you’ awareness of me involves registering such acknowledgement or confirmation by her of my autonomy and freedom as an agent.¹⁰

The ultimate interest of the SPCC, in my view, lies in developing this line of thought.¹¹ As this is often understood, appeal to recognition or acknowledgement in describing our relation to others takes us away from questions about knowledge and understanding into ethics. Similarly, much work, especially recently, under the second person heading is indeed work in ethics. But the claims I have been sketching on behalf of the SPCC are claims about what is required for understanding the concepts we use in making sense of the existence of others. And such making sense is an essential requirement on our knowledge of the existence and nature of other minds like our own. The force of the SPCC turns critically, in my view, on showing how the ethical is embedded in such knowledge and thought. What we lack, so far, is an epistemic context for securing a role for I-you thinking in epistemology. I end with first gestures in this direction.

5. The missing epistemological question

Discussions of our knowledge of other minds tend to focus on particular pieces of propositional knowledge, knowing that someone is in pain or angry and so forth. Implicit in answers to the knowledge question under the TOPC is a commitment to treating the kind of understanding, or episteme we bring to bear in this domain as theoretical, and, on many accounts, also scientific. For example, to endorse the abductive model of our knowledge of other minds, is, at the same time, to commit to the

¹⁰On the significance, and importance, of Fichte’s location of his account of ‘I’ in an ethical, and legal context, see e.g. Altman (2018). For a helpful critical discussion of the role of the summons and mutual recognition in constituting self-consciousness, and complications therein, see Williams (1992, ch 3) ‘Fichte on Recognition’, 49–70.

¹¹For a rich source of recent reflections on links between second person thinking and recognition, and more generally on the ‘ethical ladenness’ of second person thinking, see papers collected in Conant and Rödl (2014). For the contrast between the theoretical perspective normally assumed in other minds debates, and such practical questions, see Lavin (2014/16).

claim that the kind of understanding we bring to bear in the mental domain is broadly the same as we put to work in the natural sciences.

Many have argued against the specifically natural-science reading of the theoretical model of knowledge and understanding of other minds. But one of the most powerful arguments against it, and certainly the kind of argument we need for locating the SPCC in its proper epistemic home, is to be found in an unjustly, in my view, under-discussed paper on 'Person Perception and our Understanding of Others'¹² by David Hamlyn. In that paper he argues that a proper account of the link between knowledge and understanding in the mental domain should take as its point of departure not questions about propositional knowledge, but, rather, a distinct epistemological question: what is it to know a person? I end with some comments about the way his questions and claims about our knowledge of persons can begin to provide an appropriate epistemic surround for the SPCC.

I will take it as uncontroversial both that in order to be said to know someone one must know some facts about them, but, also, and more importantly, that knowledge of people is not reducible to knowledge of propositions (on pain of claiming, for example, that we each know all the people we read about in the newspapers, see on TV and so forth). So this is a genuinely distinct question, a question that rarely figures in debates about our knowledge of other minds. Hamlyn makes two general suggestions that are of particular interest relative to our concerns. (1) Our account of what it is to understand mental concepts should focus on the way they are used to express our knowledge and understanding of particular persons. (2) By thus linking questions about understanding to questions about what it is to know a person we can begin to counter the view that our understanding of mental concepts can be captured by appeal to their use in the kinds of explanations of human behaviour we find in the social sciences. The point generalises to any claim to the effect that our understanding of mental concepts can be exhaustively accounted for by appeal to the TPOC. I will call this the Knowledge of Persons Claim.

There are two claims Hamlyn argues for in developing these suggestions that I want to single out, and endorse. The first, general one states that it is a 'necessary condition of being said to know X is that we should actually stand to X in relations which are appropriate to the kind

¹²In Mischel (1974), reprinted in Hamlyn (1974/83). For independently formulated account of knowledge of persons, close in spirit and some detail (see Lauer 2014; Talbot 2015).

of things that X is'. He also holds that the appropriateness must be registered by the knower, which in turn requires that one grasp the concept of the kind of thing it is. So, in the case of persons, to know a person one must grasp the concept of a person.

Knowing a person requires understanding the concept of a person, or, as Hamlyn puts it developmentally, the gradual acquisition of mental concepts comes together with the acquisition of the concept of person. To insist on the link with the concept of a person is, at the very least, to introduce the potential relevance of a range of morally significant concepts not usually included in the observation-plus-theory model.

I will return to this general idea soon, but I turn now to the three specific claims Hamlyn makes in developing his account of the appropriate relations that underpin knowledge of persons. Such relations, he suggests (1) must be potentially reciprocal; (2) must involve some degree of emotional involvement with the other, or, as he puts it 'personal feelings' towards the other, and (3) the relational emotions are potentially morally relevant.

Bracketing, for the moment, his reciprocity claim, the second two claims about knowledge of persons say that our knowledge of persons is 'thick', inextricably bound up with emotions of potential moral significance. To say our knowledge of people is thick in this way is to say that when we subtract such emotions we are left with nothing that would count as a knowing a person.

A dramatic illustration of the kind of connection between knowledge of persons and the kind of understanding I am gesturing at is to be found in Hervey Cleckley's 1941 *The Mask of Sanity*. Summarising how, after countless hours of interviews with dozens of psychopaths, he was left with a sense of their unknowability, he writes that '... No-one who examines him can point out in scientific and objective terms why he is not real. And yet one knows, or feels that he knows. Reality, in the sense of full healthy experiencing of life, is not there' (Cleckley 1941/82, 259). His patients felt nothing of the morally relevant emotions for him (or anyone else) and he could feel nothing in return, and with the absence of this came a sense of their unknowability and unreality. Interestingly, from the perspective of Hamlyn's general thesis, Cleckley describes the resulting deficit here as a 'semantic dementia', a failure to fully understand the meaning of the basic concepts we use to make sense of our own and others' experiences. The absence of the emotions that make knowledge of others possible is bound up with a failure to understand the basic concepts used in expressing such knowledge (Cleckley 1941/82, 268).

If this is true about our knowledge of people, such knowledge takes place against a background episteme or understanding that is radically different from that which underpins the TPOC. Rather, it is the kind of understanding that informs what Strawson, in 'Freedom and Resentment' (1962), calls our 'participatory attitudes'. The distinction Strawson is interested in that paper is that between 'the objective attitude' we may adopt as policy makers, say, or in the social sciences, and the attitude we take to persons in virtue of our 'inter personal human relationships with them'. Our participatory attitudes are founded on such relations, and include attitudes such as 'resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be said to feel reciprocally, for each other'. What the Knowledge of Persons proposal says is that it is to these relations and these reactive attitudes that we should look in grounding our concepts of a person, and, hence, the understanding into which our grasp of mental concepts slots.

The import of this, relative to the TPOC, can be put in terms of a contrast between the Strawson of 'Freedom and Resentment' and the Strawson of *Individuals* (1959). In *Individuals*, the proposal that we treat the concept 'person' as primitive is put forward as a way of linking third person observation-based ascriptions of mental properties to others with first-person non-observational self-ascriptions. What the Knowledge of Persons Claim says, in effect, is that we should be putting centre stage the kinds of relations he appeals to in 'Freedom and Resentment'. It is not to our observation of others, but to our interpersonal relations with them that we should turn in grounding our understanding of the concept of a person (and, relatedly, of mental concepts).

For this proposal to take hold, though, what is required is an alternative to the *Individuals'*, and to the TOPC's appeal to third person observation. This is where we must come back to Hamlyn's reciprocity requirement, about which he says not very much, and is where the SPCC should be seen as slotting in. More precisely: the SPCC fills in, and makes sense of, the reciprocity requirement, by replacing observation with second person communication, with the joint activity of engaging in conversation; and the Knowledge of Persons Claim, in turn, provides the epistemic justification for putting second person communication and the Other I's Question centre stage when explaining our thought and knowledge of others. At least part of the elaboration and defence of the SPCC will turn on developing and making good this connection.

Acknowledgements

For conversations about issues raised in ancestors of this paper I am much indebted to Quassim Cassam, Guy Longworth, Christopher Peacocke, Sebastian Rödl and Johannes Roessler.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Altman, Matthew C. 2018. Fichte's Practical Response to the Problem of Other Minds. *Articulos* 16.
- Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to do Things with Words*, edited by J. O. Urmson, and Marina Sbisa. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2nd edn., 1975, references to this edition.
- Benveniste, Emile. 1966/1971. *Problems in General Linguistics*. Translated by Mary Elizabeth Meek. Miami: University of Miami Press.
- Buber, Martin. 1958. *I and thou* 2nd ed., Translated by R. G. Smith. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Cleckley, Hervey. 1941/82. *The Mask of Sanity*. New York, NY: Plume.
- Conant, James and Rödl, Sebastian, eds. 2014. *The Second Person, Philosophical Topics*. Vol. 42 (1).
- Eilan, Naomi. 2014/16a. The You Turn, in *The Second Person, Philosophical Explorations Special Issue*, edited by N. Eilan, 17, 346–357, 2014. Reprinted in *The Second Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by, N Eilan. Routledge, 2016.
- Eilan, Naomi. 2014/16b. *The Second Person, Philosophical Explorations Special Issue*, edited by Eilan, N. 17, 346–357, 2014, reprinted in *The Second Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by, Eilan, N. Routledge, 2016.
- Gomes, Anil. 2015. "Testimony and Other Minds." *Erkenntnis* 80: 1.
- Hamlyn, David. 1974/83. Person Perception and our Understanding of Others. Edited by Mischel, 1974, *Understanding Other Persons'*, Reprinted in Hamlyn, David. *Perception, Learning and the Self*. Routledge 1983.
- Hasse, M. 2014/16. Am I you? in *The Second Person, Philosophical Explorations Special Issue*, edited by N. Eilan, 17, 346–357, 2014. Reprinted in *The Second Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by N Eilan. Routledge, 2016.
- Heal, Jane. 2014/16. "Second Person Thought." *Philosophical Explorations* 17 (3): 317–313. 2014. Reprinted in *The Second Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Eilan, Naomi, ed., Routledge, 2016.
- Heck, R. G. 2002. "Do Demonstratives Have Senses?" *Philosophers' Imprint* 2 (2): 1–33.
- Lauer, David. 2014. What is it to Know Someone? *The Second Person, Philosophical Topics*, edited by James Conant and Sebastian Rodl. 42:(1).
- Lavin, Douglas. 2014/16. Other wills. *The Second Person, Philosophical Explorations Special Issue*, edited by Naomi Eilan 17:(3) 346–357, 2014. Reprinted in *The Second*

- Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Eilan, Naomi, ed., Routledge, 2016.
- Longworth, Guy. 2014. "You and Me." *Philosophical Explorations* 17 (3): 289–303.
- Longworth, Guy. 2019. Illocution and Understanding. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 1–18 (forthcoming). doi:10.1080/0020174X.2019.1667869.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1945. *Phénoménologie de la Perception*. Paris: Gallimard. *Phenomenology of Perception*, Landes, Donald (trans.), London: Routledge, 2012.
- Moran, Richard. 2018. *The Exchange of Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peacocke, Christopher. 2014. *The Mirror of the World: Subjects, Consciousness, and Self-Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford.
- Reid, Thomas. 1788/2010. *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*. Edited by Knud Haakonssen and James A. Harris. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Rödl, Sebastian. 2014. Intentional Transaction. in *The Second Person, Philosophical Explorations Special Issue*, edited by N. Eilan, 17: (3). 346–357. Reprinted in *The Second Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Edited by Naomi Eilan. Routledge, 2016.
- Simmel, G. 1969. "Sociology of the Senses: Visual Interaction." In *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, edited by R. E. Park and W. W. Burgess, 356–361. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Strawson, Peter. 1959. *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London: Routledge.
- Strawson, Peter. 1962. "Freedom and Resentment." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48: 1–25. Reprinted in Peter Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, 1974. Methuen & Co.
- Strawson, Peter. 1974. "Self, Mind and Body." In *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, edited by P. F. Strawson, 186–196. London: Methuen & Co.
- Talbot, B. 2015. Knowing Other People: A Second Person Framework. *Ratio* (new series) XXVIII.
- Williams, Bernard. 1978. *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*. London: Routledge.
- Williams, Robert. 1992. *Recognition*. New York: SUNY Press.
- Wood, Allen. 2006. Fichte's Intersubjective I. *Inquiry, Special Issue: Kant to Hegel*. Edited by Susan Hahn. 49(1).
- Zahavi, D. 2014b. *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zahavi, D. 2016. "Second-Person Engagement, Self-Alienation, and Group-Identification." *Topoi*. doi:10.1007/s11245-016-9444-6.