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THE INDEXICAL 'I'

The First Person in Thought and Language



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Qu'est-ce que le moi?

Un homme qui se met à la fenêtre pour voir les passants; si je passe par là, puis-je dire qu'il s'est mis là pour me voir? Non; car il ne pense pas à moi en particulier; mais celui qui aime quelqu'un à cause de sa beauté, l'aime-t-il? Non; car la petite vérole, qui tuera la beauté sans tuer la personne, fera qu'il ne l'aimera plus.

Et si on m'aime pour mon jugement, pour ma mémoire, m'aime-t-on? *moi*? Non, car je puis perdre ces qualités sans me perdre moi-même. Où est donc ce *moi*, s'il n'est ni dans le corps, ni dans l'âme? et comment aimer le corps ou l'âme, sinon pour ces qualités, qui ne seront point ce qui fait le moi, puisqu'elles sont périssables? car aimerait-on la substance de l'âme d'une personne, abstraitement, et quelques qualités qui y fussent? Cela ne se peut, et serait injuste. On n'aime donc jamais personne, mais seulement des qualités.

Blaise Pascal
Pensées

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PREFACE

The subject of this book is the first person in thought and language. The main question concerns what we mean when we say 'I'. Related to it are questions about what kinds of self-consciousness and self-knowledge are needed in order for us to have the capacity to talk about ourselves. The emphasis is on theories of meaning and reference for 'I', but a fair amount of space is devoted to 'I'-thoughts and the role of the concept of the self in cognition.

The purpose is to give a picture of how we think and talk about ourselves in a wide range of circumstances. The topic has been discussed in numerous articles during the last decades, but rarely in the form of a monograph. I felt the need for a book of this kind while working on my dissertation. The manuscript is the result of many years of reflection on the self and indexicals. Some of the theories that I advance have developed as a result of my teaching an undergraduate course in the philosophy of language the last couple of years.

In the book, several different issues are brought together in order to give a coherent theory of 'I', pertaining both to the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind. Among these, the reader will find the immunity to error through misidentification that is exhibited by 'I' in some of its uses, the relation between direct reference, rigid designation, and essentialism, the role that non-conceptual content plays to cognition, and the nature of the unity of consciousness and personal identity. The idea has been rather to give a wide/broad picture of 'I' and 'I'-thoughts than to treat exhaustively every particular issue that is raised.

The main thesis is that 'I' refers indirectly through a *de re* sense to the speaker as presented in the context of utterance. 'I' also expresses a stable individual concept. How the information expressed by the *de re* sense is gained is explained by a theory of non-conceptual content. Further, it is argued that the concept of a speaker is intertwined with the concept of a person. Persons are such that they can self-ascribe and be ascribed both mental and bodily predicates and that they can think about themselves from both a first-person and a third-person perspective.

The book is intended for philosophers in general, especially those interested in matters having to do with the concept of the self or the concept of a person and those with a general interest in the philosophy of language. The text is also accessible to graduate students and advanced undergraduates.

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During my work on this manuscript I have received a great deal of help, of different kinds and from many quarters. I will take the opportunity to express my gratitude to all those without whom this book would not have been possible.

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Parts of the manuscript have been presented to audiences at conferences and seminars in other places than Lund, among them Columbia University, Gothenburg University, and Linköping University, as well as the Conference for Swedish Philosophy in Umeå, the 10th International Congress of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science in Florence, and the Second European Congress for Analytic Philosophy in Leeds. All comments have been most welcome.

I owe much to the astute minds of Peter Gärdenfors and Sten Lindström. My advisor Nils-Eric Sahlin has given me invaluable support in many respects over the years. These people have all, in their own ways, been sources of inspiration for my work.

I have benefited from a great number of travel grants from, among others, Crafoordska stiftelsen, Gyllenstiernska Krapperupstiftelsen, and Wallenbergs stiftelse. Several trips have gone to the Centre de Recherche en Épistémologie Appliquée (CREA) in Paris, where I have enjoyed the hospitable and witty atmosphere. I have especially profited from discussions with François Recanati. Knut och Alice Wallenbergs stiftelse made it possible for me to spend a very rewarding year at Columbia University in New York under the supervision of Akeel Bilgrami. I am also grateful for financial support from Erik och Gurli Hultengrens fond för filosofi, Erik Philip Sörensens stiftelse, and Hjalmar Gullbergs och Greta Thotts stipendiefond.

Special thanks to Jan Hartman. In spite of that your ardent efforts to turn me into an analytic philosopher have not been completely successful, I hope you are not too disappointed in the result. Thank you for being there.

Thanks also for the encouragement and support from all my friends and the people at my department, who have come and gone during the period

that I have been working with the manuscript. I mention no one so that no one will feel left out.

Finally, I dedicate this book to my mother, Gunvor Brinck-Lindroth, who, being a scholar herself, has stood by me through thick and thin, and without whom this book would not have seen the light.