

I disappear

Learning about the self from the trees and The Rock

Tim Button
button@cantab.net
University of Cambridge

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This is a handout for my talk, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUMi6vkMnNs>

Bus Scenario. There's a bus accident. I come round. My first thought: *I hurt*. I open my eyes. Carnage. Tangled limbs. I see a broken arm, and think: *that arm is badly broken; the owner of that arm needs medical care*. Then I realise that my arm is in the tangle, and my arm hurts, and think: *I am the owner of that arm! I have a broken arm!*
...*but*: as we all come round, and extricate our limbs from the tangle, it turns out that I have mistaken someone *else's* arm for my own.

Buttercream Scenario. I see what I take to be my reflection, with a blob of buttercream on my forehead, and think: *I have buttercream on my forehead!*
...*but*: it's not my reflection; it's an elaborate setup with actors etc.

[in cases which] involve the recognition of a particular person, [...] there is [...] the possibility of an error, or as I should rather put it: The possibility of an error has been provided for. Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book*

Wittgenstein suggests that there are two uses of the word 'I':

- 'the use as subject': there's no such possibility with e.g. 'I hurt'
- 'the use as object': if I pick myself out as one physical object among many, error through misidentification is possible

Privacy Problems. This can lead to a kind of privacy of thought:

- I say 'I hurt': misidentification is supposedly impossible
 - you say 'he hurts': misidentification is possible
- ⇒ You can't think what I think

Disappearance Problems. What do I mean by the "I" as subject'?

- if I say 'I am [*physical description*]' there's the possibility of misidentification
 - even 'I am Tim' has the possibility of misidentification (head injury / amnesia)
- ⇒ maybe that 'I' should disappear? Just *moan*? Just say 'it hurts'?

ES DENKT, sollte man sagen, so wie man sagt: ES BLITZT [Lichtenberg]

But if 'I' disappear, maybe *I* should too? What has the right shape to be *me*?

Aphasia Scenario. I say 'I hurt' ... *but*: it's aphasia.

Compound Scenario. I say 'I hurt'; ... *but*: it's aphasia; ... *but*: someone near *is* in pain.

You say: 'you don't hurt; *he* does!'

I reply: 'I wasn't talking about *him*. I was saying something—false—about *me*!'

Last Scenario. I say 'I have a broken arm.'

You say: 'you don't have a broken arm; *he* does!'

I reply: 'I wasn't talking about *him*. I was saying something—false—about *me*!'

My suggestion: *There's a possibility of an error through misidentification iff I pick out myself something other than a first-person indexical.*

If I say 'I [*blah-blah-blah*]', there is no doubt as to whether I am talking about me.

If I say 'X [*blah-blah-blahs*]', for non-first-personal X, it might be open whether X = me.

This is profoundly unexciting. Some comparison cases

- picking out *here* using something other than a spatial indexical
- picking out *Bob* using something other than the name 'Bob'
- picking out *The Rock* using something other than 'The Rock'

Are we ok? Is there not some lingering mystery?

[...] everyone is presented to himself in a particular and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else. Frege, 'Thought'

But is 'I' that much more mysterious than 'here'?

In a community of rooted trees, could they distinguish first-personal from spatial?