

# THE SELF: ITS IMMUNITIES TO ERROR THROUGH MISIDENTIFICATION AND THROUGH MISAScription

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## Résumé

La réalité et la nature du moi constituent un problème récalcitrant auquel les philosophes ont été confrontés au fil des siècles et qui soulève certaines des questions philosophiques les plus profondes. François Recanati s'est depuis longtemps penché sur ces questions. J'examine ses thèses concernant les pensées en première personne, sa distinction implicite-explicite et le paradoxe de la première personne. En examinant les thèses de Recanati, je m'appuie également sur les arguments de certains philosophes contemporains et de deux grands philosophes du passé, Descartes et Frege : Descartes et Frege. Dans le §2, je considère les distinctions de Frege entre idée et pensée, et sens et référence, puisqu'elles sont au cœur des thèses de Recanati. Dans le §3, je discute de Frege sur les pensées « je », ce qui m'amène dans le §4 au paradoxe de Recanati et à ses façons de le résoudre. Le §5 dissout le paradoxe. Dans le §6, je considère ce que Shoemaker appelle une tendance erronée à interpréter la conscience de soi « sur le modèle de la perception sensorielle ». Dans le §7, je soutiens qu'il existe deux types d'immunité à l'erreur dans les pensées « je » : la première est l'immunité bien connue à l'erreur par mauvaise identification relative à « je » (IEMI), qui a incité Recanati à demander « ce qu'elle est et d'où elle vient » ; la seconde est ce que j'ai appelé l'immunité à l'erreur par mauvaise ascription (IEMA). Dans le §8, j'examine les points de vue dominants selon lesquels l'IEMI du « je » peut être circonstancielle, non absolue, non universelle, ainsi que les deux utilisations du « je » par Wittgenstein. Dans le §9, je réponds à certaines objections à mes arguments selon lesquels l'IEMI du « je » est absolu. Enfin, dans le §10, je démontre une idée importante cachée dans la thèse de Recanati. Pour commencer, dans le §1, j'expose des considérations préliminaires qui constituent l'arrière-plan de mon enquête.

## Abstract

A recalcitrant problem exercising philosophers over the centuries is the reality and nature of the self, involving some of the profoundest philosophical questions. François Recanati has long addressed such questions. I examine his theses regarding 'I'-thoughts, his implicit-explicit distinction, and the paradox of the first person. In enquiring into Recanati's theses, I also draw on the arguments of some contemporary philosophers, and of two great philosophers of the past: Descartes and Frege. In §2, I consider Frege's distinctions between *idea* and *thought*, and *sense* and *reference*, since they are central to Recanati's theses. In §3, I discuss Frege on 'I'-thoughts, leading in §4 to Recanati's paradox and his ways of solving it. §5 dissolves the paradox. In §6, I consider what Shoemaker calls a mistaken tendency of construing self-awareness "on the model of sense perception". In §7, I argue that there are two *kinds* of immunity to error in 'I'-thoughts: the first is the well-known immunity to error through misidentification relative to 'I' (IEMI), which prompted Recanati to ask "what it is and where it comes from"; the second is what I have called the immunity to error through *misascription* (IEMA). In §8, I examine the dominant views that IEMI of 'I' can be circumstantial, non-absolute, non-universal, and Wittgenstein's two uses of 'I'. In §9, I address some objections to my arguments that IEMI of 'I' is absolute. Finally, in §10, I demonstrate an important insight hidden in Recanati's thesis. But first, in §1, I deal with some preliminary considerations which form the backdrop to my enquiry.

## 1. Preliminaries

My enquiry focuses on the IEMI of ‘I’. It doesn’t consider other forms of IEMI, e.g., of demonstratives or definite descriptions, where misidentification is possible<sup>1</sup>.

‘I’ is an indexical, but differs from such indexicals as: ‘here’ and ‘now’, which are parasitic on ‘I’; temporal indexicals ‘today’ and ‘yesterday’ (there’s no shifting from ‘I’-thoughts to ‘you’-thoughts as one thinks of *oneself* over time, since they “could not be connected by expressing a single *dynamic* [Fregean] thought”<sup>2</sup>); proper names, definite descriptions, demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that’ whose pronominal use can be ambiguous, requiring an explicit or implicit gesture. In ‘I’-identification there can be no ambiguity, and misidentification is impossible, as I shall argue. I focus entirely on ‘I’ and ‘I’-thoughts, and Recanati’s preoccupation with them. I approach this complex area via an important relation between two marks of self-consciousness: self-identification and self-ascription. Self-identification is concerned with ‘I’-thoughts about oneself *as oneself*. It concerns the identification component of ‘I’-thoughts. Self-identification is a peculiarly strong form of *identification-free* self-reference, but this doesn’t entail that the referent is a peculiar entity, a disembodied entity, or a “completely empty, representation ‘I’”<sup>3</sup>.

Self-ascription *presupposes* self-identification. It concerns ‘I’-thoughts about oneself as being in a *certain way*, the *ascriptive* component of ‘I’-thoughts: the self-ascription of the mind’s intellectual and sensory acts and their content, of the body’s properties, and of those arising from their substantial union, *presupposed* by their interaction. This is crucial, for the possibility then arises that in ‘I’-thoughts, more is involved in self-consciousness than the mind’s acts and their content: they involve “my whole self”<sup>4</sup> — an embodied irreducible person.

Part of my undertaking, therefore, consists in defending the two kinds of immunity: IEMI and IEMA, and the thesis that any possible error in ‘I’-thoughts concerns self-ascription, not self-identification<sup>5</sup>.

In discussing the IEMI, I argue that in *all* ‘I’-thoughts, the self-identification of ‘I’ is IEMI *absolutely*. Consequently, the distinctions between absolute and circumstantial (Shoemaker/Recanati), or absolute and non-absolute (Evans), or universal and non-universal (Wright/Wittgenstein), IEMI relative to ‘I’, don’t hold. Nor are there two uses of ‘I’ (Wittgenstein), or two senses of ‘I’ (Recanati). A way that these incorrect distinctions arise can be traced to subsuming self-ascription under self-identification, or conflating self-identification with self-ascription: henceforth, *Subsumption* and *Conflation* respectively<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Given space limitations I shall not consider Perry’s  *rôles* (1979), Kaplan’s  *character* (1977), or Castañeda’s “*He*” (1966)

<sup>2</sup> Evans (1981, 295); McDowell (1998b, 217, fn.12); My (2022, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Kant *Paralogisms* A346/B404. See my (2013, chs 2–3; 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Descartes *Sixth Meditation* AT VII, 81.

<sup>5</sup> My thanks to an anonymous reviewer who referred me to Coliva’s 2003 in which she discusses my paper (1995). She unfortunately attributes to me a number of views that I didn’t propound, and some that I explicitly rejected. In it I didn’t give an alternative characterisation of IEMI; rather, following Shoemaker’s original formulation, I defended McDowell’s and Evans’ accounts. In fn. 7 I simply mentioned the second kind of immunity that I introduced to the debate, without further elaboration. But this is not the place to respond to Coliva.

<sup>6</sup> More recently, Salje (2019, 4) claims that, because self-*ascription* can be subject to error, the idea of absolute IEMI relative to ‘I’ is “generally thought [...] to be defunct and empty.” “Shoemaker was looking at the wrong side of the divide. There aren’t any judgements that are IEM in all circumstances.” This is clearly a mistake. Salje and those she draws on are committed to *Subsumption*.

## 2. Frege's Sharp Distinction: Idea and Thought

Frege's '*Vorstellung*' is translated as 'idea' or 'representation'. In *Die Grundlagen* (1953, 37 §27 n:1) he refers to Kant's dual use of *Vorstellung*: the subjective, in terms of sensibility, and the objective, in terms of the understanding. Frege considers this confusing, mixing the psychological and the logical. He argues: "the subjective sense is what is governed by the psychological laws of association; [...while] the objective sense belongs to logic and is in principle non-sensible", and explains, *contra* Kant: "I shall myself, to avoid confusion, use '*Vorstellung*' only in the subjective sense."

In *Der Gedanke* (1967, 26–28) Frege collects under *Vorstellung* the subjective, sensible, and experiential, and argues: "each of us has his own idea [...even though] many people can see the same thing"; "ideas need a bearer"; "every idea has only one bearer; no two men have the same idea." Ideas are non-comparable: "it is impossible for us men to compare another person's ideas with our own." They belong to the content of individual minds, and are thus subjective. These characterisations of *idea*, in some discussions of Frege, are summarised as 'private and incommunicable'<sup>7</sup> though Frege doesn't refer to ideas as such. Recanati, in discussing Frege, attributes privacy and incommunicability to 'I'-thoughts. I shall assess Recanati's attribution in §III and §IV, after we have a clearer understanding of Frege's idea–thought distinction.

In *Der Gedanke* (1967, 26) Frege argues that thoughts are objective and timeless and, like Descartes,<sup>8</sup> that truth is "unique and indefinable". In *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* (1948, 214 fn. 5) he states: "By a thought I understand not the subjective performance of thinking but its objective content, which is capable of being the common property of several thinkers."

Descartes, anticipating Frege's distinction, states that the acts of thinking, judging, perceiving, etc., pertain to the subject<sup>9</sup> – a *sui generis* subject–act relation – but the *content* of an act is objective. With their act–content/subjective–objective distinctions, Descartes and Frege reject psychologism, representation,<sup>10</sup> and introspection<sup>11</sup>.

Thoughts, for Frege, are communicable, objective, and real, though not *wirklich*, not actual/existent, like the sun<sup>12</sup>. "Thoughts are by no means unreal, but their reality is of a quite different kind from that of things. [...] They can be true without being apprehended by a thinker" (1967, 35, 38), and are "capable of being the common property of several thinkers." (1948, 215, fn. 5)

*Thoughts* are independent of sensation and representation; they are not perceivable by our senses, but are apprehensible by *Vernunft*, reason. *Thought* is not equivalent to any act of reasoning, judging, apprehending, etc. An act of reason "must be aimed at the thought. But [...] not confused with the thought." The "apprehension of a thought presupposes someone who

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<sup>7</sup> e.g., Billon and Guillot (2014, 100).

<sup>8</sup> Descartes: truth is indivisible, indefinable (Letter to Mersenne 16 October 1639 AT II, 597; CSMK:139. *Seventh Set of Objections with Replies* AT VII, 548)

<sup>9</sup> Descartes doesn't use our modern term 'subjective' or, as far as I know, even the Latin adjective *subiectus*, or the adverb *subjective*, which meant 'what pertains to entities'. Over time the Latin adverb acquired all the connotations associated with post-Descartes baggage, misattributed to Descartes.

<sup>10</sup> Descartes' occasional use of *repraesentare* denotes 'presentation'.

<sup>11</sup> Descartes rejects introspection, or "internal sense", as unreliable (AT VII, 77; AT VII, 23, AT VII, 29), and limited in its reach. Yet, introspection has become the yard-stick of the mental. James Pryor (1999, 279), among others, endorses introspection, arguing that beliefs about occurrent mental states, such as being in pain, "are plausibly immune to *de re* misidentification when these beliefs are held on the basis of introspection." This is puzzling: it seems that I cannot know *straight off* that I am in pain, and be immune to error through self-*ascription*, but need to introspect my occurrent mental states to find out which it is, and on the basis of which I form my belief. Presumably, if I don't introspect, I cannot know I am in pain? Introspection and beliefs are *liable* to error, not a guide to *immunity* to error.

<sup>12</sup> Frege distinguishes between '*objectiv*' and '*wirklich*'. This doesn't affect my discussion.

apprehends it, who thinks it. He is the bearer of the thinking but not of the thought.” One “apprehends or thinks a thought”, (1967, 35; 29, fn. 1) and acknowledges its truth.

Although my primary concern is with Frege’s *Gedanke* (thought), not with his *Vorstellung* (representation or idea), where appropriate I shall, following Frege, use the latter for what is psychological, and *Gegebensein* (presentation) for what is objective, what belongs to thought, consistent with his *Art des Gegebenseins*, a mode of presentation. Frege’s distinction is relevant to evaluating Recanati’s paradox, and his implicit–explicit–representation distinction.

Frege (1967, 28) explains the distinction between, and status of, *idea* and *thought* thus: “If someone takes thoughts to be ideas, what he then recognises to be true is, on his own view, the content of his consciousness and does not properly concern other people at all.” But “thoughts are neither things of the outer world [physical objects] nor ideas [of the inner world of impressions, of creations of his imagination, of sensation, of feeling].”

Thoughts belong to “a third realm” — the realm of the eternal and timeless, which is neither mysterious nor inaccessible: “The thought we express by the Pythagorean theorem is surely timeless, eternal, unchangeable”, “true independently of whether anyone takes it to be true.” (1967, 37, 29) Fregean thoughts are akin to Descartes’ eternal truths, and the true and real immutable natures. Frege’s thoughts and Descartes’ eternal truths are objective, timeless, unchangeable, and graspable by reason. Reason is universal (*Discourse AT VI*, 57); it “aspires without limit to ever greater and better things” (*Third Meditation AT VII*, 51) — towards truth and objectivity, not to its own isolation and incommunicability.

Famously, in *Über Sinn und Bedeutung*, Frege distinguishes between *sense* and *reference*, arguing that an expression or a sign “expresses its *sense*, refers to or *designates* its referent. By means of [it] we express its sense and designate its referent.” (1948, 214) *Sense* is what a thinker understands when she understands what the referent is — it is reason’s grasp of what is true and real. *Senses* are truth-conditionally relevant to thoughts<sup>13</sup>.

### 3. Frege on ‘I’-thoughts

Does Frege think that ‘I’-thoughts are private and incommunicable? Does he fall into a contradiction?

Frege states: “if I assert something about myself [...] my judgement concerns something which is not a content of my consciousness, is not my idea, [and] that is me myself.” “What is a content of my consciousness, my idea, should be sharply distinguished from what is an object of my thought.” (1967, 33–34)<sup>14</sup> “The object of an ‘I’-thought is its subject.”<sup>15</sup> Frege continues: “I, as a bearer of ideas, am not myself an idea. [...] Not everything is an idea. Thus I can also recognise the thought, which other people can grasp just as much as I, as being independent of me. We are not bearers of thoughts as we are bearers of ideas.”

In terms of the thought we express by ‘Venus is the brightest star’, not only the *mode of presentation* of ‘Venus’, and thereby its referent, but also the content of the thought are “capable of being the common property of several thinkers.” (Frege 1948, 214, fn. 5) These characterisations of Fregean *thought* capture what, in cognition, is *shareable* among different thinkers. But what’s also paramount to Frege is objectivity. When all this is carried over to ‘I’-thoughts, we seem to hit upon a problem.

In the early parts of *Der Gedanke* (1967, 25–26) Frege correctly argues that in ‘I’-thoughts “everyone is presented to himself in a particular and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else.”

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<sup>13</sup> Frege’s attribution of *sense* to empty singular terms and Evans’ explanation (1982, 22–33), needn’t concern us here.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Object’ “in the widest range” (Frege 1948, 210) indicates that the referent of ‘I’-thought is a real entity.

<sup>15</sup> Evans (1982, 260); My (2000, 2022).

In the case of Venus there is no first-person mode of presentation pertaining to Venus, but only third-person modes of presentation of Venus, graspable and shareable by any thinker. There's a disanalogy between 'I', its *first-person* mode of presentation and thereby its referent, and other singular terms. The substantial difference lies in the fact that 'I' is not simply a communication device; it's essential to 'I'-thoughts, not simply to their linguistic expressions. Self-identification concerns 'I'-thoughts about oneself *as oneself*.

It's the *shareability* of thoughts that leads Recanati, following Perry (1977, 474), to raise the problem of privacy and incommunicability of 'I'-thoughts — addressed in §4. Here I offer some clarification of Frege's statement.

“Primitive”: in self-identification one is *presented* to oneself in a basic, i.e., irreducible, unanalysable, unmediated way. There is no appeal to criteria or information concerning oneself, no mediation by evidence or identity. In 'I'-thoughts self-identification involves identification-*free* self-reference, and misidentification is impossible. There's no gap between 'speaker's reference' and 'semantic reference' as, say, in definite descriptions, where misidentification is possible.

This “primitive way” is not available to anyone else, precisely because anyone else must appeal to criteria to identify the speaker. Being 'presented to oneself in a primitive way' entails a disparity between first- and third-person perspectives, not privacy.

Put differently, if Frege is suggesting that another person cannot use the very token of 'I' used by the thinker, that no-one can occupy *my* 'I'-perspective and therefore no one can *grasp* that very mode of presentation of 'I', then that's clearly true<sup>16</sup>. But from the fact that only *my* perspective can make known to the objective world the thinker or speaker that I am, can make known to others the *irreducible* 'I'-thought, how does it follow that 'I'-thoughts are private and incommunicable?

Even saying 'I am in pain' doesn't fail to communicate who's in pain, or the thought I express. I am not merely expressing my non-comparable (Fregean) idea of pain. Others “can have sympathy for me” (Frege 1967, 28); if what I express were incommunicable, how could anyone sympathise with *me*?

In self-identification one is presented to oneself in a primitive way that is not shareable or *graspable* by anyone else. But isn't each of us capable of *understanding* that there is a primitive way in which each is presented to itself? Recanati (1995, 95) considers what seems a similar clarification of Frege's statement, but thinks that if it's accepted, the problem of 'the paradox' arises.

#### 4. Recanati's Paradox

Frege says that, in 'I'-thoughts, “everyone is presented [*gegeben*] to himself in a particular and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else.” But “now he [Dr Lauben, in his example] may want to communicate with others ['I have been wounded']. He cannot communicate a thought which he alone can grasp.” (1967, 25–26)

Realising the implications for his thesis regarding the shareability, communicability, and objectivity of *thoughts*, Frege immediately offers a (tentative) answer: “if he now says 'I have been wounded', he must use the 'I' in a sense which can be apprehended by others, perhaps in the sense of 'he who is speaking to you at this moment', by doing which he makes the associated conditions of his utterance serve for the expression of his thought.” (1967, 25–26)

Recanati (1995, 95–96) deems Frege's answer “sketchy and incomplete.” For Recanati, the passage does raise the problem of privacy and incommunicability of 'I'-thoughts, which he

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<sup>16</sup> Except perhaps in *oratio obliqua*, as in 'I, Claudius' said by Robert Graves; even then the mode of presentation can't be 'Claudius's'. See also Dummett (1981, ch. 6).

characterises as: “‘the paradox of the first-person’. First person thoughts are private, hence incommunicable; yet we do communicate them, by uttering first person sentences.”

Recanati is clearly right: we do communicate our ‘I’-thoughts. The problem, however, is that ‘private’ and ‘communicable’ are insufficiently determinate<sup>17</sup>. For a paradox to threaten, ‘private’ cannot mean merely ‘not public’, ‘kept secret’, but ‘in *principle* non-understandable by others’, as in Wittgenstein’s Private-Language Argument. For a contradiction to be generated, ‘communicable’ needn’t mean that the very mode of presentation of ‘I’ be (*per impossibile*) shareable with others, only that the ‘I’-*thought* can be made known to others.

Frege would have fallen into contradiction had he been saying, ‘I’-thoughts are in *principle* impossible to be made understandable or knowable by others, but we do make them known to others. However, he wasn’t saying this.

Recanati’s approach to solving the supposed paradox involves the introduction of two modes of presentation of ‘I’: the ‘special and primitive’, or psychological, and the ‘communication’, or linguistic. (1995) The former stands for the private, incommunicable sense  $Ego_x$  — “where ‘x’ stands for the name of the person thinking the thought (for example, ‘ $Ego_{Lauben}$ ’ in the case of first person thoughts about Lauben).” This “must be distinguished from the mode of presentation associated with the word ‘I’ in communication (‘he who is speaking to you at this moment’). The latter can be grasped by others, the former cannot.”

Furthermore, Recanati accepts the view of non-descriptive modes of presentation of indexicals, construed “as dossiers of information. Thus  $Ego_{Lauben}$  is Lauben’s dossier for whatever information he gains about himself. [...] An Ego-dossier serves as repository for information gained in [the] particular way (the first person way).” The “modes of presentation in question, whether descriptive or nondescriptive, are all ‘psychological’.” (1995, fn. 3)

Recanati (2010:15–17) reiterates the two modes of presentation: “the *linguistic* mode of presentation associated with ‘I’ (the singular predicate, ‘the speaker’, or ‘he who is speaking at the moment’), [and] the *psychological* mode of presentation that occurs in the speaker’s thought (i.e., the speaker’s self concept which he can only use in thinking about himself).”

Later (2010, 156; 2014, 509), he appeals to the notion of ‘mental files’: “the mental file ‘self’ serves as a repository of information gained in [...] a special way [“through introspection”, or from “the inside”] that goes with the ER [epistemically rewarding] relation [of identity].” When “the hearer processes the speaker’s utterance, the same singular predicate ‘the speaker’ evokes in the hearer’s mind, the hearer’s mental file containing that predicate, and that file is the hearer’s file about the person speaking to him.”

This is an ingenious attempt at solving the perceived paradox. However, it raises some problems. First, Frege ruled out that a mode of presentation is psychological, or that *sense* is private, in contrast to Recanati’s “the psychological mode of presentation”, “the private sense  $Ego_x$ ”. Anything psychological belongs to the inner world of subjective ideas. *Sense* is objective, even if we cannot “grasp it otherwise than as the sense of some expression.” (Dummett 1981, 102; 122–123)

Secondly, for Frege there aren’t two modes of presentation of the token ‘I’ used by Dr Lauben. Even in soliloquy, if Dr Lauben thinks ‘I have been wounded’, the mode of presentation of ‘I’ is no different from the mode of presentation when he says to his friend, ‘I have been wounded’. Thirdly, were Dr Lauben to have suffered amnesia, if he still understood the meaning of ‘I’, he could refer to himself and think ‘I have been wounded’ — despite not knowing who he was, what his name was, or recalling any dossier-information about himself.

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<sup>17</sup> I owe this to discussions with Stephen Blamey and Peter J. King.

Frege's *Art des Gegebenseins* presents an entity: sense is entity-invoking. (1948, 210) In 'I'-thoughts, the sense of 'I' presents the referent of 'I' in a primitive, unmediated way. Self-identification is of a piece with the identification-free self-reference of 'I'.

Recanati's "mental file 'self'", or "Ego<sub>x</sub>", or "Ego-dossier" "that serves as a repository of information gained in [...] a special way", are irrelevant to self-*identification*; they would at best be relevant to self-*ascription* of properties — his thesis involves *Conflation*.

## 5. Dissolving the Paradox

The indexical 'I' is governed by a simple Rule (R\*):

(R\*) Necessarily 'I' refers to *and* identifies the thinker, or speaker.

(R\*) leaves no latitude for the thinker's intentions, or information about itself, in self-reference and self-identification.

As a thinker, however, one's 'I'-identification must also include knowledge of what it is for  $\lceil I = \delta_t \rceil$ , to be true, "where  $\delta_t$  is a fundamental identification of a person [e.g., 'he'...] which – unlike one's 'I'-identification – is of a kind which could be available to someone else."<sup>18</sup> (Henceforth *the Requirement*.)

It seems that Frege is thinking along these lines, when he explains that Dr Lauben "must use the 'I' in a sense which can be apprehended by others, perhaps in the sense of  $\lceil I = \delta_t \rceil$ , where  $\delta_t$  stands for] 'he who is speaking to you at this moment'", which provides a demonstrative identification of the referent of 'he', and of the hearer of the token 'you' who is being spoken to now. Or a definite description: "the person who gives [the 'I'-thought] expression"<sup>19</sup> and the token 'you', the hearer, who is being spoken to now.

This analysis might still be deemed unsatisfactory, presumably because the demonstrative 'he' and the definite description 'the person' are liable to error through misidentification.

But that they are liable to error entails no incommunicability of 'I'-thoughts. Far from being a problem concerning 'I', this highlights its uniqueness: its absolute IEMI. If there are problems with 'I'-thoughts, they cannot be traced to Frege's 'presented in a primitive way'; rather, they result from assuming that communication of 'I'-thoughts must involve the shareability of the very mode of presentation of 'I' between speaker and hearer.

As I argued earlier, however, there is disanalogy between 'I'-thoughts and thoughts about, say, Venus. The *content* of the 'I'-thought '*being wounded*' is objective<sup>20</sup> – privileging neither the first- nor the third-person perspective<sup>21</sup> – and clearly "capable of being the common property of several thinkers". But, unlike the case of 'Venus', the mode of presentation of 'I' in '*I have been wounded*', is not shareable among thinkers.

Frege makes this clear: unlike "a mineralogist who shows [shares with] his hearers a mountain crystal, I cannot put [an 'I'-thought] in the hands of my readers [...]. I have to content myself with presenting the reader with a thought [...] dressed in sensible linguistic form." (1967, 26, fn.:1)

It's the shareability that precludes the primitive way of 'I' a rôle in communication. But I have given good reasons to reject the demand for shareability; there is no obvious reason why Frege could not have held that in 'I'-thoughts, what is required in communication is not shareability

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<sup>18</sup> Evans (1982, 209).

<sup>19</sup> Wittgenstein (1958, §302).

<sup>20</sup> Even if, unlike the Pythagorean theorem, it's not timeless and unchangeable.

<sup>21</sup> See Recanati (1995).

of the “primitive way”, but mutual understanding, “which is what successful [“linguistic interchange” and] communication achieve.”<sup>22</sup>

Others cannot *grasp* the mode of presentation of my ‘I’-identification, but they can *understand* the thought I express by ‘I have been wounded’<sup>23</sup>. “Reference as a communicative phenomenon, involves getting an audience to think of the right object [e.g., the speaker]”<sup>24</sup> — unless their “command of language is so erratic that [they] fail to comprehend the first-person pronoun.” When ‘I’ is used by different speakers to refer to themselves, “the thought which those speakers express [...] must [...] be distinct whenever they use that pronoun.”<sup>25</sup> Distinctness doesn’t entail privacy and incommunicability.

The upshot is that each thinker is capable of using the token ‘I’ and *grasping* non-inferentially its mode of presentation; each is capable of *understanding* that there’s a primitive way in which each thinker is presented to itself. Each is capable of conceiving the *content* of ‘I’-thoughts being instantiated otherwise than from its ‘I’-perspective.

This is part of the philosophical significance of Descartes’ *Principle* of understanding the general in the particular, exemplified by the most indubitable ‘I’-thought, grasped non-inferentially by reason: *Ego sum, Ego existo*<sup>26</sup>. In grasping this ‘I’-thought, the thinker can grasp the intelligibility and be in possession of the concept expressed by ‘ξ is thinking’, ‘ξ is’, ‘ξ exists’, which he “must conceive as capable of being instantiated otherwise than by himself”<sup>27</sup>. The thinker’s general conception of what it is for someone to satisfy such predicates is what yields a conception of objectivity. One’s ‘I’-identification “conforms to the *Generality Constraint*.”<sup>28</sup> And “this means that one’s [‘I’-identification] must also comprise [...] knowledge of [*the Requirement*].”<sup>29</sup>

‘I’-thoughts, Recanati rightly states, are communicable through sentences: the second statement of the supposed paradox is true. The primitive mode of presentation of ‘I’ is neither private nor incommunicable, simply non-shareable: the first statement is false — the paradox is dissolved. Even if Frege’s answer is “sketchy and incomplete”, the explanations in this section, and in §2-4, I believe, make explicit his tentative answer.

## 6. A Model of Dubious Coherence

A serious problem in the metaphysics of the self is the mistaken tendency to construe self-awareness “on the model of sense perception”. This model, Shoemaker (1984, 12–14) argues, is of dubious coherence when applied to self-awareness. Self-awareness involves *no kind* of perception of one’s self. Nor, I should add, can the fact that in self-identification one is *presented* to oneself in a primitive, irreducible way which is IEMI, be construed on the sense-perception model.

This dubious model is what Wright, in his ‘Reflections on François Recanati’ (2012, 252–253), attributes to Descartes: “it is because the phenomenon of IEM has been viewed through the lens of the Psychological Hypothesis [...deriving from the nature of psychological self-recognition] that it has provoked the extreme metaphysical and semantic (over-)reactions which have characterized the philosophical discussion. [...] The Cartesian notion of an ‘infallible capacity of self-recognition’ is [the most extreme], indeed [it is] egregiously

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<sup>22</sup> McDowell (1998b, 222). Evans (1982, 315–6) questions the assumption.

<sup>23</sup> We cannot *grasp* the infinite but we can *understand* that it’s complete. (Descartes AT VII, 52) See also Dummett’s (1981, 120–121) entertaining–recognising distinction.

<sup>24</sup> Evans (1982, 208); see his criticisms of Geach and Strawson.

<sup>25</sup> Dummett (1981, 124, 101)

<sup>26</sup> See my (2022).

<sup>27</sup> Evans (1982, 226).

<sup>28</sup> Evans (1982, 209; 100–105), his proviso, fn. 17, needn’t concern us here.

<sup>29</sup> Evans (1982, 209).



confused. [...] A polar recoil from this Cartesian conception is illustrated by the tendency of Wittgenstein in the Blue Book, and yet more clearly by Elizabeth Anscombe, to propose that “I” as it features in the expression of IEM I-thoughts, is not a device of reference at all.”<sup>30</sup>

This is a clear case of Descartes’ works being derogatorily labelled ‘Cartesian’, and spuriously used as a mouthpiece for whatever philosophical sin the writer wishes to attack.<sup>31</sup>

Descartes’ concern is not with any Psychological Hypothesis, nor with the perceptual model of self-recognition/self-knowledge. His concern is with reason’s objective clear and distinct grasping or understanding. Nor is he concerned with the veil-of-perception thesis: the perception “of the sun is the sun itself” (AT VII, 103; AT VI, 130), it’s world-directed, towards the mind-independent object.

Furthermore, Descartes is not concerned with infallibility, whose strength he finds uncomfortable. (Discourse AT VI, 40)<sup>32</sup>. He writes to Princess Elizabeth: it is “not necessary that our reason should be free from error; it is sufficient if our conscience testifies that we have never lacked resolution and virtue to carry out whatever we have judged [on good reasons] the best course.” (4 August 1641 AT IV, 266–267; CSMK, 258) Nor is he concerned with incorrigibility or irresistibility, but with *indubitability*: with what *cannot be doubted* (attentively adducing reasons that can withstand the methodic scrutiny), not with whether he, *psychologically*, can or cannot doubt it<sup>33</sup>.

Descartes’ *conscientia* doesn’t mean consciousness (despite numerous mistranslations), nor does it mean self-knowledge in a psychological, non-moral sense. *Conscientia* is a hard-won achievement that comes at the end of long striving and self-cross-examination, adopting reason’s objective standpoint; such virtues are constitutive of *conscientia*. It’s not only asking ‘what *am* I?’, but also ‘what *ought* I to be?’ *Conscientia* raises some of the deepest philosophical questions concerning our nature as self-conscious subjects<sup>34</sup>. It has serious implications regarding misattributions to, and ill-formed criticisms of, Descartes’ metaphysics of mind through the centuries.

For Descartes, Frege, and Shoemaker (1984, 14–15), self-awareness, self-knowledge, and self-identification do “not involve any sort of perception of one’s self [...] The way out of this incoherence is to abandon completely, not just in part, the perceptual model of self-knowledge.”

## 7. Two Kinds of Immunity to Error

‘I’ is irreducible and governed by Rule (R\*). However, it remains true that we shan’t have a proper understanding of its *essential* rôle in, and implications for, the metaphysics of selfhood and thereby of personhood, unless we show *why* and *how* its IEMI is *absolute*. I introduced the second kind of immunity and defended the two kinds of immunity in (1991, 1993, 2000, 2022);

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<sup>30</sup> Wright is not alone in such misattributions — see, for example, Kant (1933); Strawson (1959, 1966, 1994); Austin (1962); Kenny (1968, 1989); Rorty (1980); Peirce (1986); McDowell (1998a); and disappointingly (though nothing so ruthless), Evans (1982). In my (1991, 1993) I, albeit partly, followed this unreflective trend, but soon afterwards I self-administered Descartes’ invaluable methodic scrutiny and freed myself from the shackles of such ill-formed habits.

<sup>31</sup> See Williams (2006, 261-2), Cottingham (1994, 2).

<sup>32</sup> Descartes changed “must infallibly” to “must rather” (*Discourse* Latin translation, 1644. Maclean (2006, 76, fn. 34). Sometimes he uses ‘infallible’ when referring to those inclined towards divine revelation, which he rejects. (*Principles* AT IXB, 5) In his letter to [Mesland] 2 May 1644, regarding theological controversies, he says: “we may earn merit even though, seeing very clearly what we must do, we do it infallibly [infalliblement], and without indifference.” (AT IV, 117; CSMK, 234) ‘Infallibly’ is used adverbially to mean inevitably or without fail: “the will [being at one with reason] is drawn voluntarily and freely [...] but nevertheless inevitably [*aliter, infallibiliter*], towards a clearly known good.” (*Axiom* VII AT VII, 166).

<sup>33</sup> See my (2013, chps. 2–3).

<sup>34</sup> See my (2022), which also evaluates Lichtenberg’s objection to the *cogito*.

my thoughts have naturally been developing. Recently (2023) upholding the original insight, I argued that IEMA holds in all acts of the mind. Here I elucidate, albeit briefly, the IEMA in preparation for what follows.

The IEMA concerns the self-*ascriptive* component of ‘I’-thoughts<sup>35</sup>. Drawing on Descartes’ and Frege’s act–content distinction, the self-ascription of *all* the mind’s acts, intellectual or sensory, while enacted – e.g., *that* I am thinking, seeing, perceiving, etc., – cannot be doubted: they are IEMA. But IEMA might not hold regarding the *content* of such acts, since *what* I am thinking, seeing, perceiving, etc., can be subject to doubt.

Nevertheless, IEMA does hold regarding the content of mental acts such as being in pain, having a toothache, etc., in which there is no question that it is pain that I feel — being in pain and feeling pain are one and the same. It also holds for proprioceptive states, e.g., ‘my legs are crossed’<sup>36</sup>. All such ‘I’-thoughts have a *double* immunity: IEMA and IEMI.

It would be a mistake to confuse the two kinds of immunity with the distinction between mental and bodily properties, or to confuse the IEMA with the incorrigibility–corrigibility psychological distinction. The concern is with immunity and indubitability — with *what* cannot be doubted.

‘I’-thoughts meet the objectivity requirement, are truth-evaluable, even if they are not objective eternally (objectivity and eternity are not necessarily connected), since they presuppose a special centrality: an irreducible *self* with a unifying perspective from which what is real and true can be apprehended.

## 8. IEMI and Two Uses of ‘I’

Wittgenstein, in the *Blue Book* (1978, 66–67), argues that ‘I’ in its ‘as-subject-use’, as in ‘I have toothache’, is IEMI because “there is no question of recognising a person when I say I have toothache”. Whereas ‘I’ in its ‘as-object-use’, as in ‘I have grown six inches’, “involves the recognition of a particular person”, and misidentification is possible.

Shoemaker (1984, 8) in turn argues that certain self-ascriptive statements involving bodily *self-ascription*, e.g., ‘I am facing a table’ are IEMI relative to ‘I’ only circumstantially, not absolutely. Indeed, any immunity such statements have is derivative from those involving mental self-ascription.

Evans follows Shoemaker, but adds that it’s not just with bodily self-ascription that one cannot claim absolute IEMI: “one cannot make this sort of absolute claim [...] for mental self-ascription either — at least self-ascription [...] which includes ‘I see so-and-so’ and ‘I hear so-and-so.’” (1982:219) There’s a class of mental self-*ascription* in which the IEMI is non-absolute. Shoemaker and Evans are committed to *Conflation*.

Recanati’s implicit–explicit distinction seems *prima facie* analogous to Descartes’ and Frege’s distinctions. However, his ‘implicit-representation in the content’ determines that, “if the subject *felt* the position of his legs [being crossed] ‘from inside’”, ‘I’ would be IEM. (2012b, §1.3) Whereas, in ‘explicit-representation’ misidentification is possible; hence IEM relative to ‘I’ is circumstantial.

Recanati (2012b, 185) answers his question ‘where does the IEM come from?’ thus: in cases such as ‘I am in pain’, “it comes from the fact that experiences are intrinsically first-personal.” What makes “an experience [*contra* judgement] intrinsically first-personal is not its content [...] but its mode [enabling us] to classify experiential states into types such as perceptions, memories, etc., quite independent of the content of the state.” The intrinsically first-personal are IEM, the rest may be circumstantially IEM.

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<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion, see my (2000).

<sup>36</sup> Pretence and deviancy don’t affect the ordinary cases.

Recanati's modes seem analogous to Descartes' acts, but for Descartes all the mind's acts, all the subject's actions, are essentially connected to, presuppose, an I whose IEMI is unshaken whatever the self-*ascriptive* content, whatever the experiences<sup>37</sup>. Recanati's thesis is committed to *Subsumption*.

Strawson (1966, 165) argues "that 'I' can be used without criteria of subject-identity and yet refer to a subject" and thus be IEMI, because the links between criterionless self-ascription and third-person criteria "are not in practice severed." Strawson conflates *identification-free* self-reference with criterionless *self-ascription* of states of consciousness.

Wittgenstein, stating that cases such as 'I have grown six inches' "involve the recognition of a particular person", so misidentification is possible, *conflates* third-person perspective, which involves the recognition of a person, with first-person perspective which doesn't.

To offer the self-ascription of some mental properties as examples of the IEMI, and the self-ascription of some mental and bodily properties as examples of possible misidentification, is unilluminating, because cases such as 'I am in pain' are also IEMA. They form no paradigm category of being IEMI, since in all cases of self-identification 'I' is IEMI *absolutely* — recall the possibility of Dr Lauben suffering amnesia. It's also misleading because cases such as 'I see so-and-so', or 'I have grown six inches', can be subject to *misascription* of the property in question; but how can it be possible to misidentify myself using 'I'?

It follows that there's only one use of 'I', involving an inextricable link between self-identification and *identification-free* self-reference, whatever the self-ascription. There are no good reasons to allow the self-ascription of some mental properties and of bodily properties to compromise the IEMI relative to 'I'.

Wittgenstein drew his 'subject-use'-'object-use' distinction, mistakenly thinking that 'I' is IEMI only in its 'as-subject-use'. Rebutting Wittgenstein's distinction rebuts the views that 'I' in its 'as-subject-use' is not a referring term but "a shadow cast by grammar" (Anscombe 1975, 45-46, 58), leading to the denial of the self: "the self" is a piece of philosopher's nonsense [...] a metaphysical monster." (Kenny 1989, 87-92) Wittgenstein's position is elusive,<sup>38</sup> unlike Anscombe's and Kenny's categorical, but flawed, positions.

## 9. Objections and Replies

It might be objected that there are many counter-examples to my central thesis that 'I' is IEMI absolutely. Ernst Mach (1890, 50-51) relates that on getting into an omnibus, another person "appeared at the other end. 'What shabby pedagogue is that, that has just entered?', thought I. It was myself; opposite me hung a large mirror." Or, suppose that in a mirror I see a leg bleeding and think that it's mine, but in fact it's another person's leg.

Such examples, so the objections go, are cases in which the IEMI relative to 'I' is not absolute because, although they involve a referential use of 'I', it could be mistaken through misidentification relative to 'I'.

Let's consider their cogency. Unaware of the mirror at the end of the omnibus, I judge '*that person* looks shabby', but it turns out that I am mistaken. To argue that misidentification relative to 'I' is possible is to think that it makes sense to ask: '*that person* looks shabby, but is it me?' But how is this a case of misidentifying myself using 'I' and its cognates?

There's an important difference between: (a) '*that person* looks shabby', and (b) '*I* look shabby'. In the first case I misidentify *the person* who looks shabby; in the second case, while I'm unaware of the mirror, I *misascribe* the property 'looking shabby' to myself. But neither is a case of misidentification relative to 'I'.

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<sup>37</sup> Acts and actions are real, though subject-dependent. Perhaps whatever is mind-independent is real, but it's fallacious to infer that whatever is real is mind-independent.

<sup>38</sup> See my (2000).

The objector moves fallaciously from the first statement, where the question ‘that person looks shabby, but is it me?’ makes sense (only because misidentification of *the person* looking shabby is possible), to the second (‘I look shabby’), where it’s nonsensical to wonder whether the reference and identification of ‘I’ is to me, and misidentification is impossible. This cannot be said about the demonstrative, or the definite description. Before seeing the mirror, self-*ascribing* shabbiness is false precisely because the identification of ‘I’ is unshaken: ‘I’ is IEMI absolutely.

Similarly, if in the mirror I see a leg bleeding and think it’s mine, but in fact it’s another person’s, then I am mistaken in thinking that my leg is bleeding. I *misascribed* to myself a property, but the self-reference *and* self-identification of ‘I’, or ‘my’, are unshaken. It’s a case of misidentifying the leg that is bleeding, or the person whose *leg* is bleeding, not of misidentifying myself or *my* leg using ‘I’ or ‘my’. My mistake is established by determining the *self-ascriptive* component, not the self-identification component of the statement, since there can be no doubt as to whether it’s my leg referred to by the token reflexive ‘my’.

We can begin to see the centrality of the two kinds of immunity, since what remains open for consideration is whether I satisfy the self-ascribed property. But now we are in the realm of the IEMA, where an ‘I’-thought being subject to error depends upon self-*ascription*, involving ‘I’-thoughts about oneself as *being in a certain way*, and therefore upon what properties I self-ascribe. It’s not about ‘I’-thoughts concerned with self-identification, which involves ‘I’-thoughts about oneself *as oneself*. Whatever the self-ascriptive property, the IEMI of ‘I’ admits of no distinction between absolute and circumstantial, non-absolute, or non-universal immunity. Despite the distinction between the two kinds of immunity, self-ascription always *presupposes* self-identification, a subject. In self-identification, the IEMI of ‘I’ remains untouched: it’s absolute.

My arguments demonstrate that by defending, clarifying, and explaining the two kinds of immunity we can begin to understand *what we are*. The thinking *qua* thinking self cannot be the only entity that secures guaranteed self-identification. Rather, as Descartes argues, the systematic order of reasoning leads from selfhood

to personhood: to “my whole self” (*Sixth Meditation* AT VII, 81) — an embodied irreducible person who also secures the IEMI of ‘I’. Furthermore, my arguments provide a framework for knowing which elements I include within my ‘boundary’, of knowing “the *fundamental ground of difference*”<sup>39</sup> specific to myself. Just as I might incorrectly draw a boundary around myself, I might *misascribe* a property to myself, but it’s not possible that I misidentify myself using ‘I’ and its cognates.

Evans (1982, 212) argues that, in self-identification, ‘I’-thoughts “must be informed [...] by information which the subject may gain of himself [...] and] at the same time must *know which* object it is of which he thus has [...] knowledge.” This is odd given Evans’ defence of identification-free self-reference and its inseparability from IEMI. Evans has slipped because of his *Conflation*.

The appropriateness of a ‘*know who*’, ‘*know what*’, ‘*know which*’ requirement can only be considered after proper consideration of self-ascription, demonstrating that it’s the second kind of immunity that has brought out clearly the centrality and significance of self-ascription to the nature of self-consciousness.

Strawson (1959, 104; 1966, 164-5; 1994, 211) states that IEMI applies to “*both* states of consciousness and corporeal characteristics.” This is true — but it’s simply asserted (at best it’s supported by an implicit verificationism, and ordinary- language philosophy). Such a claim must surely be argued for, especially in this area of philosophy. One cannot assume that IEMI relative to ‘I’ is guaranteed by the “ordinary practice, well established among human

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<sup>39</sup> Evans (1982, 107).

beings, of reference to themselves and each other”, or to “repeat the point, by the rôle of the expression in the ordinary practice, well established among human beings.”

In contrast, the conception of the self as an embodied being, inspired by Descartes, is the outcome of my enquiry.

## 10. Recanati’s Insight

Recanati (1995, 95; 2007, 177) argues that the subject being implicitly represented in the content (involving *thetic* experience, whose content is subject-less, and which grounds the judgement) is what makes ‘I’-judgements identification-free and hence IEM. If the subject is explicitly represented in the content (is part of the *lekton* — an explicitly stated content), misidentification is possible; thus IEM is circumstantial. If the subject-explicit-content has the same grounds as the subject-implicit-content, thus lacking an identity premise, it “may also be IEM.” (2012b, §§2.2–2.3)

Recanati (2010, 192) explains: “if, on the basis of his proprioceptive experience, the subject forms the explicit first-person judgment that his own legs are crossed [...], the content of that judgment differs from the simpler, selfless content of the [*thetic*] experience (and of the primary judgment that goes with it), but nothing in addition to the experience in question is required to ground the more complex judgment: it simply makes explicit what was already conveyed by the mode of the grounding experience.” But who is making the primary judgement? It must be the subject, whose proprioceptive experience cannot be subject-less.

Perhaps the unacknowledged worry is: it must be possible to distinguish a component of judgement that is not fully absorbed by the experience judged, but which forms the topic of the judgement. Nevertheless, this requires that “the recognitional component, necessary to experience, can be present in experience only because of the *possibility* of referring different experiences to one identical subject of them all.” (Strawson 1966, 101)

It’s this possibility, together with my argument that we cannot self-ascribe experiences without presupposing the subject, which saves the recognitional component of experience from the risk (feared by Strawson) of being absorbed “into the item recognised even when that item cannot be conceived of as having an existence independent of the particular experience of it”.

In ‘I’-judgements, the subject doesn’t just happen to be in the vicinity at the right time, judging a subject-less *thetic* experience: ‘...legs are crossed’. Experiences and judgements *presuppose* a subject. Moreover, the move from subject-less *thetic* experience to the ‘I’-judgement (however primary) would require *something*, not “nothing in addition to the [*thetic*] experience in question”, because “what is conveyed by the mode of the grounding experience” is subject-less. This is more pressing because “the explicit first-person [more complex] judgment” *differs* from “the simpler, selfless content [...] and the primary judgement.” It would require criteria for self-identification. If so, it risks the collapse of the first-person case, a truly disturbing possibility. Yet in identification-free self-reference of ‘I’, and hence IEMI, dossier-information, criterial and identity requirements make no sense. All this brings out the importance of, and inextricable link between, self-identification and *identification-free* self-reference, to the *sense*, the mode of presentation of ‘I’.

Recanati hit upon an important insight: in thinking, judging, perceiving, feeling, etc., the subject cannot be part of the content, for this would lead to an infinite regress, as Descartes and Frege realised.

Frege (1967, 33) asks: “can I be part of the content of my consciousness while another part is, perhaps, an idea of the moon? Does this perhaps take place when I judge that I am looking at the moon? Then this first part would have a consciousness and part of the content of this

consciousness would be I myself once more. And so on. Yet it is surely inconceivable that I should be boxed into myself in this way to infinity.”

Descartes expresses his worries of an infinite-regress problem, thus: knowledge “does not require reflective knowledge [...] i.e., knowing that we know, and knowing that we know that we know, and so on *ad infinitum*. This kind of knowledge cannot possibly be obtained about anything.” (*Sixth Set of Replies* AT VII, 422)<sup>40</sup>

Descartes and Frege avoid both kinds of infinite-regress problem, drawing on their act-content distinction whereby the subject is not part of the content — and, perhaps unwittingly, so does Hume’s (1978, 252) famous comment: ‘I can never catch myself’ in the content of my mind.

Self-consciousness is not identical with reflection; our acts of the mind are not accompanied by a further act of reflective self-awareness, and so on *ad infinitum* — even though *what it is to be* a self-conscious subject is being able to cross-examine itself, to reflect on itself, on its acts, commitments, on the world at large.

It’s the infinite-regress problem that I identify as Recanati’s insight, but which remains hidden behind his complex theses and distinctions. Reconfiguring these makes perspicuous Recanati’s important insight, and restores the subject’s indispensability to any self-ascriptions<sup>41</sup>. The subject is not implicitly/explicitly part of the content of any ‘I’-thought: it is its metaphysically necessary presupposition.

## 11. Concluding Remarks

Recanati and the other philosophers discussed here have tried to explain the immunity to error in ‘I’-thoughts; at best they have explained (or partly explained) the first immunity, but have shown no awareness of the second. Their arguments share the mistaken premise that ‘I’-thoughts involving the self-ascription of bodily, and of mixed mental-bodily properties, such as ‘I am seeing so-and-so’, are not IEMI relative to ‘I’, absolutely or universally.

Evans (1982, 213) argues that the essence of self-consciousness is self-identification. But if my arguments are cogent, the essence of self-consciousness is both self-identification and self-ascription, revealing that self-consciousness is concerned not merely with the mind but also with the mind–body union. My arguments have exposed the shared mistaken premise that one’s body is an external object, a view that fails to appreciate the fact that the mind–body substantial union is *presupposed* by their interaction, as Descartes argues<sup>42</sup>.

I have demonstrated that the thinking *qua* thinking self cannot be the only entity that secures guaranteed self-identification. Such weighty metaphysical commitments cannot be derived from considerations of self-reference and self-identification alone. As Descartes’ epistemic commitments (*Second Meditation*) make clear: thus far, ‘I only know that I am a thing that thinks’, *not* ‘I know that I am only a thing that thinks’. (AT VII:27) The subject cannot use ‘I’ and its cognates so as to wrongly identify who’s thinking, whoever or whatever it might be. It’s presented to itself in a primitive way, demonstrating the inseparability of the *referent* of ‘I’ from the Fregean *sense* of ‘I’.

My arguments have been that, whatever the self-ascriptive component of ‘I’-thoughts, the IEMI relative to ‘I’ is absolute — both in the formal sense of self-*reference*, and in the substantive sense of self-*identification*. The essential, unique indexicality of ‘I’ is inextricably linked to the way it both refers to and identifies its referent: the subject.

Pulling together the threads of my enquiry, the *essential* rôle of ‘I’ in ‘I’-thoughts, in what we are, comes into view. The absolute IEMI of ‘I’ is guaranteed, not only by the logic of indexicals

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<sup>40</sup> On ‘reflection’, see Letter for [Arnauld] 29 July 1648 AT V, 221; CSMK, 357.

<sup>41</sup> It would avoid criticisms that his “subjectless view of the content of ‘implicit’ *de se* thought” conflicts with his ‘mental file self’. García-Carpintero (2013, 192).

<sup>42</sup> See my (2019).

or the semantic rule governing 'I', but by an indispensable ontological underpinning: a true and real subject, leading through Descartes' systematic order of reasoning, from selfhood to personhood: a metaphysical commitment to *what we are*. In Descartes' conception of 'I'-identification, the *sense* and thereby the *referent* of 'I' spans over the mind-body union capturing "my whole self", "a true *ens per se*", an irreducible embodied person<sup>43</sup>. The self is not an appendage to personhood, but its unifying source and explanatory ground. Nothing in the use of 'I' forces upon us either an actual separation of the two distinct elements of the true unity of our nature, or an ontological grounding reduction. Neither an idealist nor a neuro-physicalist-scientific being, but a true *ens per se*, a true entity in itself, an embodied, irreducible, autonomous free, self-determining person in the objective spatiotemporal world<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> *Sixth Meditation* AT VII, 81. *Fourth Meditation*. Letters to Regius December 1641 AT III, 460; CSMK, 200. January 1642 AT III, 493, 508; CSMK, 206, 209. Letters to Princess Elizabeth May 1643 AT III, 664; CSMK, 218. June 1643 AT III, 691; CSMK, 226. *Passions of the Soul* AT II, 327.

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