

What does the word 'I' refer to?

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Abstract

The 'self' is a topic that is open to many interpretations. The word has been defined by many throughout history, and it still being defined today. However, what comes into perpendicularity is when referring to the 'self' is common to not what is being referred to. The following essay will focus on explaining what is 'I' by exploring concepts of 'self' which is the 'I' is referring to. The essay is divided into three parts. The introduction focus on explaining what will happen in the paper. The second part focuses on explaining the methods of the 'self' explained by others. The third part will be the application of the 'self' and how it is being referred by 'I' where the concepts are put into test with sentences. The last part will be the conclusion where parts of the essay are summarized and gives what the best option to follow is.

Keywords: The-self, 'I', the grammar of 'I', Locke, Wittgenstein, Descartes, biological-sense, psychological-sense, Mind, Consciousness, body,

'Cogito, ergo sum' are the words of the famous Rene Descartes 'I think; therefore I am' became the recurrence of using the grammar of 'I' in the world of Philosophy. At the heart of the question of 'What does the 'I' refer to?'. However, as much as the 'I' is questionable, therefore also is the 'self' repeated in question. 'What does the 'self' refer to?'. The major question that refers to the 'I' remains the question to be answered beyond the 'self', but the question in structure sites to the usage of grammar rather than the position of self-knowledge, hence the 'self'. In the articulation or composition of 'I' to be understood in the medium of communication, the concepts of 'I' are referring to must be addressed to understand what does the 'I' refer to. Therefore, what are the concepts of the 'self' that 'I' are referring to in order to be able to answer 'What does the 'I' refer to?'. This essay will explain the methods of the 'Self' that are explained in concepts in which the 'I' are referring to. Those concepts would be tested for clarification. Lastly, the conclusion of the essay

where the main question is answered and what derivatives we come into development by understanding 'What does the 'I' refer to?'.

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines self-knowledge as the referent to one's sensations and mental states where the focus relies on knowledge one's appropriate mental state. According to the encyclopedia, there are four ways self-knowledge can be understood, and our main concern is the 4th one in the list. "One's pronouncements about one's mental states carry a special authority or presumption of truth." which focuses on the pronouncement of statements that refers to the 'I'. There is no epistemological explanation that is required, but instead, an explanation of such confusion is found in Wittgenstein critic of the reference of 'I' (**Gertler, Brie, 2010**). After every concept explained, we will use the sentence "I am happy" to explain the concept as an example.

Rene Descartes understanding of the 'self' posits on the dualist notion. The distinguishing notion that Descartes employs is the difference between body (matter) and the mind (essence). The pronouncement of the idea of the mind for Descartes follows the similar idea of the soul, where the mind is the essence of the 'self'. Therefore the 'I' being referred to is the 'self' when the required usage of language context follows is the reference to the mind. His understanding of the 'self' is there a substance, a thinking substance. The actions of the thinking substance he calls 'modes'. These modes can be observed or found. The 'self' is a composition of elements. Therefore, he concludes that he knows he exists (**Sievert, D., 1975**).

Taking the sentence "I am happy" into the understanding of Descartes method when a person says they are happy, it means the substance that formulates the thinking mind is happy. Descartes explains that the observation of mental states exists outside the thinking substance; therefore, the 'self' is the substance. Then what appears to be happy in this context would be the substance rather than the mental states observed 'modes'. Assuming that the thinking substance can change due to external factors, or by self-deception into believing it doesn't feel happy, therefore, wouldn't the 'I' of "I am happy" can change in referencing oneself by self-deception?

Taking on his famous example of "I think therefore I exist", the reference to 'I' here is the understanding that 'I think' is the ability of the substance that thinks to observe 'modes' and the mode is 'thinking' therefore the 'I' exists. However, there is a distinction between saying 'I think therefore I exist' and 'Because I think therefore I exist'(**Sievert, D. (1975) pp62-63**). The problem here arises by Descartes commission that the thinking substance is not observable but can observe others. It can observe mental state, but it cannot observe itself. So, the substance in his explanation uses 'I think' when the commission of the thinking substance is observed, then it can be said 'I can observe mental states; therefore, I exist'. So, the **my** understanding of the 'I' here is still referring to

the substance of Descartes. However, the substance of Descartes does not know itself to be a substance, it can only observe 'modes'; therefore, the 'I' cannot be sure, because all the substance is referring to is the observation and nothing more. Therefore if 'I' is referring to the observation and others understand the 'I' as the observation, then it suffices to say the 'I' in Descartes method is plausible. However, if it is the substance of thinking it is pointing at, then it is wrong. Because "I am happy" is the observation of happiness mental state rather than the substance being happy because the thinking substance is not aware of itself but is pointing at the observation.

John Locke's understanding of the 'self' focuses more by differing the identity of person, and consciousness. Locke draws a difference between 'man'(human being) and 'person'. The consciousness can transcend time, meaning it is the same person in the past is the same one in future and present. Locke gives an example where a man wearing the same clothes yesterday is the same man wearing different clothes tomorrow, in terms biologically, a few hours difference in time but the same consciousness, hence, same 'person' but not 'same man'. Locke explains that 'man' here is the body and that changes overtime. Locke then explains the mind and experiences are what constitutes of the 'self'. Where the consciousness is transferred from a body to another (substance) then according to Locke it can be said the consciousness in the mind is what defines the person or in other words, the 'self'. Resolving, Locke then determines the 'self' is found in consciousness and not in the soul or body, unlike Descartes. **(Locke, J.,1690) (Mackie, J., 1976)**. If we apply the sentence mentioned above "I am happy" what we can understand is that Locke is referring to the consciousness is happy. However, assuming the consciousness of the person A who is happy is transferred to person B who is neutral, will B with the same consciousness of A be happy since the consciousness was moved? If person B retains the memories of A, then according to Locke it is the 'same person' or 'same consciousness'. So if I remember being happy, in person B, then it can be said I am having the memories and consciousness of person A, therefore; I am person A.**(Williams, B., 1973)**.

Wittgenstein draws a distinction between Subject 'I' and object 'I'. An example of the first is "My arm is broken" and the second would be "I try to lift my arm". Wittgenstein points out that the object 'I' is prone to error due to identification of a person. A good way to understand the distinction is that object 'I' focuses on physical attribution of objects that can be observed, while subject 'I' refers to mental attributes. Taking the example "I am happy", if in mental experience I feel happy then it becomes a subject of 'I', however, assuming I am connected with another person when it comes to emotions. If "I am happy", then this observation becomes an object of 'I' because it is

observed as an attribute of another person. So when he explains “I have a bump on my forehead” as a subject 'I' that describes physical attributes that are bracketed that can be considered first-person phenomenology. Wittgenstein distinction of the 'I' falls primarily on clear thought and communication rather than explaining what the 'self' is in essence. The main concern for him is the ability for people to communicate effectively between one another. **(Button, T. (2018)) Reference Wittgenstein: The Blue Book, 66–7**

Wittgenstein gives the example of "I am in pain" the 'I' here is not referring to a person being pointed at, but rather it identifies the persons around to know who is 'I' and the 'I' is identifying 'I'. Therefore the 'I' here is not a referring term but rather an expression. It must be noted to Wittgenstein understanding that 'I' is not necessarily an expression only at the case when 'I' becomes an inappropriate paradigm of reference.

Wittgenstein tries to distinguish between the confusion of the uses of 'I' is that they usually have subjective rather than objective. Taking the example "I am happy", the “happy” is the expression of the I of my happiness instead where happiness becomes a private object of observation which only the 'I' can know about. So, Wittgenstein argues that instead of referring to private objects observed with laughing they start using verbal expressions or language. What Wittgenstein tried to explain is that the private objects and the expressions being used are two different things. But the main concern for Wittgenstein is knowing happiness is their own happiness instead of others. Taking the example "I have pain in my knee" is not saying that there is an introspective observation of pain, but rather a verbal expression used by a person to articulate the private object observed. However, Wittgenstein leaves the option that the observed cannot always be an observation, for 'we' can be deceived by fantasy of a distorted influence **(Saugstad, Jens ,2002).**

After explaining different methods, there comes a distinction between two categories of defining the 'self', biological and psychological sense. The biological sense focuses on looking at 'self' as organisms where the thought in first-person looks through the lens of a particular organism. The psychological sense follows the consciousness of the person, hence the psychology of the person. This view is famously associated to 'neo-Lockeans' that are peering more on the biological brain where the 'self' is mind and neurons that brings the biological mind together, an approach on saying consciousness is materialistic. **(Bayne, Tim, 2011).**

In the biological sense, phenomenology plays a part. Bayne gives an example of the Cerberus (two-headed dog) where we can imagine two heads of the same body where one brain feels pain, and the other does not. Where each head has a consciousness of its own, if one thinks of hunger the other might not, then how would 'I' be referred to? Bayne refers to the idea of the 'I*-thoughts' wherein an

example is given where the right brain (head) of the Cerberus is spilling sugar in the supermarket (hypothetically) and is conscious of the act. In contrast, the left brain is civic inclined and has no trail of thought of such an act. So when the Cereberus refers to itself, it is referring to two thoughts in 'I*-thoughts' in which one cannot stop leaving splashes of sugar. At the same time, the other has no thought but can still say that the Cereberus is spilling sugar, therefore two different consciousness.

Additionally, the 'I*-thoughts' cannot be referred to be said as 'I' or as thoughts of 'I', because these duo consciousness cannot be integrated, each is thinking on its own. Therefore the Cereberus cannot refer to himself as *himself*. In the biological sense, therefore, it cannot be said that two consciousness (two heads) can be phenomenal in body actions because at one set the experience from one side is not being shared with the other. **(Bayne, Tim, 2011).**

The understanding of 'I' in the Cereberus can mean a "we". Since the established idea is that with a two-headed Cereberus there will exist two different consciousness, therefore when "I am happy" is applied in this context, it can be said head A of the Cerberus is happy (assuming the one speaking is head A). However, if the Cereberus is dragging a sack of potatoes and if asked, what are you doing? A reply from head A could be "I am dragging a sack of potatoes", yet head B from the same body is convicted to the act. Therefore, in a biological context, the 'I' is referring to the body performing the action rather than the consciousness. A good distinction for such example is Locke's 'man' (human being) and 'person'. For the Cerberus example, 'man' is the body and the each consciousness on its own is the 'person'. Taking Wittgenstein approach, two different 'I', where the consciousness of person A is subject of 'I' and the consciousness of A interconnected by the body with B is object of 'I'.

Another perspective is the psychological sense. Where given the question of whether an entity can hold two consciousness together, is in the question that relates two different consciousness in one mind, a split-brain patient for example. In this case, ownership of consciousness plays a role in determining the self. In the two consciousnesses the reference of the word 'I' is different. However, assuming a consciousness from A has its point of view, [a problem would occur when it would come from phenomenal disunity, in other words, not knowing the senses of the same body should be going to A or B](#), because it would be near on impossible to refer to the self in two perspectives. Therefore, consciousness would not be available in a psychological sense **(Bayne, Tim, 2011)**. The psychological sense does not trend away from the Lockean method explained previously. **My** understanding of neo-Lockeans is that [follow the concept of 'I' being referred to is the consciousness but on a physical matter where neurons and brain matter what causes the self to exist](#). So, we take the example of "I am happy", we can understand happiness to be the neurons and brain

matter constitution, creating an understanding when referring to themselves. So "I am happy" is more of a "My brain matter that creates my understanding of myself is happy."

Conclusion

Therefore, to reach a general agreement to 'What does the 'I' refer to?' The following argument would be who requested the 'I' to be asked about. Just as there are many ways to understanding the referencing of the self through 'I', the main purpose in understanding or comprehending the 'I' argument is not a critique but reconciliation of opposite views. (Miramontes, A., 2013) If asked on a personal opinion which type of referencing should be noted as the most 'reasonable' when referring to 'I'... the writer concurs with the psychological sense in the Wittgenstein model of expression. As much the I could agree with the Descartes method of the thinking substance, nonetheless the Lockean method holds a stronger sense in terms of consciousness but applied with expression information (language) would be a better reference to 'I'. Although hypothetically, it is impossible for consciousness to be moved around, nonetheless, if the ability to transfer of 'mind' between bodies, it would make sense to refer to the old 'mind' instead of physical body when saying 'I'. However, I cannot conclude that it is the final one to be used. For this essay, one sentence was used as an example of 'I', but if given more flexibility in using more sentences, perhaps a different conclusion would come into 'mind'.

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