Egocentric judgments: multiple, but perspectival

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Abstract

I try to account for some peculiarities of some judgments one makes about oneself using resources of Russell's ill-fated multiple relation theory of judgement. In its 1912 version, it takes what we would call the 'content' of the judgement (but what is dispensed of by the theory, if it works) to be ordered by the judgement relation itself, thereby providing a sense in which this 'content' is oriented towards the judger. If the judger is herself among the objects that are ordered by the judgement relation, the perspective bestowed on the things the judgement is about is irreducibly one's own: the attribution is *de se* and the judger safe from error through misidentification.

Some of my suppositions, thoughts, beliefs, wishes, desires, emotions and judgments are not just about me, but are first-personal in the sense that they are given to me in a way they are given to no-one else (except perhaps to an omniscient deity). When I judge, eg., that I am in pain, I do not simply predicate a property of a certain object that happens to be me – I self-ascribe the property, in a way you cannot ascribe that property *to me* (though perhaps you can ascribe it in this way to you). What accounts for this difference? In my talk, I try to make progress on that question by examining just one mental act, judgment, and just one construal of it, Russell's so-called 'multiple-relation theory' of judgment (MRTJ), in just one of its many versions.

While Russell (1903: 46,§49) maintained that the "ultimate notion of assertion" is "given by the verb", he briefly (1910–1913) held a different theory, according to which a "judgment [is] a relation of a mind to several objects, one of which is a relation" 1910a: 156 . This so-called 'multiple-relation theory of judgment', though only briefly held and constantly modified in response to almost-fatal criticism, continues to attract much attention, not in the least because it promises to dispense with 'objects of belief', aka propositions. While I cannot defend it here from all possible objections, I would like to argue that an apparent problem of the MRTJ is in fact an asset, making it well equipped to deal with some peculiarities of egocentric judgments.

To solve the so-called 'direction problem' (Griffin 1985: 219) raised by Stout (1911), ie. to distinguish "a judges that bRc" from "a judges that cRb" (for non-symmetric R), Russell (as quoted in Stout (1911: 203)) contends that only the judgment relation is directed, while the subordinate relation R occurs as a term. As it is thus only the direction of the judgment relation which distinguishes (and constitutes) the two 'contents' bRc and cRb, the judgment relation must itself be in some way 'given' to the judger, at least in the minimal sense that an apprehension of its direction allows her to know which 'content' she is judging. Judgement bestows order on its multiple relata and thus partly determines its own 'content'. I will argue that it is this 1911 version of the MRTJ, which Russell subsequently modified by the introduction of logical forms, is the one that accounts best for the 'sense of mineness' in egocentric judgments.

En route to this conclusion, I argue that the phenomenon of immunity to error of misidentification forces us to take the content of egocentric judgments to be incomplete, in a sense to be specified below. Just incomplete contents, however, will not do the trick – they also have to be judged, ascribed or attributed in some special way. Postulating a separate type of mental act – self-judgment or self-ascription of incomplete properties –, however, will not do either: when different people judge that they are hungry, not just the same content is ascribed, but their judgments also belong to the same type of mental act. The solution to these problems, I argue, is provided by a modification of Russell's theory, which takes the universal relatum of

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the judgment relation not to be a relation, but rather a structural property of some kind. Such structural properties are metaphysically interesting for independent reasons, and the 'reflexive' kind may well account for the sense of mineness that makes egocentric judgments, and other first-personal experiences, special.

The phenomenon

While there is some discussion about how best to define the 'IEM phenomenon'[1] and whether or not it motivates, or even justifies, belief in an ego (cf. Peacocke (1999: 263) for a general criticism of such moves), it seems generally agreed that in some cases of immunity, the impossibility of a certain kind of error is 'logical', or 'de jure' – it is explained by the formal characteristics of the expression used, and has its ground in its inferential properties. In such cases, the thought goes, it is metaphysically impossible that one misattributes an experience one correctly characterises descriptively, with respect to its kind, its qualitative character and its content. While some still postulate a certain type of diaphaneous representation of oneself, the most straightforward explanation of the impossibility of misidentification is that no identification at all is taking place. When I self-ascribe an experience, I do not predicate, of the experience and of myself, that it is mine, nor am I part of what the experience represents – I just register the occurrence of the experience which itself is given to me as mine.[2]

The absence of an identification step of the type of "I = the thinker of this thought" in egocentric judgments – their representational independence (Peacocke 1999) – explains, according to Evans (1982) and Wright (2012), why they are immune to this type of error; according to McDowell (1997: 362), it further explains why certain types of 'continuity of consciousness' do neither involve nor presuppose a "keeping track of the subject".

Most importantly, in my view, it explains why the immunity to error through misidentification is a metaphysical feature of the mental acts in question.[3] I will thus assume in the following that egocentric judgments having identification-free contents is at least part of what explains the IEM phenomenon.[4]

That the contents of egocentric judgments are identification-free has a surprising consequence, which is not, as far as I see, widely noted in the IEM discussion: because the judger enters into the correctness conditions of the judgment (minimally in the sense that the judgment cannot be true if the judger does not exemplify some property), but not into the content, the content of an egocentric judgment that is IEM cannot be a proposition (at least not in the traditional sense in which such things are supposed to be autonomously true or false).

Egocentric propositions

This essential incompleteness of the contents of egocentric judgments is not captured by assigning the first-person judgment a diagonal proposition as its content (Stalnaker 1981: 139)[5], by egocentric belief-states or reflexive truth-conditions à la Perry (cf. 1977; 1979 for the former, 1997: 353, 2001: 132, 2006: 217 for the later

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[1]Most authors, following Shoemaker 1968, take it to be a primarily epistemological datum, a peculiarity having to do with "the kind of doubt that can be raised about a judgment" (Campbell 2012: 4).

[2]The way I am construing the IEM phenomenon makes it different from both the 'no-split between semantic and speaker's reference' Coliva (2003: 426) ascribes to Anscombe and her own "real guarantee", which concerns infallible wh-knowledge of the semantic referent of "I" (2003: 428). In construing the IEM phenomenon as having primarily to do with the *content* of the egocentric judgment, I also focus on something quite different than what **?** discusses (the question whether identification assumptions figure in my *justification* for it).

[3]The distinction Coliva (2012: 29–30) draws between the identification being part of a subject's own grounds and its being part of the background presuppositions does not seem to be able to account for this difference, nor does the – quite different – distinction between being presented to oneself as object and as subject (Coliva 2012: 36). I do not see why it should be – metaphysically! – impossible for someone *else* to identify themselves as the bearer of my experiences, present themselves as their subject and take this identification as their own grounds for the misattribution of my experiences.

[4]I say "at least part" because **?**: 293 is right in pointing out that it does not *follow* from a content being identification-free that no error of misidentification is possible with respect to it.

[5]Someone else could believe the *same* diagonal proposition but be quite differently disposed to act (Perry 2006: 211), as long as believed it in a different way – Stalnaker (2006: 285) concedes this. This point is also made by **?**: 110–111, though he mistakenly concludes that "what is lacking is a representation of the immediate way in which I am related to myself while having a thought de se" (**?**: 111). Postulating such an "ego-mode of presentation", as Frege does for Dr. Lauben (and Peacocke for everyone else, cf. 1981: 189 1983: 138),[6] is just a way of re-labelling the problem – and not a happy one, as it is neither a mode in which some *thing* is given to us (for we are not acquainted with ourselves, as Hume has noted), nor is it a *presentation* of anything at all (cf. also Perry 1977).

view)[7], nor by the claim that de se information is somehow specially stored (Perry 1980: 70, 1988: 203).

The property theory of egocentric content

Lewis 1979 is right that what is judged in egocentric judgments are not propositions, but properties: properties, that is, that are *self-ascribed*, rather than just predicated of something. Extending this diagnoses to all belief-ascriptions, however, is loosing what is specific, and troublesome, about the phenomenon. Even if we may say that all beliefs are somehow self-locating (or would be self-locating if the multiverse existed), there is something special about *self*-ascriptions of properties.

According to (Récanati 2007: 175), the content remembered is a personal proposition, a proposition true at persons, but also a proposition that is automatically self-ascribed if 'ascribed' at all:

> The first person comes into the picture only a the evaluation state: to *assert* a personal proposition is to present it as true with respect to oneself and the present time. Since a personal proposition is a property of person-time pairs, for someone to assert such a proposition is, in effect, to *self-ascribe* the property that occurs on the side of the *lekton*. (Récanati 2007: 176)

The personal proposition is then stored in the EGO file, together with information not gained in the first person way.

Gap 1: Here follows a discussion of the problems the mental files theories has with extracting identity information from the file system. The common diagnosis of both the problems of the Lewis/Chisholm property and the Recanati personal proposition theory is that they do not explain the difference between ascription and self-ascription. This is better in Castañeda's theory.

The MRTJ

The MRTJ describes an attractive middle position between some higher-order self-attribution of the judgement and the introduction of egocentric modes of presentation of some hyperintensional judgement content. Contrary to Stout's criticism that it requires that judgment entails "fixing our attention on our own minds and on the act of judging or believing" (1911: 204), only the ordering it effects, not the judgement relation itself must be transparent to the judger: while I may be unsure whether I really am judging, as long as I am certain that I am entertaining the thought that bRc rather than the thought that cRb. Neither does it require the 'content' to be hyperintensional. It is perspectival, directed from the point of view of the judging subject, and ordered relative to it, without thereby entailing that the subject (or a representation of it) is a part, or a constituent, of the judged content. In first-personal judgments, such perspectivality takes on a special character.

The standard argument Russell himself advances against the MRTJ is that it does not allow for false judgements (1984: 116). The general problem, however, only arises on later modifications of the theory which reinstate Meinongian objectives, modifications brought about by Wittgensteinian scepticism about logical constants. A more limited version of the objection that "the act of judging itself *actually* arrange[s] the term in the way they [are] judged to be arranged" (Griffin 1985: 221), confined to special cases where the 'content' is egocentric in the sense explained above, is an asset rather than a liability: that such judgments are shielded from a certain type of reference failure explains their 'immunity from error through misidentification'. The perspectivality of the content judged is in these cases automatically endorsed as one's own: the anaphoric link between (part of) what the judgment is about and the judger makes misidentification impossible.

The question whether the judging relation itself is external was at the centre of the debate from the very beginning. Its prominence comes to the fore, e.g., in respective criticisms of Joachim's *The Nature of Truth*, who defended idealism on the grounds that experience is an internal relation, making a difference to its terms. Both Bradley and Russell/Moore attack this claim from two very different directions. While Bradley

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[7]Insofar as such truth-conditions and belief-states are to account for the way something is believed (as Perry (1979: 40) suggests and (Perry 2006: 207) explicitly endorses), they are "too subjective to represent informational content" (Stalnaker 1981: 148): the commonality between two persons both believing of themselves that they are hungry is not that they believe different propositions in the same way.

argues that Joachim's experienced facts are not part of reality and denies that experience is a relation at all,[8] both Russell (1906a: 530, 1906b: 37) and Moore (1907: 233) attack the claim that experience is an internal relation[9] and accuse Joachim of confusing the object of the experience with what Moore (1902: 187, 1903: 446 / 20) called its "consciousness".[10] In defense, Joachim repeats the main reason he and Bradley have to accept the axiom of internal relations:

> ...if the relation really unites, and constitutes *one* in place of *two*, the *relata* thus united are *eo ipso* not absolutely independent Simples, but interdependent features of a whole. If, on the other hand, the relation is really "external," with the *two* there is now conjoined a *third*: but the *two* are no more genuinely *one* in virtue of the added *third*, than are the contents of a wastepaper-basked or of Mr. Moore's pocket. (Joachim 1907: 412)

The crucial issue is thus precisely whether judging may both be an external relation and order its relata so as to create a structure within the judged complex.

Gap 2: Argument that putting structural properties in place of relations within the complex judged to be true solves the main problems of the MRTJ (either no false propositions or 'objective falsehoods', extendibility to molecular propositions is questionable.

Structural properties as extrinsic non-relational (this is still sketchy, more orally)

Distributional properties: properties as a result of the exemplification of which you are qualitatively heterogeneous.

Problem 1: irreducible adverbialism. Connection with truth maker argument for properties; possible reply: necessity as a way of being true; existent as a way of being.

Problem 2: no account of change: "It makes no sense to speak of an object changing its distributional properties. Why? Because what change is on the account being offered is to instantiate (at each moment of your existence) a non-uniform distributional property. Being red at one time and then orange at some later time, for example, is to be analysed as instantiating (at all times) the distributional property being red-then-orange. To speak of an object changing its properties is a loose way of saying something about the distributional property it has that says how it is across time; it makes no sense to speak of an object gaining or losing the property that says how it is across time." (Cameron 2011)

Problem 3: spurious distinctions. Analogy with relations: both from ⊤⊤ to ⊤⊥ and to ⊥⊤ we have a difference, but if we do both and get ⊥⊥, we're back to where we started.

May we thus give the reply Ishiguro gives on Leibniz's behalf to Kant about incongruent counterparts:[11] "Leibniz would probably have said to such an assertion that, although it is perfectly clear that in a world in which there are both left-hand and right-hand gloves one can make the distinction between the two, in a universe which consists solely of a single glove, this is not the case." (Ishiguro 1990: 115)

This aspect of the form of the relational complex, as both Wittgenstein and Kant pointed out, cannot be said, but only shown.

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[8] Thus Bradley (1907: 166) criticises Joachim for neglecting the linguistic character of facts: "Truth has to copy facts, but on the other side the facts to be copied show already in their nature the work of truth-making. The merely given facts are in other words the imaginary creatures of false theory. They are manufactured by the mind which abstracts one abstract of the concrete known whole, and sets this abstracted aspect out by itself as a real thing." According to Bradley, these facts are itself part of experience – his monism is thus weakened to the claim that *experiences* are organic unities, where "object and subject and every possible relation and term, to be experienced at all, must fall within and depend vitally on [...] a felt unity" (Bradley 1909: 53).

[9] In his (unpublished) preface to a second edition of the *Principia Ethica*, Moore gives seeing as example for an external relation (1993: 24–25). Joachim (1906: 33) says that "experiencing makes no difference to the facts" is the assumption from which the whole 'New Philosophy' of Russell and Moore is derived. This is partially confirmed by the equivalence, argued for by Moore (1922: 270–271), between the axiom of internal relations and the contention, central to Moore's ethics, that some subjective (i.e. relational) values are not intrinsic.

[10] It is in this context that Russell (1906b: 45–49) appeals to the multiple relation theory of judgment as a means to avoid objective falsehoods.

[11] Two figures are *incongruent counterparts* iff they are congruent, i.e. related by an Euclidean transformation, but not related by a proper motion, i.e. cannot be brought to coincide in space. Whether, and if so in what way, incongruent counterparts present a problem for relationalism about space is widely debated: Mortensen & Nerlich (1983): incongruent counterparts / argument from handedness shows that relationism about space-time is false (this is what Campbell (1990: 126) claims)

Throughout his career, Kant repeatedly used incongruent counterparts to show that our representations of space and time are intuitional rather than conceptual[12], in effect relativising the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction to the epistemic capacity by which we access the property.[13]

Their apparent possibility may be either taken as an argument for a substantivalist account of space-time or as showing the need to acknowledge handedness as an extrinsic but irreducible, hence non-relational, properties of spatial objects.

Reflexive relations

Geach (1968: 132, §80) argued that there is a clear and logically important sense in which "Brutus killed Brutus" and "Cato killed Cato" contain a common predication which they do not share with e.g. "Brutus killed Caesar"[14]. Suppose, then, we distinguish between "...kills $\cdots$" and "...kills him- or herself". We would then treat "$\lambda x(Rxx)$" as expressing a monadic property. As Hochberg (1988: 195) has argued, this has its drawbacks: how would we then describe the holding of an asymmetric relation R between a and b? Not as "R holds between a and b, but not between a and itself", because the conjuncts would not assert that one and the same relation holds between one pair but not between the other. The difficulty, then, is this: find a semantic difference between the 'predicative' parts of "Brutus killed Brutus" and of "Brutus killed Caesar" without postulating two relations.

While it may be true, as argued by Rumfitt (1994: 623–624), that Evans (1977) successfully showed that we may treat reflexive pronouns as referential devices, this leaves the metaphysical question about the identity of reflexive instances of relations with their reflexivizations open. In the discussion about whether "Brutus kills Brutus" and "Brutus kills himself" express the same proposition, it is typically *assumed* that there is no difference on the ontological level:

> ...any situation with respect to which it is true that Venus outweighs Venus is one with respect to which it is also true that Venus is self-outweighing, and vice versa. (Salmon 1986: 425, fn. 12)[15]

We are thus faced with a dilemma: either we think that Brutus' killing Brutus and Brutus' killing Caesar involve the same relation or we do not. In the first case, we cannot account for the fact that the first relational fact is more similar to Cato's killing Cato than the second except by postulating another, extra, relation of self-killing, making the account ontologically profligate and intuitively implausible. If we do not, then we have to add extra postulates to the theory to explain the similarities between killings and self-killings and cannot, strictly speaking, account for asymmetric relations. Structural properties resolve the conundrum: the whole consisting of Brutus and Caesar does have strictly speaking the same property than Brutus – both things contain parts x and y such that x kills y.

It may be argued on general metaphysical grounds that relational complexes are individuated not just in terms of their constituents, but that instead two such complexes may differ only in whether or not some or more of its constituents are coordinated. There are thus two complexes of the form

(1) a kills a.

– one in which the two occurrences are coordinated (as in "Cato kills himself") and one in which they are not

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[12] He says in his inaugural dissertation that "between solid bodies which are perfectly similar and equal but incongruent [...] there is a difference, [...] in spite of the fact that, in respect of everything which may be expressed by means of characteristic marks intelligible to the mind through speech, they could be substituted for one another. It is, therefore, clear that in these cases the difference, namely, the incongruity, can only be apprehended by a certain pure intuition." (1992: 403; "in solidis perfecte similibus atque aequalibus, sed discongruentibus [...] sit diversitas, [...] quanquam per omnia, quae notis, menti per sermonem intelligibilibus, efferre licet, sibi substitui possint, patet: hic non nisi quadam intuitione pura diversitatem, nempe discongruentiam, notari posse."; A₂ 20, 1983: V, 58)

[13] In the *Prolegomena* (A 59, ?: 403), Kant says that the distinction between the right-hand and the left-hand glove is intrinsic to the senses ("innerlich, so weit die Sinne lehren") but is only possible by the relations of them to the whole of space of which they are a part ("die innere Bestimmung eines jeden Raumes ist nur durch die Bestimmung des äusseren Verhältnsses zu dem ganzen Raume, davon jener ein Teil ist (dem Verhältnisse zum äusseren Sinne), d.i. der Teil ist nur durch das Ganze möglich").

[14] Cf. also Geach (1975). Humberstone (2000: 7) attributes the point to Fitch (1952: 94). According to Wiggins (1976: 231), "$\lambda x(x = a)$" and "$\lambda x(x = x)$" ascribe two different properties (cf. also Wiggins 1977: 164–166).

[15] The quote occurs within a discussion of how Barwise and Perry could respond to Richard's and Soames' arguments in favour of using structured propositions rather than situations for the semantics of propositional attitude ascriptions, but it is clear from the context that it reflects Salmon's view (cf. also 1986: 416).

(as in "Paderewski kills Paderewski"). Geach (1968: 136, §82) is right that "...it is wrong to regard "himself" as turning a two-place into a one-place predicable by filling up one place; rather, a reflexive pronoun fills up both places of the two-place predicable into which it is inserted, but itself has an incompleteness tantamount to there being one empty place – an incompleteness that appears in grammar as the need of the pronoun for an antecedent." When such coordination (aka "strict" or "de iure coreference") is between the first argument place of the multiple relation of judgment and one of the others, as in "Sam judges that he himself is in love" or "Mary judges that Sam thought that she herself was responsible", the 'content' is anchored in the judger in a special way: the judgement is not just about oneself, but is also *de se*.

Self-ascription of structural properties

Because it explains the phenomena invoking special structural properties, but not special kinds of facts, the view sketched above is different from – and, I submit, more plausible than – other 'subjectivist' views, such as the views discussed, but not endorsed, by Prior 1968, 200 and Fine 2005, 311, Caspar Hare's "Egocentric Presentism" and Giovanni Merlo's "Subjectivist View of the Mental". While these views may (perhaps) be motivated on other grounds, they clearly overshoot as diagnoses of the relatively humdrum and innocent phenomenon described above.

'Reflexive' structural properties may be used to account quite generally for experiences that are said to have a 'sense of mineness', to be experienced *as one's own* (in normal cases – thought insertion, asomatagnosia and depersonalisation are the pathological cases). It is often said that such experiences present the world egocentrically, as self-related in some way. Correctness conditions for such experiences are hard to come by, however: it is not clear how exactly the world has to be for my experience to represent it as it is. It is therefore understandable (even if still wrong) that recent theorists have tried to isolate the sense of mineness from the experience and have reified it into a separate – and, at least in principle, separable – aspect of it: in addition to its qualitative character, it is said, my experience also has "for-me-ness" or "first-personal givenness" (Zahavi 2005: 26, 119, 146), "subjectivity" (Levine 2001: 7) or "subjective character" (Kriegel 2009), i.e. the fact that there is something it is like at all for the subject. While this may explain our privileged access to the experiences in question[16], it does not even address the metaphysical problem, ie. the question in what such mineness consists. To the contrary: to conceptualise the mineness as a separate aspect of my experience makes it more, not less mysterious how experiences that possess (or are otherwise linked to it) are given to me in a special way.

It therefore seems preferable to take Husserl's claim that temporal consciousness is self-presenting, that "a self-appearance of the flow [of consciousness] necessarily exists in it" and "constitutes itself as a phenomenon in itself" (Husserl 1969: 83)[17], as a model for the sense of mineness, as is often done in the older phenomeno-logical tradition (cf. eg. Merleau-Ponty (1945: 487), **?**: 581). Such talk of self-affection and self-constitution does not, however, explain what it is that makes certain experiences, ie. mine, self-presenting while others, ie. yours, do not also present themselves (to me, that is). The phenomenologists are right that the way in which my experiences are mine does not take the form of a reflective self-perception, nor of a thematic self-observation, nor does it involve any kind of self-objectification. Instead of a positive theory, however, they just offer metaphors: it is very well to say that Dasein is characterised by Sich-Selbst-Haben (**?**: 251), that experiences have a certain Jemeinigkeit (Heidegger 1927: §§9,25), that the mode of being of consciousness is the pour-soi (Sartre 1943: 18), but Sich-Selbst-Haben, Jemeinigkeit and pour-soi are themselves in need of explanation.

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[16] I am not sure that we can talk of 'explanation' here, nor that real explanation is intended. Zahavi, for one, seems quite unmoved by the fact that the mineness of an experience explains my privileged access to it only in the 'virtus dormitiva' way, cf. e.g.: "...the experiences in question are characterised by a first-personal givenness that immediately reveals them as my own. First-personal experience presents me with an immediate access to myself, and it is *therefore* legitimate to speak of an implicit (and minimal) self-awareness." (2005: 61, emphasis mine). He does go on, however, to reify it as a "minimal" or "core" self (2005: 106). Levine (2001: 84) characterises the subjectivity of mental states as a "thick [...], substantive mode of presentation" of some qualia and goes on to say that he does not "pretend to understand clearly how this can be so, and [that] it's certainly unclear to [him] how appeal to this idea can help explain the gappiness of psycho-physical identities in a materialistically respectable way" (2001: 85.

[17] "Der Fluss des immanent zeitkonstituierenden Bewusstseins *ist* nicht nur, sondern so merkwürdig und doch verständlich geartet ist er, dass in ihm notwendig eine Selbsterscheinung des Flusses bestehen und daher der Fluss selbst notwendig im Fliessen erfassbar sein muss. Die Selbsterscheinung des Flusses fordert nicht einen zweiten Fluss, sondern als Phänomen konstituiert er sich in sich selbst." The model, of course, is Brentano who claims that every conscious act has itself as a secondary object (Brentano 1874: 153–154), a view he took to be inspired by Aristotle.

Reflexive structural properties may just provide us with one.

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