

Recent Work

First-person thought (pre-proof version)

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1. Introduction

Subjects have various ways of thinking about themselves. Here are three examples: a subject can think of herself under an appropriate description (*the biker*), demonstratively (*that person*), or by mentally mouthing her name (*NN*). Whenever a subject thinks of herself in one of these ways, there is a further question whether she also realises that it is she herself she is thereby thinking of. By contrast, there is another way of thinking of oneself deserving of a place on this list that seemingly differs in this respect – the way of thinking of oneself *first-personally*, or *de se* (we’ll use these terms interchangeably). As a heuristic, we might say that this is the kind of thought about herself that a thinker would naturally express using a first-person pronoun in language (“I am F”, or “The F is *me*”).

It’s easy to feel that *de se* thought doesn’t just deserve a place on our list; it deserves a top spot. After all, even if a subject *can* think of herself in the three initial ways mentioned above, surely her first-personal way of thinking of herself looms much larger in her mental life than the others, both with respect to how often she thinks of herself in that way and how important the capacity to do so is to her normal functioning. Historically, first-person thought has attracted a great deal of philosophical attention. As Peacocke writes, ‘[a]rticulating the phenomena distinctive of the first-person has drawn forth some of the most striking contributions from the greatest philosophers ...’ (2008: 77). The aim of this article is to frame some of the more recent movements and insights in the area from the last decade or so.

First, what is *de se* thought? We’ve offered as a heuristic a relation to a bit of language: the first-person pronoun. But you might wonder whether this is really its most explanatorily important property. One might think that a deeper characterisation will be available in terms of something more intrinsic – e.g. the story about how *de se* thoughts achieve their reference. Such a characterisation would inevitably import controversy. The most popular contemporary view is that *de se* thoughts are governed by a rule that they refer to whoever is thinking them.¹ However, not everyone agrees. Some are tempted to deny that *de se* thought is referential at all.² Some think that

¹ See Campbell (2012), Peacocke (2014), O’ Brien (2007).

² See Doyle (2018)

different instances of *de se* thought might be associated with different referential stories.³ Finally, some think that *de se* thoughts might have similar referential stories to perceptual demonstrative thoughts.⁴ But all these people can agree that there is some distinctive kind of thought associated with the first-person pronoun. Since we want to use the term *de se* in such a way as to make it as uncontentious as possible, nothing we say will depend on anything beyond the linguistic characterisation (unless otherwise mentioned).

The domain of first-person thought is not characterised by a central organising question. Instead, it makes up a somewhat disorderly collection of questions – sometimes interconnected, sometimes not – about the cognitive, metaphysical, and normative significance of first-person thought, as well as questions about how best to model it, and how to reconcile our philosophical theories in this area with findings from the cognitive sciences. Just a few topics that we might have, but have not, discussed in this article include: the continued development of arguments in the metaphysics of personal identity that draw on premises involving claims about *de se* thoughts; a mini-resurgence of interest in the *Cogito*, and related epistemic issues⁶; an increased interest in the ‘sense of mineness’ (and relatedly, in the role that some argue *de se* thought plays in a full account of conscious experience)⁷; the relation of sophisticated forms of *de se* thought to more primitive, including non-conceptual precursors⁸; how much the *de se* has in common with the *de nunc*; and even the possibility of leveraging *de se* phenomena in support of absolute idealism.¹⁰

Instead we have chosen two areas to discuss in detail: scepticism about the distinctive philosophical importance of *de se* thought (§2), and immunity to error through misidentification (IEM) as it shows up in *de se* thought (§3). The reason for this selection is that these strike us as two of the most active areas involving the *de se*: in both cases, there has been notable movement in the state of the debate in the last ten years, partly as a result of contributions from different authors rebounding off each other in a sustained way.

2. Scepticism about the importance of the *de se*

³ See Longuenesse (2017) and Johnston (2010)

⁴ See Morgan (2015) and Setiya (2015).

⁵ See Hamilton (2013), Peacocke (2014), Madden (2011, 2013)

⁶ See Peacocke (2012), Campbell (2012), and O’Brien (2015)

⁷ See Guillot and García-Carpintero (forthcoming)

⁸ See Musholt (2015), Bermúdez (2016) and Peacocke (2014)

⁹ See Morgan (2019a)

¹⁰ See Rödl (2018)

One apparently pressing philosophical task concerning the *de se* is to get a clear picture of the distinctive features it has that are relevant to various aspects of mind – e.g. intentional action, emotion, perception, reasoning, understanding. The liveliest, most joined up, recent debate has focused on intentional action, so we'll focus on that, while leaving open the extent to which the dialectic around action might mirror other areas. The discussion here is very example-driven, and the diet of examples has been around since the 70s. What is newer in the last ten years is an acknowledgement that it's not clear what those familiar examples establish.¹¹ This is stimulated by a resourcefully defended minority position according to which they do *not* establish anything of interest about the *de se*.¹² We'll call this position *de se scepticism*, and opponents of the position *de se fans*. Relatively few have found *de se* scepticism wholly convincing, but the versions of *de se* fandom that have emerged in response to it are instructively different.

Here is one of the influential cases: Perry is following a trail of sugar along a supermarket floor, looking for the messy shopper who is creating the trail. At some point, Perry realizes 'I am the messy shopper'. Having realized this, Perry stops following the trail and sorts out his own trolley (Perry 1979: 3).

De se sceptics have acknowledged that cases like this one show that going from thinking of oneself in a non-*de se* way to a *de se* way can make a difference to how one acts (as Perry noted). But they point out that that just seems to a special case of the more general point that how one acts depends not just on what things one is thinking about, but how one is thinking about them. We can create the same kind of effect using a non-*de se* example in which an agent moves from using one proper name to another co-referential one. E.g. Lois hails a man she had previously ignored because she comes to realize that the man, whom she had already recognized as Clark Kent, is Superman, the very person she'd been wanting to talk to. In slogan form: *de se* cases are just opacity cases.

On these grounds, Cappelen and Dever (2013) and Magidor (2015) both argue that in order for there to be a distinctive connection between the *de se* and action, the *de se* would have to be involved in *every* explanation of action, thus raising the bar on what the fan of the *de se* seems to need to show. They then note that simply inspecting a few cases, such as Perry's case, provides no support for that universal generalization. Constructively, they offer a recipe for generating examples of

¹¹ See for example Prosser (2015: 211), Ninan (2016:86) and Torre (2018:172).

¹² See Cappelen and Dever (2013), and Magidor (2015). Other defenders of views in the same broad area – in that they also think exaggerated claims have been made about the *de se* – include Devitt (2013), Millikan (1990), Spencer (2007) and Stanley (2011).

action in whose explanation no *de se* attitude figures. The key ingredient is that the agent lacks any self-directed attitude at all – so the question of whether that attitude must be *de se* does not arise. The agent forms an intention that a certain state of affairs obtain – e.g. that a certain door is closed, that a charity is donated to – and that triggers their action. Granted, to bring such a result about, the agent will have to do something else – e.g. move their body in a certain way. But, the suggestion is, this need not involve the formation of a self-referential attitude (e.g. a *de se* intention the agent would express with ‘I walk over to the door and turn my hand’). The agent may simply be wired up so that when they form intentions whose contents are ‘actionable’ states of affair, their subpersonal systems cause their bodies to move in such a way as to cause those states of affairs to obtain. It’s uncontroversial that there comes a point at which the selection of means to our ultimate ends does not involve having a further thought (e.g. moving my arm might involve a shift in my shoulder blade, even if I do not have a further thought about my shoulder blade). There is, the proposal is, no guarantee that the self will always be in view by the time this point is reached.

This ‘action without self-reference’ idea could be given in different strengths. It could be outlining an in-principle, metaphysical possibility for agency. Or it could be outlining a possibility that human agents instantiate as they go about their business. Cappelen and Dever (2013: 40) are explicit that they need only claim the in-principle possibility. Their idea is that a need for the *de se* that is local to human agents would be of little interest, and could not in any case be discovered without detailed scientific investigation, of a sort fans of the *de se* have never rested their claims on. So considering whether an agent that was also a God could act without the *de se*, for example, would be dialectically legitimate. Most fans of the *de se* are, on the face of it, not restricting their claims to any particular category of agents (e.g. human agents, embodied agents, agents who are not Gods). A notable exception here is García-Carpintero (2017) who argues that the need for the *de se* is a deep contingent fact about human agency, and not less interesting for that. Prosser (2015) explores some of the conceptual issues around Godly activity and the *de se*.

A second choice-point for *de se* fans is whether they want to claim that all action-explanations involve the *de se* (and therefore that there must be something wrong with the ‘action without self-reference’ proposal). Many clearly do.¹³ Gjelsvik appeals to an Anscombian view on which doing something intentionally involves having practical knowledge of *I am doing it*. Babb appeals to a Castañeda inspired view on which intentional action always involves intention and intentions are, as such, *de se* (the intention *that the door be closed* is really an intention *that I bring it about that the door is closed*). The involvement of the *de se* in every case of action falls rather directly out of either of

¹³ See, e.g., Babb (2016), Bermúdez (2017), Gjelsvik (2017), Morgan (2019b).

these theories. On either view, it looks as though an account of the relationship between action and the *de se* is supported – indirectly – by the full range of evidential considerations that the overall theory of action (and, in Babb’s case, theory of intention) is supported by. In that case, it’s hardly surprising that simply inspecting a few *de se* cases and seeing what our intuitions about them are, is not enough to show what the relationship is.

Other fans of the *de se* have seemed not to commit to the maximally strong claim that all action-explanations involve the *de se*. But, as noted, the only alternative *de se* sceptics tend to consider – the claim that some action-explanations involve the *de se* – seems too weak to be interesting. So what other kind of claim might such a fan of the *de se* appeal to? A candidate is: ‘Some action-explanations involve the *de se* in a way that otherwise attractive theory T cannot deal with’. Here the role of the *de se* is not just as a phenomenon with special features, but as a special problem or challenge – in this case, for theory T.¹⁴ Lewis conceived of *de se* cases in this way, seeing them as producing a problem for the possible worlds theory of propositional attitudes he thought otherwise attractive. So did Perry, with respect to any theory that endorses what he calls ‘the doctrine of propositions’ (1979). In the last decade, *de se* sceptics have put a great deal of pressure on whether the ‘otherwise attractive’ condition is ever really met. Perhaps theories that can’t deal with *de se* cases equally can’t deal with non-*de se* cases, in which case the *de se* doesn’t raise a *special* problem after all. One reason this issue matters is that what form a more adequate framework will take is plausibly sensitive to the range of cases that were making difficulty for the previous framework. Moving to a framework like Lewis’s centered-worlds theory, whose chief innovation is that it has a special bit of machinery to deal with *de se* cases, looks like a bad bet, if the problem provoking the move isn’t in fact special to the *de se*.¹⁵

This has led in turn to greater precision from those who think *de se* cases are a distinctive problem about how the distinctive problem is supposed to arise. For example, Ninan (2016) (who presents his position as a rational reconstruction of ideas that were already present in Perry and Lewis) argues roughly as follows. Consider a case where one agent believes ‘I am being chased by a bear’ and another believes, of her, ‘You am being chased by a bear’. It looks as though this is a case in which the two agents should count as having *different beliefs*, since their expected actions are

¹⁴ Magidor (2016: 249) makes this helpful distinction between treating the *de se* as having special *features* vs. posing a special *problem*.

¹⁵ See Magidor (2016) for argument that Lewis is wrong to think that, with generous enough appeal to descriptivism, the possible worlds framework that can’t deal with the *de se* can deal with all non *de se* cases of opacity. Cappelen and Dever (2013) explore a different complaint against Lewis’s centred-worlds theory: that the special bit of machinery it involves – the notion of self-ascription – is unexplanatory of *de se* ness. For more on the centered-possible worlds framework, see many of the essays in García-Carpintero and Torre (eds.) (2016).

different (even if they both desire the same thing, e.g. *that nobody be eaten*). However, it also looks as though they are in complete agreement on how things are. This puts pressure on any theory on which there is a single notion of content that plays a role in capturing what it is for two subjects to agree, and that is also fine-grained enough to individuate mental states. The second, equally essential, part of the argument is the claim that it *isn't* possible to come up with non-*de se* cases that show the same thing. Ninan's idea here is that if two subjects count as agreeing in virtue of both believing, of Superman, that he has a certain property then they'll express their belief with the same sentence (it won't be that one thinks 'Superman is being chased by a bear' and the other thinks 'Clark is being chased by a bear'). But in this case, Ninan thinks, there is no particular obstacle to saying the two subjects have the same belief, since we don't in fact expect very different actions arising from the belief each has. This argument, if sound, would seem to be a vindication of the claim that the *de se* plays a distinctive role in relation to action.¹⁶ But notice that there's no incompatibility between the soundness of the argument and the in-principle possibility, or even everyday occurrence, of action without self-reference. At least some *de se* fans may thus be tempted to regard the claim that all action-explanations involve the *de se* as a red herring.

Most of the action discussed in this literature has been of a fairly unsophisticated humdrum sort – spilling sugar, hailing people, avoiding bears etc. Several recent contributions move towards normatively richer territory. Setiya (2015) discusses what he takes to be a widely accepted view that we have a distinctive kind of reason to favour ourselves, conceived *de se*. He argues that we in fact do not and that our tendency to favour ourselves is the primordial case of love at first sight. Paul (2017a, 2017b) argues that there is a notion of empathy that is both essentially *de se*, and crucial to explaining our moral assessment and decision-making – being able to imaginatively project oneself into the first-person perspective of another.¹⁷ She also argues for a notion of *self-understanding* that is essentially *de se*. Titelbaum (2017) argues that facts about the outcomes of one's own reasoning processes may have a different evidential significance than facts about the outcomes of others. O'Brien (2011) argues that *de se* thought – or more specifically, the subjective perspective it entails – is one of the preconditions for the various shades of self-conscious emotion, e.g. shame, guilt,

¹⁶ The argument involves an 'I-'you' case. Leaving aside the question of whether such cases pose a special problem for otherwise well-motivated theories, there has been a recent mini-explosion of interest, especially from those working in the neo-Fregean tradition, of how to think about the *de te*, either in its own right or in its relationship with the *de se*. Longworth (2014) argues that some *de te* thoughts are *de se* thoughts. Salje (2017) argues that there is an irreducible mode of presentation associated with *you*. Peacocke (2014b) and Martin (2014) debate the right way to think about interpersonal self-consciousness, in which one is aware of oneself as figuring as an object in someone else's consciousness, and the connection to the *de te*. For more on the relationship between the *de se* and *de te*, see many of the essays in the *Philosophical Explorations* (2014) special issue on 'you'-thought.

¹⁷ Cappelen and Dever (2017) reply to Paul by denying that the notion of empathy that matters in moral psychology involves the *de se*.

pride. From the point of view of evaluating *de se* skepticism, the range of points at which the *de se* might appear important makes the sceptical position more challenging to defend. Anyone who accepts the various features has an explanatory task of explaining why they are all aspects of a single kind of thought.¹⁸

3. Immunity to error through misidentification

A second live sub-area in *de se* thought involves a pair of epistemic properties – *error through misidentification* (EM) and *immunity to error through misidentification* (IEM) – as they show up in *de se* thoughts. Take a thought of the form *Fa*. Here are two ways it is potentially vulnerable to error: the thinker might be right that *something* is *F* but be wrong in identifying that thing as *a*; or she might be right that *a* is *something*, but wrong about whether it is *F*. Roughly, IEM is immunity against the first kind of mistake. Most people think that a privileged class of *de se* thoughts is IEM. (If I judge in the normal way that *I feel nervous*, then it's hard to see how I could be wrong about *who* feels nervous.) Most people also deny that *de se* thoughts are the *only* ones associated with this property – it's normally also taken to be a property of (some) demonstrative, other indexical, and mathematical thoughts, and thoughts involving descriptive names.¹⁹ As a matter of fact, however, most work on IEM has been work on IEM as it applies to *de se* thought. This means that debates about IEM are intermingled with the *de se* in a way that has substantially affected the moves and positions that have emerged. (As we will see in a moment, an especially pronounced version of this preferential treatment can be seen in recent views of IEM that explicitly draw on metasemantic features of the *de se*.) Moreover, some theorists have looked to IEM as a precisely definable notion that might help more render more tractable questions concerning the *de se* that seem to be of maximal philosophical interest but whose existing formulations make hard to adjudicate.²⁰

IEM is not a new concept. Its potted history normally begins with Wittgenstein's brief remarks in *The Blue Book* (1958), through Shoemaker's elaboration of the phenomenon and coining of the phrase (1968), to Evans's (1982) influential account that (among other things) made it standard to relativise IEM to the grounds on which a thought is formed. The debate since then has been characterised by a spirited, if sometimes less than fully coordinated, search for the correct formulation, explanation, and account of the significance of IEM. This more recent literature can sometimes be difficult to piece together, partly because different views of IEM are often developed

¹⁸ For attempts to derive various *de se* phenomena from the reference rule he takes to govern *de se* thought, see Peacocke (2012).

¹⁹ See also Smith (2018) for a discussion about whether it also applies to *plural* first-person reference (*we*-thought).

²⁰ See, e.g. Morgan (2018a)

in the context of pursuing different broader projects. However, the last decade or so in this debate has seen a new and interesting division in party-lines, which we will focus on here.

The first camp emerging from the split is the *identification-freedom* approach, characterised by the claim that the presence of IEM is always explained by the absence of an identificatory-component in the thought's grounds. If the thought *I am F* isn't reached by putting together a distinct thought of the form *b is F* with an identity of the form $b=I$, then it looks as though there is no point at which an error of *misidentification* could get introduced. After all, a misidentification is just an identification that has gone wrong, and grounds of this sort do not involve an identification. On the *identification-freedom* approach, then, a *de se* thought is IEM when, and because, it is formed in a way that involves directly apprehending oneself in an exclusively *de se* way. A merit of this approach to IEM is that it 'liberates us from any need for metaphysical or metasemantic extravagance in trying to account for the phenomenon.' (Wright, 2012: 255)

There are a number of internal disagreements among contemporary identity-freedom theorists.²¹ One is how to understand the idea of *grounds*. Nearly no-one thinks that the possibility of EM requires the performance of a conscious inference (*b is F, I = b, so I am F*). But there are still varyingly demanding ways of understanding what *is* needed. Does the identity component need to be part of a rational reconstruction of the subject's reasoning? Would it suffice for it to be part of a thinker's presuppositional background to which she has default entitlement, if not ready access? Or does it need to be accessible to the subject, at least in principle? Different identity-freedom theorists answer these questions differently, resulting in formulations of IEM-properties of different strengths that sort cases differently.²²

The most urgent current issue for the identity-freedom camp, however, is an external challenge descending from Pryor's influential 1999 distinction between two kinds of error (and immunity) through misidentification.²³ The first, *de re misidentification*, fits neatly with the identity-freedom approach: where there is *de re* misidentification, the belief's grounds involve a false identity-belief.

²¹ One prominent continuing issue is whether to admit different grades of IEM, such as absolute/logical/de jure/de facto, or to only treat one of these as genuine IEM (see, e.g., Coliva (2012, 2017), Recanati (2012), Prosser (2012), García-Carpintero (2013, 2015), McGlynn (2016).) Another is how to treat the presence of indubitably known identities (See, e.g., Smith (2006) and Coliva (2017).

²² Sometimes this issue is posed in terms of *justificational architecture, doxastic or epistemic structure, formative structure, or explanatory/causal basis*, or discussed in the context of a distinction between *liberal* and *conservative* views of epistemic justification; for more discussion see Coliva (2006, 2012), Wright (2012), McGlynn (2016, ms), Morgan (2018), and García-Carpintero (2013, 2018).

²³ Pryor 1999; several recent writers have attempted to improve on Pryor's original formulation (e.g. Hu (2017), Merlo (2017), Morgan (2018), Recanati (2012), McGlynn 2016, ms)

The second is the notion of *wb-misidentification*, and is still usually introduced with Pryor’s original example:

I smell a skunky odor, and see several animals rummaging around in my garden. (...) Approaching closer and sniffing I form the belief, of the smallest of animals, that it is a skunk in my garden. This belief is mistaken. There are several skunks in my garden, but none of them is the small animal I see. (1999: 281).

My grounds for the belief *That is a skunk* seems not to rest on a false identity of the form $a=b$. Instead, I have grounds for an existentially general belief about a property-instantiation (*Something hereabouts is a skunk*, based on smell), but I have picked out the wrong witness to that existential. It is still appropriate to say that my thought is mistaken through a misidentification. But it is a ‘misidentification’ in the sense of being a faulty ‘singling out’ of the right witness, rather than a faulty identity of the form $a=b$. Such cases appear to show that the fact a thought includes nothing of the form $a=b$ in its grounds is compatible with its *not* being IEM. That puts pressure on the claim that a thought’s including nothing of the form $a=b$ in its grounds is ever enough to explain its being IEM, even in case of thoughts that have both properties.²⁴

Coliva kicked off a lively response to this challenge in her (2006), by arguing that all seeming cases of *wb-EM* can be reduced to *de re-EM*. Her strategy is to show that even in these cases, the grounds for the subject’s thought still involve a (mis)identity. It’s just that one side of the identity will feature a non-*de re* – but still singular – concept. For example, she offers the following reconstruction of the false identity involved in the skunk example:

‘*This animal (I can now see) = the animal (in my garden) which is actually responsible for this odor I can smell.* (2006: 412)

Objectors have variously responded that this strategy illegitimately makes use of a uniqueness assumption (who says there was only *one* thing I was smelling in the original case?), relies on idiosyncrasies of the showcase example, or that the descriptive singular concepts invoked by this strategy will always be too trivial to provide genuinely informative identity-beliefs.²⁵

The second emerging camp from the recent split in these debates is arguably better suited to accommodating *wb-EM*. Call it the *metasemantic* approach (and recall that this is the kind of ‘metasemantic extravagance’ Wright hoped the identification-freedom approach might help us

²⁴ See, e.g., Guillot (2014) and García-Carpintero (2013, 2018) for this objection to the identification-freedom view.

²⁵ For objectors to Coliva’s strategy, see Wright (2012), McGlynn (2016, ms), Garcia-Carpintero (2018) and Palmira (2019); Recanati (2012) and Prosser (2012) both endorse versions of Coliva’s strategy.

avoid). The metasemantic approach is newer and more heterogenous than the identification-freedom approach, but can be grouped by a unifying ambition to provide an explanation of the IEM of *de se* thoughts that springs from an account of how the reference of *de se* thoughts is fixed, rather than just from the grounds of particular *de se* thoughts. As Peacocke writes:

Whenever there are phenomena distinctive of a given concept, a good theory of that concept should explain those phenomena. This general point applies when the phenomena are those of immunity to error through misidentification, and the concept is the first person concept *I*. (2012: 144)

Different contributors to this approach follow this injunction in different ways depending on their preferred metasemantic account of the *de se* – the view that introspective impressions play a role in fixing the reference of *de se* thoughts (Palmira (ms), García-Carpintero (2018)) or where those thoughts are otherwise fixed in the manner of perceptual demonstratives (Morgan 2015), will explain cases of *de se* IEM differently from a view on which it is a version the token-reflexive reference rule that does the explanatory work (Peacocke 2012, 2014; Hu 2017)²⁶. It is not possible to survey all the options here. We will instead present one prominent version of the approach from Recanati (2007, 2009, 2012).

Recanati posits a category he calls *implicit de se* thoughts, whose distinguishing feature is that although they systematically concern the thought’s thinker, that thinker is not represented in the thought’s content. The thought’s content is *thetic* (or gappy), and has a truth-value only when evaluated relative to a particular subject.²⁷ When these thoughts are based directly on experience, the subject is delivered by the *mode* of the experience (approximately, the type of experiential state) – not because the mode fills in a representation of the subject, but because it constrains who the subject must be. When I have the thought I would express as “My arms are outstretched” on the basis of proprioception, the content of my thought is something like the open sentence ‘___ *arms are outstretched*’. The proprioceptive mode on which it is based, however, delivers *me* as its relevant circumstance of evaluation, because proprioception can only ever deliver information about oneself. Now, according to Recanati such implicit thoughts based directly on experience will always be IEM. Why? Because given that I am not represented at all in either the content of the thought or experience on which it is based, the basic conditions for any error of *misidentification* (in either sense) are not met.²⁸

²⁶ See also Prosser (2012).

²⁷ This is the treatment Lewis gives of all *de se* attitudes.

²⁸ Cf. accounts of IEM by Ismael (2012) and Guillot (2013). Recanati also thinks that there is a second layer of *de se* thoughts with IEM – *explicit de se* thoughts – that *do* explicitly represent the thought’s subject. These *de se* thoughts are

Since nothing in this style of account depends on specific claims about the thought's grounds, it isn't *per se* committed to the claim that IEM is always explained by the absence of an identity-component in those grounds. As a result, metasemantic approaches seem better positioned to accommodate the notion of wh-IEM. This advantage is unlikely to impress opponents following Coliva, who anyway think that the idea of an independent notion of wh-IEM is spurious.²⁹ Other objections that have been raised against versions of the metasemantic approach include the comparative complexity of the account, the worry that explanations at this level cannot account for the basis-relativity or non-universality of *de se* IEM, the fact that the appeal of any one of these accounts of IEM is hostage to the appeal of a specific metasemantic view of the *de se*, and suspicions about the scope on this approach for a unifying account of IEM beyond the case of the *de se*.³⁰

The two approaches to *de se* IEM explanation described in this section are pitched at a high level of abstraction. There has also been plenty of ground-level work in the last ten years about the extension of *de se* IEM. It is striking that these first-order debates are similarly characterised by a lack of agreement: most (but not all) consider the IEM of introspective *de se* judgments to be non-negotiable, but other candidates – including bodily awareness, agentive, and memory *de se* judgments – remain controversial.³¹

Indeed, the absence of fixed points in the debate about *de se* IEM might raise alarm bells for some.³² There is disagreement in this literature on, in summary, all of the following: what the extension of *de se* IEM is; what the best explanation of it is; whether it subdivides into importantly different sub-categories (and, if so, which these are); what significance it has for an understanding of *de se* thought; and whether the phenomenon of IEM has similar interest in non-*de se* cases as in *de se* cases. What's more, the discussion has been intricate and long-running enough that an author of a paper might easily, and quite reasonably, concentrate on a highly localised aspect of one of these

reached by a non-inferential process called 'reflection' from implicit *de se* thoughts – since no inference is involved, there is no new opportunity for a misidentification to be introduced. This addition to the account is not important for our purposes.

²⁹ See also Smith (2006) for another argument against wh-IEM, and McGlynn (ms) for a response; see also Salje (2016) for an objection to a closely related formulation of IEM.

³⁰ See, e.g. Wright (2012), Morgan (2012), Coliva (2017) and Hu (2017). See also Campbell (2012) for an argument that *de se* thought is *unique* in resisting a metasemantic explanation of IEM.

³¹ For some recent discussions of the IEM of introspective judgments see García-Carpintero (2018), Hu (2017), Parrott (2017); of bodily awareness judgments De Vignemont (2011, 2012), Schwenkler (2013a), Morgan (2018), Salje (2017), Lane and Liang (2011), Gallagher (2012), Kang (2016); of action judgments O'Brien (2007, 2012), Romdenh-Romluc (2013), Lane and Liang (2011); and of memory judgments Fernandez (2014), Bermudez (2012, 2013), Hamilton (2009).

³² E.g. Schwenkler (2013b) and Howell (2007). A more extreme reaction to the state of this literature is to deny the existence of IEM altogether (e.g. Cappelen and Dever 2013).

questions, without engaging with the overall question of why their doing so matters. This would be unproblematic in the context of a shared, unvoiced understanding of what is up for grabs in the debate. But it isn't obvious that such an understanding exists. What does this mean for the future of these debates? As with post-Gettier attempts to rehabilitate the JTB account of knowledge, which eventually resulted in wholesale changes of approach to the relevant subdiscipline, there is the possibility that at a certain point *de se* theorists will just start playing a different game. Perhaps the concept of IEM is a tool that initially appeared helpful in understanding the *de se*, but turned out not to be. This would, of course, be compatible with thinking that many of the ostensibly IEM-focused papers contain important insights – for example, about the nature of various bodily illusions, or the notion of thought-authorship – that are achieved, as it were, on the way to a claim about IEM. An opposing view would be that it is simply a datum that certain *de se* judgments are IEM – however unclear it is exactly which these are, or how best to define the phenomenon in general terms – and eschewing the topic would just involve ignoring a question because it has proven hard to answer.

4. Conclusion

None of the debates about the *de se* – about its significance, distinctive features, or even existence – show any sign of letting up. As a topic with a long history, the continuing vigour of these discussions are testament to the tenacity and depth of the philosophical puzzles that give rise to them. While there is a widely shared instinct that there is something special about the *de se* that is illustrated by *de se* cases, it has proven surprisingly difficult to distil that significance into a single, simple point. And while there is a persistent sense that *de se* IEM tracks something of real importance, decades of sustained effort haven't yet given us a clear shared idea of what that is. What is clear, however, is that there is a rich seam of philosophical material in this area that ramifies across mind, language, morality, theory of action, metaphysics of the self – indeed arguably across all areas of human-centred philosophy.³³

³³ For discussion and comments we owe thanks to Jessica Begon, Aidan McGlynn, Dilip Ninan, Michele Palmira and John Schwenkler.

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