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Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

*On the thesis that 'I' is not a referring term**John Campbell*

The use we make of 'I' is not explained by the way in which it refers to an object. In this the first person contrasts sharply with other referring terms. Usually, we use a term the way we do because it stands for something. In the case of 'I', the use comes first and we look for a reference afterwards; the use may even drive us to find a new kind of object, such as a soul, to act as reference for the term, rather than having the use grounded in a prior conception of the reference of the term.

This contrast between the first person and other referring terms is what seems to me right in the idea that 'I' is not a referring term. Usually, the pattern of use that we make of a singular term is explained by the way in which it stands for an object. A sense that this is not what is going on in the case of the first person is, I shall suggest, what drives the idea that there is no such thing as the self.

I trust that there is some immediate appeal to this way of stating things, but the whole idea of a pattern of use being explained by the way a term refers needs some more explanation. I begin on this in Section 1 below. In Section 2 I consider how immunity to error through misidentification, a striking aspect of the use of a term, relates to the way in which its reference is determined. In Section 3 and 4, I set out the case for saying that the use of 'I' is not explained by the way in which the reference of the term is fixed. In Section 5, I develop the point that the pattern of use of 'I' cannot be validated by a characterization of the reference of the term.

PATTERN OF USE AS EXPLAINED BY REFERENCE

The question about 'I' is whether its pattern of use is normatively and causally explained by the ascription of reference to the term. In general,

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when we are concerned with the meaning of any term, we can make a distinction between:

- (a) the pattern of use of the term, and
- (b) the reference of the term.

Typically, when we have a referring term, we take it that the pattern of use of the term is explained by the reference of the term. I mean this in two senses:

- (1) the correctness of the pattern of use that we make of the term is shown to be normatively correct by the reference assigned to the term, and
- (2) our making the pattern of use of the term that we do is causally sustained by our knowledge of the reference of the term.

Here I am using ‘reference’ to mean: ‘the assignment of an object to the term, in virtue of which the term makes a contribution to determining the truth or falsity of statements containing it’. It may give some sense of the kind of explanatory role I am envisaging for the ascription of reference to remark on an analogy between the reference of a singular term and the truth-table for a propositional constant. The analogy is that just as the reference of a singular term determines its contribution to the truth or falsity of statements containing the term, the truth-table for a propositional constant determines its contribution to the truth or falsity of statements containing it. Suppose that you are teaching a class elementary logic from scratch. One way to begin is simply to spend the first couple of weeks drilling the class in the inference rules for the propositional connectives, without any concern at all for their intuitive meanings. Once the class has mastered the formal manipulations associated with the terms, you introduce the truth-tables for those terms. At this point, there may be a certain sense of illumination, as the intended meanings of those signs are revealed. At this point, you can explain to the class why the rules of inference you have introduced are not simply arbitrary. You can point out that, given the truth-tables, the rules of inference you have introduced are the weakest possible introduction rules that guarantee the truth of a statement containing the constant, given the truth of the undischarged premises; and the elimination rules are the strongest possible that guarantee the truth of the conclusions, given the truth of a premise containing the constant. Assuming that your class actually grasp this – and do not simply spend the semester in a complete fog about the whole business – there will be a certain causal sensitivity in their use of rules of inference to the truth-tables they associate with the signs. If someone forgets the rules

of inference associated with a sign, for example, then so long as they remember the truth-table they ought to be able to reconstruct the rules of inference. And if the truth-table associated with a sign were to be changed, by arbitrary stipulation for example, in one way or another, then there would be a corresponding change in the rules of inference one associated with the sign. Now the parallel between knowledge of the truth-table for a propositional constant and knowledge of the reference of singular term is not complete. In particular, the ordinary speaker often seems to be directly confronted with the reference of a perceptual demonstrative, for example, in a way in which the ordinary speaker is not typically confronted with the truth-table for a logical connective. But thinking about the special case of a logic class does, I think, provide an initial model for the role that our knowledge of the reference of a perceptual demonstrative plays in our use of that term. My question in this essay is whether knowledge of the reference of one's own use of 'I' plays a similar role in grounding the pattern of use that one makes of the term.

For another model of the explanation of pattern of use by reference, consider the case of descriptive names. By a 'descriptive name' I mean a name that is introduced and explained by means of a definite description. So, for example, we can consider a name such as 'Rocket', explained by means of the description, 'the fastest dog in Point Isabel'. Here the reference of the name is fixed by the description. And given the way in which the reference of the name is fixed, it is straightforward to describe the pattern of use of the term. The introduction rule is:

Exactly one dog in Point Isabel is faster than the others
 Any dog in Point Isabel that is faster than the others is F
Rocket is F

And the elimination rule is:

Rocket is F
 Exactly one dog in Point Isabel is faster than the others
 Any dog in Point Isabel that is faster than the others is F

That is, someone who grasps the way in which the reference of this name is fixed will thereby be causally sustained in assigning the term this pattern of use; and the way in which the reference is fixed also explains why this is the right pattern of use to make of the term. What this example makes plain is that it is not just the reference of the name that explains the pattern of use. It is the *way* in which the reference of the name is fixed that explains the pattern of use. To see that, you need only consider the name 'Sherlock', whose meaning is fixed by the description, 'the most

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inquisitive dog in Point Isabel'. The pattern of use of this name will be quite different. (I leave writing out the introduction and elimination rules for this name as an exercise for the reader.) For, of course, though there is a big difference in the patterns of use of 'Rocket' and 'Sherlock', traceable to the difference in the ways in which the references of the two terms are fixed, it may also still be true that:

Rocket is (identical to) Sherlock

So the difference in pattern of use is explained by the difference in the ways in which the references are fixed, rather than by a difference in reference itself, for there may be no difference in the references of the two names. The model for perceptual demonstratives – terms like 'this' and 'that' used to refer to currently perceived objects – is broadly similar, in that pattern of use is explained by way of referring, though there are, of course, some significant differences between the case of perceptual demonstratives and the case of descriptive names.

IMMUNITY TO ERROR THROUGH MISIDENTIFICATION

There are deep connections between the way in which the reference of a term is fixed and the immunity to error through misidentification of judgments containing that term (the phrase 'immunity to error through misidentification' was introduced by Shoemaker (1968)). How should we define the notion of 'immunity to error through misidentification'? One way to do it is in terms of the kind of doubt that can be raised about a judgment. Often, when you make, say, a simple subject-predicate judgment, there are two different ways in which you could be wrong. Suppose I am lecturing to a class and to my indignation I see someone talking to her neighbour. I think, 'Sally is talking'. There are two different ways in which you could raise a doubt about the correctness of my judgment. It could be that the person I see is talking all right, but that's not Sally. In that case, the judgment I made, 'Sally is talking' is wrong about the subject but not wrong about the predicate: there's talking all right. So even though I sustain that doubt, I can hold on to my right to the judgment, 'Well, at any rate *someone* was talking'. On the other hand, you could raise a doubt as to whether there was any talking going on at all. This is, as it were, a doubt about the predicate, and if sustained it will typically leave me with no right to any remnant of the original judgment. In these terms, a judgment, '*a* is F', made on some particular basis, is immune to error through misidentification if it meets the following

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condition. There can't be a challenge to it that is, as it were, local to the subject term, and leaves the predicate untouched, so that one could accept the challenge yet still, on the strength of one's original right to the judgment, keep the right to say, 'Well, at any rate *someone* is in pain'.

This is a general formulation that covers two specific cases distinguished by Jim Pryor (1999). In the situation I just described, for example, even though your doubt is sustained as to whether it was Sally, I keep the right to judge, 'Well, *that person* was talking', not just the existential judgment, though of course I keep the right to that as well. There are other cases, however, in which I don't keep any such right to a judgment about a specified individual. For example, suppose that, looking at this person, but not knowing who it is, I judge, 'that person is talking'. Suppose you then raise the doubt whether it was that person who was talking, and the doubt is sustained. Then although I may still have the right to judge, 'Someone was talking', and dark consequences may follow, I don't have any right yet to make any identification of a person as the person who was talking. I have only the existential judgment. Pryor puts it round the other way. There is a case in which I do have the right to judge, '*a* was talking', but then go on to make a mistaken identification of *a* with someone else. This contrasts with the case in which really I have the right only to the existential judgment, 'Someone was talking', and make a mistake in homing in on one particular person as the source. In this kind of case, when it's pointed out to me that I homed in on the wrong person, I don't keep the right to specify anyone as the person who was talking; all I have the right to is the existential judgment.

As I said, the way in which the reference of a name is fixed is going to have implications for the immunity to error through misidentification of judgments made using it. Given the way in which the reference of the name 'Rocket' is fixed, for example, there are going to be judgments using that name that are immune to error through misidentification. Suppose, for example, that I judge:

Rocket is faster than the other dogs in Point Isabel

that judgment is not infallible. There might be no dogs in Point Isabel at all, or there might be a dead heat between a number of them as to which is fastest. But it is not possible that one of the dogs is faster than all the others, but that it is not Rocket. There can't be a mistake in this judgment that is, as it were, local to the subject term. There is no way of challenging this judgment that will leave in place my right to some judgment of the form, 'Well, anyway *a* is faster than other dogs in Point Isabel'. In fact, the

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only way to challenge the judgment will be to question my right even to the existential judgment, 'Some dog is faster than the others in Point Isabel'.

To give one other example, you might think of a police force investigating the actions of a presumed serial killer, in connection with which they've introduced the descriptive name 'Jack'. An enterprising junior officer might imaginatively suggest: 'But perhaps there's not a single killer at work here, perhaps it's a whole lot of different people, some copying others.' That might be a good idea. However, consider the junior officer who suggests: 'Perhaps some one person did indeed commit all these murders, but we're on the wrong track, for perhaps it wasn't Jack'. This is not a helpful suggestion. The judgment, 'Jack committed those murders' is fallible, but it isn't subject to error through misidentification.

So in general: the judgment '*x* is *F*', when made on a particular basis, is subject to error through misidentification if there is a way of challenging one's right to the judgment that does not also involve challenging one's right, on the same basis, to the existential judgment 'Something is *F*'. Immunity to error through misidentification is a matter of there being no such way of challenging the judgment.

THE FIRST PERSON

On the face of it, the first person operates on a quite different basis than a descriptive name. If the first person has a reference, it is specified by a simple rule, the token-reflexive rule: 'Any token of "I" refers to whoever produced it'. This is the most straightforward way of stating how the reference of 'I' is fixed. In fact, I would argue that it is really the only way of saying how the reference of the first person is fixed. It never goes wrong; there are no significant counterexamples to this as an account of the reference of 'I'. Alternative accounts of how the reference of 'I' is fixed are satisfactory only insofar as they agree with the determination of the token-reflexive rule. Insofar as they disagree with the determination of the token-reflexive rule, alternative accounts of reference-fixing are invariably wrong and the token-reflexive rule invariably gets it right. The trouble is that it is very difficult to see how the token-reflexive rule can play the kind of role that the determiner of reference plays in the case of a descriptive name. It does not, on the face of it, explain, causally or normatively, the pattern of use that is made of the term. And it does nothing to explain why some judgments involving the first person are immune to errors of misidentification, whereas others are subject to error through

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misidentification. So insofar as we use the rule to assign references to tokens of the first person, the ascription of reference to the first person seems to do no explanatory work. It can seem to be a wheel that turns nothing.

You might say that the critical reason why we need the notion of the reference of the first person is not to explain the pattern of use that is made of the term, and not to explain the immunity to error through misidentification of certain judgments using it, but simply to establish the existence of standards of right and wrong for particular individual judgments made using the term. The trouble is that, in general, the ascription of reference is not needed to establish the existence of standards of right and wrong merely for individual judgments. If there is a distinctive pattern of use for the first person, then that itself sets standards for individual judgments. If we are not concerned with the ratification of those patterns of use themselves, then on the face of it we do not need the ascription of reference. (A parallel may be useful here. Consider again the case of the propositional connectives. We can simply lay down what the introduction and elimination rules for a propositional connective are to be. Relative to those introduction and elimination rules, we can assess individual uses of the connectives in particular judgments as right or wrong. We do not need to bother with the truth-tables unless we are interested in explaining why the patterns of use themselves are right or wrong.)

Let me fill out something of the difficulty in seeing how the pattern of use of the first person could be explained by the reference of the term. There is a basic difficulty with the idea of *explanation* here that I can bring out by looking once again at the case of descriptive names. Recall our example, 'Rocket'. The descriptive matter used in explaining this term – 'the fastest dog in Point Isabel' – does not at all depend on the existence of such descriptive names as 'Rocket'. Even if there were no descriptive names, we could still talk about Point Isabel and about one dog being faster than another. In fact, we could still talk in that way even if we did not name dogs at all. It is a bit more difficult to envisage this, but on the face of it we could understand and use this descriptive matter even if we could not refer demonstratively to dogs: if, say, they had all been segregated from humans and simply roamed large enclosed spaces, unobserved by anyone. We might still know, in a general way, that these animals are around, and form hypotheses about them, for example, that one in a particular area will be faster than all the others. So when we fix the references of names like 'Rocket' or 'Sherlock' we are doing so by appealing

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to a vocabulary that was introduced and established prior to, and independently of, the use of those names. Consider now the reference of the first person. The reference of the first person is fixed by what I will call the token-reflexive rule: 'Any token of "I" refers to whatever person produced it'. We need the notion of a 'person' here to get the reference right. If we try substituting 'human', for instance, for 'person', then insofar as 'human' and 'person' come apart, we will get the reference wrong. But the notion of a 'person' that we need here cannot be introduced and established prior to, and independently of, the use of the first person. This means that the kind of *explanation* of pattern of use by reference that is available in the case of descriptive names is simply not available in the case of the first person.

To illustrate the point, suppose we consider a familiar puzzle case, Locke's case of the Prince and the cobbler. Suppose, then, that one morning, the body that wakes up the Prince's bed, with all the same bodily organs as the night before, has all the apparent memories of a previous life as a cobbler, down to a drunken brawl in a tavern the night before. Simultaneously, an irate figure awakens in the gutter; it is the body of the cobbler, but it has all the apparent memories of the Prince's previous life, and calls for his servants to bring him tea. Suppose that each body has the apparent memories that it does because of what happened earlier to the other body; there has been a swap of memory-impressions between the two. So the pattern of use that we find in their employment of 'I' will include such transitions as this:

At time t_1 , there is a sensory impression, 'I am locked in a brawl'

At time t_2 , there is a memory impression, causally deriving from that sensory impression, that 'I was locked in a brawl'.

Suppose the figure in the Prince's bed at time t_2 asks whether he is right to conclude, 'I was locked in a brawl'. If the appeal to the reference rule as explaining the pattern of use of the term were ever going to do any work, it would be here. What our subject is asking is whether that pattern of use of 'I' over time is legitimate; whether (in effect) a merely causal connection between earlier use of 'I' and later use of 'I', not grounded in sameness of body or brain, is sufficient to legitimize the transition from, at t_1 'I am F', to, at t_2 , 'I was F'. If the idea that pattern of use is, causally and normatively, explained by reference, is ever going to do any work, it has to do so here. So our subject is directed to the token-reflexive rule, which implies that the transition is correct if and only if the two tokens of 'I' refer to the same thing; that is, if and only if they refer to the same

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person. But the question of sameness of person here provides no traction on the question whether the pattern of use is correct. The question of sameness of person is just the same thing as the question whether the pattern of use is correct.

Another way to put the point is to remark that there is no way of introducing the notion of a 'person' into the language of a community without also introducing the first person. There can be a community that understands the concept of a dog prior to its having any way of making singular reference to dogs. There can't be a community that understands the concept of a person but doesn't yet have the use of 'I', or some similar device.

Another way to get at this same general problem is to think in terms of a theorist observing a pattern of use and trying to construct a semantic account of the term that will explain the pattern of use it has. Consider again our earlier example of the propositional constants. Consider a theorist who remarks the usual introduction and elimination rules for '&'. One form his theory might take a clause such as this: 'A & B' is true if and only if A is true and B is true. As usually understood, a theory like this has no hope of explaining the pattern of use of '&'. For all that the clause does is to project the pattern of use of 'and' in the metalanguage onto the sign '&' in the object-language. If the usual introduction and elimination rules for conjunction hold for 'and', then they will be projected onto '&'. If the usual rules do not hold for 'and', then they will not hold for '&'. In contrast, the classical truth-table for conjunction really does provide an explanation of the use of the sign, as we saw earlier. Giving the truth-table is not a matter merely of projecting the use of sign in the metalanguage onto a sign in the object-language. In fact, it is consistent with the appeal to truth-tables that there should be no sign at all for conjunction in the metalanguage. Now suppose we reflect on the analysis of 'I' in these terms. Suppose we think of it from the perspective of a theorist who remarks the temporally extended uses we make of 'I', from 'I am F' at one time, to 'I was F' at a later time. Assume the theorist tries to explain the correctness of such transitions by appealing to the idea that 'I' in the object-language is governed by the token-reflexive rule, 'Any token of "I" refers to whatever person produced it'. Then the term in the metalanguage, 'person', will have its own coordinate uses of 'I' as a term of the metalanguage. All that will have happened is that the pattern of use of 'I' as a term of the metalanguage has been projected onto the use of 'I' as term of the object-language. The attempt to appeal to the 'reference' of the first person has explained nothing.

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JOHN CAMPBELL

I think it is helpful to compare and contrast the way the first person works with the ways in which some other possible token-reflexive terms would work. Suppose we find a people who, though intelligent and speaking a shared language, do not have the first person or anything like it. Perhaps we can suppose that they have at least rudimentary psychological predicates, of the kinds that you and I comfortably ascribe to animals, and they customarily ascribe these psychological predicates to one another, using demonstratives such as ‘that human’ to identify one another. They can also ascribe ordinary physical predicates to one another, again using perceptual demonstratives to identify one another. And finally, each individual A can, of course, use a perceptual demonstrative to identify A and ascribe predicates of both kinds to that human. Suppose now that we suggest to them that they introduce to their language a term ‘H’, governed by the following rule: ‘Any token of “H” refers to the human that produced it’. Baffled yet polite, they go along with our suggestion, and can now use and assess remarks such as ‘H is hungry’, or ‘H weighs 200lb’. But let us reflect on exactly what procedure our people will have to use to have the right to make a remark such as ‘H is hungry’. They are relying on their pre-established vocabulary to interpret the sign ‘H’. They will have to begin with a demonstrative judgment, ‘that human is hungry’, and move from that to the judgment, ‘H is hungry’. It’s not quite obvious how they acquire the right to make that move. Perhaps initially other people nudge you, telling you that in this situation you have the right to say, ‘H is hungry’. Perhaps you have some specific marks by which you identify the human, demonstratively specified, on the basis of whose characteristics you can say, ‘H is F’. In any case, it does seem evident that, however you do it, when you make the judgment ‘H is F’, your judgment will be subject to error through misidentification.

I have just described a case in which the pattern of use of our term, ‘H’, really is explained by a token-reflexive rule of reference for the term, in something like the strong sense in which the pattern of use of a descriptive name can be explained by the way in which the reference of the name is fixed. So we can make sense of the pattern of use of a token-reflexive term being explained by the reference rule for the term. We could similarly have a pattern of use for a token-reflexive ‘X’ explained by a reference rule such as ‘Any token of “X” refers to whatever animal produced it.’ This might be closer to our actual use of ‘I’, which seems to allow the possibility that people of many different species might use the term. But