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978-0-521-19830-1 - Immunity to Error Through Misidentification: New Essays

Edited by Simon Prosser and François Recanati

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IMMUNITY TO ERROR THROUGH MISIDENTIFICATION

Immunity to error through misidentification is recognised as an important feature of certain kinds of first-person judgments, as well as arguably being a feature of other indexical or demonstrative judgments. In this collection of newly commissioned essays, the contributors present a variety of approaches to it, engaging with historical and empirical aspects of the subject as well as contemporary philosophical work. It is the first collection of essays devoted exclusively to the topic, and will be essential reading for anyone interested in philosophical work on the self, first-person thought or indexical thought more generally.

SIMON PROSSER is a lecturer in philosophy at the University of St Andrews. His research involves a variety of issues in the philosophy of mind and in metaphysics.

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[More information](#)*Preface*

Our judgments about the world are prone to many kinds of error. One kind of error occurs through what are commonly known as ‘cases of mistaken identity’ – cases in which one forms a false belief because of a misidentification of the person or object about whom one made the judgment. It is often held, however, that certain categories of judgment are immune to errors of this kind or, in the jargon coined in a classic paper by Sydney Shoemaker in 1968, they possess *immunity to error through misidentification* (henceforth IEM). In particular, it has been claimed that first-person judgments exhibit IEM – in other words, that certain kinds of judgments about oneself cannot be in error through one’s mistakenly taking someone else to be oneself. Examples of the kinds of judgment that have been claimed to have this property include ‘I have a headache’ (where the judgment is made on the grounds that one *feels* one’s head aching) and ‘my legs are crossed’ (where the judgment is made on the basis of proprioception). In the first case, it is said, I could not be mistaken about *whose* headache I was aware of; and in the second kind of case I could not be mistaken about *whose* legs I felt to be crossed.

A phenomenon of this kind was discussed by Wittgenstein, who distinguished judgments in which ‘I’ features as ‘subject’ from those in which ‘I’ features as ‘object’. It is the former that are said to exhibit IEM. Arguably something similar was discussed by Kant. Contemporary interest in IEM was largely triggered by Shoemaker’s work, however, and by the prominent role played by IEM in Gareth Evans’s work on first-person thought. In subsequent work on first-person thought IEM has continued to play a prominent role, and many philosophers now regard it as a desideratum on a theory of first-person thought that it provide a satisfactory account of IEM. An understanding of IEM is thus held to be a vital component of an understanding of the self and of self-knowledge.

As this volume shows, recent discussions of IEM have broadened in several directions. Firstly, there are debates over the definition of IEM,

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with a number of authors distinguishing several varieties of IEM. Secondly, there are debates over whether IEM holds of first-person judgments contingently or (in certain cases at least) as a matter of logical necessity. Thirdly, there are discussions of the extent to which IEM is a feature of judgments other than those involving the first person, such as judgments expressible using indexical and demonstrative terms (e.g. ‘here’, ‘now’ and ‘that’), and the significance of this for thoughts and judgments expressible using those terms. Fourthly, the issue of IEM surfaces in discussions of empirical data in several areas: in psychology, data concerning illusions of self-knowledge (such as the rubber-hand illusion) and various impairments of self-knowledge; in linguistics, data concerning the resources natural languages offer for the expression of ‘*de se*’ thought (thought about oneself). All of these debates overlap to some extent, and all are associated with discussions of the reasons for IEM and the significance of this for our understanding of the self and of self-knowledge.

This volume brings together a set of new essays by prominent authors in the field and covers a full range of theoretical, empirical and historical issues. The literature on IEM has increased markedly over the last few years but to date there has been no collection of work devoted to this issue. The present volume is intended to fill the gap.¹

SIMON PROSSER AND FRANÇOIS RECANATI

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