On Knowing I am Not Alone in the Universe

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1. Introduction

Questions about our knowledge of other minds have occupied far less philosophical attention than have questions about our knowledge of the material world. The major reason for this is the underlying assumption that the resources we should appeal to in explaining such knowledge are the same as those we appeal to in explaining our knowledge of the material world, namely observation and inference. Given this, accounting for our knowledge of other minds is not of much additional interest, epistemologically speaking. There can be debates about the kinds of inference required, and, indeed about whether perception on its own suffices for knowledge, but there is nothing fundamentally different here from debates and claims about our knowledge of the material world. Hence, it warrants only a page or two, or, at most, a chapter, in general treatises about our knowledge of the 'external' world. Call this the Nothing Special Claim. Thus Dretske, who appeals to perception for explaining such knowledge writes: 'I do not believe that there is any particular, any special, problem about other minds. … The way I have of knowing that my wife is angry is the same way I have of knowing that her jaw is set and her eyes have that characteristic glint' (Dretske 1973, 35). And Fodor, who advocates an abductive inference account of such knowledge writes: 'When I was a boy in graduate school, the philosophy of mind had two main divisions: the mind/body problem and the problem of other minds… Philosophical fashions change: it has gotten harder to believe that there is a special problem about the knowledge of other minds' (Fodor 1994, 292).

The challenge to this approach I will be concerned with draws on Reid's deepest objection to Berkeley's idealism. The complaint was that 'what I call a father, a brother or a friend is only a parcel of ideas in my own mind… I am left alone, as the only creature of God in the universe, in that forloon state of Egoism…' (Reid 1788 I chi, 15). The claim that their existence outside his mind is highly probable would not have been regarded by Reid, and indeed versions of it weren't, as an improvement on what Berkeley had to offer. The challenge implicit in Reid's complaint is to explain why and how our relations with people we know well, e.g. friends and family, contribute to our knowledge that we are not alone in the universe, in a way that makes the very idea of solipsism absurd. I will label this the 'Friends and Family Challenge'.

One response to the Challenge is to say 'we share your pain', so to speak, but to go on to claim that we should 'stifle our emotions', as Broad put it (1925, 318), and produce an account of knowledge of other minds that conforms to the resources appealed to in our account of our knowledge of the material world, namely, perception and inference. Uncomfortable as the results of this may turn out to be, as the best this delivers is a high probability that our nearest and dearest exist, this is something we just have to live with. I examine two responses in this vein that appeal to inference in section 2. In section 3, I look at an appeal to perception without inference to see whether it can secure knowledge that we are not alone in the universe in a way that succeeds in quietening the kind of worries underpinning the Friends and Family Challenge. I will suggest that it can't.

A quite different kind of response to the Challenge is to say that knowledge that one is not alone in the universe is indeed something we don't have, but is also something we should not be seeking. What we have, and this suffices as far as the Challenge is concerned, is practical engagement with others. In section 4, I briefly consider one such response, which appeals to Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*.

Finally, there is the response I will begin to explore in the second half of the paper. It says that we can and do know we are not alone in the universe; and that the concerns underpinning the Friends and Family Challenge can and should be incorporated into our account of such knowledge. However, doing so requires preparedness to broaden our understanding of the nature and source of knowledge in this domain.

Before beginning, it will help to have in place two general points. First, I will take it that all the responses to the Challenge that appeal to perception, with or without inference, are informed by the following widely accepted claim about the sources of our knowledge of other minds.

The Observation Claim:

> Our knowledge of other minds is based on observation, in one of the following two ways: either perception reveals other minds to us, or it provides the basis for inferences about them.

The second point is this. A distinction is sometimes drawn between 'knowing *what*' and 'knowing *that*' (see, e.g. Avramides 2001, 19; Cassam 2007, 156). Questions about the first are concerned with how we know what a person is thinking and feeling and so forth. Questions about the second ask how we know that we are not alone in the universe, that others exist. As I will be treating the distinction, it is reflected in the distinction between the counterparts to the predicative and singular component in thoughts expressing first person knowledge of one's own states, as in "I am in pain". Knowledge *what* questions are concerned with the predicative counterpart, e.g., in our case, what it to know that someone other than oneself is in pain. The second focuses on the counterpart to the singular component in my thought and asks: what is it to know that there are counterparts to my 'I', other centres of consciousness, other first-person perspectives, other 'I's?

Many discussions of other minds don't clearly distinguish between the two questions. However, explicitly addressing the counterpart to the singular component in self-knowledge is essential for showing we are not in a 'forloon state of Egoism'. Or so I will be arguing in section 5, The central suggestion here will be that addressing this question requires that we abandon the Observation Claim, and put in its place a series of alternative claims that at the same time begin to do justice to the concerns that inform the Friends and Family Challenge.

A second central suggestion will be that these alternative claims ultimately derive their rationale, and centrality, from the role they play in addressing a critical epistemological question, one that is left out of most current debates about our knowledge of other minds. This is the question of what it is to know a person. I return to this question, and to its relation to the issues raised by the Friends and Family Challenge, in the final section of the paper, once we have in place the initial ingredients necessary for addressing the 'knowledge that' question.

2. Inference and Setting the Emotions Aside

Russell's chapter on other minds, 'On Analogy' in *Human Knowledge,* opens with following motivation for devoting a separate chapter to the topic:

> The postulates hitherto considered have been such as are required for knowledge of the physical world. Broadly speaking, they have led us to admit a certain degree of knowledge as to the space-time structure of the physical world, while leaving us completely agnostic as regards its qualitative character. But where other human beings are concerned, we feel that we know more than this; we are convinced that other people have thoughts and feelings that are qualitatively fairly similar to our own. We are not content to think that we know only the space-time structure of our friends' minds, or their capacity for initiating causal chains that end in sensations of our own. A philosopher might pretend to think that he knew only this, but let him get cross with his wife and you will see that he does not regard her as a mere spatio-temporal edifice of which he knows the logical properties but not a glimmer of the intrinsic character. We are therefore justified in inferring that his scepticism is professional rather than sincere. (Russell 1948, 425–28)

Setting aside the implied suggestion that in the case of the physical world scepticism is real rather than merely professional, the main point I want to highlight concerns Russell's announced motivation for engaging with the problem in the first place, which is in two parts. First, there is the claim that we are more convinced that we know that minds with a qualitative character like our own exist than we are that we know the qualitative character of the physical world. Second, there is his explanation of this conviction -- our emotion-laden relations with friends and relations, people we know. An acknowledgement, of sorts, of the strength of the Friends and Family Challenge.

The second point is this. Having delivered himself of this diagnosis, the task, as he sees it, is not to incorporate or indeed fully account for the intuitions that underpin the Challenge, but to set them aside and to produce a good (analogical) inferential account that might go some way towards justifying our belief in the existence of others. The nature of this inference is such that the existence of other minds is, when all is said and done, merely probable, albeit highly so. The existence of his wife and others he might get angry at, or love or hate, is, when all is said and done, a conjecture. But that is the best we can hope for.

I turn now to C. D. Broad's explanation in his 1925 *Mind and Its Place in Nature* of why philosophers have paid little attention to the other minds question. I quote it in full, for its own sake, but also because doing so will help to put into context some of the questions I will be concerned with.

> The proper analysis of our belief in the existence of other minds, and the question of how it can be justified, have been far less thoroughly discussed by philosophers than the corresponding questions about matter and our alleged knowledge of it. Many philosophers have wanted to deny the reality of material objects, and have felt that it was a feather in their caps when they succeeded in doing so to the satisfaction of themselves and their followers. But, seemingly, no one wants to be a Solipsist; and scarcely anyone has admitted himself to be one. It has been left to rival philosophers to tell him that, on his principles, he ought to be one; and this has generally been regarded as a charge to be repelled and not as a compliment to be thankfully acknowledged. We should be doing too much credit to human consistency if we ascribed this to the fact that all convinced Solipsists have kept silence and refused to waste their words on the empty air. It would seem then that we have a stronger belief in the existence of other minds than in the existence of material things. No one in his senses doubts either proposition in practice; but the philosopher can and does doubt the latter in his study, whilst, even in that chaste seclusion, he seems to be unable or unwilling to doubt the former. I do not think that this difference can be ascribed either to the fact that the evidence for the existence of other minds is more cogent than the evidence for the existence of matter, or to the fact that we have a stronger instinctive belief in the former than in the latter. I think that the real explanation is that certain strong emotions are bound up with the belief in other minds, and that no very strong emotions are bound up with the belief in matter. The position of a philosopher with no one but himself to lecture to, and no hope of an audience, would be so tragic that the human mind naturally shrinks from contemplating such a possibility. It is our business, however, to stifle our emotions for the present, and to follow the argument whithersoever it may lead. (Broad 1925, 317–18)

It is, of course, not quite true that nobody wants to be a solipsist. Russell cheerfully declared himself to be a one at one point, and is reported to have received a letter at the time from a Lady someone or other saying how strongly she agreed with him, and how odd it was that not everyone is a solipsist, given the cogency of his arguments. This serves to highlight a distinctive feature of solipsism, its deep, self-stultifying absurdity, which goes a long way towards explaining why scepticism about other minds hasn't received much attention.

Broad's second point is that our belief in the existence of others is 'bound up' with 'strong emotions', in contrast to our belief in the existence of the material world. It is not just that contemplating the non-existence of anyone else is hard for the minimally self-aware philosopher to sustain rationally, but the contemplation of the idea is emotionally unbearable in a way that has no parallel in the material world case. What is unbearable is inherently linked to communication, not being heard, having no-one to talk to, having no-one to commune with.[1]

The final point is this: what is remarkable, in my view, is that Broad's observation about the emotional weight of our belief in the existence of others is restricted to his diagnosis of why philosophers have steered clear of the subject. Having delivered himself of the diagnosis, his immediate next move is to say that we must stifle such emotions and get down to the serious business of explaining and justifying our belief in the existence of other minds. The account he goes on to produce is a complex version of inference by analogy.

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[1] More accurately, it is the idea that the relations we think we have with others are a complete illusion that makes the prospect of solipsism so awful, in a way that has no parallel in doubts about the existence of physical objects. I am indebted here to Lucy Campbell. And it is perhaps, partly with this in mind that Cavell writes: 'What is the worst that befalls me should it be the case that material objects don't exist? I suffer a generalized *trompe l'oeil*, and of course *trompe l'oreille* as well…But if there are no human beings, then what befalls me is a generalized and massive *trompe l'ame; my soul* … cheats me…into taking it that it has company" (1979, 424).

So, there we have it: for Broad too, what we care about, our emotional engagement with our friends and relations (and audiences, in Broad's case), which makes us have a stronger belief in their existence than we have in the existence of physical objects, has no bearing on what we can know, on what we are justified in believing. On that front, we must restrict ourselves to an appeal to a combination of perception of behaviour and various forms of inference, which deliver at best a high probability that other people exist.

3. Perception

Over the past three decades, an increasingly popular way of trying to rebut the inferentialist account of our knowledge of other minds is to say that we can, and do, acquire knowledge directly through perception of others' mental states. I can see that someone is in pain, or embarrassed, just as I can see actions essentially described in terms of their intentions. One is not just presented with external effects or symptoms from which one must infer hidden private mental causes. Our question is: can such approaches do better than inferentialist accounts in addressing the Friends and Family Challenge?

There have been many versions of the appeal to perception. The version I want to have before us is Fred Dretske's, as discussed by Quassim Cassam in his chapter on Other Minds in *The Possibility of Knowledge*, as the issues they raise take us straight to the heart of the problems we need to focus on, and arise, I believe, for all perceptual accounts.[2]

Suppose I am at a meeting in which the Bursar's carefully laid financial plans are being ripped apart by one of 'our less agreeable colleagues'. I glance across at him, and see his flushed face, twitching hands and set jaw. I know he is furious. How do I know? -- asks Cassam. "I can see that he is", he answers (Cassam 2007, 161).

Drawing on Dretske's account of primary epistemic seeing in the other minds case, Cassam says that the example just discussed is an instance of such seeing in the same way that seeing that a rod is hot by seeing it glow is. In neither case is it necessary to see the heat, or see the anger. Rather, we have what Dretske calls 'primary epistemic seeing', in our example, so long as the following conditions are met. (i) You see the Bursar, (ii) he is angry, (iii) the conditions are such that he wouldn't look the way he looks now unless he were angry, and (iv) believing that the conditions are as described in (iii) you take him to be angry.

Turning now from knowledge *what* to knowledge *that*: Dretske himself, who denied that knowledge is closed under entailment, thought that while perception can deliver knowledge *what*, along the lines just sketched, it cannot deliver knowledge *that*. Zombies look exactly like humans, so condition (iii) doesn't hold for such knowledge. One cannot see that others have a mind and hence that solipsism is false. Nonetheless, according to Dretske, it does hold for knowledge *what* because condition (iii) normally holds, and that is enough (Dretske 2005, 13–26).

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[2] Cassam has since revised his position, and now holds that claiming that knowledge of other minds is perceptual is consistent with its being inferential. See Cassam (2017).

Cassam, in contrast, holds that perception, by providing us with knowledge of what someone is feeling or thinking, also 'puts us in a position to know *that* others think and feel' (2007, 159). 'We do not 'first have to come up with a justification for thinking that there are other minds and then figure out what others are thinking and feeling. Rather, we can come to know *that* there are other minds by seeing *what* others are thinking and feeling' (Cassam 2007, 159). Key to this position is his rejection of what he calls the 'zombie elimination requirement' (2007, 168). Condition (iii) must be met in order for me to see that someone is angry, say, and I must believe it to hold (iv). But I do not have to *know* that condition (iii) is met, which is what the 'zombie elimination requirement' demands. Such knowledge is only required for knowing that one knows (2007, 169–70), which is not what we require in normal cases of knowledge acquisition by perception.

Suppose we agree with Cassam that the zombie elimination requirement is too strong. One might still deny that perception on its own suffices for delivering knowledge that others exist. Compare the other minds situation with a case of having primary perceptual knowledge that you would express as 'this object is hot' when you see that it is red. Simple perception, on its own, suffices for delivering the awareness of the object that underpins the use of the singular component in the thought, the demonstrative. In contrast, no amount of staring at an item presented in perception delivers awareness of another 'I', another first-person point of view. There is nothing that perceptual awareness on its own provides us with that stands to the deployment of the idea of another first-person point of view, another's 'I', as perception stands, on its own, to the deployment of a demonstrative thought. If perceptual awareness on its own doesn't deliver even a *prima facie* awareness of another 'I', then, in eliminating the relevance of the zombie requirement we must appeal to a capacity other than perception to secure a subject's grasp of the idea of another first-person perspective. It is only when this is secure that it is right to move from knowledge what to knowledge that, in the manner Cassam proposes.

An immediate objection, on Cassam's behalf, might be: when I observe someone and think 'This person is sad' this can surely be an expression of knowledge that at least one other person exists. And indeed it can. The claim is, rather, that perception on its own can't be the *origin* of our idea, and knowledge, that other subjects exist. For a capacity to be the origin, in this sense, of an idea is for the proper exercise of the capacity to be necessary and sufficient for the acquisition of the capacity to deploy the idea in expressions of knowledge (given various background capacities). Perception is the origin, in this sense, of demonstrative thought. In contrast, while perception may be necessary, it is not sufficient for acquisition of the capacity to deploy the idea of another first-person perspective in expressions of knowledge; it is in this sense that perception is not the origin of the idea. Of course, once a subject has acquired the idea it can be exercised in other, derivative, in this sense, contexts, for example in perception-based judgements; hence the possibility of judgements based on perception being expressions of knowledge that other possessors of a first-person perspective exist. But on its own, perception, unsupplemented by other capacities, is not sufficient. If this is true, we must appeal to something in addition to perception to explain our knowledge that others exist.

There is another interesting feature of all appeals to perception to explain our knowledge of other minds that is worth noting at this point. The perceived emotions referred to in the examples used to illustrate such knowledge are all emotions of the observed person. Russell, in contrast, and to a certain extent Broad, appeals to the emotions one feels oneself in interaction with others, it is these that give us the strong belief in others' existence, and it is presumably such emotions too that figured in Reid's voicing of what we are calling the Friends and Family Challenge. A question this leaves us with is: is there a way in which such relational emotions can be made to play a part in the account we give of our knowledge of others' existence, contra Russell and Broad?

Before beginning to address this question directly, in the next section I say a few brief words about a response that says that commitment to the existence of others is indeed bound up with our emotion-laden interactions with them, but insists that this is not a matter of knowledge. Using some important insights here, I turn to formulating the alternative to the Observation Claim that we will consider for the remainder of the paper.

4. Framework Propositions and Practice

One radical response at this stage is to agree with Dretske that perception doesn't deliver knowledge that one is not alone in the universe, but to go on to deny that this means that the possibility of solipsism is left open. Our not being alone in the universe shows up not in our knowledge about the world, but, rather, in the practices we adopt towards each other, responding to cries for help or smiles of gratitude, pitying a person in pain and so forth. This is the response to Dretske suggested by Anita Avramides, drawing on Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* (Avramides 2013). We don't first assure ourselves that the cries we hear emanate from a real person rather than a zombie, and then proceed to care for it. Here she is in agreement with Cassam. There could be no such assurance based on vision. Contra Cassam, though, she claims that these practices of care, in the pain case, say, are foundational for our so much as getting into the act of being a person and treating others as persons. The proposition that others exist is a meaning-conferring framework or hinge proposition that provides the bedrock for our engagement with people. Speaking of knowledge of such propositions is inappropriate. It is not knowledge, but practical engagement with others that anchors us to the world of others. This is where both the sceptic and attempts to engage with the sceptic on her own terms go wrong.

There seems to be something profoundly right about the idea that our commitment to the existence of others we encounter or know is not (solely) theoretical, of the kind that is looked for within the framework of the Observation Claim. But it is a further, additional step to say that such practical engagement is extrinsic to, and independent of, knowledge of the existence of those we engage with, in such a way as to make engagement with questions about how we come by such knowledge inappropriate or redundant. This is a key question I return to in the final section of the paper, where I consider various reasons for resisting this additional step.

5. Communication and Second Person Knowledge

At this point it will help to return to the Observation Claim. The third person perspective is variously characterised as objective, theoretical, detached, scientific. These notions are not necessarily synonymous, and the connections among them are interesting, but relative to our immediate concerns, the ones that matter are ‘theoretical’ and ‘detached’. Contra the suggestion we have just been looking at, it is possible to claim both that our knowledge of the existence of others is neither purely theoretical nor detached, in that it has a specifically practical and engaged aspect to it; and, at the same time, that the practicality of our engagement with others does not rule out, or replace, propositional knowledge, including knowledge that we are not alone in the universe. Rather, on the view we now turn to examine, the practicality shows up, first of all, in the *content* of the thoughts that express the basis for such knowledge. In particular, it shows up in the singular component in such thoughts, which involves immediate awareness of another’s first person perspective, the other’s ‘I’.

No amount of perception on its own implicates awareness of another first-person perspective, another ‘I’. The situation changes radically, or so I will be suggesting, when we move from perception to communication. The thesis we will be examining says that in accounting for the nature of our awareness of others when communicating we find both awareness of others as other ‘I’s’, and practical engagement with them. That is the claim I will be unpacking for the remainder of this paper, and it can be introduced via the following claim, which should be taken as a proposed replacement for the Observation Claim.

The Second Person Communication Claim (SPCC).

a. Our grip on the idea that other possessors of a first-person perspective exist is rooted in our capacity to enter into particular kinds of communicative exchanges with others, in which we stand in relations of mutual address and think of each other as ‘you’.
b. The source of our knowledge that other possessors of a first-person perspective exist lies in the exercise of these capacities in such communicative exchanges.
c. Thinking of another as ‘you’ is ethically laden, it is of potential moral significance.

The first clause concerns our understanding, our grip on the very idea that other I’s exist. Call this the Conceptual Claim. The second concerns knowledge. Call this the Knowledge Claim. The final clause takes up the idea that there is a distinctively practical dimension to our engagement with others. I return to this only in the last section. Here I focus on the Conceptual and Knowledge claims, in that order.

The Conceptual Claim

Much has been written in recent years about second person thought as expressive of a distinctive way of thinking of others. For my purposes, I will be drawing on three things Buber says in *I and Thou*. Before that, though, a serious caveat is in order. For Buber, the I-thou relation is essentially moral or ethical; and it holds between people, but also between people and God. In fact, the latter was arguably his main concern, but it will not figure at all in what follows. I will return to some of the ethical dimension of I-thou relations between people in the next section. Here I will focus on the implications of his characterisation for claims in the philosophy of mind and epistemology. These are not explicit interests that Buber has, but for what it's worth, I think his claims must have such implications if they are to have the force he intends them to have in ethics.

The Communicative Relation Claim

> 'I "experience" the it. I bring back from the encounter with things "some knowledge of their condition." I experience "what there is to things…But my relation to the You is different than this…The basic word I-You establishes the world of Relation. Whoever says You does not have something as his object…he stands in a relation.' (Buber 1996, 55–56)[3]

The Mutual Interdependence Claim

> 'Relation is reciprocity. My you acts on me as I act on it…' (Buber 1996, 67)

The I-You Claim

> 'When one says You, the I of the You is said too.' (Buber 1996, 54)

I take these in turn, beginning with the Communicative Relation Claim. Suppose I see someone looking sad, and think a third personal thought to myself such as 'she is sad'. In so doing I stand in an experiential relation to what Buber calls 'the world observed'. Alternatively, I might look across at her in order, as we say, to catch her eye, to connect, and, perhaps, once connected, either to indicate by raised eyebrow or gesture or verbal question that I want to know how she is feeling. In doing so, I seek to establish a communicative, or dialogical relation with her. When that is the aim of my looking, I am attempting to stand in a relation of mutual address with my friend, and, thereby, an awareness of her as 'you'. The expression of such thinking makes manifest, in one way or another, my willingness to communicate, an openness to further exchange. I aim, that is, to 'establish the world of relation' with her, in Buber's terms.

I have so far spoken only of attempts and aims. The second Mutual Interdependence Claim concerns the success conditions for 'you' awareness. Such awareness is, as Buber puts it, reciprocal, or mutual. I may look across in order to catch her eye, but fail to do so, say because she is looking elsewhere or because her mind is elsewhere though she is in fact looking at me. I am only aware of her as 'you' when she reciprocates -- 'you' thinking is a kind of thinking about a person you can only engage in when that person thinks about you in the same way, as 'you'. It exhibits a property I am calling 'mutual interdependence'.[4]

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[3] The page references are to the 1996 version of Kaufmann's 1970 translation. The original (subsequently much corrected) German version appeared in 1923.

[4] Buber's distinction is close to a distinction made by the sociologist Georg Simmel between two ways of acquiring knowledge of others. The first employs 'simple sight and observation'. In the second, '*[b]*y *the same act in which the observer seeks to know the observed, he surrenders himself to be understood by the observer*. …. What occurs in this direct mutual glance represents the most perfect reciprocity in the entire field of 'human relationships'' (Simmel 1969, 256).

One set of issues here is structurally analogous to those that arise in debates between bifurcationary and non-bifurcationary approaches to perceptual experience and experience-based thoughts. The bifurcationist says that when giving an account of, say, demonstrative thought, how things are for the subject from her perspective can and should be explained wholly independently of whether there is an object out there that she is perceiving. The existence of the object is relevant only to wholly independent questions about reference, where reference is to be explained separately, by appeal to purely causal, 'external' relations between the experience and the world. The anti-bifurcationist denies this -- reference to the world is essential for 'delineating the contours of subjectivity' in veridical perceptual experience and experience-based thought.

Returning now to the Mutual Interdependence Claim: it says that A can only be aware of B as 'you' when B reciprocates and thinks of A as 'you'. You-thinking is a kind of thinking about a person I can only engage in when that person thinks about me in the same way. It exhibits the property I am calling 'mutual interdependence'. To adopt this claim is to say that just as I may essay in a perception-based demonstrative thought about a person, but fail, say because there is no-one there to be perceived, so I may attempt a second person thought about a person, but fail, because she fails to think of me in the same way as I aim to be thinking of her. There is a kind of world-dependence here, but the world one is depending on is the world of the other thinking about me in the same way as I am of her. That is, there is dependence not only on the existence of the other, but on the way the other thinks of me—a dependence, if you like, on the other's subjectivity incorporating mine. To take this line is to say that success in establishing 'the world of relation' requires that the attitude of address is reciprocated.

Underlying this we find a further important disanalogy with perception. Perceiving something involves standing in a perceptual relation to it, but my standing in this relation is just a means towards the aim of acquiring information about the object perceived. As Buber presents it, in attempting to stand in an I-you relation, achieving the dialogical relation is an end in itself, not just a means to information acquisition (I return to the significance of this later on).

The final claim, which I label the I-You Claim, is expressed in the passage quoted in the claim that 'When one says you, the I of the... I-You is said, too.' Perhaps the best way of filling out this idea is to be found in Emile Benveniste's following passage.[5]

> I use I only when I am speaking to someone who will be a you in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally I become *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as I. Here we see a principle whose consequences are to spread out in all directions. Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as I in his discourse. Because of this, I posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, completely exterior to "me," becomes my echo to whom I say *you* and who says *you* to me. This polarity of persons is the fundamental condition in language, of which the process of communication, in which we share, is only a mere pragmatic consequence. [...] Neither of the terms can be conceived of without the other; they are complementary […] and, at the same time, they are reversible. (Benveniste 1971, 224–25).

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[5] I am indebted to Moran's *Exchange of Words* (2018) for attention to Benveniste, and to his illuminating discussion of him and related issues in Chapter 6 'The Social Act and its Self-Consciousness'.

There is a great deal going on in this passage, some of which I return to later. For the moment, moving from language, and the use of the first-person pronoun, to first person thought, the three ideas I want to extract are the following. First, 'I' thinking in the context of conversation is essentially relational—I-in-relation-to-you. Second, a condition on thinking such a thought is that one grasp its bi-directionality, that I am, at the same time, a You to the other's I. To say such thinking is essentially relational and bi-directional, when coupled with the Mutual Interdependence Claim, is to deny that we can sever the other's existence from a characterisation of what is going on in each of the 'you' thinkers' minds. The third idea is that in thinking such thoughts I necessarily take the other to be an I-thinker. Thinking of someone as 'you' involves thinking of her as both addressor and addressee, where to do so is to treat her as a thinker of I thoughts.

Each of Buber's three claims, the Communicative Relation Claim, the Mutual Interdependence Claim and the I-You Claim, requires much defence and elaboration. But I will take it that they express the minimum needed for beginning to unpack and make good the conceptual clause of the SPCC which says, recall, that *our grip on the idea that other subjects exist is rooted in our capacity to enter into particular kinds of communicative relations with others, in which we stand in relations of mutual address and think of each other as 'you'*.

Two clarificatory sets of points are in order before we proceed. The first set concerns the 'I' in the I-You Claim. The 'I' here is the 'I-as-subject'; and the I-you claims, as I read them, concern I-as-expressive-of-the-first-person-point-of-view, and, relatedly, it is another's I-as-subject that is being responded to when one thinks of the other as 'you'. There is, of course, much to be said about what goes into having a first-person perspective and treating another as the possessor of one, some of which we will return to, but I take it that it is I-as-subject that Buber had in mind, as indeed did Fichte in his much earlier 'No thou, no I; No I, no thou'. And this is how I shall be reading the SPCC. Secondly, the I-You Claim is naturally read as referring to a self-conscious perspective, and this is probably how Buber intended it. In contrast, the SPCC, as I read it, is intended to range over the kind of perspective involved in developmentally early so-called 'proto-conversations', from the age of three months on, on the one hand, and fully self-conscious manifestations of a first-person perspective in mature dialogue, on the other. Here too, there is much to be said on what is involved in the progression from the first to the second, but the SPCC can be stated independently of such an account. Finally, to say that the I-You Claim is concerned with I-as-subject is not to say, of course, that there is no more to be said about the way in which third person thought about oneself and others 'as objects' is related to such I-you thinking, and about how all of these are related to reference and use of the first-person pronoun. In particular, to endorse the SPCC is not to say that third person knowledge, in some sense, of both ourselves and others is not also essential for full blown self-knowledge, and indeed for treating others, and oneself, as persons. The claim is, rather, that the second person engagement is essential for so much as making others' 'I-as-subject' available to me: it is in this sense the hinge on which thought of others as possessors of a first-person perspective turns.[6]

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[6] For more on this see (Eilan 2024).

The second clarificatory point takes us back to the notion of an 'origin' of an idea. So far, I have said nothing about empathy. Here it is important to distinguish between appeals to empathy in answer to the question of how we know *what* others are thinking, feeling etc, on the one hand, and in response to questions how we know *that* others exist, on the other. Our concern in this paper is exclusively with the latter question. As it is often introduced in this context, empathy is described as the capacity the addition of which to perception suffices for giving us the idea of another perspective. A central problem with such appeals to empathy, though, is the recurring oscillation we find between, on the one hand, accounts of empathy in this role that in some way involve imagination, or a putting of oneself in the other's shoes; and, on the other, the postulation of empathy as a kind of primitive experiential capacity which, by definition, presents another's centre of consciousness or first-person perspective, as such. The trouble with appeals to the first understanding of empathy, in this context, is that the other's first-person perspective either gets swallowed up in the empathizer's own, or its separateness is presupposed. The problem with the second is that the postulation of a brute capacity to empathetically experience others' perspectives, as such, is question-begging unless we have an account of what this consists in.

The SPCC should be seen as a corrective to the oscillation between these two options. With respect to the second: standing in relations of mutual address, according to the SPCC, is the most basic manifestation of the exercise of the kind of empathy that is the origin, in our sense, of the idea of another perspective. An articulation of what it is to adopt such an attitude, as spelled out in the clauses of the SPCC, is, at the same time, an articulation of what it is to exercise the kind of basic empathy that is the origin of our sensitivity to the existence of other first-person perspectives.

With respect to the first option: one key difference between this way of appealing to empathy and most others is that the most basic exercise of empathy is essentially mutual. My own perspective in such contexts doesn't swallow up the other's because its deployment, in these contexts, is partially dependent on the other's 'you-awareness' of mine; it doesn't get swallowed up by the other's, because the deployment of the other's first-person perspective, in these contexts, is partially dependent on my 'you-awareness' of it.

The Knowledge Claim

If the claims we have been considering are right, it follows that when someone in the course of conversation with me says: 'I'm sad', the immediate knowledge I acquire has the content: 'You are sad'. Given that to be aware of someone as 'you' is to be aware of that person as a possessor of a first-person perspective, then, on the face of it, the knowledge I acquire and express is at the same time knowledge that I am not alone in the universe. In the next section I return to the objection that our engagement with others is essentially practical, rather than a matter of propositional knowledge. But here I focus on distinctive features of the knowledge we *prima facie* acquire and possess in second person contexts, which sets it apart from the kind of knowledge we can gain by observation.

In the context of I-you exchanges, my knowledge that another person exists is essentially bound up with the other's knowledge that I exist, when such knowledge is based on our standing in I-you communicative relations. Knowing of another's existence here comes together with being known to exist. The knowledge is mutual. This is in contrast to knowledge I may express on the basis of perceptual encounter, a kind of knowledge that is uni-directional. The importance, and indeed much of the promissory interest, of this feature emerges when we think of how it might be used to combat the Cartesian starting point in accounting for self-consciousness and self-knowledge. The minimal interpretation says that there are contexts in which I-thinking is interdependent with another's I-thinking. Correlatively, knowledge that I exist does not, in this context, have conceptual or epistemic priority either over the other's knowledge that I exist, or my knowledge that another does. For this to have its full anti-Cartesian impact, we would need arguments, for which there is not the space here, that show that this context has conceptual and epistemic priority over contexts in which one thinks first-person thoughts, and expresses self-knowledge, in solitary, non-dialogical contexts. Establishing the interdependence in the context of I-you exchanges is one, first step in such an argument.

6. Our Friends and Family

On the SPCC, the most basic manifestation of mutual I-as-subject awareness is the mutual treatment of each other as addressees and addressors. But what is it to treat someone as addressor and addressee? As Buber himself developed this idea, fully registering the other's first-person perspective, her 'I', when I am aware of her as 'you', requires adopting an attitude of 'confirmation' towards her. There is much that goes into this notion, but it bears a family resemblance to Cavell's appeal to 'acknowledgement' and it is on a *kind of continuum* with others', including Fichte and Hegel's, appeal to 'recognition', which brings in mutual recognition of, and respect for, the other's autonomy, freedom and so forth.

If we treat I-you thinking in this way, then ethics is internal to the very heart of our capacity for self-consciousness and awareness of other points of view. But some care is needed here with respect to the concepts we bring to bear in fleshing this out. Family resemblance is not identity. There is a distinction in kind, or, rather, in emphasis, between, on the one hand, appeals to recognition and grasp of the concept of a person, when applied to fully self-conscious speech acts, of the kind we find for example in Benveniste; and, on the other, what Buber and others mean by 'confirmation'. The concepts that are appealed to in filling out the latter are those of emotional openness and connection, compassion, care and so forth. Concepts that are appealed to in spelling out recognition are those of rights, demands, claims, the full-blown concept of a person and so forth. The distinction between these two is sometimes discussed under the headings of the distinction between the ethics of care, on the one hand, and justice, on the other. My own view is that we need both families of concepts in doing full justice to the sense in which fully self-conscious I-you awareness is essentially ethically laden. For current purposes, though, registering the existence of both will have to suffice in indicating what needs to be developed and expanded upon in explaining the ethical ladenness of I-you awareness.

Suppose we endorse some version of the ethical ladenness claim. It is here we reach perhaps the source of the deepest resistance to the idea that knowledge that others exist can be based on I-you exchanges. The thought might be: other 'I's are not just encountered, or happened upon, in the course of seeking knowledge of the world. One is not merely in the business of acquiring knowledge about the world when one treats someone as an addressee. There is an additional adoption of an ethical stance, and one's treatment of another as an addressee resides there, in this independent addition. (This may well have been Buber's own position.)

However, to say we are not just in the business of acquiring knowledge when we think of someone as 'you' does not of itself deliver the claim that when one thinks in this way, with the ethical weighting such thinking entails, one is not, at the same time, expressing knowledge both of another person's existence and of the state they are in. On the account I've been sketching, we can and should treat the adoption of the ethical stance as internal to a way of thinking that is expressive, directly, of knowledge. Its knowledge-yielding status is due in part to the Mutual Interdependence Claim. Whether I succeed in addressing someone, thereby treating them as a person, depends on their response to me—there is a deep dependence on others here. Unless my call, so to speak, is responded to, my intentions cannot be fulfilled. It is not just up to me. I must be responsive to the world of others, in address no less than I am responsive to the material world when I acquire knowledge about it by perceiving it.

To say all of this is not, of course, to say that such reciprocal thinking is the only source of moral engagement with others. It pertains specifically to the origin of our treatment of others as possessors of a first-person perspective, and, hence, persons; such treatment is not the only reason for adopting a moral attitude towards another living being; treating them as fellow animals can provide such reasons as well. Nor is it to say that whenever I think of someone as a person I must be addressing them and they addressing me. It is, rather, a claim about the root of our understanding of others in general as persons. And, finally, to say that it lies at the heart of our treatment of others as persons does not, of course, exclude treating other human beings as persons even in cases when, for a variety of reasons, they are not capable of reciprocating.

An objection of a different kind to the link I have gestured at between moral engagement and communicative 'you' thinking, from the opposite direction, might come from the observation that the notion of address, as it is relevant to communication, can hardly bear the moral weight being given it. The claim might be that the kind of communication we engage in with our everyday exchanges with people should, rather, be modelled on a notion of communication that applies equally to the sense in which we communicate with our computers when, for example, we ask Google questions and get answers. And such communication is wholly devoid of any moral valence.

There are indeed notions of communication on which communication is conceived of solely as the transfer of information, and for which the notion of address is purely technical, carrying no moral significance at all. But such notions would, arguably, deliver no more than inferential knowledge of the possible existence of interlocutors,[7] and, most importantly, nothing about the existence of other first-person perspectives. The suggestion has been that if communication is the source of such knowledge, the notion I've been sketching is the one we should be looking at. But more needs to be said about why this is so and about the rationale for adopting it in the first place. What provides this, I suggest, at least in part, is the role it plays in enabling our knowledge of particular people and in exchanges with people we know, in short, our interactions with our friends and relations. It is the potential embedding in such knowledge of people that does it, and it is here we come back to the Friends and Family Challenge.

Russell, as we saw, maintained that our belief in the existence of others is much stronger that our belief in the existence of physical objects. His particular example, of getting cross with his wife, may not be the kind of episode that makes one think that the state of Egoism would necessarily be forlorn, but it is nonetheless an example of the kind of relation that Reid had in mind in formulating his friends and family objection. There is a depth and strength to these relations and to the kind of knowledge of existence they provide that makes the very idea of solipsism seem particularly ludicrous. The challenge, as we formulated it, the force of which is set aside and not really recognised by Russell and Broad, was to find a way to incorporate these emotionally-laden interactions into an account of our knowledge of the existence of others. The account sketched of second person communication begins to go some of the way, at least in showing how awareness of other I's is so much as possible, but does not yet, as so far developed, explain the emotional depth and formative framing role such relations have in our knowledge that we are not alone in the universe. I-you communications achieve this depth, I suggest, at least partly in virtue of the role they play in explaining what it is to know a person.

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[7] For an example of such an account see Burge (2013).

7. Knowing Other People

Discussions of our knowledge of other minds tend to focus on particular pieces of propositional knowledge, knowing that someone is in pain or angry and so forth. As noted at the outset, questions about what it is to know another person tend not to figure in such discussions, as indeed, so far, they have not figured in ours. The final suggestion I want to make is that they should. In particular they should take centre stage when explaining how we know we are not alone in the universe. I end with a quick sketch of the kinds of claims I think need developing on this front.

In an unjustly, in my view, under-discussed paper on 'Person Perception and our Understanding of Others' David Hamlyn (1974) argues that a proper account of the link between knowledge and understanding in the mental domain should take the question of what it is to know someone as its point of departure. He makes two general suggestions that are of particular interest relative to our concerns.

(1) Our account of what it is to understand mental concepts should focus, initially, on the way they are used to express our knowledge and understanding of particular persons.

(2) By thus linking questions about understanding to questions about what it is to know a person we can begin to counter the view that our understanding of mental concepts can be captured by appeal to their use in the kinds of explanations of human behaviour we find in the sciences.

There are two additional claims Hamlyn argues for in developing these suggestions that I want to just help myself to. The first, general one states that it is a 'necessary condition of being said to know X that we should actually stand to X in relations which are appropriate to the kind of thing that X is' (1974, 221). He also holds that the appropriateness must be registered by the knower, which in turn requires that one grasp the concept of the kind of thing it is. So, in the case of persons, to know a person one must grasp the concept of a person.

Knowing a person requires understanding the concept of a person, or, as Hamlyn puts it developmentally, the gradual acquisition of mental concepts comes together with the gradual acquisition of the concept of person. To insist on the link with the concept of a person is, at the very least, to introduce the potential relevance of a range of morally significant concepts.

Now, questions about what it is to know a person are rich, fascinating, and arguably not answerable by appeal to necessary and sufficient condition analysis. Can one know someone just by observing them intently? Can a biographer know a person better than her friends and relations ever did? Can an emotion-free psychopath know people, and indeed be known? What role does knowledge of character play in an account of such knowledge? Can a friend, or a psychotherapist, know a person better than she knows herself? And so forth. What I take to be important in the Hamlyn claims so far listed just is the link between all such questions about what it is to know a person, on the one hand, and questions about what it is to understand the concepts that we use in describing the mental lives of others, and, therefore, to understand claims that express propositional knowledge about them, on the other.

Hamlyn does, however, make three additional specific substantive claims that I think capture essential ingredients in paradigmatic cases of knowing people. They are debatable, of course, but introducing them briefly here will give an indication of the kind of framework I think needs developing in order to begin to address the Friends and Family Challenge.

According to Hamlyn, then, the relations that underpin knowledge of persons:

(1) must be potentially reciprocal; (2) must involve some degree of emotional involvement with the other, or, as he puts it 'personal feelings' towards the other, and (3) the relational emotions are potentially morally relevant.

Bracketing, for the moment, his reciprocity claim, the second two claims about knowledge of persons say that our knowledge of persons is 'thick', inextricably bound up with emotions of potential moral significance. If this is true about our knowledge of people, such knowledge takes place against a background epistēmē or understanding that is radically different from the detached, purely theoretical epistēmē which informs the Observation Claim. Rather, it is the kind of understanding that informs what Strawson, in 'Freedom and Resentment' (1962), calls our 'participatory attitudes'. The distinction Strawson is interested in in that paper is that between 'the objective attitude' we may adopt as policy makers, say, or in the social sciences, and the attitude we take to persons in virtue of our 'inter-personal human relationships' with them (1962, 194). Our participatory attitudes are founded on such relations, and include attitudes such as 'resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be said to feel reciprocally, for each other' (ibid.). Although he doesn't put it quite in these terms, we may read Hamlyn's proposal as claiming that it is to these relations and these reactive attitudes, rather than observation, that we should look in explaining our primary or initial grasp of the concepts of a person, and, hence, the understanding into which our grasp of mental concepts and their use in expressing propositional knowledge slots.

For this proposal to take hold, though, what is required is an alternative to the Observation Claim's appeal to third person observation. This is where we must come back to Hamlyn's reciprocity requirement, about which he says not very much, and it is here that the SPCC should be seen as slotting in. More precisely: the SPCC fills in, and makes sense of, the reciprocity requirement, by replacing observation with second person communication. What gives our knowledge of people its reciprocal nature is the role played by communication in enabling our mutual knowledge of each other. In turn, I suggest, such second person communications get their potential ethical depth, in part, through their role in sustaining our ethically-laden, participatory relations with each other. [8]

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[8] For excellent development of the idea that our knowledge of other people rests on second person relations, very much in keeping with the account sketched here, see Lauer (2014).

The bearings of all of this, even as summarily sketched, on the Friends and Family Challenge should be clear. The challenge was to show how we know we are not alone in the universe, in a way that does justice to the deep role played by our friends and relations in anchoring such knowledge. The suggestion has been, first, that the capacity for standing in I-you relations of mutual address is necessary for knowledge that other I's exist; and, second, that it is the role of such exchanges in enabling knowledge of other people that gives this knowledge of other 'I's existence its emotional and moral depth. More strongly, it is in virtue of its role in enabling knowledge of other people that the SPCC has its constitutive role in providing for knowledge of the existence of other first-person perspectives. Our relations with 'brother, father and friend', as Reid put it, far from being something to set aside, should, if what I've been suggesting is on the right tracks, be accorded a central role in explaining how I know I am not 'left alone, as the only creature of God in the universe, in that forloon state of Egoism'.

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