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## BOOK SYMPOSIUM COMMENTARY

### Intersubjective exchanges

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Richard Moran's "social-relational" account of illocutionary acts such as telling takes off from, and develops, a particularly powerful version of Reid's notion of "social acts of mind". On his version, the other's contribution, or uptake, is essential to making such acts the acts of *mind* they are. The questions I pursue are the following. (1) What does this social dependence amount to in Moran's account? What does it take, on his account, for another's contribution to be essential to the existence and nature of the *mental* aspects of a speaker's illocutionary act? Much turns here, I will be suggesting, on how we should understand the role he gives address and the second person in explaining the nature of illocutionary acts. (2) What are implications of putting centre stage Moran's account of such acts for the general story we should tell about the nature of our thought and knowledge of both others and ourselves. To explore this, I lay out progressively radical readings of such implications, and raise questions about which of these Moran would be happy to endorse.

**Keywords:** Moran; illocutionary acts; address; second person awareness; self-consciousness; other minds

#### I.

The Preface to the *Exchange of Words* introduces its topic thus:

This book is an exploration of "what is distinctive about the forms of human intersubjectivity that are exemplified in acts of speech, primarily the act of one person *addressing* another, and aims to give a philosophical account of the relations between various dimensions of this basic human phenomenon". (Moran 2018, ix, Moran's emphasis; unattributed references henceforth are to Moran's book)

At the heart of the story lies Moran's "social relational" account of illocutionary acts such as telling, which takes off from, and develops, a particularly powerful version of Reid's notion of "social acts of mind".

As Moran notes, telling is "[f]rom a philosophical perspective a phenomenon with multiple aspects, whose relations to each other remain relatively unexplored". It is a phenomenon of language, epistemology, moral psychology, and a phenomenon in the philosophy of mind, not least, "a form of intersubjectivity whose philosophical description poses a special challenge to traditional models for thinking about the nature of understanding another person and the 'problem of other minds'" (x).

One of the many strengths of the book is that it brings into view and illuminates connections that are too often obscured in the contemporary, largely compartmentalized

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approach to these different areas in philosophy. The connections I will trace normally come under the “philosophy of mind” heading. They chiefly concern the implications of Moran’s social-relational account of communication for the account we should give of our awareness, knowledge and understanding of ourselves and others. Putting his account of communication centre stage, I will be suggesting, can provide an important and quite radical reorientation of the way we approach central questions in this area. Much of what follows turns on asking how radical Moran intends these implications to be.

The Preface ends with a brief comparison with *Authority and Estrangement*. In the latter, the distinctiveness of the first-person perspective was set out in distinction from a third person, observational and theoretical perspective. In this book, however, he writes:

the relevant other person is not an observer but a participant in the conversation, and the speaker’s understanding of her own role must incorporate the perspective of the interlocutor, as the two people in dialogue alternate between the role of speaker and audience in the course of the conversation. The act of making a claim or a promise is an exercise of self-consciousness by the speaker, an act whose reality depends on the speaker knowing in a first-person manner how she means her utterance to count for the other person. But this self-understanding of the nature of her act must be shared by her interlocutor if her act is to amount to anything. Speech, and in particular the act of claiming something as true, is in a way emblematic of something that is in one sense an act of self-assertion, and also, in its solicitation of the recognition of an audience and participation in the wider public institution of language, an acknowledgement of dependence. Hence in the story presented here I am just as concerned to emphasize the forms of relation and types of act that are reserved for our relations with *other* people, and which are not possible, or are not the same possibilities, with respect to oneself. (xii)

The issues I want to explore all turn, in one way or another, on how we should understand the significance of this shift in the perspective relative to which the first-person perspective is delineated, from third to second. To do so, in section **II**, I examine the role played by Moran’s appeal to “address” and the second person in explaining the sense in which social acts of mind depend essentially on others’ contributions. In section **III**, I consider possible implications of his account for the story we should tell about our understanding, awareness and thought of others, and ourselves – setting out progressively radical senses in which mental aspects of social acts might be said to depend on others’ contributions.

## II.

Moran’s first chapter begins with a famous quote from Reid, in which he introduces the idea of social acts of mind.

I call those operations social, which necessarily imply social intercourse with some other intelligent being who bears a part in them ... [T]hese social acts of mind ... can have no existence without the intervention of some other intelligent being, who acts a part in them ... They cannot exist without being expressed by words or signs, and known to the other party. [My emphasis] (Reid 1788/2010, V.vi: 664a)

Commenting on this notion of social acts, Moran says that it is much more revisionary of dominant accounts of the mind than is sometimes realized. No one will doubt, he says, that there are social acts that require two or more people for their completion, but

the so-called ‘social acts of mind’, it may be thought, must always be de-composed into a properly ‘mental’ part, followed by the various possible ways a person may either act upon or give

expression to this properly mental state of his and gain the understanding and cooperation of another person. (4)

This is the decomposition that he rejects, in his own and Reid's name. His account of illocutionary acts as social acts of mind, challenges, that is, the view on which the mental aspects of our communicative acts, exist and are specifiable (a) independently of their external expression, and (b) independently of the other's contribution. My main focus in what follows will be on (b). The question I want to pursue is: what does this social dependence amount to in Moran's account? What does it take, on his account, for another's contribution to be essential to the existence and nature of the *mental* aspects of a speaker's illocutionary act, to what makes it the *mental* act it is?

To begin, it will help to have as background prevalent interpretations of Austin's remark to the effect that a mark of illocutionary acts, such as telling, is that their performance "involves the securing of uptake." (Austin 1962, 116–117, his emphasis) – where it is this uptake condition that makes them essentially communicative. As this is usually understood, uptake is explained by appeal to the concept of "recognition" – crudely, on one version, one's act is taken up in the required way when it is either recognizable or recognized by the other. Correlatively, appeal, of one kind or another, to recognition would be one way to cash Reid's notion of completion of one's act of mind by another.

In fact, quite how this should work has been subject to much debate, and is tricky. Different versions are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 in particular. Guy Longworth provides a useful map of the options presented in debates in this area (Longworth 2019). These turn, for example, on whether one demands *de facto* recognition of the act by the hearer, or mere recognizability by others of the act produced by the speaker; whether recognition is deemed necessary or sufficient, and if necessary, necessary for the performance of the act or for fully successful performance, and more. That said, *all* of these developments of uptake by appeal to the concept of recognition give an account on which the acts performed are, in *some* sense, dependent on others' recognition, so some sense in which the satisfaction of the conditions for the successful performances of the illocutionary act turn on others' contribution.

Grice summarizes his account of non-natural meaning thus: "Shortly, perhaps, we may say that '*A* meant<sub>NN</sub> something by *x*' is roughly equivalent to '*A* uttered *x* with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention.'" (Grice 1957, 219.) It is such appeals to recognition, in part, that lead naturally to reading this as an account of telling as well. Moran too gives the solicitation of recognition a critical role in his account of illocutionary acts. But one of his several critiques of Grice is that his account fails to do justice to the deep social dependence of the mental aspects of the communicative act on the audience's uptake or recognition. Our question is: what is it in his own account that, in contrast to Grice's, secures this?

A striking feature in many Grice-inspired accounts of illocutionary acts such as telling, but many others critical of Grice for various reasons as well, is that, for all they say on this matter, *address* is not treated as constitutive of, or internal to, the execution of a communicative act of telling – by either speaker or hearer. It is, at most, a background, independent activity one might engage in, a verbal or non-verbal "hey you" the speaker might produce, for example, in order to attract attention, prior to performing an illocutionary act.

Now in the quote I began with, Moran emphasizes the concept of "address"; and throughout the book, address is treated as constitutive of the kinds of social-relational acts he

has in mind. If I have understood it, it also plays a key role in explaining the sense in which the mental aspects of our illocutionary acts depend on others. Before turning to the

nature of this dependence, though, let us begin with the question of how in general we should think of address, if not as a mere pragmatic and inessential accompaniment to the act of telling?

It can help, here, to switch attention to the audience. In most discussions of the kind of recognition involved in uptake there is, to my knowledge, no explicit requirement that the hearer make known to the speaker that the illocutionary act has been registered, let alone recognised for what it is. Thus, for all that is usually said, for Sam to have successfully told Sally that he is sad, it may suffice that Sally recognise the act of telling, to herself, and think, to herself, “He’s sad” without in any way *acknowledging to Sam*, that his illocutionary act of telling has been recognised, by her, or is even recognisable. Sam may be left wondering, and have to rely on observation and inference in reaching conclusions on this front.

When we think of what is less than ideal in the exchange just described, in particular, the absence of acknowledgement from Sally to Sam, the notion of address that comes to the fore is one on which “address” qualifies an attitude internal to the basic activity of communicating, rather than being a description of an extrinsic, additional activity. When we think of it in this way, to make this attitude manifest, is, at the very least, to make manifest to one’s interlocutor a readiness to communicate further, an openness to further exchange. Sally doesn’t do this. More specifically, she doesn’t make manifest to Sam the attitude we may assume Sam was attempting to adopt towards her in saying what he said. To take this line on telling is to say that a minimal condition on the uptake required for telling to be so much as in the offing, is that the hearer manifest towards the speaker an attitude of address, in the sense of an openness to further communication. In the absence of this, the speaker may have conveyed information, got the message across and so forth, but failed in his attempt to tell.

There is a great deal more, of course, to the notion of address that Moran is interested in, and I return to this in the next section. And I’m not sure whether he would accept this as an initial, minimal characterization. But one thing it might be useful for is this. In setting out his own social-relational account he picks up on, and develops, Tugendhat’s complaint against the one-sidedness of the Gricean story, arguing, in contrast, that assertion essentially invites a “yes” or “no” from the interlocutor. Assertion is in this sense essentially embedded in a conversation, even if the audience doesn’t in fact say anything. Now, on the story we have told, Sally does not, in fact, produce what Tugendhat calls “a counter utterance”. But what is it about the story as told that makes it the case that the *possibility* of Sally producing one is not built into the description so far of what it is that Sam does; what is it about the story that fails to ensure this possibility? Moran suggests the following answer:

The illocutionary knowledge and understanding must be actually held in common such that the speaker’s knowledge is the condition of the interlocutor’s knowledge *and vice versa*. It is this structure that makes possible the sort of “counter-utterance” Tugendhat is referring to, so that the content that is affirmed by the speaker and denied by the interlocutor is a matter of common but opposed “position takings” by them, and not only a complex content entertained singly by each of them. (167, my emphasis)

This sounds exactly right, but, again, the question remains: what is it that makes it the case that our description of the Sam and Sally “exchange” does not have this structure, why is it that on the story told they do not share knowledge? After all, there is *a* sense in which they both know the same thing, that Sam’s sad, and there *a* sense in which Sally knows what she knows because Sam does. What is lacking here is Sally’s knowledge being a condition

for Sam's, the *vice versa*. I suggest that one critical role for the minimal notion of address just sketched, lies here: it can provide something like the ground for the possibility both of the *vice versa*, and the possibility of a "yes" or "no". They come into potential play, and are made possible, when we adopt attitudes of mutual address and make mutually manifest, e.g. by eyes locking, smiles and so forth, that channels of communication are open. In so doing, we establish a kind of communicative connectedness, or relatedness, thereby making possible both the sharing of knowledge, and the possibility of a "yes" and "no". Conversations rather than pronouncements take place within a framework in which readiness to communicate is made mutually manifest, where it is in virtue of this mutual manifestness we stand in a social, dialogical relation to each other.

Let us return, with this in place, finally, to the question of the social dependence of the mental aspect of illocutionary acts. Suppose we adopt this as a starting point, and say that we should think of the paradigm case of telling as one that takes place within the framework of conversation, in which we adopt attitudes of mutual address, making mutually manifest our

readiness to communicate. In what sense does building this in as a condition of successful telling introduce a deeper socialization of the mind, a deeper dependence, than does the appeal to recognition along the lines a Gricean account allows for?

It is here, I think, that we come to Moran's invocation of the second person perspective. To adopt an attitude of address is be aware of someone as "you", and on the account Moran develops of it, drawing on Benveniste (1966/1971), understanding the possibility of a "yes" and "no" is underpinned by an understanding of the reversibility of "I" and "you" in conversation and debate. Moran writes:

In speaking of the incorporation of the point of view of the interlocutor in the speaker's confident declaration that she is hereby warning or promising, the thought is that the first-person character of the illocutionary utterance and the role of self-consciousness in its accomplishment can only be understood in terms of the complementarity of the first- and second-person pronouns, the addressor and the addressee. (156)

In other words, the kind of self-consciousness constitutive of the production of an illocutionary acts is internally linked to an understanding that in thus producing it one is a "you" to the other. Just as they are a "you" to oneself.

Let us return to the Sam and Sally episode and equip Sam with this understanding of the reversibility of roles. This is an understanding he could have in this situation, even though Sally fails to think of him as "you", fails to enter into dialogue. Our questions now are: does he succeed in thinking of Sally as "you"? And does he succeed in engaging in the kind of self-consciousness he would were Sally to respond in kind? It seems to me that Moran's answers to these questions are critical for understanding the nature and depth, as it were, of his social dependence claim.

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. One way to understand Moran's insistence that the other's contribution cannot be hived off from the characterization of the mental act of telling, say, is to read him as insisting, in an analogous way, that in characterizing the second person awareness that is constitutive of illocutionary acts such as telling, we cannot hive off the other's "you" thinking: reference to the other's thinking of me as an addressor and addressee is essential for characterizing how things are for me, from my perspective. This is what it is for the other's contribution to be essential to the mental aspect of the illocutionary act.

In more detail, on this interpretation, beginning with the second person: there is a reading of Buber on "I and thou", on which 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 a property I will call "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 in our story, Sam tries and fails to address Sally, tries and fails to adopt a second-person perspective on her. Success requires that the attitude of address is reciprocated, (just as one may look across at someone in order to establish a communicative relation, to connect, but fail because she fails to respond in kind, say because she is looking elsewhere).

Turning, now, from "you" to "I": if we transfer what Benveniste says about language to thought, there are three ideas we find in the reversibility claim Moran quotes (Benveniste 1966/1971, 224–225). 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. 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.

To say such thinking is essentially relational and bi-directional, when coupled with the idea of mutual interdependence, is to make a radical claim about at least some kinds of self-conscious thinking – to the effect that they too depend on another thinking of me in the same kind of relational way. Self-consciousness itself, in these contexts, depends on the other's contribution.

I am not entirely sure whether Moran would want to go that far; I return to related issues in the next section. He may have gentler ways in mind of securing the social dependence of the mental aspects of speech acts, gentler ways of explaining what it is to incorporate the other's subjectivity. That said, I end this section with a thought about why this strong reading might help with other things Moran says. He writes: "the characterization of the awareness held in common between two people in a situation of dialogue has proven curiously resistant to philosophical explication". (167) One of the main reasons, as he notes, is that when characterizing mutuality there seems to be an inevitable appeal to multiplications of iterations in explaining what it amounts to. The chief problem is not so much the complexity, various technical ways of blocking it have been suggested, but, rather, the alienation from each other that would result if that is the best we can do. As

he says, in his wonderful description of Dorothea and Casaubon in *Middlemarch*, the more they iterate the further they get from each other, the more alienated they become. The mutual interdependence claim in effect does away with the need for iterations by dividing the labour between the two participants. I can share knowledge, on this view, because I can share I-you thoughts, in the strong sense that my thinking would not be as it is, from the inside, unless the other was thinking of me in the same way.

I myself don't really see a different way of blocking the retreat to iterations. Be that as it may, we may ask why it matters that we do effect such a block. The answer lies in Moran's (and Elliot's, of course) description of Dorothea and Casaubon's fate. We think we do better than that, not always but at least sometimes. We think we can achieve the kind of mutuality Georg Simmel has in mind when he distinguishes 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)*

Simmel is talking of the way eyes can lock; but when they do, they do so in virtue of being informed by the same attitudes of address and "you" awareness that inform our speech acts. We need an account of the functioning of "I" and "you" in both verbal and non-verbal communication, that explains how our lookings and speech acts can, in Moran's phrase, "incorporate the other's subjectivity". I have been suggesting, along with Moran, that an understanding of the nature of address is key here; and proposing, perhaps with Moran's agreement, one way of securing it, via adoption of the mutual interdependence claim.

### III.

Standard formulations of the "other minds problem", epistemological and conceptual, take it as given that our knowledge and understanding of others is based on observation and expressed in third person thoughts such as "She is in pain". The third-person perspective, in turn, is variously described as providing us with an objective, and/or detached and/or theoretical and/or scientific perspective on others. These tend to be contrasted with the first-person perspective one has on oneself, described as immersed and so forth.

This picture of our thought and knowledge of others is then used to point to *prima facie* epistemological asymmetries and conceptual gaps between third-person thoughts and knowledge about others, and the kind of first personal thought and knowledge we have of ourselves, expressed in propositions such as "I am in pain". The challenge is to explain how knowledge about others is possible, and how the concepts we use have the same meaning in the first- and third-person case, despite these asymmetries and gaps.

Although communication is the source of much of what we learn about each other, it tends not to be singled out as a distinct source of knowledge and understanding, the assumption being that the same framework applies here too. On such views, when someone tells me that she is sad, say, I learn that she is sad on the basis of the evidence provided by the utterance I hear, where my most immediate thought will have the form: "She is telling me that she is sad" or perhaps more directly "She is sad". On this kind of account, there is nothing the appeal to the third person perspective can't accommodate when we turn to communication-based thought and knowledge.

To take Moran's account of communication seriously is to reject the third person framework, and its formulation of the problem of other minds, at least for the case of



communication. The knowledge and understanding we have of each other through communication involve an essential interdependence between our first-person thought of ourselves and second-person thought of others. Connectedly, and importantly, the thought and knowledge we bring to bear in finding out about each other in these ways is, as Moran emphasizes throughout, practical rather than theoretical, at least in the minimal sense that it is, essentially, exercised in knowledge of how to hold a conversation, to put it very crudely.

But it is also practical in a fuller sense, and here we reach the full force of his treating address as essential to illocutionary acts. To treat someone as an addressor and addressee, as Moran develops the story throughout his book, is to treat them as a *person*, with all the ethical dimensions that the concept carries with it. In particular, in the context of conversation, it involves recognition or acknowledgement of, and respect for, the other's autonomy, freedom and so forth. It locates such knowledge and understanding not in our capacity to theorize objectively, but rather in the capacity to enter into the kind of reciprocal participant relations that Strawson described in "Freedom and Resentment". This does present a truly radical, rich, promising, and much needed, in my view, alternative to the third personal theoretical framing of the problem of other minds (coupled with a potential explanation of what seems so off-key about the formulation of the "problem" as a theoretical one, to be "solved" by appeal to quasi scientific modes of reasoning).

Suppose this is how we should think about our knowledge and understanding of each other through conversation. One question we might ask is whether communication thus treated has explanatory priority in an account of what gives us the idea of other minds, relative to the capacity we undoubtedly have to adopt a third-person perspective on others (and ourselves). Moran does not, I think, address this directly, but there is every reason to think, I suggest, that he may well take this line. One reason is this. Suppose we ask: what gives us the idea of other self-consciousness beings, other "I" thinkers to begin with? The question tends not to figure strongly in analytical writings on other minds, perhaps because of the idea we find in both Strawson and Williams on Descartes, for example, that I can only single myself out as an entity when I take a third person perspective on myself, view myself objectively, "from the outside", as one object among others. This is something reflection on its own is meant to yield, and the idea might be that once I have that, the idea of other self-conscious subjects comes for free. The obvious response to that is that until I am in some sense presented with other "I"s, other instances of self-consciousness I can't begin to make sense of the idea of other subjects. (And if I can't have self-consciousness without the idea of being one among others, then I haven't begun to explain self-consciousness either). The idea of other "I"s is what engaging in conversation gives us by definition, on Moran's account. We don't engage in conversation unless we treat others as other "I"s. With this in mind, we may think that communication, as Moran presents it, should have priority – it is in virtue of our capacity, from early on, to stand in a variety of communicative relations that the very idea of other subjects, other "I" gets off the ground. Third-person thought of ourselves and others, initially at least, comes into being in service of making sense of various aspects of our conversational situation.

There is a similar question to be asked about self-consciousness itself. "No thou, no I; No I, no thou" declares Fichte. (SW 1, 189). Moran endorses something similar in his account of the role that being treated as an addressee plays in securing a singling out of myself as an entity, and thereby a referring role for "I". (165). Here too, though, there is a question of how radical his claim is. Does he mean, as does Fichte, that this is needed for getting I-as *subject* off the ground, where the latter is equated with the I-as -free-agent, and hence as moral agent? Or is it that the other is needed for getting I-as-object

off the ground, as it does for Sartre, where it is the other's gaze that objectifies me? The latter is supposed in some sense to alienate me from my immersed perspective, whereas at least some of the rhetoric that surrounds discussion of I-you relations, there is a sense of connection with myself, as subject, even discovery, that being addressed as "you" in conversation brings with it. I think Moran is closer to this idea, but the question this raises is whether he would go as far as endorsing the view that I-as-subject awareness comes into being, or view, in virtue of our capacity for conversation with others.

I turn, finally, to the most radical possible way of reading Moran's social-relational account of illocutionary acts. In the final chapter of the book, "The Self and Its Society", Moran rejects a deeply entrenched picture on which everything required for explaining dialogue, and social structures more generally, can be modeled in the soul's conversation with itself, as in Plato's analogy of the city and the soul. My final question is whether he'd want to go as far as Stuart Hampshire, for example, in his proposal in *Justice is Conflict*, that we invert Plato's direction of explanation:

Discussions in the inner forum of an individual mind naturally duplicate in form and structure the public adversarial discussions . . . the public situations that I have mentioned give rise to corresponding mental processes which are modeled on the public procedures, as a shadowy movement on a ceiling is modeled on an original physical movement on the floor. (Hampshire 1996, 150)

According to Hampshire, the basic structure of the kind of reasoning we engage in solitary thinking derives from the structure of assertion and counter assertion, argument and so forth that we find in conversation. Similarly, the role of the first-person, first-person authority and so forth in soliloquy, all derive from their role in such public goings on. Here, too it would be good to know whether Moran would want to take things this far. I should say that I suspect, but am not sure here, that this kind of inversion, all too briefly and roughly described, is a step too far for Moran; and that there is a sense for him in which we need a partially, at least, independent characterization of the nature of the solitary first-person perspective to explain the nature of social interactions, and the nature of the interdependence we find in communication.

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