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Reading Others Well and Being Well Read

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READING OTHERS WELL AND BEING WELL READ

by

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ABSTRACT

READING OTHERS WELL AND BEING WELL READ

by

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2017
Under the Supervision of Professor Edward Hinchman

The conceptual problem of other minds is over how we can so much as form thoughts or beliefs about (let alone know) mental lives other than our own. What I call the conceptual problem of other conscious minds restricts this question to others' phenomenally conscious experiences. Past appeals to an individual's inferential, imaginative, or perceptual faculties all more plausibly presuppose than provide a solution to this problem: such faculties allow us to form thoughts about others' experiences only if we already have some prior means of doing so (§§2-5). This is not the case with testimony, which I introduce and defend as the most plausible solution to the conceptual problem of other conscious minds (§§6-7). I then try to introduce an analogous conceptual problem over others' psychological states to see whether testimony too might solve it (§8). Testimony cannot solve what I call the conceptual problem of other cognitive minds—regarding others' psychological dispositions—but this turns out to be something of a pseudo-problem (§9). What I call the conceptual problem of other people—regarding others' commitments and values—is a significant problem of other minds (§10), and one for which testimony again seems to be the best solution (§11).

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What is the problem of other minds? It cannot simply be one example of the general problem over whether we know anything. We may never have sufficient evidence to rule out that the people closest to us are secretly deceiving us about their true feelings or are “zombies” (sophisticated automata, whatever) incapable of feeling at all. But the problem of other minds has traditionally concerned the source, not strength, of our reason for believing we are not alone (cf. Avramides, 2011; Hyslop, 2014; Gomes, forthcoming). I learn of my conscious experiences through memory or introspection (direct acquaintance, inner sense, what-have-you), but I can neither remember nor introspect the experiences of anyone else: any experience I could would have to belong to me. Initially, then, the question is not quite whether or to what extent I can know about others’ conscious lives but *how*.

This cannot simply be an epistemic problem. For memory and introspection are the source of not only my knowledge but also just my understanding of conscious states and what they are like: they are the primary means by which I form thoughts, beliefs, and concepts about my conscious experiences, say, of what it is like to feel heartbroken or “hear” inner monologues. So, before my inability to introspect or remember another’s conscious life leaves any epistemic question of how I *know* about it, it leaves a more basic conceptual question of how I can even *think* of it. How could a thought about your conscious state even occur to me? Call this question of how we can form thoughts or beliefs about (let alone know) conscious experiences of which we are not the subject **the conceptual problem of other conscious minds**. As Wittgenstein (1953/2009, §283) put it, “What gives us *so much as the idea* that beings, things, can feel?”¹

¹ For other (increasingly) conceptual interpretations of the problem of other minds, see Malcolm (1958), Strawson (1958, ch. 2), Kripke (1982, Postscript), McGinn (1984), Peacocke

Past responses to this question have all assumed that each of us must come up with this idea on our own: I must reason, imagine, or see for myself that others can feel. The problem with this, I argue, is that each of these abilities is more plausibly enabled by our already having the idea in question than our most basic means of acquiring it. Since this is not the case with testimony, I say we can get the idea that others feel from them, by their telling us so.

While making that case, I will assume that our “mindreading” ability to form thoughts

(1984; 2012), Nagel (1986, ch. 2), Avramides (2001), Moran (2001, §5.1), Brewer (2002), Pickard (2003), Bilgrami (2006, ch. 1, §2), Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, ch. 9), Smith (2010b), and Gomes (2011).

My presentation of the problem departs from this literature in two respects. First, whereas many of these authors claim to discuss “the conceptual problem of other minds” *simpliciter*, I make their exclusive focus on conscious experiences explicit in the name. Second and more substantively, authors have traditionally presented the conceptual problem of other (conscious) minds as concerning the acquisition or possession conditions of general phenomenal concepts (concepts characterizing conscious experiences), which can be unequivocally applied to others and ourselves. I try to avoid this overly scholastic formulation of the problem as much as possible, since it might bog down an otherwise intuitive issue with irrelevant controversies concerning the nature of concepts generally. Everything I say should survive translation into the more technical jargon. For this to be the case, though, the thoughts or beliefs I form about others’ experiences must be taken *de dicto*.

As word of caution, I will slide back and forth between two different questions involved in any “problem of other minds,” over how we can think/know *what* is on another’s mind and how we can think/know *that* another has a mind at all, respectively. A background assumption in the literature seems to be that the “that” question can only realistically be solved by first answering the “what” question. I suppose a transcendental argument might be given to solve the epistemic “that” question independently of answering either the epistemic or conceptual “what” questions. But no real human first comes to think/know that other minds must exist and only later comes to think/know about what might be on their minds.

about the thoughts (beliefs, desires, intentions) of others is not in question and will be taken for granted.² This assumption seems fair, first, because it is not obviously placed out of bounds by the problem itself when formulated either by other authors or by myself just now. Second, I will eventually argue that the assumption can be not only discharged but, so to speak, repaid with interest. After solving the conceptual problem of other conscious minds, I will show how testimony might not only not succumb to but solve whatever conceptual problem of other minds might arise concerning the thoughts (beliefs, desires, intentions) of others. But for now, I want to press the question: how can we *not* get the idea that beings, things, can feel?

§1 Introspection?

Couldn't this idea have occurred to me merely by introspection? After all, *I* am a being, thing, that can feel. So if I could recognize that, I might generalize that "beings, things, can feel" and later simply suppose that holds of other beings or things.

I could have formed such an idea from my own case only if (a) before I was made aware of others, I could introspectively form thoughts about myself as a conscious subject and (b) before I was made aware of others, I could introspectively form thoughts about my conscious experiences as mine. That is, to get the idea in question I would need to introspect not only a conscious subject and a conscious experience but also the "feeling" or "having" relation holding between. Only then might I get the idea that *this being, thing feels (that)* and infer *this being, thing, can feel*.

² 'Mindreading' is a jokey label adopted by cognitive science for our (perhaps innate) ability to predict others' behavior through belief-, desire-, and intention-ascriptions. See Malle and Hodges, eds., (2005) and Baron-Cohen et al., eds., (2013) for recent work on the topic. Goldman (2013) contains a useful survey.

The problem is that neither (a) nor (b) seem remotely plausible. Even now, already aware that other beings can feel, I do not form the thought when struck, “I now possess a pain (which belongs to me and me alone),” but a thought more like, “(there is) pain *here*,” or, “*that* hurts”: “I distinguish an intensity, a location, etc. in the pain, but not an owner” (Wittgenstein, 1975, §65). Similar claims about other sensory experiences can be made with only greater plausibility if we acknowledge even just the *prima facie* intuitiveness of naïve realism in the philosophy of perception. When I perceive the room around me, what I am thus (naively) aware of is the room itself and, so far as that perceptual experience is concerned, that is it. I do not appear *within* that conscious experience, neither as what is perceived nor as some peripheral, onlooking conscious subject (not conspicuously at least). Whatever my experiences make me (naively) aware of before I am aware of others cannot be myself, not as the subject of such awareness. But neither does my experience appear within or make me (naively) aware of itself, let alone *as my experience*.³

This does not and need not prove that there is no such thing as a conscious subject. The point is more mundane. Introspection makes me aware of *what* I feel (i.e. feelings, moods, experiences). It does not make me aware of the fact *that* I feel. So it does not and cannot by itself give me the idea that *I (this being, thing) can feel*, from which I might extrapolate the conceptual possibility of other subjects.⁴

³ Another metaphor of interiority, provided by Evans (1982, 227), delivers the same result: “the subject... gazes... *at the world*... he does not in any sense gaze at, or concentrate upon, his internal state. His internal state cannot in any sense become an *object* to him. (He is *in* it.)”

⁴ For an excellent, extended discussion on the difficulty of explaining how we know that we are conscious, see Dreteske (2003).

I will pass over the further, I think insurmountable, difficulty that would be involved in extrapolating from a solitary instance an idea of more things just like but not exactly it—that is, the

§2 Inference? Analogy?⁵

So suppose I observe that when this body (what I will call “mine”) behaves or interacts with the environment in certain observable ways, there are certain observable sensations around it. Then, when other similar bodies similarly behave or interact with the environment, I might reason by analogy that there should be similar sensations around them. This prediction is readily testable and evidently false: when others behave in those ways, none of those familiar sensations appear to be around. Of course, there doesn’t *appear to me* to be such sensations around only because the sensations accompanying this body are *mine*, only appearing to me, and the sensations accompanying those bodies are *theirs*, only appearing to them. But this is to say I can only reason by analogy to the possibility of experiences belonging to someone else if I am already entertaining the idea that these things, human bodies, can feel. In other words, I can reason about the experiences of others by analogy in part only because I am somehow already able to think about experiences belonging to someone else, not vice-versa. Although analogical reasoning may be *one* means by which—eventually—I think about (perhaps even come to know) the experiences

difficulty of miraculously forming the perfectly general concept of, say, CONSCIOUS SUBJECT that applies equally to myself and others and yet was based on myself (with all my idiosyncrasies) alone. For if the concept I form of a self must in the first place be based entirely on myself, then it would seem that whenever I redeployed it in a thought that was to be about other minds, I would be only thinking of that, myself.

⁵ For classic examples of the argument by analogy in response to the epistemic problem of other minds, see Russell (1948/2002), Hampshire (1952), Ayer (1946; 1953), and Hyslop (1995). (Ayer (1946, 93) provides the caveat that the argument by analogy, as he uses it, is not intended to solve the conceptual problem, but he does not suggest why.) As Avramides’s (2001) points out, the idea that the “tradition” of the analogical argument dates much farther back is something of a myth: not even Mill relied on such an argument (Thomas, 2001).

of others, it requires that there also be some prior means by which such thoughts occur to me.

Likewise, it will be no help to suggest that we suppose others feel in an effort to predict and explain their bodily behavior, and then infer the truth of this hypothesis from its success. First off, I only need to attribute a belief-desire psychology (or the like)—not a phenomenology—in order to predict and explain another’s behavior. (This, after all, is how epiphenomenalism gets its foot in the door.) So any inference to the best explanation would need to pick a better *explanandum*. But more importantly, to form the supposition that others feel *just is* to form a thought about others’ conscious lives. So this proposal too presupposes (or puts off) rather than provides an explanation for how we can do that, which was our question.

§3 Imagination?

Could I come to think it is possible for an experience to belong to someone else because I imaginatively conceive that possibility?⁶ Here it will be useful to distinguish between what we might call the “mental paint” of an imagining and the “mental caption” we give it.⁷ Suppose I am to imagine your visual experience. The mental paint does not represent whose experience this is: it just displays how a particular scene looks, what it is like to see it. That no more suggests the possibility of an experience belonging to someone else than it does the possibility of me having a visual experience elsewhere. If what I imagine is to be *your* visual experience, this must be due

⁶ Cf. Nagel (1986, ch. 2) and Hyslop (1995, 8-13). To my knowledge, no one has pointed out that this proposal relies on the highly controversial thesis that conceivability is evidence of possibility. When this thesis is used to support the possibility of zombies, it spawns a literature; when it is used to support the possibility of other minds, it becomes the apparently received view.

⁷ These metaphors are intended to map onto the distinction between what is sometimes called the imagination’s phenomenal or sensory content and its stipulated or suppositional content (Kung, 2010; Balcerak Jackson, 2016).

to the mental caption I give it in thought: I must attach to this raw visualization the supposition that it is yours. But if I must give my imagining this caption—that is, think or suppose that this visual experience is yours—in order for it to be an imagining of your experience, then I can imagine another’s experience in part only because I can somehow already think of an experience belonging to someone else, not vice-versa. The imagination too presupposes rather than provides our means of forming thoughts about others’ experiences.⁸

§4 Perception?

Perception is often said to provide the material of the imagination. So if the imagination is not the original source of the idea we are after, perhaps perception is: perhaps I can just see that others have conscious experiences like those that I introspect.⁹

⁸ Peacocke (1984, 102-4; 2012, 154) makes the same argument. However, his own solution to the conceptual problem seems to take too much for granted when it explicitly presumes a prior understanding of ourselves as falling under “[a] range of subjects...as a range of things of the same kind as me, standing in the same kinds of relations to the world” (2012, 163). But that presupposes that rather than explains how I understand that I might just be, in Nagel’s useful terms, “merely one of many examples of mental phenomena contained in the world” (1986, 20).

I have ignored one part of Nagel’s (1986) appeal to the imagination: the key, he says, is to first “think of ourselves as one point of view among others” (20). But this cannot work, for I am not a point of view but a viewer, a subject occupying a point of view. Although I can certainly imagine the possibility of (me) experiencing different points of view, the goal was “to conceive of experiences of which one is not the subject.” And “[w]e cannot make sense of the idea of other minds by construing it in a way which becomes unintelligible when we try to apply it to ourselves,” as he himself says.

⁹ Dretske (1973), Brewer (2002), Pickard (2003), Cassam (2007, ch. 5), Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, ch. 9, esp. 183-187), and Peacocke (2012, §7) defend this possibility. Others appeal to perceptual criteria but in a Wittgensteinian spirit (Malcolm, 1958; Strawson, 1958/2003; Cook,

To improve the chance of success, let us assume that perception can have both conceptual and non-conceptual content. Since I do not know what else it can be, I will further assume that non-conceptual content can be equated with phenomenal content, which in turn can be characterized by what it is like to have the relevant experience. We can then say that two experiences differ in non-conceptual content iff they differ in phenomenal content iff there is a difference in what it is like to have one perceptual experience rather than the other.

This means that if the non-conceptual or phenomenal perceptual content could represent and thereby give me the idea that experiences can belong to someone else, then there should be a difference in what it is like for me to, say, (a) see you as you feel heartbroken and (b) see your zombie twin as it stands physically-identical to your heartbroken self but (lacking consciousness) feels nothing.¹⁰ I take it that there could be no phenomenal contrast between my two visual experiences (of you and your zombie twin), from which it follows that the non-conceptual, phenome-

1969/2006; McDowell, 1982/1998). As these latter approaches try to “deflate” the problem or reject the terms in which it is formulated, it may not be fair to lump them in with more straightforward perceptual solutions. Nevertheless, I think the argument I present here bears on both approaches. See Gomes (2009) and Smith (2010b) for other criticisms of perceptual responses that I endorse but will not rehearse here. Parrot (2017) takes himself to also be criticizing the perceptual model but basically recommends such a model himself. He thinks we automatically infer from perceived expressions to unperceived mental states. But if this automatic inference is arguably “intra-perceptual,” that is just how Gallagher (2008; 2016) and others think “direct perception” works.

¹⁰ Here I am appealing to Siegel’s (2010) “method of phenomenal contrast.” If zombies are out of the question, you could just as well perfectly feign the expressions of heartbreak in (b) instead. Auditory experiences could also be put in place of visual ones, and the choice of feeling heartbroken is arbitrary.

nal content of perceptual experience cannot make me aware of other conscious minds. But suppose someone had the intuition that there could be a difference between the two cases. The burden on this person would be to argue that this supposed phenomenal contrast would not arise in virtue of my (i) background cognition (e.g. thoughts, beliefs, expectations), (ii) background non-sensory experiences (e.g. emotions, moods), or (iii) non-representational phenomenal content (“raw feels”). For if there were a difference in what it is like for me to see your heartbroken and zombie selves and (i)-(iii) could be ruled out as sources of this difference, then it would seem the phenomenal content of my perception might represent and thereby give me the idea that others (you) feel. But I know of no attempt in the literature to argue that this is or could be the case, and I do not expect an attempt to be forthcoming.¹¹

Can it be, then, that the conceptual content of my experience is what gave me the idea that other people have experiences? There are two interrelated problems with this proposal.

Suppose I form a concept on the basis of introspecting, say, the experience of heartbreak. What must the application conditions for this concept then be like? Suppose it has application conditions restricted specifically to what it is like *for me* to feel heartbroken. This could not possibly be the conceptual content carried by my perception of *another's* experience of heartbreak, an experience characterized by what it is like *for them* to feel heartbroken. So alternately suppose that the application conditions of my concept is general, referring only to what it is like to feel

¹¹ For example, I have not found the resources for such an argument in the neo-phenomenological work of Gallagher (2008; 2016), Gallagher and Zahavi (2008, ch. 9), Smith (2010a; 2015), Krueger and Overgaard (2012), McNeill (2012), Gallagher and Varga (2014), and Krueger (2014a; 2014b), although they all claim we can (more or less) “directly” perceive the consciousness of others.

heartbroken and not relativized to any particular subject. This possibility can alternately be described as positing an implausible and unnecessary ambiguity or *ad hoc* extension of the application conditions for the concept that, remember, I am supposed to form on the basis of introspection alone. For the sense in which I notice what it is like to feel heartbroken when I introspect my experience of heartbreak is clearly not the sense in which I might notice what it is like to feel heartbroken when I perceive that you are heartbroken. To insist that my concept—formed on the basis of introspection alone—covers these two cases both begs the present question and begets a new one of why I would ever form a single concept *specifically about a singular conscious feeling* spanning these two experiences, when from my first-person perspective there is no such singular feeling.

So the first problem with appealing to perception's conceptual content is that whatever concept I form of my own experiences on the basis of introspection alone could not have application conditions that would automatically carry over to what I perceive when I perceive another mind. The natural reply would be to suppose our concepts of experiences are not formed merely on the basis of introspection. For example, Gallagher (2008; 2016) is arguably the staunchest advocate of the idea that we can "directly perceive" another's mental state: he explicitly stakes all of perception's work on its conceptual content but also explicitly adopts "an account that links concept acquisition to language acquisition" (2008, 539). The problem with this suggestion is that it seems to make some part of language acquisition (perhaps testimony) rather than perception the ultimate solution to the conceptual problem. We have here a problem familiar from the imagination's dependence on mental captions. If I can perceive another's experience, it is only because I already (somehow) have the conceptual resources or ability to form thoughts about experiences of which I am not the subject, not vice-versa. It becomes more correct to say, not that I

can think you are in pain because I can see so, but that I can see you as in pain because I think of you so. Perception, too, presupposes (or puts off) rather than provides an explanation for how we are able to think of conscious experiences belonging to someone else.

§5 Natural Expressions?

It may be felt that, at this point, I risk overlooking an undeniable fact of human life, to wit that certain mental states have certain characteristic natural expressions, which any person who has lived a day around others has plainly observed and, often, cannot help but notice.

To address this concern, it will help to take stock of our problem. Introspection allows me to form certain concepts—what in hindsight we might distinguish as “phenomenal concepts”—referring to what it is like (for me) to see red, to feel heartbroken, etc. These would presumably be *recognitional* concepts or concepts the possession of which requires or is characteristically indicated by an ability to recognize the concept’s instances: I experience heartbreak for the first time, introspectively notice what it is like (for me) to feel heartbroken, form a concept referring to the quality of that experience, and then reuse this concept later to remember or recognize the feeling when it recurs. That is how I recognize and think about my conscious experiences, but it cannot be how I recognize or think about anyone else’s, which I can neither introspect nor remember.¹²

It may be argued that, though of course not by introspection, there is a way in which we can recognize the experiences of others according to the same phenomenal concepts with which

¹² This talk of phenomenal concepts is dispensable. I base my characterization of them on Chalmers (1996; 2010), Papineau (2002), Alter and Walter, eds. (2006), and Balog (2009). The supposition that phenomenal concepts are recognitional is controversial but rhetorically convenient. Again, the same points can be made using a different framework.

we recognize our own. This strategy might proceed in two steps.¹³ The first is to make the metaphysical claim that conscious experiences are essentially physically embodied. Although one “thing,” pain might still have, so to speak, two sides to it: a phenomenal side (characterized in terms of what it is like for a subject to be in pain) and what might be called (depending on your philosophy of mind) a behavioral, physiological, functional, or—as a neutral placeholder—psychological side. The first claim, then, is that the phenomenal and psychological are two sides or “modes of presentation” of a single, embodied “thing” or state. This is combined with a second claim that we can be said to perceive something although we only ever see some of its parts or sides. I might be said to see a barn, something which has a front and a back, even though I only ever see its facing surface. Just so, although I recognize my experience of pain from its first-person phenomenal mode of presentation, I can see your experience of pain even though I only ever see its third-person psychological mode of presentation, which we come to call its “natural expressions.” In seeing these, I can see your experience of pain—something which has a “hidden,” phenomenal side—just by seeing its embodied, psychological, expressive face. Granted, just as the facing surface of a fake barn façade looks just like the facing surface of a real barn, some bodily expressions misleadingly look just like the natural expressions of pain. But if I see the facing surface of a real barn, I see a barn, and if I see your natural expressions of pain when you are in pain, I see your pain. “Seeing what is so may not be easy, but whatever the difficulties, they don’t seem to be concentrated in the area of other minds” (Dretske, 1973, 44), so we might just as well sweep the problem of other minds under the rug of general skeptical worries.

But we know it does not belong there. Grant that I might in the foregoing sense “see”

¹³ The following is based on Brewer (2002), Pickard (2003), Green (2010), and some of the authors cited in fn. 11.

your pain, which happens to be phenomenally conscious (to you, not me) because I see its embodied expression. For all that, our problem is *conceptual*, and nothing about the above picture suggests anything whatsoever as to why I should so much as think that when I see your embodied “expressions” of heartbreak, I am seeing a mental state the dark side of which, so to speak, is phenomenally conscious. Even if your conscious states were as identical to the psychological states I witness as Superman is to Clark Kent, it would no more follow that I must recognize your psychological state *as* conscious than it does that Lois Lane must recognize Clark Kent *as* Superman. No explanation has been given for how or why I come to recognize your body *as* expressing conscious rather than psychological states. No explanation has been given for why I should even see your “expressions” *as expressions* at all.

This is easier to appreciate if we consider natural expressions from the first-person perspective. We are trying to understand how one conscious mind can be known, understood, or so much as thought of by another. There is a tendency to assume we must approach this only in terms of how I can know, understand, or think of another’s conscious life. But I am just another mind too. If there is a problem of access here, it should equally hold for the other direction. So I might as well ask, “How can another mind know, understand, or think of *my* conscious life?”¹⁴

From this side of the problem, I do not even think of—nor can I sincerely consider adequate—those mere bodily behaviors, considered only as natural happenings over which I would

¹⁴ My thoughts here are greatly indebted to Cavell (1979/1999) and Moran (2012a). Cavell distinguishes between an “active skeptical recital” (over how I can know another) and a “passive skeptical recital” (over I how I can be known by another). I think those titles are misleading, however, since the “passive” problem is really the question of how I can *make myself known* to others.

have no authority to accept as mine, as my expressions. From the first-person perspective, it boggles the mind how a cry (this gross, automatic sound!) or tears (this gross, automatic fluid!) could *express* my feeling of heartbreak (*this!*). Yet with you, supposedly, I need only see your face and with it a whole parallel conscious life lies open before me. (To think that so many have worried that their feelings were not understood, when they need only have fallen under another's line of sight when the lighting conditions were right.)

When we turn the problem of other minds around and consider how we can make others recognize our own experiences (“make ourselves known”), we appreciate the difficulty of whether and how we can see a conscious experience as being expressible at all. If and when we do think of our experiences as having been successfully expressed to another, this success comes not or at least not primarily by natural expressions *considered in themselves*. Rather, for something to be an expression of what is on my mind, I must be able to sign-off on, endorse, or use it *as* my expression.

Or something more or less like that seems to be the case. I suppose that if your natural expressions of pain (a certain look, sound, and behavior) could represent your feeling of pain to me, this could only be either by resemblance, by correlation (like how dark clouds “naturally mean” rain), or by mere interpretation. The feeling of pain *qua* feeling is utterly unlike the look or sound of pain *qua* looks and sounds, so the representation of the former by the latter cannot be by resemblance. Any correlation between the look (sound, behavior) and feeling of pain arguably is not observed to hold even in my own case. I do not see how I look when I feel pain. But even supposing I did, I anyway know from my own case both that I can feel as if I am in pain without behaving so and that I can behave as if I am in pain without feeling (being) so. (We might put this by saying, “Where do we get *so much as the idea* that beings, things, can deceive us as to

how they feel? From our own case, and how.”) Also, we should not forget that whatever correlation is supposed to be in play here will *prima facie* not appear to me to hold in the case of others (cf. §2). And if it does not even appear to me that your expression of pain is correlated with a feeling of pain (nor, going off my own case, that it should), then it is mysterious how your expressions can represent your feeling of pain to me, in the sense of giving me the thought that you are in pain, by correlation. That leaves us with the dangerous proposition that even a natural expression of pain stands in need of an interpretation in order to so much as be a representation of pain. But whose interpretation matters? Suppose you are behaving as if you are in pain and I observe. That it is *your* interpretation which crucially matters is plausibly a necessary condition for the possibility of deception (and so, in part, for the received view of the problem of other minds as merely an epistemic issue of ruling out bad cases). For it cannot be that what makes your natural expressions of pain veridical rather than deceptive is that I interpret them to be so.

It is precisely because the natural expressions of pain provide a characteristic appearance to being in pain that they provide a means of deception, of appearing as if one is in pain when one isn't. Feigning pain is an intentional act, and part of the intention involves not just the interpretation you want others to give to your appearance, your expression, but the interpretation you in fact give to your expression. (It is not quite *feigning* pain if I am in fact in pain.) This, I think, makes sense of the intuition that when I wonder whether you are really in pain, I feel I need to adopt your perspective, to perceive what you perceive. This would be incoherent if what I wanted to perceive was your pain (in your mind's introspective eye), for if I could introspect it, it would be mine, not yours. But the intuition makes sense if what I want to gather from your perspective is whether you perceive your expression of pain *as* a true expression of pain rather than a tool to mislead. And there *is* a sensible way for me to get this, your “say” on the matter.

§6 Testimony?¹⁵

Before we are moved by skeptical worries, we think that if you want to know how another feels, normally they are the best person to ask, and if they tell you how they feel, normally you ought to believe them. In technical jargon, we might say that a subject's first-person authority, expressed in their "phenomenal avowals," *prima facie* entitles and obligates their audience's beliefs about the speaker's experience.¹⁶

Once we entertain skeptical worries, this norm seems to hang in the air, both in the sense of lacking support and in the sense of being up for grabs. Is it right of us to defer in trust so readily? Perhaps we are (as behaviorism and its descendants suggest) only under the spell of some superstition surrounding introspection and first-person authority. Or can this social norm be rationally supported at the level of the individual? Perhaps each of us thinks (or should think) to ourselves, "I should be sensitive to the epistemic entitlements and obligations generated by another's phenomenal avowals because I already think of them as being conscious subjects like me with conscious experiences like mine. (I can independently *see* this. Or imagine it, or whatever.) So their say over their conscious experiences should be as good as my say over my own." Or perhaps the norm in question is simply bedrock, and we should suppose with Austin (1946, 186) that

¹⁵ For testimonial response to the epistemic problem of other minds, see Austin (1946), McMyler (2011a), Gomes (2014), and maybe Moran (2012a).

¹⁶ Following Wright (2001), we can say a phenomenal avowal is "the phenomenon of authoritative, non-inferential self-ascription" of a phenomenal concept, "like 'I have a headache', 'My feet are sore', 'I'm tired', 'I feel elated', 'My vision is blurred', 'My ears are ringing', 'I feel sick' and so on" (320-21). My phrasing here leans on Ross's (1989, 79) suggestion about testimony in general, that "our response to language reflects a sensitivity to the entitlements and obligations generated by its use."

our “believing in other persons, in authority and testimony is an essential part of the act of communicating, an act which we all constantly perform. It is as much an irreducible part of our experience as... sensing coloured patches.”

We know now that if we should try to bootstrap our thoughts about other minds without their help, we should never get off the ground. But we can avoid any quasi-behavioristic skepticism or revision of our ordinary experiential talk if we take the third, Austinian route. Except where Austin and others just take testimony to be epistemically basic to how we know of other minds, here we must take testimony to be, if you like, conceptually basic to how we think of them. The result might be thought of as an inversion of the traditional individualistic line of reasoning above: I am said to think of other conscious subjects like myself with experiences like my own because I am sensitive to the epistemic entitlements and obligations generated by the phenomenal avowals of others.¹⁷

This can make easier to swallow the seemingly solipsistic conclusion that we do not think of or understand others’ experiences in the way we do our own. My phenomenal judgments (thoughts, beliefs) will be about my own experiences when (and only when) they are sensitive to the introspected or remembered satisfaction of phenomenal concepts’ application conditions. I have a concept of TOOTHACHE, which has application conditions like *hurts, by teeth*, etc. In introspection, I notice an experience that hurts by around some of my teeth. I judge that it is a toothache. My judgment is about my toothache. There I have a “first-hand” understanding of the

¹⁷ This “inversion of a common conditional” is inspired by and modeled on Kripke (1982, 93ff.). Wright (2001) remarks that “my avowal that I’m in pain must be accepted by others, *on pain of incompetence*, as a ground for the belief that I am” (321; emphasis added). I do not believe Wright intends to assert that this deference is what an audience’s understanding might (even partly) consist in or be constituted by. But that is the present proposal.

phenomenal concept TOOTHACHE and the phenomenal judgment that *I have a toothache*. It just amounts to the sort of sensitivity with which we already associate talk of first-person authority, e.g. “observationally privileged access.” What would be a “second-hand” understanding of phenomenal concepts or judgments? The sensitivity of judgment to the relevant authority’s judgment over whether the relevant concept’s application conditions are satisfied. Crucially, there seems to be no good reason to suppose that here we must be *deliberately* sensitive to another’s authority as such: to be sensitive to your authority, my beliefs about your experiences only must be formed or revised in light of what you (would) tell me about them; they do not need to be so formed or revised because I independently already realize that you are the proper authority on this matter. Because of this, the present appeal to testimony does not face the problem of presupposing that we *already* have some *other* means of forming thoughts or beliefs about others’ experiences, the way appeals to inference, imagination, and perception do.

To be clear, I am taking for granted the correctness of the norm that we can know how someone feels by their testimony. Since that specifically concerns knowledge, I am not thereby presupposing that testimony is the correct solution to the *conceptual* problem of other conscious minds. I am only assuming, first, that we will at some point be in a position to offer testimony as a possible solution to the *epistemic* problem of other conscious minds. Second, I thereby presuppose that *some* solution to the conceptual problem can be given, for to assume *that* we can come to know how another feels is to assume *that* we can form thoughts about their feelings. But it is not to assume a particular explanation of *how*, which still might be through testimony.

§7 How Phenomenal Concepts Refer

We earlier considered the difficulty of whether and how we can think of our conscious states as being expressible at all. This last proposal clearly must take on this if not the general

mystery of how language refers at all.¹⁸ Clearly a general theory of reference cannot be presented here. But in the tradition of modeling talk of sensations on talk of ordinary objects, we can rely on a fortuitous analogy between the present account and one well-developed and entrenched theory of how proper names refer—that of Evans (1982), recently expanded upon by Dickie (2011; 2015).

This theory distinguishes between two different ways in which someone might understand a proper name. Those who originally produce a name understand it insofar as they have a causal, “direct rapport” with the name-bearer: using the name in question—say, ‘Evans’—Evans’s contemporaries could demonstratively identify, reidentify, and generally know the man *as* the man referred to by ‘Evans’. Those who lack these abilities—who lack this direct rapport and so this way of understanding the name—can still borrow and in a distinct sense be said to understand it. Hence, a “consumer” of ‘Evans’ like me can hold beliefs about Evans so long as my beliefs are formed or constrained by my remaining means proper to obtaining information about Evans—chains of testimony leading back to the original “producers” of ‘Evans,’ including Evans himself. Since there is no requirement that I form beliefs in this way deliberately (for instance, as the best way of doing so), no prior understanding of the name’s referent is presupposed on my (or generally any consumer’s) part.

The analogy will be that just as I understand a producer’s testimony about Evans and so can form beliefs about the man, I can understand your phenomenal avowals and so can form be-

¹⁸ It must also take on the live problem over how *de se* communication works (see e.g. García-Carpintero and Torre, eds., 2016). But since no one doubts that *de se* communication works, this is no serious objection to the present proposal.

liefs about your conscious mind. One side of this analogy should be familiar. Your privileged access to and resulting recognition-based “first-hand” understanding of your conscious experiences sufficiently resemble the personal acquaintance and resulting direct rapport Evans’s contemporaries had with Evans: you can introspectively focus your attention on, later remember or recognize, and form beliefs about your conscious experiences according to a phenomenal concept; the producers of ‘Evans’ can demonstratively refer to, later reidentify, and form beliefs about Evans *as* the man named “Evans.”

To complete the analogy, we need an independent reason to think of an audience’s “second-hand” understanding of a phenomenal avowal on the model of a consumer’s understanding of a proper name. Here are two reasons, albeit interrelated ones.

First, for a consumer of a proper name, the testimony of that name’s producers is thought to serve as the proprietary means of forming beliefs about the name-bearer. It serves as what Dickie (2015, 51) calls “a specific ‘trumping’ route to justification”: when I form beliefs about Evans, I let (trustworthy) testimony trump what I might, for example, otherwise infer from general assumptions I have about philosophers. But we already likewise said (§7) that a speaker’s phenomenal avowal is thought to serve as the proprietary means of forming beliefs about the speaker’s experience—that thought is just what was expressed by our ordinary norm governing phenomenal avowals. Our sensitivity to the entitlements and obligations generated by such avowals *just is* a deferential disposition to grant their testimony a “trumping status” when forming beliefs about the speakers’ experiences.

So the first reason for modeling an audience’s “second-hand” understanding of a phenomenal avowal on a consumer’s understanding of a proper name is that, in each case, we *do* de-

fer to the authority of others or think we ought to. The second reason is that we *ought* to so defer—we are *right* in thinking we ought to—for in each case testimony *is* the proprietary means of justification.¹⁹

Suppose I form my beliefs on the basis of what all and only the producers of ‘Evans’ tell me about the man. If my testimonial beliefs end up being true of Evans, this will not be merely a matter of luck: my beliefs will be the result of a line of information traceable back—through the producers’ avowals, memories, and “first-hand” direct rapport with the man—to Evans himself. Yet if my testimonial beliefs end up *not* being true of him, bad luck must have intervened: I must have been the unlucky victim of deceit, distorted channels of communication, a forgetful speaker, etc. And if my testimonial beliefs happen to be true of or correspond to someone else—call him Devin—this also must merely a matter of bizarre luck since, *ex hypothesi*, my testimonial warrant will or at least need not have originated from the producers of ‘Devin,’ i.e. those who knew Devin and so are in a position to assure others about him. The same exact modal profile shows up in the case of testimonial beliefs about other’s experiences. Suppose I form my beliefs on the basis of the phenomenal avowals of you and you alone. If my testimonial beliefs are not true of your experience, bad luck must have intervened: again, I must have been the victim of deceit, distorted channels of communication, etc. If my testimonial beliefs happen to be true of or correspond to someone else’s experience, this too will be merely a matter of bizarre luck since, *ex hypothesi*, I formed my beliefs merely on the basis of your phenomenal avowals alone and you are

¹⁹ Dickie (2015, ch. 2) provides an extensive proof of *why* we would be right in saying that my beliefs are about α (e.g. Evans) if they are formed on the basis of the proprietary (“trumping route”) means of justification for beliefs about α . What immediately follows is my attempt to turn her proof into a sort of “aboutness” heuristic.

in no authoritative position to avow (you have no privileged access to) anyone else's experiences. Yet if my testimonial beliefs end up being true of your experience, this will not be merely a matter of good luck, for given how my beliefs are formed, that is just how they should have turned out barring unlucky interventions: my beliefs will be the result of a line of information tracing back—through your avowal, through your introspection—to your conscious experience itself.²⁰

Given these analogies and the fact that in the case of proper names, an audience need not be personally acquainted with a name-bearer in order to form thoughts or beliefs about him or her, I conclude that the audience of a phenomenal avowal analogously does not need to be directly acquainted with another's conscious experience in order to form thoughts or beliefs about it. Your phenomenal avowals provide my most reliable means for forming true thoughts about your experiences. If those thoughts are true about your experiences, then *a fortiori* they are about your experiences. The only mystery is how you might convey your experiences to me in language in the first place. But that seems no more and no less mysterious than how you might use

²⁰ Similar profiles can be found in the case of introspection, indicating that it is the proprietary “trumping route” to justified present-tense first-person phenomenal beliefs, and the case of memory, indicating that it is the proprietary “trumping route” to justified past-tense first-person phenomenal beliefs. If my present-tense first-person phenomenal beliefs are formed on the basis of introspection, I will be (incredibly) unlucky if my beliefs do not match my present experience and not merely lucky if they do; if my past-tense first-person phenomenal beliefs are formed on the basis of memory, I will be (not so incredibly but nevertheless in familiar ways) unlucky if my beliefs do not match my past experience and not merely lucky if they do.

For those curious, Dickie (2015) herself does not cover reference to conscious experiences and in fact explicitly restricts her theory to “mundane” things like people and ordinary objects. So all that I am saying is an original extension of her framework.

language to convey to me a man I never have and never shall meet—which is not much more mysterious than how words refer at all. Yet that they do refer must be presupposed for this line of reasoning to be pressed in the first place.

With the present proposal now on the table, I want to show how it treats two test cases central to discussions of other minds. The first is non-speaking infants and non-human animals. The present testimonial account might seem to exclude the non-conversant from the conscious realm as we think of it. However, the proposal is strictly only that we can think of another's conscious experience insofar as we are sensitive to the trumping status of their phenomenal avowals. Insofar as that sensitivity is a disposition, all that means is that *if* these creatures told us about their experiences, we would forsake speculation and take their word as our own. But our speculation is speculation *about their experiences* because this conditional holds. A benefit of this proposal is that it is this conditional that seems to tempt us into worrying about our access to infants' and other animals' conscious experiences: we want their word but lack it. The present account thus seems implicit in the suggestion that because they do not speak, there arises a question as to why we believe they lead a conscious life like ours.²¹

The second test case is blindsight patients. These patients report lacking any conscious

²¹ I wish neither to imply nor deny that pre-linguistic infants have an authority over their experiences that the acquisition of language merely enables them to express. Language-acquisition might enable such authority; it might not. Also, when I say, "if they told us about their experiences, then we would forsake speculation and take their word as our own," I am assuming (as is standard in the epistemology of testimony) that we have no overriding reason to judge them incompetent speakers. Of course, we usually do have a reason to believe that non-speaking creatures are not competent speakers. If a newborn or a lion seemed to pronounce phenomenal avowals in perfect English, we should no doubt try to have them speak about other things too. If they could do so, competently, I think we would (rightly) trust their avowals.

awareness of what they nevertheless demonstrate some form of perceptual awareness. If asked what object they see before them, when (say) a cup is conspicuously located before them, they will report nothing or at least not mention it if it lies in the “blind” portion of their visual field. But when asked to reach out for something anyway (say, the nearest object), they will reach towards and even shape their hand in preparation for how they should grasp that particular object (e.g. the cup’s handle). Assuming these studies have been performed properly, there can be no appeal to the absence of “ideal conditions” for *our* perception or vicarious-imagination of these patients’ conscious experiences. They certainly *look* as if they are consciously aware of what is around them. But we do not believe such appearances, for—as the present account successfully predicts—their phenomenal disavowals trump the deliverances of perception.

To be clear, we can and do form thoughts and beliefs about—and in some sense, imagine—what it is like to be another on the basis of inference and perception. However, such an ability depends on a prior scaffolding. It comes only after we are told and so otherwise made aware of the possibility of such experiences. Moreover, these thoughts, beliefs, and imaginings are only *about* another’s experience insofar as they are sensitive to—and so guided and subject to correction by—the relevant (first-person) authority. Just as if some figment of my imagination was named ‘Evans’ but incorporated nothing of what I had been told about Evans, I would not be imagining him, if you purported to imagine a blindsight patient’s visual field but ignored their phenomenal (dis)avowals, you would not be imagining (not even poorly) *their* experience at all.²²

²² As before, if such an imagining somehow matched Evans, this would be merely a matter of good luck. My imagining might have just as well matched someone else. But if my imagination is guided in deference to the right authorities yet fails to match (or approximate) Evans, bad luck

§8 Other Problems of Other Minds

Our problem has been how we can form thoughts or beliefs about (let alone know) conscious experiences of which we are not the subject. Our solution, minimally, is this: if a subject forms a belief about their own conscious experience on the basis of introspection (or memory), their testimony expresses their first-person authority, and we rely upon their expressed authority, we can form our own belief about their experience by taking their word as our own.²³ Using the bifurcation between the phenomenal and the psychological, we can say our solution presupposes access to another's psychology (their communicated thoughts) in order to explain our access to their phenomenology.

This is where our appeal to testimony will face a presupposition problem, if anywhere. You might worry, for example, that the structure of our solution generalizes in a problematic way. We said that reference to a conscious state is secured or "fixed" when the thought is formed on the proper basis. For first-person phenomenal thoughts, that requires a sensitivity to their proprietary means of justification, introspection; for second- or third-person phenomenal thoughts, it requires a sensitivity to the expressions of the relevant subject's first-person authority. But why stop there? Why not say that any thought about *any* mental state is about that mental state when it is sensitive to the relevant subject's first-person authority over their phenomenology *or* their psychology? After all, we normally treat others as being the proper authorities over not only (to put it crudely) how they feel but also what they think (believe, desire, intend). Yet if we were to

has almost certainly intervened.

²³ I say this "minimally" solves the problem insofar as it provides a sufficient condition for forming a thought or belief about another's experience. The more interesting proposal came from taking a sensitivity to this thought/belief forming process to be a necessary condition.

raise a “conceptual problem of other psychological minds”—over how we can form thoughts or beliefs about (let alone know) another’s thoughts (beliefs, etc.)—a parallel appeal to testimony would seem a non-starter. For I recognize others’ testimony as intelligent, intentional speech acts (rather than meaningless sound and fury) in part only because I attribute thoughts and intentions to them, not vice-versa.²⁴

I want the present theory of reference for mental attributions to generalize, because restricting it would be *ad hoc*. So I accept the challenge being presented. But my answer to the question of whether testimony can solve this conceptual problem of other psychological minds is “yes and no.” Instead of addressing this conceptual problem head on, I’ll pursue a divide-and-

²⁴ I provide this argument mostly for the exegetical purposes of getting the new problem on the table. But I am skeptical of the general claim that “I recognize another’s speech act as an intelligent, intentional communication... in part only because I attribute thoughts and intentions to them, not vice-versa.” What can we be thinking of when we suppose this? Perhaps we imagine one or two (Gricean) cases where some speech act “doesn’t speak for itself,” so that I (the imagined audience) must engage in some additional process of interpretation if I am to understand the speaker: there is an enigmatic speech act, a range of possible interpretations before me, and I will understand the speaker if and only if I seize upon the right one (say, the same interpretation the speaker gives her speech act). Then we take the problematic step of (over)generalizing from such bad cases, supposing that this must be what is *always, necessarily* going on in communication even in the best of cases: my access to what is on another’s mind must always be mediated by an interpretation, and the faithful correspondence of my interpretation to what is on the other’s mind must always be no small matter of luck. (Perhaps, someone might suggest, the process just so often goes so smoothly, and passes by so quickly, that we do not notice it.) This is just as after hearing the argument from illusion or hallucination, it may seem sense data must always stand between me and the world, and the faithful correspondence of my sense data to the world must always be no small matter of luck. (McDowell seems to make essentially these points in various places (e.g. 1984/2002).)

conquer strategy, distinguishing two conceptions of the psychological—two different ways of thinking of psychological states—and so two possible conceptual problems of other psychological minds. As a preview, I will argue for the following two claims. First, the conception of psychological states that is most likely essential to communication does not give rise to a conceptual problem of other minds and so, *a fortiori*, it does not raise a conceptual problem that testimony cannot solve. Second, for the conception of the psychological that *does* give rise to a conceptual problem (one that has been completely overlooked until now), testimony once again seems to be the best solution. All told, that means testimony seems to be the best solution to every conceptual problem of other minds that sensibly arises.

Before introducing the competing conceptions of the psychological, I want to note that, as before with the distinction between the phenomenal and psychological, this new subsidiary distinction need not be taken ontologically, that is, as multiplying the sorts of psychological properties or states one might have or be in. Given that and the conceptual nature of our problems, it again will not matter whether these two different conceptions of the psychological pick out one and the same thing and so turn out to be as metaphysically identical as Clark Kent and Superman. There in any case remains the question of how we come to be able to think of others (and ourselves) in these different ways.

§9 The Conceptual Problem of Other Cognitive Minds

The first, no doubt dominant conception of the psychological is what I will call cognitive. It considers psychological states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions to be theoretical posits of some sort, usually causal dispositions. Their relation to a subject's behavior is descriptive: first-, second-, and third-person psychological ascriptions primarily either explain past or present behavior or predict future behavior. When I look at the sky and say, "I think it is going to rain," I

am adopting the same sort of speculative relation to my mental state as I adopt toward my dog when I see it bark up a tree and say, “It thinks the squirrel ran up there.”

Taking psychological states to be (let us suppose) dispositions, we can ask **the conceptual problem of other cognitive minds**: how can I so much as form thoughts or beliefs about (let alone know) the cognitive dispositions of others?

If this worry does not move you, it is with good reason. The conceptual problem of other *conscious* minds gains traction from the failure of our means of forming thoughts about our own conscious experiences to be a means of forming thoughts about others’: we can introspect or remember our conscious experiences but not anyone else’s, which raises the question of where get so much as the idea as there being anyone else’s. But there is nothing analogous here, since we neither introspect our dispositions nor remember them in such a way that we cannot remember anyone else’s. Partly because of that, we also do not naturally conceive of ourselves “cognitively,” in terms of dispositions, independently of and prior to our interactions with others. After I reach a certain age and read enough psychology, I may then begin of my mind as a mere heap of dispositions. But it is a notorious fault of the cognitive conception (stomached as scientific progress) that it is alien to our self-conception. That is why a conceptual problem of other minds cannot sensibly arise here, for any conception of “another mind” should just be that of “another like me but not me.” If I do not think of myself as a cognitive mind or of my mental states as theoretically posited causal dispositions, no problem can sensibly arise over whether and how I can think of “another cognitive mind like me” or of “a theoretically posited causal disposition like mine but not mine.”

That is not to deny that there is a meaningful *question* of how I can form thoughts or be-

beliefs about another's cognitive dispositions. It is only to deny that this question is a live *problem*—especially a philosophical one “of other minds.” For that question is merely a special instance of the wider question, “How can I form thoughts or beliefs about cognitive dispositions (be they my own or another's)?” And that seems to be a question for cognitive science to answer. What is important is that there is no disturbing self-other asymmetry here to reckon with. It is generally supposed that whatever innate, sub-personal “mindreading” faculty we might have would be equally adapted to figuring out what you believe or desire as to what I do (cf. fn. 2). Or if there is an asymmetry, it may be because such faculties will have been adapted to deliver information about others' dispositions but not our own. Hence we are thrown back onto the question of how we can come to attribute cognitive dispositions to ourselves.

Either way, if I am correct about the form a problem of other minds must take to be a problem of other minds, anyone who would claim cognitive science has solved or “naturalized” the problem of other minds (e.g. Epley, 2008) would be seriously misguided. The cognitive science on mindreading has nothing to do with the problem of other minds. For, again, I do not think of *my* beliefs, desires, or intentions as theoretically posited causal dispositions, so whatever theoretically posited causal dispositional “beliefs,” “desires,” or “intentions” cognitive science suggests some sub-personal mindreading faculty discovers, they cannot be what is at issue in a philosophical problem of other minds.

None of this, however, speaks against the assumption that communication should be understood “cognitively,” at least in its most basic form. That is, *what* we communicate are cognitive states (information-theoretic causal dispositions) and *how* we do it is through the operation of mindreading faculties. Very roughly, this might work as follows. An audience's mindreading

faculty can produce “belief” states in the audience by inferentially processing what causal dispositions might best explain a speaker’s behavior. Predicting this, a speaker’s mindreading faculty produces “intention” states in the speaker to (be disposed to) behave in such a way that the audience’s mindreading faculty, picking up on the speaker’s “intention,” will inferentially produce in the audience certain “beliefs” about the speaker’s cognitive states. That is a very crude sketch, but it seems to be how many people currently think communication works. It is basically Grice (1957/1989), broken down into sub-personal cognitive faculties.

If that picture is correct, it means the cognitive science on mindreading can be dismissed as at best indirectly relevant to the problem of other minds: dismissed because what the cognitive science on mindreading directly addresses is no problem of other minds at all; indirectly relevant because this itself shows how the presuppositions of an actual response to the problem of other (conscious) minds—appealing to testimony—might be kosher.

§10 The Conceptual Problem of Other People

Appropriating Strawson’s (1974/2008) distinction, we might diagnose the cognitive conception of psychological states as adopting an (overly) “objective attitude” towards others when we cannot naturally adopt such an attitude towards ourselves. Strawson’s opposing “participant attitude” is taken by what I will (partly for that reason) call the personal conception of the psychological. From this perspective, psychological states are thought of as commitments, values, regards, or expectations (in the sense in which we say that we hold others or ourselves to certain expectations). Their relation to a subject’s behavior is normative if only in the sense that acts only become intelligible as successes or failures and agents only become intelligible as succeeding or failing insofar as their behavior lives up to (or at the least conforms to) or breaks their commitments. I may desire to be with the ones I love, believe I can do so in such-and-such ways,

and intend to act in those ways but, for all that, not do so, even when I do not face any serious obstacles. That does not show I did not “really” have those desires, beliefs, or intentions; it only shows that I will have lived a tragically unfulfilled life.

I take it that these commitments (values, regards, expectations) most importantly show up as the non-affective, non-phenomenal components of the reactive attitudes we hold towards others and ourselves—attitudes like “gratitude, resentment, forgiveness, love, and hurt feelings” (Strawson, 1974/2008, 5). And since the reactive attitudes are supposed to be reactions to the same sort of attitudes revealed in someone’s actions—for instance, “attitudes towards us of goodwill, affection, or esteem on the one hand or contempt, indifference, or malevolence on the other” (5-6)—we can say that having a psychology of this sort is a necessary condition for being appropriately subject to the reactive attitudes. It has become common to follow Strawson in thinking that to hold someone responsible just is to adopt these reactive attitudes toward them. For this way of thinking, having a psychology of this sort (of commitments, values, etc.) will also be a necessary condition of being appropriately held responsible. In other words, possessing these psychological states is essential to being an agent rather than a patient—that is, having these states is essential to being a “person.” (That is the second reason for the conception’s name.)

To be clear, although the reactive attitudes are essentially interpersonal—“attitudes *towards us*”—the personal commitments (etc.) they target are not. I accept Bennett’s (2008, 65) suggestion “that although it is all right to tie reactive attitudes to responses to *somebody’s attitude*, it is unduly narrowing to tie them to responses to *somebody’s attitude towards somebody*.” I might hold everyone to the expectation that they value the beauty of the Grand Canyon; I can then feel indignant if they show a lack of due regard. Generally, I may engage in self-reproach or

censure others when we think or behave irrationally, disregarding the patterns of reasoning we value and are committed to.

Another clarification: it is common to misinterpret Strawson as conflating reactive attitudes with judgment-less reactive feelings, merely phenomenal experiences, “raw feels.” So, in partly locating (on behalf of the personal conception) psychological states in the reactive attitudes, it behooves me to insist that it is *not* being suggested that to have a belief *just is* to have a certain feeling. (This is often attributed to Hume. It seems to be the origin of the phrase “propositional attitude.”) If anything, this gets things backwards. Strawson himself originally said part of the “central commonplace” he wanted “to insist on is... the great extent to which our personal feelings and reactions depend upon, or involve, our beliefs about these attitudes and intentions” (1974/2008, 5). Our feelings are what they are—e.g. jealousy or envy or righteous indignation—because of what judgments they embody. This “judgment-sensitivity” is brought out well by the following passage of Hieronymi (2001) on the reactive attitudes:

We typically have them because we think we have reason to. If we come to see that they are unfounded, they will (in the well-functioning psyche) disappear. Like our beliefs, we can't “just decide” to have them, and, like our beliefs, we may be able to do things to ourselves that we can predict will make them go away. But, like our beliefs, these attitudes have judgments proper to them (e.g., someone worth caring about has disrespected us).
(Hieronymi, 2001, 535)

My suggestion (on behalf of the personal conception of the psychological) is that these attitudes appear to be so much “like our beliefs” because they partly *just are* our beliefs. The suggestion is that—appropriating Strawson's words once again—“[o]nly by attending to this range of attitudes can we recover from the facts as we know them a sense of what we mean, i.e. of *all* we mean,

when... we speak of” beliefs, desires, and intentions (1974/2008, 24).

If we think, then, that such psychological states are internally linked the reactive attitudes—or more generally the “participant attitudes,” including the reactive ones—it is reasonable to suppose that psychological ascriptions (according to the personal conception) primarily function in our practices of finding and holding each other responsible. Our psychological ascriptions will then be just as varied as our ascriptions of responsibility across first-, second-, and third-person contexts. For instance, first-person psychological ascriptions might be primarily thought of as acts of *taking responsibility*. This can include deliberative avowals, decisions committing oneself as to what *to* think, want, or do (e.g. Moran, 2001). It might also include certain forms of assurance in which we take responsibility for the commitments or expectations others go on to form.²⁵ Second- and third-person ascriptions might be assimilated under those activities paradigmatic of reactive attitudes already mentioned like praising, congratulating, blaming, accusing, imputing, and so on. For example, when I accuse a well-behaved politician of secretly harboring racist beliefs, I am evidently not explaining his past or present racist behavior (since *ex hypothesi* he has none) nor am I necessarily predicting racist behavior to come: I may just be accusing a well-behaved politician of harboring racist beliefs—expressing disapproval of his blameworthy quality of will, if you like, and in so protesting, expressing my own values and commitments.

²⁵ Cf. Austin (1947/1970, 99), “saying ‘I know’... is *not* saying ‘I have performed a specially striking feat of cognition, superior, in the same scale as believing and being sure, even to being merely quite sure’.... When I say ‘I know’, I *give others my word*: I *give others my authority for saying* that ‘S is P’.” Such assurances need to be restricted to specifically directed forms of address, “tellings” (Moran, 2005; McMyler, 2011; Hinchman, 2014). Or we might think that all forms of assertion have this ritual of taking responsibility for what others are, on our account, entitled to believe (Brandom, 1983).

Contrast this with the usual way a cognitive conception is introduced in the philosophy of mind, through strained descriptions of toy examples. A man gets out of his chair and walks to the fridge. The philosopher asks us why. We, *justifying* his behavior, might say that that is where the food is. That is why we should go the fridge ourselves, and that is just what we should tell anyone who asked us why we were doing so. But the philosopher corrects us: someone goes to the fridge because of his desire for food and his belief that food is there. And that is correct, incontestable as far as it goes. But the philosopher always goes a bit farther, adding, “After all, there may not have been any food in the fridge and the man would have gone towards it anyway.” Only with this it comes out that the “why” question we were asked was searching for an *explanation* of the man’s behavior, and it *is* contestable that this is what we find in the man’s beliefs and desires. For if we ask, “How can beliefs and desires explain his behavior? Do they *cause* it? How?” we will be shrugged off and told, “Sometime perhaps we’ll know more about them,” or worse, “Explanations come to an end somewhere.” Then we may feel some inclination “to deny the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don’t want to deny them!” (Wittgenstein, 1953/2009, §308). The point of the personal conception, I take it, is that we can avoid this pressure to deny the existence of beliefs, desires, and intentions if we take their ascriptions to be ways of justifying, defending, or criticizing one another rather than shadowy ways of explaining our “bodily behavior” in proto-scientific, “para-mechanical” (Ryle, 1949) terms.²⁶

²⁶ My foregoing presentation of the so-called personal conception of the psychological is admittedly a hodgepodge of ideas that seem to have been floating in philosophical waters for some time now. Authors who gesture towards *some* conception like this—especially in contrast to the cognitive—include, e.g., Sellars (1956/1991), McDowell (1999/2009), Moran (2001), Bilgrami (2006), Brandom (2006), Korsgaard (2008; 2009), and Coliva (2016). (If quoting Ryle seems

That is the good news about the personal conception. The bad news is that, letting commitments be our paradigm, we can raise what I will call **the conceptual problem of other people**: how can I so much as form thoughts or beliefs about (let alone know) another's commitments? Or, in Wittgensteinian phrase, what gives us so much as the idea that beings, things, have commitments? This, I will argue, is a genuine problem of other minds.

For that to be the case, we must primarily form thoughts or beliefs about our own commitments in such a way that does not extend toward others'. I have already said that, when we adopt the personal conception of psychological states, first-person psychological ascriptions might primarily be thought of as deliberative avowals. So perhaps we come to think about our commitments through deliberation. Ordinary language would seem to speak in favor of this, insofar as 'introspect' and 'deliberate' are fairly interchangeable. Admittedly, though, this may be due to Descartes's lingering influence over our ordinary ways of speaking. It would be better if we had some stronger reason to suppose that deliberation allows me to form thoughts not only

ironic given that his dispositional analysis of psychological terms paved the way for current cognitive analyses, see Park (1994) for an alternative reading compatible with the personal conception.) Bilgrami's *Self-Knowledge and Resentment*, in particular, has strongly influenced the way I speak and think of this conception. Although I became aware of the cognitive-personal division in the philosophy of mind on my own, Bilgrami's distinction between dispositional and commissive intensional states comes so close to the distinction I had in mind and yet, in various ways, presents it more clearly, that I have framed my distinction very much on the model of how he frames his own. However, I take my "personal conception" to provide the richer, more descriptively adequate account of the practical, participative perspective on psychological states Bilgrami and I try to map out. I also crucially depart from Bilgrami in that he does not think a conceptual problem of other minds can arise for psychological states if they are commitments (2006, 199-204); I take his dismissal of this possibility to be wholly unconvincing and hasty.

about what *to* think or do but also about what I do think or intend (that is, about my thinking or my intending). We find this reason in the “transparency” of questions about my commitments (“What do I believe? What do I want?”) to questions about the world (“What is true? What is desirable?”): setting abnormal cases aside, I can determine the facts at issue in the former question by answering the latter. As Evans (1982, 225) describes it,

[I]n making a self-ascription of belief, one’s eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward—upon the world. If someone asks me ‘Do you think there is going to be a third world war?’, I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question ‘Will there be a third world war?’ I get myself in a position to answer the question whether I believe that *p* by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether *p*... If a judging subject applies this procedure, then necessarily he will gain knowledge of one of his own mental states.

If the “mental states” here are conceived of as dispositions, Evans’s proposal might seem insane, for surely something like repeated observation is necessary for knowledge of a disposition. But Evans’s remarks will seem intuitively correct to anyone who has not already bound themselves to some monolithic cognitive conception of the psychological. So we might just as well ask, “What must a belief be like such that we can be aware of it in the way Evans suggests?” Commitments are an obvious answer.

While I do not want to suppose a person can only learn of their commitments through rational deliberation, it does seem to me that commitments are essentially things which *could* be learned of in this way. (This is just as a subject’s conscious experience is essentially something

which could be learned of by introspection.) We said before that commitments are held by persons. A person is a rational agent, in at least a thin sense of ‘rational’. To be a rational agent, a person’s commitments must normally be sensitive to deliberation from reasons. That means that in normal cases, a person will be in a position to give their answer to the question “*p*?” iff they are in a position to answer “Do I believe (desire, intend) *p*?” But a “normal case” is just a case where unlucky contingencies are avoided, and unlucky contingencies, *qua* contingencies, could have been avoided. So in the cases where those contingencies would have been avoided, the commitment, unknown in the unlucky case, would have been known in the normal way. So in the normal cases, a commitment is learned of by deliberation, and in the abnormal cases, it could have been.²⁷

There is also reason to think that rational deliberation *always* allows one to learn of some of their commitments. For, allowing the transparency condition to hold, the output of such deliberation will be not only an answer to the question “*p*?” but an answer to the question of what the deliberator thinks about *p*. Either answer might conflict with previously formed or held commitments as to the matter over *p*. There are three ways of responding to the possibility of such conflict. The first is to implausibly assume that rational deliberation always replaces or updates one’s

²⁷ I do not want to deny that there are extreme cases of commitments that as a matter of (contingent) fact defy rational deliberation and yet are not quite irrational (or arational) dispositions. (They certainly remain within the scope of appropriate reactive attitudes.) Frankfurt (1998, 110ff.) calls these “limits of the will,” as when after rational deliberation, a mother decides to give up her child but cannot “bring herself” to do so when the time comes. While I suppose I could dismiss such a case as merely a matter of sub-personal dispositions inferring with personal commitments, that seems to me to be a falsification. Although I am ultimately unsure whether or how cases of “limits of the will” matter to the present discussion, I do not think they matter much and can be safely set aside as abnormal.

former first-order commitments, outright eliminating whatever commitments the person had before. The second is to implausibly deny that deliberation ever allows one to form higher-order thoughts about those commitments. The third is to allow for that people can simply hold inconsistent commitments or beliefs about them. I might at one commit myself to p through rational deliberation and so—through the transparency of that deliberation—come to think (even know that) I am committed to p . I may later commit myself to $\sim p$ through rational deliberation and so—through the transparency of that deliberation—come to think (even know that) I am committed to $\sim p$. Having both commitments does not prevent me from forming thoughts or beliefs about (even knowing) one of them.²⁸

So the transparency of rational deliberation always allows me to form a thought or belief about some of my commitments or other, and any commitment of mine is something that I could have learned of by such means. But that it is it: neither condition is also true of others' commitments. I can "make up my own mind" but not another's. The transparency of deliberation cannot let me learn of another's commitment any more than introspection can let me learn of another's experience. So we have the gap necessary for a problem of other minds to arise.

(The analogy with the conceptual problem of other conscious minds might be pressed further. One obstacle that made that problem more difficult to overcome was the fact that introspection presents me with my conscious experiences but neither as mine nor as accompanied by some conscious subject (§1). There has so far been a slight but I believe non-fatal equivocation in my use of 'commitment': it may refer either to my commitment to something or to the thing to which I am committed. If it means the latter, then the transparency of deliberation clearly allows me to be aware of my commitments without realizing they are mine. If 'my commitment' has the

²⁸ This strategy is inspired by Bilgrami (2006, ch. 4).

former reading, the same might still be true but not so obviously. Suppose, sometimes, there is a certain phenomenology to deliberation—something it is like to consciously, rationally deliberate on those occasions. Then I might have a certain (non-factive) awareness of reasons r_1, \dots, r_m verifying p . But where reasons r_1, \dots, r_m are just the reasons on the basis of which I am committed to p , such an awareness would plausibly just be an awareness of my commitment to p on the basis of r_1, \dots, r_m . And *that* I might be aware of without being aware of it *as mine*. What if there is no phenomenology to deliberation or in any case you deny that there is? Make p the content of some (true) observation statement and r_1, \dots, r_m the (veridical) observation.)²⁹

It might be possible to repurpose most of the arguments from §§2-5 to show that inference, imagination, and perception cannot solve the conceptual problem of other people either, for

²⁹ I take the time to go through this because as Moran (2001; 2012b) develops Evans’s transparency method, he crucially appeals to our self-conception as rational agents: the proposal sometimes seems to be that I am only able to know that I believe p because of the conjunction that the evidence favors p and, as a background condition, I believe I am a rational agent that forms beliefs in line with the evidence. (That explains *why* I can know that I believe p —not *how*, which is still through the transparency of rational deliberation.) But if this were the case, then it would seem unlikely I could form thoughts or beliefs about my own commitments prior to being aware of others using the transparency method. For it is highly unlikely that I think of myself as a rational agent independently of and prior to my awareness of others and their rational commitments. On some occasions, however, Moran writes as if I can be aware of my commitments through deliberation without being aware of them *as mine*, in a way highly congenial to my parenthetical thoughts in the main text. For example, “In the first-person perspective on belief,” he (2012b, 235) writes, “my primary relation is not to the fact of having some belief but rather the commitment to its truth and what that requires of me.” (I assume I can be aware of what is required of me without being aware of myself.)

Dretske (2011; 2012) once again provides excellent discussion of how we can know *what* we think in a way that does not require or afford knowledge *that* we think.

similar reasons. But instead of doing either that or once again addressing each faculty one-by-one, I will rely on one sweeping argument that suggests we could not get the idea that others have commitments through any such third-person means, considered individually or in combination. This comes from Kripke's (1982) interpretation of Wittgenstein, part of which contains an argument to the effect that we cannot "read off" a person's commitments from their behavior unless we already know what those commitments are.

A commitment, remember, is something one can either successfully live up to or fail to follow through on. A person's actions *conform* with her commitments or they do not. Some actions are what she *ought* to or is *permitted* to do, relative to her commitments; others are not. Kripke's argument (very roughly) is usually taken to be that unless we already know what a person's commitments are, we cannot tell whether some observed bit of her behavior was commitment conforming or breaking. Moreover, no additional amount of behavior could help settle that question since such behavior could always be an elaborate way of failing to live up to her commitments.

To use Kripke's example, at a certain point in learning arithmetic and its language, I committed myself to using the '+' sign to perform a certain function. If I committed myself to using '+' to perform addition, then for some arbitrarily high natural number n , which we may suppose I have never encountered before, I should (relative to my commitment) respond to " $n + 1 = ?$ " with the sum of n and 1. But if I committed myself to using '+' to perform some "gruesome" function that yields the "quum" 5 anytime an input is n or higher, then I should (relative to my commitment) respond to " $n + 1 = ?$ " with "5". Because of this, whatever I say to the question " $n + 1 = ?$ " cannot by itself show you whether I originally committed myself to using '+' to perform addition

or “quaddition”: if I respond with the sum of n and 1, I may be conforming to my past commitment to perform addition or I may be breaking my past commitment to perform quaddition; if I say “5,” I may be conforming to my past commitment to perform quaddition or I may be breaking my past commitment to use ‘+’ to perform addition. Unless you already know what my past commitment was, you cannot tell whether my present behavior is commitment conforming or breaking. And if you cannot tell whether my present behavior is commitment conforming or breaking, you cannot tell on the basis of that behavior alone what I am committed to. In fact, even if you know *that* my behavior conforms to (breaks) my commitments without knowing *how* or *why*, you cannot read off my commitments from my behavior, since my behavior can conform to (break) indefinitely (perhaps infinitely) many distinct commitments relative to which I ought to do different things on some other occasion.

You might suppose that you can safely claim to know I have some higher-order commitment to not use symbols to perform any gruesome function like quaddition. If I did have that higher-order commitment, then it would be incorrect of me (relative to my commitment) to respond to “ $n + 1=?$ ” with “5”. But if instead I had the higher-order commitment to not using symbols to perform gruesome functions *except* for quaddition (or except for quaddition *now*), then it could be correct of me (relative to my commitment) to respond to “ $n + 1=?$ ” with “5”. Appealing to the possibility of higher-order commitments is of no help, since unless you already knew what my higher-order commitments were, you cannot tell whether my behavior conforms to or breaks them. And if you cannot tell whether my behavior conforms to or breaks my higher-order commitments, you cannot tell on the basis of such behavior what my higher-order commitments are. Yet, as before, even if you know that my behavior conforms to (breaks) my higher-order commitments without knowing how or why, you cannot read off my higher-order commitments from my

behavior, since my behavior can conform to (break) indefinitely (perhaps infinitely) many distinct higher-order commitments relative to which I ought to do different things on some other occasion.

Since the form of this problem is perfectly general, the focus on my commitment to use signs in a certain way is dispensable. The problem generalizes to *any* commitment to *do anything*. (To check this, read back the concluding trio of sentences in the last two paragraphs with any arbitrary commitment in mind.) That being so, there seems to be a serious question over not only how we know what another person is committed to but also where we get so much as the idea that such beings, things, have commitments. This is because any bit of behavior that might by itself naturally suggest the presence of one commitment should equally naturally suggest the presence of infinitely many other distinct commitments that are equally compatible with the observed behavior. Yet obviously, such an array of possible commitments cannot spring into our minds when we observe another's behavior. So it seems highly implausible to say we naturally get the idea that others have commitments (as we understand them) by merely observing their behavior.

We observe the behavior of many other, non-human things in the world that neither have commitments nor suggest to us by their behavior that they do so. We do not feel ourselves inclined to read off *any* commitments from their behavior. Yet when we observe other people, we do feel ourselves inclined to read off commitments (to something or other, at least) from their behavior. That this happens after a certain level of maturation cannot be denied. The problem is that the likeliest explanation for this inclination is that we attribute those things we call "people" some higher-order commitment to behave so as to fulfill as many and break as few commitments as possible (or whatever). And to attribute a higher-order commitment to someone is to attribute

a commitment to them. Our question was how we can do this. The suggestion that we see others' behavior as commitment-following because we think of them as commitment-followers—things committed to following through on their commitments—is just a roundabout way of saying that we *do* think about others' commitments, we *do* have the idea that they have them. It is not an explanation of *how*.

§11 Communication and Commitment

I want to suggest we can get the idea that others have commitments *from them*, by their telling us so. For this to work, it cannot be that we get the idea from the fact of their speech act, combined perhaps with some other observed facts. That would make it so that our thought or belief was formed via a process that reduces to merely third-person means, some sort of observation (however complex) of their behavior. We just saw how that cannot work. And as before, it cannot be that they tell us about their commitments and we decide to believe them because we already assume they are the proper authority on the matter, since we cannot think of them as being proper authorities over their commitments without already thinking of them as having commitments.

Rather, the picture must be something like this. As in §6, we take it as more or less a bedrock fact that if you want to know what a person thinks (believes, desires, intends), normally they are the best person to ask, and if they tell you what they think (etc.), normally you ought to believe them. In technical jargon, we might say that a person's first-person authority, expressed in their psychological avowals, *prima facie* entitles and obligates their audience's beliefs about the speaker's commitments. From this "trumping status" of psychological avowals, we move as before to the conclusion that an audience's thoughts or beliefs, when sensitive to this trumping

status (though not necessarily deliberately so), will refer to the speaker's commitments.³⁰ The chain, then, will proceed in ideal cases like so: I form a belief about my commitments on the proper basis, *via* the transparency of rational deliberation; as a result, my sincere psychological avowals will express my first-person authority; so long as you form your beliefs about my commitments on the proper basis, being sensitive to my word and taking it (in this case) as your own, your belief will in fact be about my commitment.³¹

³⁰ If our “moving as before” goes *via* another analogy with proper names, we might run into trouble. Such an analogy will be strained, this time, on the side of the producers of a name and a speaker avowing their commitment. We need a parallel with the name-producer's direct rapport with the name-bearer that establishes the referential connection. Here is a sketch of how that might be done. Suppose that rational agents are, by definition, normally attentive to the rational connections or “supporting relations” they find between their reasons r_1, \dots, r_n and p . If we take this putative connection or supporting relation between r_1, \dots, r_n and p to just be (at least part of) the agent's commitment to p given r_1, \dots, r_n , then we have a parallel first with the name-bearer's ability to identify the name-bearer and second, perhaps, with their ability to know them as such. If one thinks that the commitments of rational agents are, necessarily, by default “stable” (Bratman, 2014) or “preserved” (Burge, 1993/2013) over time, then there may be some parallel there with a name-producer's required ability to reidentify the name-bearer.

³¹ I understand this proposal to in some sense off-load rather than solve many problems into the philosophy of language and theories of communication. For instance, there is of course the left over problem as to how, in the first place, I could deliberately form definite commitments (commitments that determinately determine for any given action whether it conforms or breaks that commitment) in order to communicate them to others. But that is just the general rule-following problem. There is also the related issue of how any finite medium of communication can represent a thought whose content may be indefinitely—perhaps infinitely—complex. My goal has not been to solve these issues but to show that the problem of other minds has more in common with them than with some generic skeptical worry over how we know anything. In particular, I want to block the temptation to ignore some issues in the philosophy of language (like the

The order of explanation, then, will be that you can be said to think of other people with commitments like your own because you are sensitive to the epistemic entitlements and obligations generated by their psychological avowals, not vice-versa. But what does it mean to say that you are “sensitive” in this way?

We can adopt a cognitive perspective and again construe this sensitivity as a deferential disposition. We can again freely appeal to the hypothesis that communication generally—and so the communication of commitments specifically—is explainable through the operations of sub-personal mindreading faculties. After all, the cognitive and personal conceptions of the psychological can both be correct: for all we know, they are simply complementary ways of conceiving the same thing. So there is no fault in letting a testimonial solution to the conceptual problem of other people take advantage of the free lunch (the mindreading faculty) left on the table after the so-called conceptual problem of other cognitive minds failed to arrive. That is just how the conceptual problem of other conscious minds was solved.

Or we can retain the personal perspective on psychological states and try to characterize in its terms what a person’s “sensitivity” to others’ psychological avowals must come to. In line with the general theme of the personal conception, someone’s understanding of others’ expressions is something they can be appropriately held responsible for. *Ceteris paribus*, if I understand your psychological avowal, then I can be expected to form a commitment to the claim that you have whatever commitment you avow. And *ceteris paribus*, if I can be expected to form such commitments, I will be open reproach for failing to do so and challenged to give reasons in my

one regarding communication above) as trivial instances of the problem of other minds, which in turn might be ignored as a trivial instance of generic skepticism. The former two stand together and apart from the latter.

defense. (I may, for example, provide reasons I take to show that you are untrustworthy and so that things were not *ceteris paribus*.) Focusing on the contrapositive (cf. Kripke, 1982, 93ff.), anyone we cannot claim is open to such reproach we cannot claim to understand psychological avowals. Infants, for instance, are not open to reproach for failing to form commitments in light of others' phenomenal avowals, nor can they be challenged to give reasons for failing to do so; they are not expected to form such commitments. And we do not say they understand us.

It is tempting to think that the order of explanation here flows always and entirely in one direction: we do not hold infants responsible or expect them to form commitments *because* they cannot form commitments. However, what we do not and cannot do because infants cannot form commitments is *appropriately* hold them responsible. Moreover, it is almost more correct to say that in most if not all cases, a person (or person-in-training) cannot form commitments because she will not be held responsible for them (appropriately or not) either by others or, crucially, by herself. That is only “almost more correct” because the in fact correct thing to say seems to be this: a person (or person-in-training) can form commitments only because she will be held responsible for them (appropriately or not) either by others or, most importantly, herself. I baldly assert that this is correct because I think in most cases we form commitments by *taking* responsibility: if I hold myself responsible for ϕ , I am committed to ϕ , and if I am committed to ϕ , I am responsible for the commitment. I take that to be the core truth of compatibilist theories of responsibility. Perhaps some qualifications about background conditions are necessary—I may need to be rational and the like. But otherwise I am taking that compatibilist insight as a given.³²

³² If I am aligning myself with “response-dependent” theories of responsibility here, it is not with the caricature that what it is to be responsible can be reductively explained in terms of what it is to be held responsible. First, I wouldn't commit myself to any reductive explanation, since I

The suggestion, then, is that for someone to be able to understand others' psychological avowals is for them to be able to be held responsible, in specific ways and under the right conditions, for forming commitments presumably about the speaker's commitments, having been audience to the speaker's avowal. There is a noncoincidental similarity between this theory of understanding and the one presented in Kripke (1982), except where Kripke speaks too often of "brute" feelings of appropriateness, I would speak of commitments and reactive attitudes—holdings of responsibility. In line with what was said earlier about personal psychological ascriptions—that they are, among other things, primarily ways of defending or criticizing others—to say someone "understands" is not to speculatively refer to something in their head as if spectators from afar but to sign off on, endorse, or commend their performance as members who must coexist, cooperate, and collaborate in a community we are both in. That at least is a first, rough take on what the audience's psychological state is like in communication.

Turning to the speaker, we owe a characterization of her psychological state during her phenomenal avowal—her "communicative intention." This might be more straightforward. Generalizing the conclusion of §5, we can say that in order for something to be a speaker's expression, the speaker has to interpret it to be so. Let that interpretation be her communicative intention, which (according to the personal conception) will have to be a commitment of some sort or other. In the case of psychological avowals, I suggest that the commitment is to impose on the

know of none that work. Second, being responsible and being held responsible seem to me to be interdependent. No one could be responsible if no one was held responsible, even by themselves. And no one could be held responsible—that is, what we were doing could not be holding each other *responsible*—if no one was ever in fact responsible. Conceptually, I think HOLDING RESPONSIBLE is at least as basic as BEING RESPONSIBLE, insofar as we understand the latter in terms of the former. But metaphysically, I suppose the two must be on a par.

audience, via this communicative act, a commitment to the claim that the speaker is committed to whatever she says she is. What is it for a speaker to “impose” this commitment upon her audience? As an intentional act itself, it too must be a commitment, specifically the commitment to the audience’s becoming committed, on the basis of her avowal, to the claim that the speaker is committed to whatever she says she is. In terms of responsibility, this comes to the following: when I tell you about my commitments, I take responsibility for the fact that you might now be held responsible for being committed to the claim that I’m committed to what I tell you I am.

What any of that means will, I suppose, depend on your theory of responsibility, of what it is to be and be held responsible. Almost as if confirming the testimonial response to the conceptual problem of other people, it is increasingly popular to think of the reactive attitudes—being reactions to others’ commitments and expressions of our own—as “incipiently forms of communication, which make sense only on the assumption that the other can comprehend the message” (Watson, 1987/2004, 230). This thought has provided a springboard for recent “expressive,” “communicative,” and “conversational” theories of responsibility which all take the ability to understand the commitments others’ reactive attitudes communicate (and how) to be the pivotal necessary condition for being a responsible agent oneself (e.g. McKenna, 2012; Bennett, 2013; Boxer, 2013; Macnamara, 2015).³³

³³ Unsurprisingly, neo-expressivists like Bar-On (2004; 2015) and Green (2007) have already written much on how certain emotional actions can have expressive or communicative functions. What is surprising is how such work seems to have gone unnoticed by expressive/communicative/conversational theories of responsibility. For example, McKenna (2012) seemingly attempts to coin a notion of “act-meanings” that can already be found in Bar-On’s works (and, before hers, Sellars’s).

Unfortunately, such theories never specify how we are supposed to be able to so understand or “comprehend the message.” The solution on offer to the conceptual problem of other people suggests one way of filling that gap. I can be said to understand another’s reactive attitude if I treat their expressed reaction as settling the question for me as to what they are committed to and (only if) I am sensitive to the “trumping status” of such expressions when forming my thoughts or beliefs about their commitments. Of course, given how we understand this “sensitivity” according to the personal conception, this may mean that responsibility requires the ability to understand others responses to your agency (in the way the communicative theories of responsibility suggest), which in turn requires (to put crudely what we said earlier) the ability to be treated and held responsible by oneself and others as if one understood. We are led back to the idea that being responsible requires being held responsible.

Discussions of moral responsibility and the problem of other minds have tended to proceed entirely apart from one another. Perhaps participants on each side have assumed they can safely ignore the other despite the clear and deep connections running between the two areas. We indisputably restrict the obvious candidates for moral responsibilities to other minds: when distinguishing the appropriate targets of blame, we never find natural disasters, untimely bad weather, and malfunctioning electronics belonging alongside mature, well-functioning adults. From there, it becomes controversial. It strikes me as noncoincidental that cases of moral responsibility qualifying as borderline to just beyond the border—the mentally insane, the severely disabled, non-human animals, very young children—are those beings we despair of conversing with and standardly find problematic in discussions of other minds.

Pointing out that responsible agents must be other minds is not very interesting, though. But we might find a nearby, stronger thesis if we reflect on what we have discovered other

minds, as we think of them, must be. In §5, I argued that it makes sense to think of natural expressions as representing our mental states to others only if we interpret them as doing so.³⁴ I also mentioned there that the interpretation or “perspective” others have of their own mental life is what we want but feel we cannot have. I could no sooner acquire the first-person perspective on another’s mental than it would cease to be another’s mental life. That seemed to be the problem. But every time we have found a solution, it has appealed to the possibility of getting another’s first-person perspective from them, through communication.

Now, insofar as we are responsible for our actions—those things we are *committed* to doing (unlike involuntary muscle spasms), those acts we *take* to represent our commitments—everything I just said should seem to mesh well with the expressive/communicative/conversational theories of responsibility I cited above. Yet what I just said also indicates that they may have overshot their mark. For the crucial necessary condition to being responsible for one’s actions may not *primarily* be the capacity for understanding other’s reactions to them and the commitments such reactions express. If that is a necessary condition, it seems derivative upon the more straightforward condition of having a first-person perspective on one’s actions—that is, the ability to interpret one’s behavior as representing one’s commitments, which would include the ability to judge that behavior as faithful to or misrepresenting one’s commitments. (I take it that this interpretation and judgment can, according to the personal conception, cash out in more commitments, specifically the commitment to the claim that one’s behavior (mis)represents one’s (other) commitments.) That is what very young children, non-human animals, slow laptops and deadly earthquakes cannot do, and we accordingly exempt these things from (if we were ever inclined to

³⁴ I made that case only for conscious states, but the argument carries over to commitments.

include them in) our practices of holding one another responsible.³⁵ If I were to resent any of those things, I would be making a judgment of their behavior that they could not make themselves. Yet when I resent you for the commitment your behavior seems to express, I cast a judgment you might make yourself in the form of guilt.

That is the stronger thesis. It is not just, trivially, that if you are a responsible agent, you must be another mind. Nor do I think that it is fundamentally that if you are a responsible agent, you can understand others' responses to your agency. It is that if you are a responsible agent—a being whose behavior can appropriately (if not correctly) be judged to express certain commitments—then you must be capable of making such a judgment yourself. That condition may need to be tightened in various ways. It may be that you need to be able to interpret your behavior as expressing specifically interpersonal commitments or a quality of will towards others. Either way, we can now embrace the moral significance latent in Gomes's (2011, 371) otherwise ho-hum conclusion that "[r]eflection on the conceptual problem of other minds should remind us that the problem of other minds is a problem about our relation to other people."³⁶

Conclusion

If everything I have said is correct, testimony seems to be our best solution to every conceptual problem of other minds that sensibly arises. That includes the conceptual problem of

³⁵ Since what I have just given is only a necessary condition, it does not suffice for counting the mentally insane and severely disabled as responsible when they are not. But it does raise the empirical question of whether and to what extent these human beings can interpret their behavior as expressing their commitments—and whether, from case to case, there is a correlation with our attributions of degrees of responsibility.

³⁶ Gomes was writing only on what I have singled out as the conceptual problem of other conscious minds. I cannot imagine he intended that remark to bear the weight I am placing on it.

other conscious minds, which previous authors have failed to solve, and the conceptual problem of other people, which previous authors have failed to notice. It does not include the conceptual problem of other cognitive minds, which previous authors have mistakenly taken cognitive science to solve when it cannot for there is no such problem. And if I am right, we find the problem of other minds belonging somewhere between issues of communication and issues of responsibility—perhaps even bridging the two—but *not* under the rug of some generic issue over whether we can know anything.

Although I began this essay denying that the problem of other minds should be assimilated with such general worries, I might be accused of being inconsistent (in spirit, if not on print) on this point. Most philosophers tend to deny that there is any interesting problem of how we know other minds: there is only the general problem of how we know anything (or better, how each of us knows anything). But I have ended up similarly claiming that there is no special problem of how we understand others when they tell us about their experiences or commitments: there is only the general mystery of how we ever understand a speaker's reference. So I might fall on the wrong side of Cavell's indictment that

In making the knowledge of others a metaphysical difficulty, philosophers deny how real the practical difficulty is of coming to know another person, and how little we can reveal of ourselves to another's gaze, or bear of it. Doubtless such denials are part of the motive which sustains metaphysical difficulties. (Cavell, 1979/1999, 90)

Still worse, since I have taken the Austinian route of supposing our practice of telling and trusting each other about our mental lives to be bedrock, I might appear to shy away from the possibility of further philosophical conversation altogether, keeping instead to shallow, quietist waters.

However, the present account need not deny how real—and I suppose Cavell means *peculiar*—“the practical difficulty is of coming to know another person.” Nor need it pass by the deeper sources of this difficulty in silence. Rather, I take the resulting picture to show where the real life problem of other minds lies—not in any general struggle with the defects of our finite cognitive or perceptual faculties, but in our struggle to express ourselves, to trust our expressions and those of another. It is these struggles that make natural our tendency to doubt the connection we have with one another. It is natural to wonder whether we have made ourselves clear to another if not despair that we cannot all always be as articulate as Joyce, Proust, or Woolf. And it is natural to feel vulnerable when our access to others is not (for it cannot be) entirely within our control alone, when our ability to believe what another says about their thoughts or feelings depends substantially on our ability to believe *them*. “Yet letters are venerable,” Woolf reminds us, “and the telephone valiant, for the journey is a lonely one, and if bound together by notes and telephones we went in company, perhaps—who knows?—we might talk by the way.”³⁷

³⁷ From *Jacob's Room*, quoted at the conclusion of *Wisdom* (1956, 217).

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