



Faculty of Humanities



I, You, and We

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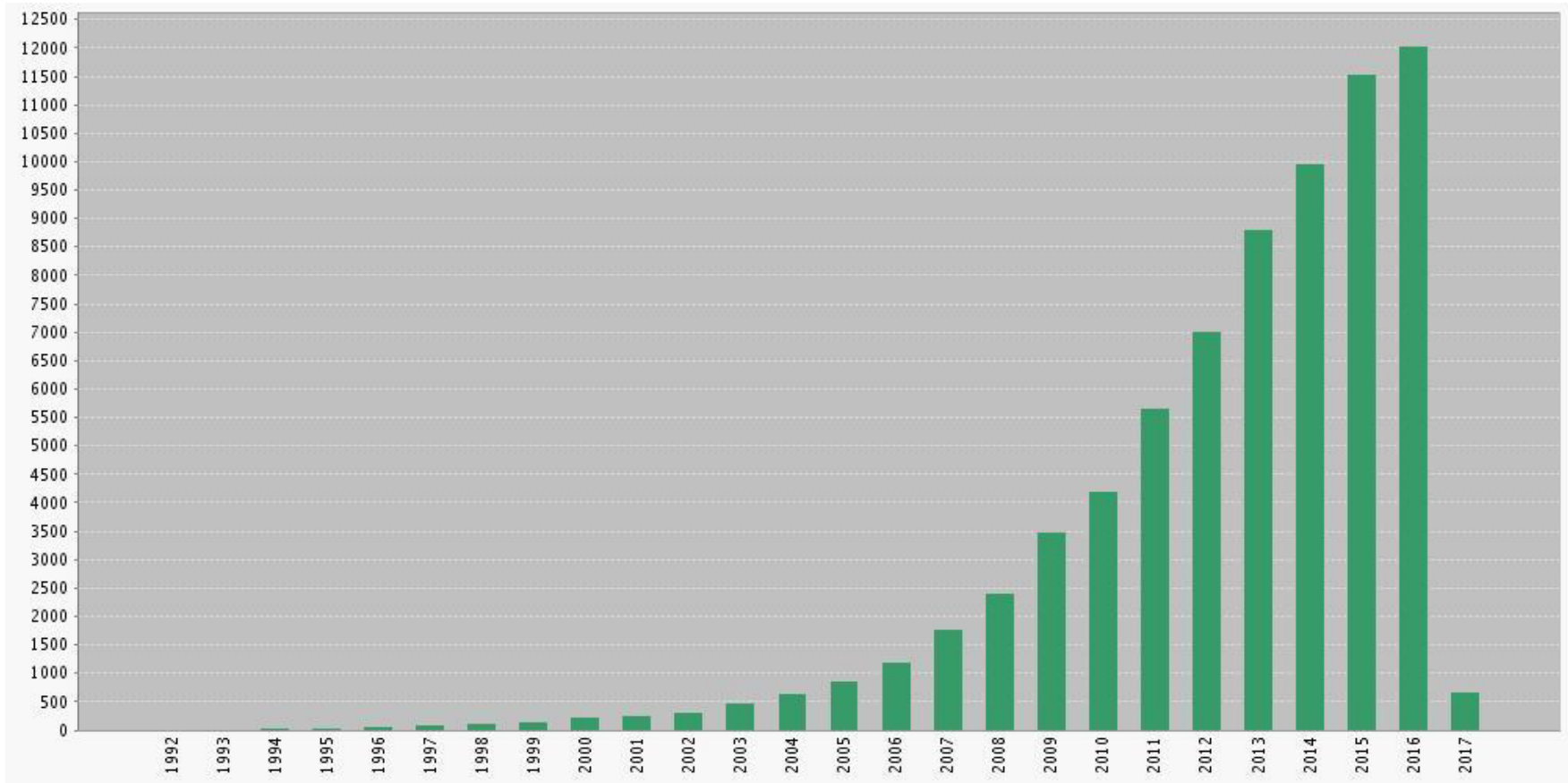


Self & Other: Social cognition and communication

- How are they metaphysically and epistemically related?
- Are these relevant questions?
- It is not obvious that everybody would agree
- Some Buddhist thinkers have advocated the view that there is no deep difference – not even an experiential one – between me and you
- It is hard to see why a committed anti-realist about the self should consider these problems to be anything but pseudo-problems
- Put more positively, shouldn't a proper engagement with these questions involve reflections on what we take a self to be?



Self in neuroscience On ISI Web of Knowledge: Citations



“Autism - ‘Autos’: Literally, a Total Focus on the Self?”

- “The idea that as a result of neurological factors one might lose aspects of the self is scientifically important, in that it offers the promise of teaching us more about what the self is. In this chapter I do not tackle the thorny question of how to define the self. Rather, I accept that this word refers to something we recognize and instead raise the question: are people with autism trapped – for neurological reasons – to be totally self-focused?” Simon Baron-Cohen



Multiple notions of self

- material self, social self, spiritual self (James 1890)
- ecological self, interpersonal self, extended self, private self, conceptual self (Neisser 1988)
- autobiographical self, narrative self, cognitive self, contextualized self, core self, dialogical self, embodied self, empirical self, fictional self, minimal self, experiential self, normative self, neural self, etc.

Equivocations

- Multiple notions of self, multiple types of self-experience and self-apprehension
- The same holds true in the case of social cognition: You can also experience and understand others in different ways
- Social cognition is not just one thing
- Until recently, the default options in the TOM debate was to approach the other through either a privileging of the first-person (simulation theory) or third-person (theory-theory of mind) perspective
- Recently, however, a new approach has appeared on the scene, one that argues that a proper account of social cognition has to factor in the importance of the second-person perspective
- Eilan: "You turn"
- Schilbach et al: "Toward a second-person neuroscience"
Behavioral and Brain Sciences 2013
- But what is a second-person perspective?



Pauen: “The second-person perspective” (2012)

- Social cognition based on the third-person perspective:
Utilizing objective features (behavior, brain scans)
- Social cognition based on the second-person perspective:
Drawing on one’s own experiences when ascribing mental states to others
- Simulation theory is a kind of second-person perspective taking
- Hard to see why this should amount to anything different than a standard first-person approach to social cognition



Reciprocal nature of second-person engagement

- “Communication, when we confront each other face-to-face, is not a one-way process from me to you. The way you respond to me alters the way I respond to you. This is a communication loop. [...] This is the big difference from my interactions with the physical world. The physical world is utterly indifferent to my attempts to interpret it. But when two people interact face-to-face, their exchange of meaning is a cooperative venture. The flow is never just one-way” (Frith 2007: 175).
- To adopt a second-person perspective on another is to relate to the other as a you (rather than as a he or she)
- For me to relate to another as a you is to relate to someone who relates to me as a you
- Second-person engagement consequently involves a subject-subject (you-me) relation, where I am aware of the other and at the same time aware of myself in the accusative, as attended to or addressed by the other



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- Social cognition, interpersonal self-consciousness, reciprocity



You and We

- Why should second-person engagement be important?
- A frequent claim is that agents that directly interact with one another, can achieve a 'meeting' of minds, that is qualitatively different and informationally richer than anything that can be achieved through recursive exercises of inferential mindreading
- Might second-person engagement also be of relevance for our understanding of collective intentionality and communal experiences?
- Edith Stein: The we arises from the 'I' and the 'you' (1917)
- Alfred Schutz: It is when two individuals engage in a reciprocal you-orientation that they establish a we-relationship (1932)
- Edmund Husserl: Community is based on communication. It is while relating to the other as a you that the we is formed (1932)
- Face-to-face real-time interaction might allow for some constitutive coupling



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- Face-to-face real-time interaction might allow for some constitutive coupling – but is that all?



What kind of we?

- Consider a case, where one's distress is enhanced by the distress of five other people in the waiting room, who also missed their transatlantic flight
- This case is a case where one's behavior and affect is influenced by the presence of other people
- It might be accounted for by appealing to some kind of emotional contagion
- This case, is very different from a case where one is part of a winning sports team, and where the joy and pride one feels with one's teammates isn't simply a joy and pride that is causally dependent upon the bodily proximity of certain others, but rather is a joy and pride that is felt *together* with others, as one that *we* are having: I experience the joy and pride not simply as *mine* but as *ours*.
- Interaction, co-regulation and identification
- What does it take to feel, think, or act as (part of a) we?
- How do I come to think and experience myself as one of *us*?



Group-identification and social identity theory

- According to social identity theory, group-identification necessarily involves a change in self-apprehension
- If I am to identify with others, if I am to adopt a we-perspective, I need to de-emphasize my distinctiveness and instead highlight those features that I have in common with others
- Importantly, the self-apprehension required if one is to adopt and maintain a we-perspective is not immediately available. It is not an innate part of our psychological makeup, it is not an automatic component of our own first-personal self-experience, but rather involves a subsequent transformation or modulation of it
- This might be where second-person engagement comes in: It provides me with a socially mediated externalized form of self-experience – one that allows me to see the similarity between myself and others
- Necessary and not sufficient condition: The existence of antagonistic dyads



Intertwinement of perspectives

- Recent philosophical discussions of collective intentionality have tended to centre on the question of how individuals collectively intend to do something and whether such collective intentions differ from a mere aggregation of individual intentions
- Little attention has been devoted to an examination of the kind of self-experience and the type of interpersonal understanding that are at play in different we-formations
- This is unfortunate
- A satisfactory account of we-intentionality must necessarily be embedded in a more overarching investigation of self(-consciousness) and social cognition
- First-person singular, second-person singular and first-person plural perspectives are interconnected



Dissenting Russian and Polish voices

- Semyon Frank (1877-1950)
 - "The I is only possible in its relation to a you, that is, as a member of a we"
- Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859)
 - "If I am I, because you are you, and you are you, because I am I, then I am not I, and you are not you. But if I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you, and we can talk."
- The debate is not merely theoretical, but also political
- Is collective identity primary? Does my group-membership exhaustively define who I am?



Concluding questions

- If there are genuine we-phenomena, what does that tell us about the nature of self?
 - Do they testify to the fluid character of selfhood?
 - Is the fact that we can identify with a group and adopt a we-perspective compatible with just any notion of self, or does it rule out certain overly static and disembodied models?
- Are all forms of social cognition equal to the task, or are some forms (e.g., inferential attribution, imaginative projection, reciprocal empathy, etc.) especially conducive for the emergence of a shared we-perspective.
- What is the relation between the we-intentionality, we find in face-to-face interactions and more anonymous forms of we-intentionality?



Thanks for your attention!

