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'You Are Here': The Second-Person Epistemology

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Abstract: It seems insufficient for both the first-person and the third-person perspective to be able to completely explain the exchange of knowledge in certain situations, as there will always be cases that cannot be categorized under these. In this case, the conception of the second-person perspective becomes a prominent idea in epistemology, regardless of the acclaimed theory that the perspective itself does not exist, and that it may simply be reducible to the third-person. This paper aims to examine the the initial two main perspectives; the first-person and the third-person, and how both have certain points that causes a gap in certain situations—that there still seems to be an insufficient explanation for cases that, regardless of thorough examination, still cannot qualify under the main perspectives. The first two perspectives will generally be seen through the epistemological justification of the Internalist and Externalist view, and will branch off to the Philosophy of Mind under the Theory theory and the Simulation theory. It then aims to qualify the second-person perspective, that is the main feature of the second-person epistemology; to prove the existence of the second-person epistemology through certain interactive, cooperative and collaborative communication whilst posing sufficient conditions to motivate the claim. I claim that the second-person epistemology *does* exist. This revolves around the modified interaction theory, wherein I modify the interaction theory branching off from the philosophy of mind, in order to adhere to the principles of epistemology. The interaction theory in this sense is when one can make predictions and claims through constant interaction with an external person, but in the epistemological sense—*learn* or *obtain knowledge* through the constant interaction with people who cannot directly adhere to the linguistic phenomena of mentioning the word 'you' or 'your'.

Key Words: *Second-person perspective, Second-person epistemology, Mind, Interaction, Communication*



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1. Introduction

In a world that produces a stream of claims and ideas that need to be justified, the concept of epistemology as a discourse puts into question whether one could decide on attaining what one could consider 'true knowledge' be necessary. In particular, several debates within epistemology tend to question where one could attain knowledge that is certainly true and completely justified. In a sense, the exchange and acceptance of knowledge through certain modes of presentation of a person qualifies on what level one could consider knowledge—whether first-person perspective is simply intrapersonal and is privileged to one person, or how the third-person perspective can be conveyed in both ways, intrapersonal and interpersonal, puts into question whether the second-person perspective could somehow manage to relay an equal or at least sufficient amount of knowledge as compared to the other two. The paper aims to redefine the concept of knowledge into the second-person epistemology, explaining the entailed gaps between communication in this perspective. First, I will distinguish the different views or perspectives that lead to the conception of knowledge in the field of epistemology, and then further narrow it down to the second-person perspective, and how its existence as a discourse is based on 'co-operative communication and interaction', as compared to that of the independence of the first-person and third-person perspectives.

1.1 *The Existing Second-Person*

Epistemology has long accepted the need for communication in order to relay knowledge, and that certain epistemic claims must go through a certain level of justification in order to be considered as true knowledge (on the basis of justified true belief). According to Moran, "[t]he notion of 'bipolar' or 'second-personal' normativity is often illustrated by such situations as that of one addressing a complaint to another, or asserting some right, or claiming some authority." If the first-person view need not to involve factors that are external to the self and the third-person view need to be formed on the basis of reliability, the second-person view may only be maintained if it is in relation to a known other. In other words, there is a cooperative collaboration between two differing elements of opinions, a non-

accidental exchange of information that needs to be reconfirmed by one another. Moran (2013) further claims the importance of speech and testimony, stating that:

...I have argued that the way a person's act of telling another person that P comes to be a reason for belief in P is importantly different from how ordinary evidence functions as a reason for belief, and that this difference is obscured by a failure to give sufficient attention to the specifically verbal nature of the act of telling someone something. (p. 116)

This moderately disregards the first-person view, which involves the reason for belief, and introduces a completely verbal exchange of information. The idea behind this is that the information is asserted into the person accepting the information, whether he or she accepts it or not. Moran explains this, stating that "[i]n promising someone to do something, for example, a speaker may be said to create a reason for doing something in incurring a (second-personal) obligation to do it, an obligation that does not precede the promise itself." The promise, prior to the obligation, need not be fulfilled by the promisor if not mentioned to begin with, and thus the act of promising itself links the promisor into the idea that they are obligated to fulfill it. Heal (2014) states that some philosophers such as Heck (2002) and Peacocke (2013) think that the first-person and third-person accounts exhaust the field of thought, that "[t]he second-person view exists [merely] as a linguistic phenomenon." Heal further explains the meaning behind Heck's linguistic phenomenon, by offering a thought experiment. Consider the statement 'summer is just around the corner—it's getting warmer'. Despite having mentioned the words 'you' or 'your', it is still sufficiently directed at someone that is "thought of as 'you'." In this sense, statements do not necessarily need to have pronouns such as you or your, only that the statement implies a level of correlating to 'you'. If one were to completely attach one's self to the idea that second person is found in the usage of 'you' or 'yours', then statements like 'it's getting warmer' can only be discerned at a level of acceptance in first-person and third-person view. Heal defines this in Heck's words, saying that "unless we countenance the idea of thoughts which



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occur when and only when a certain word is uttered, Heck's view requires that the thoughts leading to utterance containing the word 'you' can themselves be explained by thoughts which are first and third person only."

In this sense, Peacocke further supports Heck in the disagreement with the possibility and existence of a second person, by blatantly saying that "there is no such thing as a second-person belief". This is because that regardless of mentioning the word 'you' or not, it would eventually lead to seeing such claims in the first-person or third-person perspective. Heal further expounds on the argument, stating that:

One argument which may contribute to its attraction starts from the premise that the distinctiveness of second person thought, if any, must be manifested in its upstream epistemology. Combined with the idea that the second person has no epistemology different from that of the third person (which will seem plausible to many even it is not obviously correct), this would yield the position Heck and Peacocke set out.

Heal finds that the second person thought may be uttered on the grounds of 'you' or 'yours', but necessarily will lead and be analyzed in the third-person sense. However, the problem lies on the reliance of the perspectives on the usage of metaphors, pronouns and verbs. Pauen further extends the debate, by stating that "[w]hat is needed is a difference not in terms of the epistemic object but, rather, in terms of epistemic access—even if it may turn out to be necessary to refer to specific epistemic objects in order to clarify what the specific kind of access is." The value pointed out here is not in the perspective itself, and the person that is experiencing the situation, but rather who has epistemic 'access' over said experience. My experience of my own hands will not differ when I am looking at another person's hands—I will see hands, and it will not vary for anyone else—would it then be considered self-knowledge? If one considered the classic example of the sensation of pain, my pain could differ from someone else's pain—and that in itself highlights the concept of the first-person and the third-person.

The second person is a completely different concept as compared to that of the first-person and the third-person, the importance being stated by Pauen as "that there is a specific kind of epistemic access which is quite different both from first-person and third-person perspective taking." Indeed, there is

a level of knowledge and claims that cannot be categorized as neither first-person nor third-person—but this should not lead to the claim being disregarded completely. Pauen (2012) states that the second-person perspective:

...requires that the epistemic subject ascribes mental states to sentient beings and that she does so based on her own experience or imagination of this very mental states... Likewise, you should be able to imagine what it would be like to believe that the world is the center of the universe which, again, would include drawing on your experience of having some related beliefs and ideas, say being in the center of a square with everything else revolving around you, etc. (p. 39).

In a sense, one does not need to consider someone else's experience in order to fall under second-person thought, that it doesn't require for you to have a real, current migraine in order to understand the second-person perspective of someone else's migraine. This leads you to having to imagine having a migraine, recalling your past experience of having a migraine, or vaguely the experience of pain itself. Ultimately, the real gap that exists that hinders one from understanding the second-person thought is that "if we just feel, believe, or desire what others feel, believe, or desire, but do not realize that it's their feelings, beliefs and desires? The most obvious feature that is missing is a self/other distinction, that is, the recognition that what this is all about is their feeling rather than ours." This leans towards the acceptance that, Pauen continues, that "missing is a self/other distinction, that is, the recognition that what this is all about is their feeling rather than ours... it requires some kind of awareness that the mental state we are imagining or replicating actually is the other person's mental state, no matter whether it is an effect, a belief of a desire". Second-person, if not an experience that grounds with a co-operative other, is actually the act of replicating a mental state, such that one would be feeling the same way as the other would. He states, however, that it is not sufficient. The second-person "is not objective", "is not about what is the case in the external world", and "is about what other people believe to be the case."

2. Motivating the Second-Person

Interaction, then, is mainly the reason as to why the second-person perspective differs greatly from the



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other two. The proposed common theory, which is found in the philosophy of mind, is the idea of the *interaction theory*, wherein Gallagher (2004) specifically qualifies as a supposition to compensate for what the Theory theory and the Simulation theory lack. He states that “When I am interacting with you in a second-person relationship—in conversation or while working together on a project, for instance—my experience is not one of acting as an observer, attempting to formulate an explanation or prediction of your behavior.” His view on the interaction involves the lack within the capability of the Theory theory and the Simulation Theory, categorizing the interactions as a focal point in understanding the other person, and that “[t]his account implies that the recognition of another person’s beliefs, desires, or intentional states involves conceptual, declarative knowledge.” The first two theories, that directly relate to the first-person and the third-person for Gallagher, seems to be lacking. Third person seems to take a “detached theoretical attitude toward the person in discussion,” and “does not capture the dynamics of [the] ongoing interaction with [the] interlocutor.” Furthermore, he states that in this view:

second-person interactions, the mind of the other is not entirely hidden or private, but is given and manifest in the other person’s embodied comportment. The basis for human interaction and for understanding others can be found already at work in early infancy in certain embodied practices that are emotional, sensory-motor, perceptual, and non-conceptual. Interaction theory contends that these embodied practices constitute our primary access for understanding others, and continue to do so even after we attain theory of mind abilities. (p. 204-205).

However, by simply stating that, in this case, mental states are not completely exclusive to the person and should not be seen as private—could such be considered as knowledge? Simply comprehending an external person’s intentions through observation of actions seems to solve a second-person relationship, but still leaves an epistemic gap. From this point, I will be using a modified version of the interaction theory, following the claim that one could motivate second-person epistemology by interacting with

others in a particular way. Consider the following modified interaction theory view:

G1 S knows that $p = Df.$ S has had a recent, direct, and sufficient number of interactions with p .

This view poses a possible sufficient argument for the second-person epistemology. Using the view stated above, let us examine the following cases.

Case 1. Min just recently moved into his current neighborhood and is feeling unsociable. The first few weeks were spent in complete isolation—he had not bothered stepping out of the house at all to socialize.

- (a) Min has no second-person knowledge of anyone in his neighborhood.

Say that Min, after a few weeks, has gathered enough courage to walk around his neighborhood for the first time. It is only then does Min’s presence occur to his neighbors. However, he only learns their names—nothing more, nothing less. Does Min have second-person knowledge of his neighbors?

- (b) Min has insufficient second-person knowledge of anyone in his neighborhood.

Over time, Min constantly greets his neighbors, but doesn’t initiate small talk, or doesn’t relate any conversation to anything personal. However, he still consistently greets them ‘good morning’, ‘good afternoon’, and ‘good evening’ on his daily route.

3. The Modified Interaction Theory

Min, in Case 1, encounters his neighbors (which are numerous entities), and in case 2, encounters a therapist (a single entity). At point (a), Min denies the condition of interaction completely, that being unable to communicate with an external entity would cause an epistemic gap. Min could be considering his own mental states in first-person knowledge, by stating that ‘I do not want to go outside’. In this case, Min gains knowledge through first-person. However, in (b), entities external to Min are introduced. From this point, interaction and imparting certain statements may be considered as second-person knowledge. In consideration to G1, Case 1 seems to be able to satisfy all the given



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conditions. In this case, Min has constant interaction with his neighbors, allowing the conditions of being *recent*, *direct* and *consistent* in reference to interaction to be fulfilled.

It may be the case that the insufficiency is due to the lack of what Talbert claims exists in second-person epistemology—that “[b]oth are subjects, capable of sharing mental states.” Min, in this case, does not share a mental state—the small talk is simply an exchange of words that is accepted by the receiver, and is in no way imparting any new information, and if the receiver does not try to mutually comprehend the given mental state, then there seems to be a gap as well. What of a situation wherein *S* does not completely tell the correct mental state behind the imparted knowledge—the input of false information therefore cannot prove the existence of second-person epistemology. In this case, *any* statement, whether it be true or false, can be considered knowledge. With the concept of the modified interaction theory, we may add:

G2 *S* knows that $p = \text{Df. } S$ has had a recent, direct, and sufficient number of interactions with p , and that p is telling the truth.

Truth, in this sense, is truthfulness in alignment to p 's mental states. Say that p may be thinking in a first-person perspective, may be considering one's own mental states—and then by imparting such mental states through communication (interaction with one that is external to the self), the receiving end of the mental states will accept the information as knowledge in the second-person perspective. This then, as Heal claims, brings in the “co-operation”[,] a kind of action or activity where agents... have a common purpose and hence common knowledge of their circumstances and of what they are doing.”

It seems to still be insufficient. There still seems to be something missing, consider the additional condition:

G3 *S* knows that $p = \text{Df. } S$ has had a recent, direct, and sufficient number of interactions with p , that p is telling the truth, and *S* has no available bias for the information about p .

If there is abrupt precedent interaction with another subject, and that interaction causes a certain bias forming within the main subject that blocks off any further knowledge from coming in, then it seems to pose a problem for second-person epistemology. In

this case, a certain bias would be unable to, regardless of whether the other is telling the complete truth, would not allow the second-person exchange to qualify as knowledge.

4. Conclusions

In this sense, the second-person epistemology differs largely as compared to that of the first-person and third-person epistemology, which is done through direct, real-time exchange. In truth, there are certain situations that pose that there are cases of knowledge that cannot qualify under either prominent theories, and thus fall under the existing, second-person epistemology. Certain conditions seem to prove sufficient the kind of second-person epistemology one can gain from examining the points stated—that in such real time, truth perceiving situations, one may be able to attain a level of epistemology only through accepting the second-person view. Furthermore, there must be a level of emotional acceptance that one must take up in order to accept such knowledge.

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