

Some Reflections on Our Knowledge of Other Selves

- 1) According to Ian Ramsey, "I become aware of myself as I become aware of an environment transcending observables" (Prospect for Metaphysics, 167f.). I.e., we talk of ourselves in terms of "I" "because we recognize it [sc. "I"] as being used as an indicator word by others for themselves, relating to their public behaviour and more, and we recognize that we ourselves want to talk precisely of that . . . and so of 'I'." "It is not likely that we should use 'I' for ourselves, if there were nothing else but ourselves." We become aware of ourselves as we become aware of others, so that "the use of the word 'I' commits us . . . to pluralism of persons."[#] On my view, the very nature of our experience as both sensuous and nonsensuous entails that, like the animals, we are always already aware (even if not humanly aware) of "an environment transcending observables." Thus the discovery of ourselves and others, as well as our discovery of an environment of observable objects, is of the order of a finer discrimination of a datum of which we were in some sense aware before the discovery. To this extent, Ramsey's view of the origin of the experience of sociability does not reach back far enough to recover the real origins--or, better, all the originating factors--of that experience. The value of his view, however, is to make clear that the human experience of self and the human experience of other selves are coeval with one another. I would add only, with Scheler, (who, however, omits our consciousness of other selves!) that "consciousness of the world, of the self, and of God forms an inseparable structural unity." In becoming conscious of myself and other selves, I also become conscious "formally" of God, of "the formal sphere of a Being, absolute in itself."
- 2) Also relevant in a somewhat similar way is Wisdom's position that

our knowledge of others depends upon a mutual interplay between observations and self-knowledge. Behaviorism is to be rejected because "it neglects the fact that though one who has never tasted what is bitter or sweet and has never felt pain may know very well the behavior characteristics of, for instance, pain, he yet cannot know pain nor even that another is in pain--not in the way he could had he himself felt pain. It is from looking round him that a man knows of the pain of the love and of the hate in the world, but it is also from his own ^{heart} ~~hears~~" (Paradox and Discovery, 15). This seems to me profoundly right, though it's important to stress, I think, that one's knowledge of his own heart is already, in its way, a social affair, a matter of knowledge of the other, albeit not by way of observation. What ultimately warrants our interpretation of our "observations" in terms of our "self-knowledge" is that the latter itself is already sympathetic knowledge of the other, even if another other than the one we observe.

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