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BEING-TOGETHER: AN ESSAY ON THE FIRST-PERSON PLURAL

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation concerns the philosophy of the first-person. It consists of three principal philosophical studies, each concerning a set of concepts that, when taken together, form a skeletal though unified account of the first-person. The first part concerns the various uses of the first-person singular (‘I’) as well as first-person immunity to error through misidentification. The second part concerns the various uses of the first-person plural (‘we’). I argue that (i) there are several distinct uses of the first-person plural pronoun, (ii) that each of these uses can be articulated inferentially, and (iii) that one use of the first-person plural—what I call the “generic use”—is conceptually basic. In the third part, I argue that the first-person plural pronoun is, at least on some of its uses, the grammatical mark of a certain form of self-conscious understanding, and it is this kind of self-conscious understanding that underwrites the possibility of speaking a language. I end by outlining some structural relations between the various uses of the first-person singular and the first-person plural. According to the account offered here, the first-person singular and the first-person plural form a non-additive unitary structure. Correctly understood, an account of the first-person must include both the first-person singular and the first-person plural.
The essays in this dissertation are the fruit of several longstanding conversations: with my committee, Mark Lance, Terry Pinkard, and David Bronstein; with my teachers, Bill Blattner, Yuri Corrigan, Wayne Davis, Bryce Huebner, Rebecca Kukla, Huaping Lu-Adler, Mark Murphy, Evan Riley, and Kate Withy; and with my friends, Daniel Baker, Gaurav Bagwe, Gabe Broughton, Clark Donley, Jason Farr, Rose Ryan Flynn, Jonathan Gombin, Oren Magid, Jake McNulty, Thomas Pendlebury, Kyle Scott, Ryan Simonelli, Omar Talhouk, Gerald Taylor, and Wim Vanrie.

I would like to single out four philosophers for special thanks. For the past five years I have been in nearly continuous conversation with Terry Pinkard. These conversations have had a transformative effect on my conception of philosophy, and this document everywhere bears the marks of his influence. Mark Lance, my chair, made himself available at the drop of a dime anytime I had something to say or discuss this past year. He has been a relentless critic and supporter of my work, and I am very grateful for the seriousness with which he brought to this project. In my third year of graduate school I met weekly with Kate Withy to discuss Heidegger's Being and Time. Unlike anyone I've met, Kate shows how reading a philosophical text can be as much an ethical activity as it is an intellectual one. Her commitment to the activity of philosophy has been a constant source of inspiration. Lastly, my gratitude to Jason Farr extends far beyond anything I can or want say here. For the past four years, hardly a day has gone by without his companionship. Much of this dissertation has been hammered out on our walks together, and his friendship has been a great joy in my life.

I would like to thank Ella Taranto for her unabating enthusiasm for this project over the past year.

I save my deepest gratitude for my family: my mother, Steffie; my father, Stewart; and my sister, Kameron.

Questions that approach the philosophical are everywhere threatened by unintelligibility, and no experience is more familiar to me than the illusion of having meant something. Those listed above have saved me from the worst of my mistakes.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 1: FIRST-PERSON IMMUNITY TO ERROR THROUGH MISIDENTIFICATION
......................................................................................................................................................... 21

CHAPTER 2: ARTICULATING THE FIRST-PERSON PLURAL ................................................................. 53

CHAPTER 3: ON THE FIRST-PERSON PLURAL CHARACTER OF LINGUISTIC PRACTICE
............................................................................................................................................................. 82

CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................................ 111

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................................... 116
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Forms of the first-person plural</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Forms of the first-person singular</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Immunity and its grounds</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Complete forms of the first-person plural</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Descriptions by exemplification</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Left-hand side of descriptions by exemplification</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Active and passive diatheses</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Here again we see language as the existence of spirit. Language is self-consciousness existing for others. It is self-consciousness which as such is immediately present, and as this self-consciousness, it is universal.

—G.W.F. Hegel

This dissertation (or “essay,” as I’ve called it) concerns the philosophy of the first-person. It consists of three principal philosophical studies, each concerning a set of concepts that, when taken together, form a skeletal though unified account of the first-person. The first part concerns the various uses of the first-person singular (‘I’) as well as first-person immunity to error through misidentification (hereafter, first-person IEM). The second part concerns the various uses of the first-person plural (‘we’). I argue that (i) there are several distinct uses of the first-person plural pronoun, (ii) that each of these uses can be articulated inferentially, and (iii) that one use of the first-person plural—what I call the “generic use”—is conceptually basic. In the third part, I argue that the first-person plural pronoun is, at least on some of its uses, the grammatical mark of a certain form of self-conscious understanding,

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and it is this kind of self-conscious understanding that underwrites the possibility of speaking a language. I end by outlining some structural relations between the various uses of the first-person singular and the first-person plural. According to the account offered here, the first-person singular and the first-person plural form a non-additive unitary structure. Correctly understood, an account of the first-person must include both the first-person singular and the first-person plural.

These studies cover a wide swath of conceptual space, and from the perspective of contemporary philosophy of the first-person, it is not clear that they all fit under a common heading. In this introduction, I bring out some of the substantive interrelations between these studies. They build one upon the others, and the concepts elucidated in the initial parts are then put to work and further elaborated in the subsequent parts. By showing the conceptual interrelations between the topics listed above, I hope to begin to exfoliate the term ‘the first-person’ to find a place for these topics under one heading: the first-person.²

This essay begins where many studies of the first-person begin: the source of first-person singular immunity to error through misidentification (first-person IEM). Abstractly, some statement or assertion $\phi$ has the property of first-person IEM if and only if any context that constitutes this assertion as knowledge that something is $\phi$ constitutes as well knowledge that one oneself is $\phi$. But why is first-person IEM the standard starting point for work on the first-person? It is largely accepted (and I do accept) that first-person IEM is one of the principal marks of self-consciousness. When my use of ‘I’ is immune to error through misidentification, I know myself to be in some way or another,  

²Throughout this essay I use small capitals to denote concepts. I use italics for emphasis and to denote propositions, e.g., $p$. I use single quotes to mention terms or sentences—though see Chapter 3 §2 for some complications regarding the use/mention distinction—and I use double-quotes for quoting sources as well as intratextual indirect speech. I also use double-quotes to introduce terms-of-art. I use minuscule xs, ys, and $\phi$s as variables to range over various sorts of entities at issue in propositional schemas. (Though see Chapter 2 §2.2.1 for complications concerning syncategorematic verbal nexuses.) I use majuscule As, Bs, and Cs, as variables to range over action-types.
and this knowledge is different in form from ordinary, third-person empirical knowledge. If I assert “I think that DB is a great poet,” my assertion is about myself, as myself, at least in part: it expresses something about what’s going on with me as the thinking, asserting subject. Such uses of ‘I’ express a form of agential self-conscious knowledge.

Although there is a wealth of work on first-person singular IEM and its philosophical significance, my starting point is strategic. No contemporary account of first-person IEM applies to uses of both the first-person singular and the first-person plural. In fact, given a core assumption at work in contemporary accounts of first-person IEM, these accounts are structurally incapable of encompassing uses of both the first-person singular and the first-person plural. This raises a question. Is the first-person plural a genuine form of the first-person? That is, can the first-person plural be set aside in a philosophical account of self-consciousness and the first-person? My aim here is to offer an account of first-person IEM that applies to both uses of the first-person pronoun. If this can be done, then we can begin to investigate whether there are sui generis forms of self-consciousness expressed by the first-person plural pronoun.

But there is, as stated, a significant obstacle that stands in the way of my aim. Accounts of first-person IEM almost universally attempt to locate the source of first-person IEM at the level of sub-sentential sense. It is assumed that first-person IEM is the property of a certain kind of sub-sentential semantic or conceptual content. This is a crucial mistake. First-person IEM is not in any way to be located at the level of sub-sentential sense, and thus there is no reason to think that it is a property of a single kind of content—a first-person singular I-concept or some primitive singular self-concept, for instance. Once this assumption is dropped, it is easier to widen the scope of first-person IEM to non-singular uses of the first-person.

The core idea that motivates my account of first-person IEM is that first-person IEM belongs to a certain context of activity—namely, to claims, assertions, or judgments and the kind of authority
that is internal to such acts. I call this kind of authority “illocutionary authority,” and I argue that it is an essentially self-conscious capacity of mature speakers and thinkers. The source of first-person IEM is a feature of a speaker’s illocutionary authority to determine the illocutionary character and epistemic grounds of certain acts.

A major conceptual move, relevant to everything that comes later, is introduced here. The analysis of the concept ILLOCUTIONARY AUTHORITY requires a use of the first-person singular ‘I’ as an operator—that is, a use of ‘I’ that stands outside of a predicative proposition. This leads me to introduce a distinction between what I call “categorematic” and “syncategorematic” uses of the first-person. An assertion $C$ is a categorematic first-person assertion if and only if $C$ is of the form $\phi a$, where $a$ is a first-person (singular or plural) singular term, and $\phi$ is a predicate. An assertion $C$ is a syncategorematic first-person claim if and only if $C$ is of the form $(Oa)P$, where $a$ is a first-person (singular or plural) singular term, $Oa$ is some sentential operator, and $P$ is a sentence. Important for what comes later, the distinction between categorematic uses of the first-person and syncategorematic uses of the first-person applies across both singular and plural uses of the first-person.

The second stage of my argument is to suggest that certain uses of the syncategorematic ‘I’ function as what I call “self-identifying displays.” Certain uses of the syncategorematic ‘I’ function to display—which is not to be confused with any kind of descriptive or referential semantic function—

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3 My account is deeply indebted to Evans’ account of first-person IEM in his (1982) *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford University Press. As will be clear, although my account is motivated by similar insights, the details of my account diverge greatly from Evans’ account.

4 I adopt the use of these terms from Kimhi, I. (2018). *Thinking and Being*. Harvard University Press. I prefer the term “syncategorematic” over the more common “propositional attitude report” for reasons that are made plain in Chapters 1 and 2. Briefly, I argue that the logical form of a syncategorematic first-person claim (singular or plural) is not $\alpha(\xi, \zeta)$, where $\cdots \alpha \cdots$ stands for the relation that $S, \phi, p$. The concept PROPOSITIONAL ATTITUDE is often analyzed as a kind of relation. The fact that it is an attitude towards something already encodes such a presumption. I want to avoid any such construal in this account.
a knowledge-dependent, commitment-acknowledging act. To use ‘I’ in this way is to self-knowingly display oneself as the locus of illocutionary authority.

To make sense of the concept SELF-IDENTIFYING DISPLAY, I argue that assertions, claims, or judgments that are immune to error through misidentification do not have the ontological status of events, and so the grammar of these acts cannot be captured using an existential quantifier.\(^5\) First-person assertions or judgments that are IEM are state-quantified: they are states of being responsive to and responsible for a commitment in light of possibly indefinite forms of disagreement, clarification, and other forms of epistemic interaction. According to my account, certain uses of the syncategorematic ‘I’ function to display oneself as the locus of epistemic authority within these epistemic contexts. I call these “practical discursive contexts,” and I suggest that these contexts are the media of discursive epistemic interaction. A statement that is IEM relative to the first-person pronoun marks oneself as the locus of a particular kind of epistemic authority within a practical discursive context.

But what are the properties or features of these epistemic media and how are they constituted? I propose that to make sense of such media (among several others) we must come to see that the first-person plural and concomitant phenomena are partly constitutive of these media. A practical discursive context is, first and foremost, the medium of our possible agreement or disagreement, and the embedded first-person plural pronoun is an essential element in the constitution of these contexts. The sort of epistemic engagement at issue here must include an understanding of what we are doing, and this sort of understanding has a particular form.

If this is correct, then reflection on first-person singular IEM requires reflection not only on uses of the first-person singular, but on uses of the first-person plural. The philosophical elucidation

\(^5\) Events are, ontologically speaking, countable and thus can be the objects of a quantificational analysis, as Davidson has argued. Davidson, D. (1980). “The Individuation of Events,” in Essays on Actions and Events. Oxford University Press, 163-180.
of a core property of the first-person singular requires an analysis of the first-person plural. Moreover, if correct, then this account of first-person IEM can—given that the distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic uses of the first-person applies across the singular and the plural—be applied to uses of the first-person plural pronoun.

This leads to the second part of the essay (Chapter 2) in which I introduce the three uses of the first-person plural and allied distinctions.

The first-person plural belongs to a certain context of inferential activity. The three uses of the first-person plural pronoun are introduced through distinctive forms of inference. Crucially, the unity of these inferences is not separate from the self-consciousness of their unity. Because the referent of ‘we’ is, on any of its uses, not extensionally specifiable, the referent of some use of ‘we’ must be cognized through an irreducibly first-person mode of cognition that is conceptually articulated by its inferential form. In this account, I talk of “cognizing or inferring first-person plurally” as opposed to “cognizing something that is first-person plural.” It is this first-person mode of inferring or cognizing that supplies unity to a plurality of persons. The unity is not given or grasped as something external to the epistemically first-personal act of thinking, judging, or claiming.

Furthermore, following the spirit of Kant’s argument in the first Paralogism of Pure Reason, it is tempting, though wrong, to infer from some real unity of persons (e.g., we are wearing red hats) to a substantial thing to which the ‘we’ in the proposition refers. This might appear puzzling. At least with categorematic uses of the pronoun, the intuitive referent of the pronoun is a set of persons. These pluralities are constituted, in part, by individual persons and their properties. The idea to be explored here is that the source of their unity rests on a form of thinking or claiming that is not empirical, and this form of thinking does not commit us to mysterious referents for the first-person plural pronoun.

I start with the following datum, which helps to get in view the first (what I call “distributive”) use of the first-person plural: there is no empirical difference between a mere set of individuals each
instantiating some common property—e.g., \( S_1, S_2, \ldots S_n \) are standing on the sidewalk—and a set of individuals that constitute a ‘we’—we are standing on the sidewalk. The difference between these two cases comes down to a difference that rests on thinking or claiming that is epistemically first-personal. This is again what I mean by a unity that is not separate from the self-consciousness of its unity.

In formalizing the first-person plural inferences, I fuse a Castañeda first-person plural pronoun with a judgment or assertion stroke.\(^6\) This makes it formally explicit that the first-person mode of cognizing is present at every line of the inference.\(^7\) Where \( \varepsilon \) is a Castañeda plural logophoric pronoun and \( \vdash \) is a judgment or assertion stroke, the distributive form of the first-person can be introduced as follows:

\[
\text{Terry} \vdash \varepsilon \ \varepsilon \text{ are standing on the sidewalk}
\]

entails

\[
\text{Terry} \vdash \varepsilon \ a_i \text{ is standing on the sidewalk (for any } i \text{ such that } A_i \text{ is in the extension of } \varepsilon). \]

and

\[
\text{Terry} \vdash \varepsilon \ a_i \text{ is standing on the sidewalk (for any } i \text{ such that } A_i \text{ is in the extension of } \varepsilon)\]

entails

\[
\text{Terry} \vdash \varepsilon \ \varepsilon \text{ are standing on the sidewalk}. \]

The strategy here, following Frege’s *Begriffsschift* and Per Martin-Löf’s constructive type theory, is to treat an epistemic notion of judgment or assertion as internal to these inference patterns. The

\(^6\) Castañeda does not talk about plural logophors, but it is a natural extension of his theory. Just as Castañeda talks of ‘he*’ or ‘she*’, I can talk of ‘they*’. This is the logophoric form of ‘we’. It is symbolized here by \( \varepsilon \). See Castañeda, H-N. (1999). “‘He’: A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness,” in *The Phenomeno-logic of the I: Essays on Self-Consciousness*, Indiana University Press.

\(^7\) I have here been influenced by Per Martin-Löf’s articulation of constructive type theory. In Martin-Löf’s system, each line of a proof is a demonstration, which is an epistemic notion. See Martin-Löf, P. (1983). “On the Meanings of the Logical Constants and the Justifications of the Logical Laws,” in *Nordic Journal of Philosophical Logic*, Vol. 1, No. 1.
pronouns in the inferences have sense only by being fused with the judgment-stroke. This is exactly how it should be. As I argue in Chapter 1, uses of ‘I’ and ‘we’ that are immune to error through misidentification come on the scene only when a subject performs certain kinds of acts, and this feature of my account is given a formal representation by the fusion of the judgment stroke with the logophoric pronoun. It is a cognizing or judging that is, in itself, first-person plural. The first-person is only derivatively, as I explain in Ch. 1 §3.1, part of the content judged.

Supposing the above act-based analysis is correct, do there exist other uses of the first-person plural? A standard response is “No.”8 This standard response is backed by the focus of contemporary theorists on a limited number of propositional schemas. To limit one's schemas to, for instance, “We intend to φ’ or ‘We φ that p’ functions to underwrite a presupposition contained in the use of nominalizations like “the first-person plural.” Namely, that the first-person plural pronoun is logically monosemous, and that it lacks internal categorial divisions. On the face of it, this assumption ought to appear strange. If the first-person singular admits of internal distinctions, as nearly every theorist admits, then why not the first-person plural? Cleaving to this thought, the remainder of Chapter 2 is devoted to the articulation of several further uses of the first-person plural pronoun and concomitant concepts and distinctions. I argue that there are, including the above distributive use, three uses of the first-person plural pronoun, and that each use of the pronoun admits of two cross-categorial distinctions: a distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic uses of the pronoun and a distinction between generic and non-generic uses of the pronoun. The chart below features examples of the three standard uses of the first-person plural divided into their categorematic and syncategorematic forms. Each use, like the example above, is articulated in Chapter 2 by way of a form of inference.

Table 1. Forms of the First-Person Plural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Distributive Use</strong></th>
<th><strong>Transactional Use</strong></th>
<th><strong>Institutional/Cooperative Use</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categorematic</strong></td>
<td>We are wearing hats</td>
<td>We are dancing the Tango</td>
<td>We are dealing with an outbreak of the flu (attributive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>We are committing ourselves to democratic procedures (commitment-undertaking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Syncategorematic</strong></td>
<td>We both think that Leipzig is beautiful</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>“We, the CDC, believe that cigarettes are carcinogenic”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, if this act-based articulation of the various uses of the first-person plural is correct, then it will only work as an articulation of non-generic categorematic and non-generic syncategorematic uses of ‘we’. For, some first-person plural unities are not constituted by acts in any sense. As I argue in Chapter 2 §2.1, certain kinds of first-person plural unities—paradigmatically, the unity of a linguistic practice—must be presupposed to render intelligible the three standard uses of the first-person plural. If so, then these uses of the pronoun cannot be articulated in the above way.

So, if these standard forms of first-person plural judgement are possible, then there must be, to paraphrase Kant, a “higher unity” which contains “the ground of the unity” of the standard forms of first-person plural judgement.⁹ I claim that this is the unity of a linguistic practice. As I argue, if

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⁹ Kant, I. (1999). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood. Cambridge University Press, B131. In other words, there must be a use of the first-person plural that functions like Kant’s synthetic unity of apperception: the ‘we’ is not a substantial thing, but is the source of the unity of persons that makes possible our various standard uses of the first-person plural pronoun. It is worth noting that this line of thought is in no way alien to Kant’s concerns in the first Critique. For, in the paragraph immediately succeeding the “higher unity” claim at B131, Kant also claims

For the manifold representations that are given in a certain intuition would not all together be my representations if they did not all together belong to a self-consciousness; i.e., as my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must yet necessarily be in
these standard first-person plural judgments are possible, then it must be possible for those who fall under a given ‘we’ to assent to (or dissent from) the content of these judgments in the first-person.\(^\text{10}\)

But this means that the content of a judgment—e.g., \(F_{we}\)—must be general in such a way that it can be assented to across the various members of the ‘we’. The kind of generality at issue here is non-quantificational generality and is only available to thought in the context of a linguistic practice. It is a form of generality that is essentially linguistic or logico-linguistic. This kind of general unity is articulated by way of these conceptually basic forms of the first-person plural.

Making sense of this “higher unity” requires articulating (i) a distinction between generic and non-generic forms of the first-person plural, and (ii) a unity that is not constituted by individual or collective acts of speaking or thinking or passive receptions of linguistic content. There must be a kind of first-person agreement or unity in language that cannot be captured by acts of explicit or implicit agreement or be constituted by passive receptions of pre-existing linguistic or conceptual content. I will suggest that our mutual attunement in language—which is the ground of our ability to frame standard first-person plural judgments—requires an investigation into the concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE and concomitant concepts. This takes me to Part 3.

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accord with the condition under which alone they can stand together in a universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not throughout belong to me (B132).

On my reading of this claim, Kant is gesturing towards an understanding of the unity of the first-person singular and the first-person plural. For a representation to be mine, it must be thinkable both first-person singularly (“The I think must be able to accompany all my representations” (B131)) and first-person plurally, i.e., in a “universal self-consciousness” (B132). In one of the more famous understatements in philosophy, Kant then adds, “From this original combination much may be inferred” (B133). One aim of this essay is to fill in some of these inferences. That said, in order to affect this unity of the singular and the plural, we will have to take something of a Hegelian or Wittgensteinian turn: the “higher unity” is one that only shows itself in our repetition of signs in language. This will require major transformations of several of the central Kantian philosophical concepts.

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10 Non-concept mongering creatures can fall under the extension of a ‘we’ as in “We [Quentin and dog-Brewster] are taking a walk.” This does not present problems for the thesis stated in the body text. I only mean to claim that cases involving non-concept mongering creatures cannot be taken as paradigmatic cases. These cases are conceptually downstream.
What is a linguistic practice? To isolate the target phenomenon, I begin with an analysis of some of the ways in which a linguistic practice is represented in thought and talk. Propositional schemas like ‘Ss speak $L$’, ‘Their practice is to speak $L$’, or ‘We speak $L$’ are the simplest propositional units that represent such practices. It is, I suspect, no accident that these propositions all contain plural subject terms. Moreover, these propositions are not mere representations of abstract linguistic structures, though they may include such structures in their referents. Rather, they concern the actual goings-on of participants in a practice. Taking these two features seriously, I suggest that linguistic practices have two essential features, which I refer to as the “generality” and “actuality” of linguistic practices.

**Generality:** A linguistic practice is something that might be exhibited in a potentially infinite series of acts in a potentially infinite number of agents, each act sharing a common explanation or general description.

**Actuality:** That a population acts on, is disposed to act in accordance with, and commonly exemplifies a linguistic practice is part and parcel of what it is for a linguistic practice to exist.

The first feature, generality, concerns the relation between a language and the individual actions or activities that ‘instance’, ‘exhibit’, or ‘show’ the language within a linguistic practice. There is no internal limit to the number of speech acts that exhibit the language, nor an internal limit to the number of agents who potentially fall under a given language. The plurality of the subject term is, in a sense to be defined, unbounded. That these propositions all contain plural subject terms is, then, no accidental feature. One of the philosophical tasks is to articulate the distinctive form of plurality and generality that is exhibited in these various schemas.

The second feature, actuality, also concerns a relation between a language and individual actions within a linguistic practice, though this time in an ontic register. That a population acts on, is disposed to act in accordance with, and commonly exemplifies a linguistic practice is constitutive of
there being a linguistic practice at all. If some abstract linguistic scheme is never instantiated in a population of actual speakers, then there is no linguistic practice.

Though they are expressed in different ways in different conceptual theatres, these two features are commonly discussed in the extant literature.¹¹ The central philosophical puzzle is how to reconcile these two intuitive features of linguistic practice and thus to render philosophically perspicuous the attendant concept.

To get these two features in view, I begin by analyzing everyday descriptions I call “descriptions by exemplification.” Descriptions like “It is their practice to say x—in fact, she said x to mean \( \varphi \)” or “We, the speakers of \( L \), use x to mean \( \varphi \) in \( C \)—in fact, I use x to mean \( \varphi \) in \( C \)” are descriptions by exemplification, and they bring together the two features of linguistic practice outlined above. In each of these descriptions, the description functions by displaying a relation of exemplification between a speech act and the linguistic practice of which it is a part. My hypothesis is that a correct understanding of LINGUISTIC PRACTICE will afford a perspective in which these descriptions can be true, and thus will show how the two features, generality and actuality, stand in relation to one another. I hope to show that certain common assumptions in contemporary philosophy of language make difficult such a perspective. Common understandings of the generality of linguistic practice—that which is represented on the left-hand side of these descriptions—exclude a common-sense view of the actuality of linguistic practice—that which is represented on the right-hand side of these descriptions—and vice versa.¹²


¹² Take, for instance, Davidson’s influential discussion of the relation between linguistic generality and the actuality of speech behavior. Given Davidson’s understanding of linguistic generality, he denies that languages or linguistic practices have a kind of actuality. By Davidson’s lights, the existence of some determinate language “does not depend on anyone’s speaking it, any more than the existence of
To see past common assumptions in the literature, I begin with the claim that even if our possession of the concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE arises with experience (as it surely does), it does not follow that our possession of the concept arises from experience. The concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE is here treated as a form-concept: the concept articulates a particular kind of unity which provides a principle of intelligibility to the things united. The elements united under a linguistic practice are, principally, the linguistic contents endemic to the linguistic practice as well as the speech acts that exhibit these contents. Everything of importance here will depend on getting in view the specific “mode of dependence” of the elements on that which unifies, i.e., the linguistic practice. To get this mode of dependence in view requires reflection on two principal thoughts.

First, although it is true that a linguistic practice does not exist apart from the actual linguistic behavior of speakers, the relationship between speakers and the practice of which they are a part must be understood as first-person plural in character. The sort of engagement in linguistic practice at issue is first-person plural. It must include an understanding of what we are doing, and this understanding has a particular form. Using the taxonomy elaborated in Chapter 2, I suggest that this form of understanding is captured by syncategorematic generic uses of the first-person plural pronoun.

shapes depends on there being objects with those shapes.” Davidson, D. (2001). “The Second Person,” in Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective, Oxford University Press. P. 107. Strictly speaking, only utterances and speech behaviors of individual persons exist in reality. A language, considered as such, is an abstract object “that is unobservable, changeless, and its components are also unobservable and changeless” (ibid). Although his conception of language secures its generality, this conception leaves no room for its alleged actuality. Davidson thus cannot make intuitive sense of descriptions by exemplification.

13 I do not deny that there is a related empirical concept of LINGUISTIC PRACTICE that is deployed in various empirical investigations. My claim is that any empirical use of the concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE will presuppose a non-empirical concept that is the condition of the possibility of the phenomenon referred to by the empirical concept. Unless participants in a linguistic practice can apprehend themselves as bearers of a linguistic practice first-personally, there could not be the sort of stability, normativity, and unity characteristic of an actual linguistic practice. A form-concept, as is developed in the following, is one that bears an essential relation to self-consciousness: the unity of the phenomenon picked out by the concept is one that is not constituted in isolation from a self-conscious form of thinking. LINGUISTIC PRACTICE is such a concept.
Without such an understanding, there could not exist the kind of actual regularities constitutive of a common language that exert normative authority on us.

My second thought, which I can only gesture at here, is that the perspective from which the concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE initially comes into view is not an external perspective on a linguistic practice. In fact, our initial relation to this concept is not one of passive judgmental awareness in any sense. Following Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, I argue that certain concepts show themselves, and this sort of showing cannot be modeled on implicit or explicit acts of saying, judging, or grasping.  

As I read the *Tractatus*, an elucidation of subjectivity or the first-person is internal to an elucidation of propositional sense and linguistic practice. A study of propositional sense—for instance, how the sign “p” can say $p$ (*TLP* 5.542)—is not independent of the study of our subjectivity: of how we picture facts to ourselves (*TLP* 2.1).  

But, as is everywhere emphasized in the *Tractatus*, the formal features of propositional sense and subjectivity only show themselves together. One of my principal ends is to rehabilitate the idea that there is a distinctive way in which certain concepts show themselves that cannot be modeled on the implementation of concepts in judgment. That we make sense in language shows itself only in our participation in language, and our participation includes a first-person

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16 I mean for “judgment” here to carry the widest possible sense, which includes both practical and theoretical judgment. Note also that I am not saying what some Aristotelians say about the conclusion of practical reasoning, namely, that it is itself an action. If I were to extend my account of the first-person to practical cognition and action, I would attempt to show that these debates are similarly framed by an active/passive bipolarity. Just as the unity of a linguistic practice bears an essential relation to a form of self-consciousness, the unity of an action is one that bears an essential relation to a form of practical self-consciousness. Intention-in-action, which is practical self-consciousness at work in acting, shows itself in the material progress of the deed itself. I hope for this to be the topic of future work.
plural form of understanding. The concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE shows itself in our participation in language. It is only derivatively an object of judgmental awareness.

But in what sense can a concept show itself? Here, it will be of absolute importance to reflect on the semantic properties of the expression “shows itself” and cognate expressions. My claim is that sentences such as “that ‘p’ says p shows itself” or “that we mean ϕ by x shows itself” are all sentences in the middle diathesis or middle voice, and that these constructions cannot be assimilated into either active or passive voice constructions. Although philosophers have long analyzed the distinction between the active and the passive diathesis, the middle diathesis has been almost wholly neglected. In Chapter 3 I offer a novel philosophical account of the middle diathesis and its significance. Once this grammatical form has been apprehended reflectively, it becomes possible to articulate how a concept can show itself without assimilating that sort of “coming to presence” into either a passive cognitive reception or an act of judgmental awareness. The official statement of my doctrine on the concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE amounts to the following: that we understand that x means ϕ shows itself. It shows itself in the process through which the showing is manifested: in acts of speaking English, for example.

What this view affords is a perspective on linguistic practice that allows us to see how descriptions by exemplification are philosophically unproblematic. The generality of linguistic content shows itself in the speech behavior of speakers in a linguistic practice. To gain this perspective requires an understanding of how the first-person is a feature not only of individual activity, but of our

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18 I am moving quickly over difficult philosophical terrain. I want to note, however, that what shows itself, according to my account, does not stand opposed to nor does it lie “on the far side” of what is expressible, i.e., the sayable, grasable, or judgable. Rather, what shows itself lies, as it were, at the very center of the expressible. This is one of the central lessons of Narboux’s insightful reading of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus, and I am indebted to his insights. See Narboux, J-P. (2014). “Showing, the Medium Voice, and the Unity of the Tractatus,” in Philosophical Topics, Volume 42, Number 2, p. 212.
participation in language. The generality of linguistic content and linguistic practice shows itself in our participation in language. This perspective is, at the same time, an elucidation of syncategorematic generic first-person plural judgments. For, these were the uses of the first-person plural that could not be accounted for by our act-based inferential account of the forms of the first-person plural in Chapter 2. These uses of the first-person plural are expressions of what shows itself in our participation in language: they articulate the form our understanding takes as practitioners in a language or linguistic practice.

This, then, takes us full circle. In Chapter 1, I investigate the first-person singular. Reflection on the property of first-person singular immunity to error though misidentification leads us to consider the concepts PRACTICAL DISCURSIVE CONTEXT and SELF-IDENTIFYING DISPLAY. Both of these concepts, when analyzed, make reference to a ‘wider context’. This ‘wider context’ is a general epistemic context which is the medium of our possible agreement or disagreement. This leads to an investigation into the first-person plural. It is the first-person plural that allows us to conceptually articulate such media. But, as is shown, the first-person plural has several distinct uses, and certain uses of the first-person plural are conceptually prior to other uses. This leads to an investigation into the basic use of the first-person plural and the concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE. The concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE is a form-concept that, first and foremost, shows itself in our participation in language. Unlike other uses of the first-person that are articulated via distinctive inference patterns, this basic use arises only because we engage with one another in a way that shows that we are engaged in a common project of making linguistic sense.

So far so good. At this point, however, there is a lingering question. What is the relation between the first-person plural and the first-person singular? This is the question takes up the rest of this introduction and is a theme throughout the essay.
In the contemporary literature on the first-person, there is an assumption, usually implicit, that the first-person singular is conceptually prior to the first-person plural in the sense that it, the first-person singular, is a necessary constituent in an account of the first-person plural and not vice-versa. In Chapter 2 I call this the “Priority Assumption.” The Priority Assumption is often in play when the first-person plural is reduced, decomposed, or analyzed into concepts that have their home solely within the scope of the first-person singular. Under the Priority Assumption, the first-person plural is treated as a species of the first-person singular in the sense that the plural form is a complex construction of the singular form plus, at least on some analyses, further independent parts. On this assumption, the question governing an account of the first-person plural is this: What is the value of \( x \) in the equation \( \text{first-person singular} + x = \text{first-person plural} \)? One of the red threads running through this dissertation is the thought that there is no such value for \( x \). According to my account, the question above rests on a mistaken conception of the relation between the first-person plural and the first-person singular. The Priority Assumption ought to be rejected in full.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, the Priority Assumption is put aside. And suppose also we put aside the idea that the first-person plural is conceptually prior to the first-person singular. (This would be the mirror image of the Priority Assumption.) Both forms of priority ought to be rejected. What could an alternative to these assumptions be? We need a way of understanding a genus-species relation that does not (i) conceptually prioritize the genus over the species and (ii) does not understand the relation between the genus and species as one of conceptual addition. We find the roots of an alternative in a comment by Franz Brentano:

When we compare “red thing” and “colored thing” we find that the latter is contained in the former, but we cannot specify a second thing that could be added to the first as an entirely new element, i.e., one that would not contain the concept, colored thing. The red thing is distinguished from other colored things as being a red-colored thing. Consequently, the differentiation is identical with the species.\(^{19}\)

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Following Brentano, every “red thing” is a “colored thing,” but not every “colored thing” is a “red thing”; therefore, “red thing” is a species of “colored thing.” But to the equation colored thing + x = red thing, no answer is forthcoming. This is so because some x is colored in virtue of being, say, red and not vice versa—there is no logically independent quality that can be added to “colored thing” to explain “red thing.” As A. N. Prior writes, “the color of what is red is its redness.”\(^{20}\) If this is the correct way of describing this genus-species relation, then no logically independent quality “could fulfill the explanatory function of a differentia, because it is logically dependent on the explanandum.”\(^{21}\) If what makes a red thing a red thing is, in part, its redness, then there is no non-circular way to comprehend the difference between “colored thing” and “red thing.” What is important to note, however, is that no one doubts that this circularity makes the difference between “colored thing” and “red thing” unintelligible. Rather, it shows that—in this kind of genus-species relation—the species is prior to the genus. Although the species “red thing” is less abstract than its genus, there is an important sense in which the genus “colored thing” is an abstraction from the more determinate species.\(^{22}\)

I want to propose the following hypothesis, the truth of which will only be assessable after the account is laid out in full. The first-person singular and the first-person plural are both species of the genus “the first-person,” and the genus-species relations exemplified by the first-person plural is a species of the first-person and the first-person singular is a species of the first-person are of the same form as red thing is a species of colored thing. On this account, the first-person singular and the first-person plural are equiprimordial and internally related species of a common genus. There is a unity to the first-person.


The two species of the first-person are known only together, and they—first and foremost—show themselves in the medium of language. The first-person singular shows itself in the actuality of linguistic practice and individuals’ speech behavior; the first-person plural shows itself in the generality of linguistic content and practice. To drop the Priority Assumption is to see the first-person singular and the first-person plural as species of a common genus, and to see the genus as an abstraction from the species. There is no way for the intellect to move from the genus to the species without a prior grasp of the species: the unity of the first-person singular and plural.

In sum, the argument that supports this conclusion is the following:

(1) If the first-person singular is available for use, then the concept PRACTICAL DISCURSIVE CONTEXT must be intelligible. (Chapter 1: §2)
(2) But the elucidation of the concept PRACTICAL DISCURSIVE CONTEXT requires concepts that have their home in the first-person plural. (Chapter 2)

But:

(3) The elucidation of the first-person plural, on all its non-generic uses, requires concepts that have their home in the first-person singular. (Chapter 2: §1)

So:

(4) If the first-person singular is available for use, then the first-person plural must be available for use; and
(5) If the first-person plural is available for use, then the first-person singular must be available for use.

Finally:

(6) There would be no uses of the first-person—singular or plural—outside the medium of a linguistic practice, the elucidation of which requires both the first-person singular and the first-person plural in their conceptually most basic forms. There is an original unity to the first-person which shows itself in the medium of language. (Chapter 3)

What follows is not a comprehensive account of the first-person. Rather, it is an interrogation of a narrow train of thought: if the first-person plural is recognized as a genuine form of the first-person (as I argue it ought to be), then how should this recognition affect a general philosophical account of the first-person? My suggestion is that recognition of certain features of the first-person plural forces the topic to become significantly broader in scope. Moreover, reflection on the first-person plural transforms certain elements of the first-person singular in ways not available absent such reflection.
As I show in the footnotes, the first-person plural is almost wholly ignored in the extant literature. This project is, then, one attempt to integrate the first-person plural into a broader philosophical account of the first-person. Many themes have been left out. That said, I have attempted to follow the internal logic of the investigations where they lead me. The topics addressed herein constitute some of the minimal elements necessary for a comprehensive account.

23 Even the casual reader will notice that when I am speaking in *propria persona*, I sometimes speak in the first-person plural. Who is this “we” and how ought it be understood? Although a much fuller account can be found in Chapter 2, this use of “we” (at least coming from my pen) ought to be understood on the model of an invitation. It is not descriptive of “our” position, nor is it the position of some would-be enlightened philosopher—something like the academic’s form of the majestic plural. Both interpretations rest on a characteristic sort of mistake, one that assimilates uses of the first-person plural to expressions of a different logical or semantic order. In this work, the first-order uses of the first-person plural are invitations to thinking. I am asking you to consider a position or argument to determine, so far as is possible, the scope of our agreement or disagreement. I am here following an idea gestured at in Williams, B. (2008). *Shame and Necessity*. University of California Press, p. 171.
Chapter 1: First-Person Immunity to Error Through Misidentification

What signs fail to express, their application shows.
What signs slur over, their application says clearly.

—Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (3.262)

My aim in this chapter is to clarify the phenomenon of first-person immunity to error through misidentification (hereafter, first-person IEM) by determining in what the source of first-person IEM consists. I will argue that the source of first-person IEM is a speaker’s illocutionary authority—that is, a speaker’s authority to determine the illocutionary character and epistemic grounds of certain illocutions. My account stands in contrast to the dominant contemporary position that attempts to locate the source of first-person IEM at the level of sub-sentential sense—either, for instance, in the sense of the first-person pronoun or in the sense of a certain class of predicates.

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The plan of this chapter is as follows. In §1 I introduce the phenomenon of first-person IEM. In §2 I argue that the property of first-person IEM applies only to claims, assertions or judgments—not, as Evans rightly notes, to propositions simpliciter.\(^{26}\) I develop this point by elucidating a formal characteristic of assertion or judgment, namely, that it is an essentially self-conscious act. I then argue (§3) that the source of first-person IEM lies in the nature of the assertoric act and the authority a speaker has in determining the illocutionary character and epistemic grounds of her act. I end by showing how my account encompasses the standard examples of first-person IEM.

§1.1 Introduction

It is often noted that declarative assertions can be in error in at least two ways. Suppose that Kameron sees a surfer off the pier and asserts “Juan is riding a longboard.” Kameron’s assertion might be in error in virtue of ascribing to Juan a property that he does not, in fact, have—for instance, he might be riding a shortboard. Or, Kameron’s assertion might be in error in virtue of ascribing the correct property to the wrong object. Perhaps it is Peter, not Juan, off the pier. The former sort of error can be called an “error of mispredication” and the latter sort of error an “error through misidentification.”\(^{27}\) Since at least Wittgenstein’s discussion in *The Blue Book*, certain classes of declarative assertions have been thought to possess immunity to the latter sort of error.\(^{28}\)

In *The Blue Book* Wittgenstein distinguishes between two distinct uses of the first-person singular pronoun: uses of ‘I’ as subject and uses of ‘I’ as object. Uses of ‘I’ as subject are exhibited in

assertions such as “I see so and so,” “I think it will rain,” and “I intend to make coffee.” Uses of ‘I’ as object are exhibited in assertions such as “I have grown six inches,” “I have chocolate on my nose,” and “I have red spots on my arms.” Following Wittgenstein, only in the latter, object use is “there room for a certain kind of error […] The error in question is an error in identifying which person the predicate is true of, if it is true of anyone at all.” This is not so when ‘I’ is used as subject. When one makes a statement such as “I think that Los Angeles is south of San Francisco,” certain forms of evidential challenge are de jure inapplicable. To the question “are you sure that it is you who think that?”, no substantive answer is possible. While statements of this kind can be false, statements making use of ‘I’ as subject are, as Shoemaker puts the point, immune to error through misidentification relative to the first-person pronoun.

While the specifics of Wittgenstein’s account of first-person IEM are hotly disputed, that he put his finger on an important feature of certain uses of the first-person singular pronoun is relatively uncontroversial. At the most abstract level, an assertion that $\varphi a$ makes use of a first-person $a$ as subject if and only if any context that constitutes this assertion as knowledge that something is $\varphi$ constitutes as well knowledge that one oneself is $\varphi$. That is, uses of ‘I’ as subject are not subject to error though misidentification.

Importantly, this condition is not met when one’s assertion that $\varphi a$ rests upon or is grounded, implicitly or explicitly, in a belief whose content is an identity proposition. Formally, for any assertion

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31 Wittgenstein goes on to conclude that ‘I’, when used as subject, does not refer to a particular person. This may be true, but, as many commentators have rightly suggested, this doesn’t follow solely from premises having to do with first-person IEM. For insightful discussions of Wittgenstein’s claims, see Longuenesse, B. (2017). *I, Me, Mine: Back to Kant, and Back Again*. Oxford University Press and McDowell, J. (2009). “Referring to Oneself,” in *The Engaged Intellect*. Harvard University Press. For a contemporary defense of a version of Wittgenstein’s view, see Doyle, J. (2018). *No Morality, No Self: Anscombe’s Radical Skepticism*. Harvard University Press.
of the form \( \varphi a \), where \( a \) is a first-person singular term and \( \varphi \) is a predicate such that the following syllogism is constructible, that use of \( a \) is a use of ‘I’ as object:

1. The \( \psi \) is \( \varphi \)
2. \( a = \psi \)
3. \( \varphi a \).

To illustrate, suppose we fill in our \( \psi \)s, \( \varphi \)s, and \( a \)s as follows: Ella is walking though the supermarket, and she notices a trail of sugar down an aisle.\(^{32}\) Ella then forms the belief that (1) *The shopper with a torn sack is making a mess.* Ella follows the trail of sugar, though she can’t find the sugar-spiller. At one point, however, Ella has the realization that (ii) *she* is the shopper with a torn sack.\(^{33}\) Upon this realization, Ella asserts that (iii) “I am making a mess!” As this reconstruction makes clear, Ella’s assertion that “I am making a mess!” rests upon (here, an explicit) belief whose content is an identity proposition. Ella’s assertion that \( \varphi a \) involves object-\( a \) because her knowing that \( \varphi a \) depends upon a prior knowledge that \( a = \psi \)—viz., *she* is the shopper with a torn sack. Ella’s assertion, therefore, makes use of the first-person singular as object because it rests on an intermediate premise, a premise that stands in need of objective justification. It is therefore liable to errors of misidentification relative to the first-person pronoun. Such an intermediate premise is never available in uses of the first-person singular as subject.

While the above considerations help us home in on the target phenomenon, they do not uncover the source of first-person IEM. In light of this, two dominant analytic strategies have emerged within the contemporary literature. They are “analytic” in the sense that each strategy attempts to uncover the source of first-person IEM through a sub-sentential semantic analysis.\(^{34}\)


\(^{34}\) I use the terms ‘semantic’ and ‘sense’ interchangeably. Nothing critical rests on this. Indeed, given that many writers on first-person IEM are Fregeans, this mode of expression is helpful for philosophical continuity in the discussion.
The first, which I call the “predicate analysis,” attempts to locate the source of first-person IEM at the level of predicative sense. The fundamental thought driving the predicate analysis is the following. For a certain class of specified predicates \( \{F_1, F_2, \ldots, F_n\} \), understanding the sense of and application conditions for, say, \( F_1 \) allows for a range of cases in which being sensitive to the presence of \( F_1 \)-ness just is knowing that \( F_1 \)-ness holds of oneself.\(^{35}\) Note that the claim is not that merely being sensitive to the presence of \( F_1 \)-ness is sufficient for knowing that \( F_1 \)-ness holds of oneself—for instance, I might know that \( F_1 \)-ness holds of someone else based on ordinary perceptual observation. Rather, the source of first-person IEM, on this kind analysis, inheres in a certain class of predicates and their first-person application conditions. So, for instance, if one understands the sense of and first-person application conditions for the propositional function \( \xi \) have a toothache, one is then in a position to immediately, i.e., non-inferentially, form the assertion that \( I \) have a toothache “when one feels pain of the right kind in one’s tooth,” where ‘one’ must be heard as a Castañeda or logophoric pronoun.\(^{36}\) In such a case, there is no room for the question: someone feels tooth-ache pain, but are you sure that it is you?

The second strategy, which I call the “pronominal analysis,” (and of which there are several rival variants), attempts to locate the source of first-person IEM in the sense of the first-person singular pronoun or first-person \( I \)-concept.\(^{37}\) On the most common form of the pronominal


\(^{36}\) Bermúdez, J. (2016). *Understanding “I”: Language and Thought*, Oxford University Press, p. 131. Curiously, Bermúdez does not remark on the peculiar character of this use of ‘one’. I can see no way of making sense of his account absent this characterization.

\(^{37}\) It is common in the literature to switch between talk of assertions involving the first-person pronoun and propositions involving the first-person \( I \)-concept. For a representative of this tendency, see Musholt, K. and Cahen, A. (2017). “Perception, Nonconceptual Content, and Immunity to Error through Misidentification,” *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 60(7). I do not think this is wholly innocent. With some notable exceptions, philosophers of language treat propositions as essentially forceless, but they treat assertions as forceful linguistic acts. Given these commitments, it becomes obscure whether they are talking about acts or static bits of content. This will be all-important going forward.
analysis—namely, the account given in Evans’ *The Varieties of Reference* and modified in the subsequent literature—the strategy is to fit an account of the first-person singular pronoun within a general semantic theory of singular reference, i.e., object-dependent reference. On such an account, the property of first-person IEM is a fallout from the semantics of the first-person singular pronoun, at least on some of its uses. The pronominal analysis is motivated in the following way.

Referential expression types can be divided into classes based on the kind of identification or discrimination procedure—i.e., the kind of competencies necessary for distinguishing the object of a statement from other objects—involved in the competent use of a token of a referential expression type. So, for instance, when one has discriminating knowledge based on standing in a perceptual information link to an object, one is naturally in a position to refer to that object with a demonstrative term. Alternatively, when one is in possession of a set of distinguishing facts about an object, one is naturally in a position to refer to that object with a definite description. Analyses of this kind are “semantic” in the sense that they attempt to uncover the referential modalities by which a term operates in use. The strategy, then, is to extend this kind of analysis to first-person referring expressions.

Given this methodological backdrop, the pronominal analysis starts with a standard datum. When one’s first-person assertion is IEM, one must be in touch with an object, i.e., oneself, though in a way that does not rest upon a form of object-identification. Put another way, the information link that brings one “in touch” with oneself is not one for which object-identification is possible; such acquaintance is identification-free. Although it may appear that the pronominal analysis leaves no

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room for an identification-free referential term given its criterion of difference for referential expression-types, this would be to conflate two senses of ‘identification’. As Evans rightly notes, when one makes a first-person claim that is IEM, one is making a claim about oneself. In this minimal sense, one has identified an object. But this is different from saying that such claims rest upon an implicit or explicit identification component such as is displayed in the syllogism above. Suppose this is correct. This then raises the all-important question: what kinds of information links are identification-free and give rise to uses of ‘I’ that are IEM?

Although there is much debate in the literature, the debates concerning which information links give rise to first-person IEM are, as it were, local debates. Where a certain group of philosophers admit that, say, somatic proprioception and kinesthesis can ground assertions that are IEM, another group denies the reliability of such grounding information links. The most commonly debated sources of first-person IEM are (i) introspection (e.g., “I am thinking of Benjamin’s great essays on art”), (ii) somatic proprioception and kinesthesis (e.g., “I am lifting my arm”), and (iii) visual kinesthesis (e.g., “I see that the kitchen hasn’t been cleaned”). Despite these local disagreements, the pronominal analysis is committed to the following semantic thesis: tokens of the first-person singular pronoun are IEM only relative to certain kinds of information links. As Evans puts the point, “the property of being immune to error through misidentification is not one which applies to propositions simpliciter, but one which applies only to judgments on this or that basis.”41 The semantic content of the first-person singular pronoun on an occasion of use is only determinate relative to an information link and only some of these will impart that use with the property of first-person IEM.

Although my principal aim is to offer a view of first-person IEM that is not beholden to a widely-held assumption—namely, the assumption that the source of first-person IEM is to be located

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at the level of sub-sentential sense—I want to plant some initial suspicions concerning the two dominant analytic strategies.

First, on the predicate analysis, there appears to be no way to specify in a principled way the relevant class of predicates that are IEM-susceptible. While Shoemaker has argued that this class can be restricted to standard psychological predicates, Evans and Bermúdez have rightly suggested that there are many instances of first-person IEM that do not obviously involve the occurrence of psychological predicates. One challenge, then, is to provide a non-ad hoc principle for differentiating between IEM-susceptible and non-IEM-susceptible predicates.

Second, on both the pronominal analysis and the predicate analysis, much weight is given to the correct observation that “the property of being immune to error through misidentification is not one which applies to propositions simpliciter, but one which applies only to judgments on this or that basis.” Call this “Evans’ observation.” Both accounts attempt to accommodate this observation by focusing on the kinds of epistemological grounds that give rise to claims that are IEM. Although any account of first-person IEM must have something to say about such epistemological grounds, there is an important insight contained in Evans’ observation that is all but passed over on the above accounts. It is this. That first-person IEM belongs to a certain context of activity—namely, to claims/assertions or judgments. A thinker is susceptible to first-person IEM only in the context of making a claim or presenting a judgment. It is this understanding of Evans’ observation, I maintain, that holds a clue to a different way of understanding first-person IEM.

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To my mind, the standard understanding of Evans’ observation—namely, the focus on the kinds of epistemic grounds that give rise to first-person IEM—amounts to the claim that the first-person pronoun is an indexical expression or concept. As with many indexical expressions, the first-person pronoun is a token-reflexive expression type: the content expressed by any tokening depends essentially on its context of use; in this case, the type of information source relevant to the grounding of the judgment or claim. It is, then, no surprise that different epistemological grounds give rise to different employments of the first-person singular pronoun. Any account of first-person IEM must make sense of this phenomenon, but it is by no means distinctive of the phenomenon, and it is an open question whether this focus on epistemic grounds and their differentiation—as opposed, for instance, to a specific context of activity or use—can provide the kind of foothold necessary for making progress on first-person IEM.

Third, it is taken for granted on both the pronominal analysis and the predicate analysis that the distinction between the use of ‘I’ as object and the use of ‘I’ as subject exhausts the significant uses of the first-person singular pronoun. This is a significant assumption, and it is an assumption that can be questioned. Against the tendency to treat the first-person singular pronoun as having only two distinct uses, I will suggest that there is a further distinction that cuts across both uses of the first-person singular pronoun. It is only when we have a complete taxonomy of uses of the first-person singular pronoun that a complete account of first-person IEM can come into view.

§1.2 Self-consciousness and Assertion

When my use of a first-person singular pronoun is IEM, I know myself to be in some way or another. If I assert that “I am thinking of DB,” my assertion is about myself, as myself, at least in part: it expresses something about what’s going on with me as the thinking, asserting subject. In other words, such uses of ‘I’ articulate a form of agential self-knowledge. But there are several ways in which I can
know myself to be $F$. I can, for instance, know that *I am wearing a tie* through sense perception, but I can also know that I, myself, think or judge that *Daniel is a poet* by thinking or judging that thought. Moreover, there seem to be distinct forms of agency corresponding to different sorts of rational activities. Intuitively, the kind of agency involved in acting intentionally (i.e., practical agency) is different from the kind of agency involved in acts of inferring, judging, and asserting, i.e., theoretical agency. So, if these intuitive considerations are right, we ought to confront two questions: (i) What kind or kinds of self-knowledge do first-person assertions that are IEM articulate? And (ii) what kind of agency is involved when someone’s claim is IEM?

I begin by articulating the sense in which assertions or claims are self-conscious acts. I use this account to then address questions (i) and (ii).

In asserting “p,” I know that I’m asserting $p$, and I know this not based on perception or on inference from evidence of whatever sort. This is to say that assertion is a self-conscious act. I want to suggest that there is no way to strip the fact that I know I’m asserting $p$ from the fact that I’m asserting “p.” Although this knowledge may be implicit, when my act is made conceptually explicit, these facts are interdependent. I will start with two arguments in its favor. I then move to a positive account.

Suppose that assertion is a constitutively rule-governed activity.44 If assertion is a constitutively rule-governed activity, then if $S$ asserts that “p” in normal circumstances, then $S$ must follow the constitutive rules governing the activity of asserting. To follow a rule, $S$’s actions—linguistic or otherwise—must do more than merely conform with the rule. The rule-follower, $S$, must act on an

44 This argument is indebted to a similar argument provided by Rödl, S. (2017). “Self-Consciousness, Negation, and Disagreement,” in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Issue No. 3 Vol. CXVII, p. 3. Note that theorists who understand assertion as rule-governed attempt to uncover the constitutive rules of assertion. This is so, in part, because few deny that assertion may be subject to various subsidiary, non-constitutive, contextually based rules—for instance, “Assert “p” in C only if “p” is funny in C”.

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understanding of herself as conforming to the rule.\textsuperscript{45} This is to say that the rule-follower must be acting non-accidentally in conformity with the rule; her behavior must be governed by her understanding of the rule. But if—in asserting—$S$ is acting on an understanding of herself as conforming to the rules governing assertion, then $S$‘s understanding \emph{that she} is asserting must be internal to the fact that $S$ is asserting. Although $S$‘s understanding \emph{that she} is asserting may be tacit or non-explicit, when this understanding is made explicit, the relevant cognitive state amounts to knowledge: in $S$‘s asserting that “$p$,” $S$ knows that she is asserting $p$.

The above argument only speaks to those who accept that assertion is a rule-governed activity. Here is an argument that is independent of that supposition. An assertion is, whatever else it is, a putting forward of some proposition as true—or, perhaps, true relative to the common ground.\textsuperscript{46} This means, then, that assertions can fail in at least one respect, namely, they can be false. But this means that to describe $S$ as asserting is already to bring to bear on her a normative order. A speech act that is not held to such an order is not an assertion. If so, then such a normative order is internal to the constitution of assertion. There is, in other words, no way to pry apart a description of the form “$S$ is asserting “$p$”” from the implicit evaluation that $S$‘s assertion “$p$” is successful iff $p$ and $S$‘s assertion “$p$” fails iff \emph{not-} $p$.\textsuperscript{47} Unlike certain forms of behavior that are intelligible independent of their falling under a normative order, to classify $S$‘s act as asserting requires that one bring to bear a normative order such that the act that falls under it is unintelligible absent that order.

But this is not only true from the third-person perspective. It is also true first-personally. If an agent is rational, then it is always in principle licit to ask on what grounds she holds that $p$ upon asserting “$p$.” Indeed, even if she “admits to lacking grounds, \emph{she accepts the presupposition of the question}—

\textsuperscript{47} There are many other ways in which an assertion can be a success or a failure. I only mean to suggest that this way is basic, and that a standard of assessment is internal to the phenomenon.
that she is in a position to speak for whatever grounds she has.” If so, then the asserter must know what she* is up to in the relevant context. For, acceptance of the presupposition of the question is tantamount to knowing that it applies to her present situation. As argued above, what she is up to is in part constituted by a normative order that is brought to bear on the act. She must know, in asserting, that she* is putting forward, as true, \( p \)—that is, she must know that she* is asserting \( p \). This is what makes it intelligible to ask on what grounds she holds \( p \), when she asserts “\( p \)” Again, her knowledge of what she* is doing may be merely tacit or non-explicit, but, when made explicit, the relevant cognitive state amounts to knowledge.

Suppose this is correct. If so, then the fact that a speaker is asserting presupposes that the speaker has the defeasible authority to constitute her utterance as having the illocutionary force of an assertion. A mature speaker must have this sort of illocutionary authority because such authority is built into the constitution of the assertoric act. If assertion is a self-conscious act, then its status as an assertion must depend on one’s knowledge of the act. Otherwise, one could assert and fail to know that one is doing so. Since my knowledge that I am asserting is internal to the fact that I so assert—i.e., it is not merely happenstance that I know that I am asserting—I must have an authoritative role in determining the character of my act. But this also means that the kind of knowledge at issue here is practical in the following sense. Unlike the knowledge I have of, say, the contents of your refrigerator, the fact that I am asserting is not independent of my knowledge of that very act. The knowledge stands in an internal relation to what is known in that the applicability of a certain description (i.e., “…is asserting”) is formally dependent on my conceiving of the act in those terms. The ascription of such

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49 There are further conditions that must be in place for a speaker to count as asserting. I take up these further conditions in Chapter 3.
knowledge thus opens an intensional context such that the truth of the description depends upon my knowing my act under that very description. Of course, understood extensionally, there are many events in the world that one can pick out that are concomitant with an assertion—e.g., Ella’s vocal chords produced sounds ranging from 30-50dB—but these will not count as intensional descriptions of assertoric behavior; they are merely reports of what happened, not what was done.\(^{50}\) Thus, while it is possible to characterize the contents of your refrigerator without reference to the fact that they are known perceptually, this is not the case with the fact that I am asserting. In the case of assertion, what we have is a knowledge-dependent act, where the kind of knowledge at issue plays a constitutive role in what is known.\(^{51}, 52\) Just as an unknowing action is simply an unintentional event, an unknowing assertion is no assertion at all. Moran usefully puts the point in the following way.

[S]omeone uttering the sounds associated with the English sentence, “The rain has finally stopped,” but has no idea what the words mean, or perhaps that they are words, [or has no understanding of what she is doing] has not asserted anything, not even poorly. And the utterance of the words, “I promise to meet you tomorrow at three” fails to be a promise at all, if produced under hypnosis, or by someone asleep, or without understanding of what she is saying.\(^{53}\)


\(^{52}\) This in no way suggests that a speaker is immune to illocutionary misfires of sometimes a severe sort. Nor am I denying the much-recognized phenomenon of illocutionary silencing—see Langton, R. (1993). “Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22 No. 4 and Kukla, R. (2014). “Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice,” *Hypatia*, Vol. 29. I do mean to suggest, however, that it is a necessary condition on S’s asserting that S has the defeasible authority to constitute her utterance as having the illocutionary force of an assertion. That a speech act with a particular illocutionary force can be silenced or given the wrong kind of uptake presupposes that the speaker has some authority such that that authority can in some cases be silenced. This is consistent with Kukla’s contention that the constitution of a particular speech act is internally related to its uptake in material social space (2014: 5). I will have much more to say about this internal relation in the chapters ahead. My way of modifying Kukla’s point will be to show that the first-person singular and the first-person plural form a non-additive unitary structure such that being the author of a claim requires having a standing in a certain kind of discursive practice—namely, a linguistic practice. Kukla’s account only poses a problem if it is presupposed that social uptake stands in an external relation to an agent’s first-person singular modes of engagement. I deny this.

There is no way to strip the fact that S knows that she* is asserting \( p \) from the fact that S asserts “p”. The knowledge is requisite for the internal constitution of the phenomenon.

Nonetheless, I want to stress that this sort of authority is defeasible. Although I must have a defeasible authoritative role in determining the character of my illocutionary act, there are cases in which this authority can be either partially or wholly defeated—that is, cases in which an agent wholly or partially lacks the relevant self-conscious knowledge. But it is all-important, in these cases, to distinguish between (a) knowledge the absence of which impairs the action and (b) knowledge the absence of which “annuls its character as an action of a certain type at all.”

Assertions can suffer all sorts of partial impairments resulting from the lack of certain kinds of mental states or environing circumstances. Insincere assertions, assertions made under duress, and assertions made while intoxicated, at least sometimes, all fit under (a). That these examples admit of qualification—e.g., ‘insincere’, ‘intoxicated’, ‘under duress’—shows that some paradigmatic standard is the standard against which a qualification makes sense. These acts are ‘privative’ or ‘qualified’ in the sense that they fall short in relation to the standard of full self-conscious knowledge of what one is up to. But these cases do not cast doubt on the claim that assertions are knowledge-dependent acts. According to my account, to make sense of these cases as privative or qualified, we must refer to the paradigmatic or unqualified case, and the paradigmatic case is one where the speaker asserts knowingly, in the sense that she knows that she* is asserting.

The above arguments leave me with a task. I’ve suggested that in the case of S’s asserting “p,” S’s understanding that she* is asserting may be tacit or non-explicit. But when this understanding is made explicit, the relevant cognitive state amounts to knowledge: in S’s asserting “p,” S knows that she* is asserting \( p \). So, what is the explicit conceptual form of this knowledge? To answer this question just

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is, I'll argue, to answer our former question: what kind or kinds of self-knowledge do first-person IEM claims articulate?

To answer this question, we need to return to our original topic of first-person IEM. Our question was: What is the source of the special kind of immunity to error with which uses of ‘I’ as subject possess? It is a curious feature of the contemporary literature that once this question is raised, it is taken as given that we have in view the complete table of uses of the first-person singular pronoun. Against this tendency, I want to note that there is a further distinction that cuts across both uses of ‘I’: the use of ‘I’ as subject and the use of ‘I’ as object.

Consider these two claims:

1. I am walking to the grocery store.
2. I think that Leipzig is beautiful.

Although both (1) and (2) contain the ‘I’ as subject, only in (1) is the ‘I’ contained within the predicative proposition—that is, the ‘I’ saturates a first-level functional expression ‘…am walking to the store’. In (2), the ‘I’ does not play a role within the predicative proposition. The ‘I think’ attaches to an already complete proposition, i.e., Leipzig is beautiful. Call this latter use of ‘I’ “syncategorematic” and the use of ‘I’ in (1) “categorematic.” We can make this distinction formally perspicuous. An assertion $C$ is a categorematic first-person assertion if and only if $C$ is of the form $\phi a$, where $a$ is a first-person (singular or plural) singular term, and $\phi$ is a predicate. An assertion $C$ is a syncategorematic first-person claim if and only if $C$ is of the form $(Oa)P$, where $a$ is a first-person (singular or plural) singular term, $Oa$ is some sentential operator, and $P$ is a sentence.55 The chart below represents this cross-categorial distinction.

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55 I am here indebted to Kimhi, I. (2018). Thinking and Being. Harvard University Press, pp. 79-85, though I have broken from his understanding of the categorematic/syncategorematic distinction. Also, note that although the sentential operators under discussion can iterate—e.g., we can admit of sentences of the form $(Oa)\ldots(Oa)P$—these grammatical possibilities can easily lead to misunderstandings. Syncategorematic operators are, on my account, expressions of self-
Table 2. Forms of the First-Person Singular

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorematic</th>
<th>Use of ‘I’ as object</th>
<th>Use of ‘I’ as subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I have grown six inches”</td>
<td>“I am walking to the grocery store”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syncategorematic</td>
<td>“I think φ”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the various uses of the first-person singular discussed, one feature of the syncategorematic use of ‘I’ stands out—namely, that the syncategorematic ‘I’ can be attached to any complete proposition. This is not the case with other uses of ‘I’. For instance, if we symbolize the categorematic use of ‘I’ as subject as ‘I_CS’, the categorematic use of ‘I’ as object as ‘I_CO’, and the syncategorematic use of ‘I’ as subject as ‘I_SS’, then we can exclude certain combinations as nonsensical:

(A) I_CO think that CT is a great painter.
(B) I_CS have paint on my floors.
(C) I_SS am hankering for ice cream this evening.

Notice, however, that for any φ and for any propositional attitude verb φ, I_SS φ + p expresses a sense—i.e., no combinations are a priori excluded. For our purposes, I want simply to note the following hypothesis. If it is true that the syncategorematic ‘I’ can be attached to any complete proposition—even, for instance, a proposition containing the use of ‘I’ as object—then there is reason to think that the syncategorematic use of ‘I’ stands in need of a separate account.

* * *

Though there are many uses of the syncategorematic ‘I’, I am going to restrict the following discussion to its occurrence within my proposed knowledge schemas for assertion.56 (Despite the surface grammatical differences, both schemas express the same content.)

consciousness. An iterated syncategorematic operator cannot, then, be understood as a kind of additional reflective state. See below and the Introduction to this work.

56 Often, the syncategorematic ‘I’ is used as an epistemic qualifier on an assertion; for instance, “I think that the plants will grow” might, in context, mean I am reasonably confident that the plants will grow. The syncategorematic ‘I’ can also be used without its ordinary self-ascriptive function as in “I thought I told you to hold your position!” or “I’m afraid I’ll have to ask you to leave.” A complete account would treat of these uses, but they can be left aside at present.
Knowledge Schema-1: In asserting “p,” I know that I’m asserting p.

Knowledge Schema-2: In S’s asserting “p,” S knows that she* is asserting p.

We now have the resources to elucidate how the syncategorematic use of ‘I’ works in the above schemas. My account rests on two central thoughts. First, the use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ exhibited in the knowledge-schemas functions as a self-identifying display. Second, syncategorematic uses of ‘I’ of this kind are all uses of ‘I’ as subject and thus immune to error through misidentification relative to the first-person pronoun. My aim will be to show that unpacking these thoughts yields a theoretical framework that casts light on the source of first-person IEM. In so doing, my hope is to avoid the pitfalls of both the pronominal and predicate analyses without neglecting the insights internal to each.

Consider a situation in which I assert the following.

(1) Rodrigo worked on the Union Pacific Railroad.

Given what I have argued regarding the self-conscious character of assertion, in asserting (1), I know what I am doing and that I am doing it. We can represent this fact via two nominally distinct grammatical expansions of (1). I will call these “syncategorematic expansions.” Continuing with the context opened by (1), I can, in virtue of my illocutionary authority to bring this act about, expand (1).

(2) I’m asserting that Rodrigo worked on the Union Pacific Railroad.

But since this illocutionary act is a knowledge-dependent act, I can make one further expansion.

(3) I know that I’m asserting that Rodrigo worked on the Union Pacific Railroad.

The intuitive data presented by these expansions can be captured by the following thesis.

Syncategorematic Expansion Thesis: Any utterance with assertoric illocutionary force can be expanded, first-personally, into a form that makes use of the syncategorematic ‘I’. This use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ is a device that functions as a self-identifying display. The expression functions to display a knowledge-dependent, commitment-acknowledging act. To use the ‘I’ in this way just is to self-knowingly display oneself as the locus of assertoric authority.\(^57\)

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\(^{57}\) This thesis is modeled on a transitory thesis that Austin suggests at a critical junction in *How to Do Things with Words*: “[…] any utterance which is in fact a performative should be reducible, or
To hear this thesis rightly, we need to avoid certain dead ends having to do with the concepts SYNCATEGOREMATIC EXPANSION and SELF-IDENTIFYING DISPLAY.

To begin, I have been careful not to speak of inference here. To say that I “syncategorematically expand” is not to be equated with inferring. Why not? If my coming to know that I’m asserting \( p \) were to be gained through inference, then it would have to be either inductively or deductively justified. I’ll suggest that neither of these will do.

Assume that the inference is deductive. If the transition from \( \vdash \text{“p”} \) to “I know that I’m asserting \( \text{“p”} \)” is deductive, then I must, first, accept that premise that I am asserting \( p \). But if that’s the case, then I already know, before making the inferential step, that I am so asserting. There is, then, no work for the deductive inference to do. To so much as get the inference off the ground, I must already know what the account seeks to conclude. Perhaps, then, the inference is inductive? If so, then to know that I am asserting, I must take an empirical look at myself—perhaps I watch my lips move in the mirror—and then infer that I am asserting “\( p \)” from behavioral evidence. This line of thought conflicts, I think, with an essential feature of asserting—namely, that it is something done, and it is something for which an agent is responsible. We do not suffer assertions. They are exercises of rational, intentional agency. Further, in asserting “\( p \),” there is little sense to be made of the demand: please find out if you are asserting. An inductive inference view of this kind only allows for an alienated conception of assertion.

expandible, or analyzable into a form, or reproducible in a form, with a verb in the first person singular present indicative active (grammatical).” Austin, J. L. (1975). How to Do Things With Words, Harvard University Press, p. 61-62. Austin rejects this thesis because it is under inclusive. If relativized to assertions, however, it is true.

58 For ease of expression, I have used the turnstile symbol \( \vdash \), following Frege, as a force operator/judgment stroke.

59 This nonsensical demand needs to be kept apart from sensible questions such as “Do you really mean to be claiming that?” These sorts of questions all presuppose that the speaker knows what she
As an alternative, I’ll suggest that an expansion is a kind of self-identifying display. Let the following case serve to fix the basic idea.

Suppose that you are taking an advanced-level Spanish course. For the final assessment, you must hold a conversation with the instructor for ten minutes. In these ten minutes, the point is to display your mastery of the language by speaking the language with the instructor. Although, let’s suppose, you never assert “Yo hablo español,” you nevertheless display, by speaking the language, that you speak Spanish. The locus of the display is, thus, your activity of speaking. Because of this, the display is self-identifying. You do not, in this case, say that you speak Spanish; that you speak Spanish shows itself in your activity of speaking Spanish.

Two qualities of the example deserve remark. First, the display manifests itself in the context of a practical doing. What is displayed is only made manifest in the use of the Spanish language. Indeed, even if you explicitly claim “Yo hablo español” (understood in the generic sense), that this is true is only seen in your practical mastery of the language in use. Second, in displaying that you speak Spanish, you are not making manifest any particular state of affairs. Rather, what is displayed is a general rational capacity, which can be exercised by performing particular linguistic acts across time. Call the former quality “the practicality of the display” and the latter quality the “generality of the display.” I want to suggest that the use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ exhibited in the knowledge-schemas is a self-identifying display and can be understood in much the same way as the Spanish language example. The expression functions to display a knowledge-dependent, commitment-acknowledging act, which is both practical and general.

To get my account off the ground, let’s start with an initial distinction and a negative result. A self-identifying display makes manifest the characteristics of my act as opposed to the content asserted.

is doing in the relevant sense. They merely call into question the speaker’s understanding of the specific commitments of her speech.
When I display, through a syncategorematic expansion, that my assertion is a knowledge-dependent and commitment-acknowledging act I have not introduced any new truth-conditional content to what is asserted. I have only explicitly displayed what was already implicit in the constitution of the act itself. What is displayed is a characteristic of my act qua act of a certain type. Despite its surface grammar, then, the syncategorematic ‘I’ used in such contexts is sense-transparent in that the operator “I know that I’m asserting” makes no additional contribution to the truth-conditions of what is asserted. If it were not sense-transparent, the asserter—in virtue of performing the assertion—would always be correct in claiming that her assertion is true. Consider the case where $S$ asserts the following.

(4) I assert that the surf is 8-12 feet.

If it is false that the surf is 8-12 feet, $S$ can rightly argue that her assertion is nonetheless true. For, if the syncategorematic expression ‘I assert’ were to contribute additional truth-conditional semantic content to the claim, then it would be unambiguously true that $S$ asserted truly, despite the falsity of the surf being 8-12 feet.\(^6\)

Against this negative result, my positive account can more easily come into view. I’m going to suggest that in using the syncategorematic ‘I’ in this way, I do not describe my act, but display, via a sign, that the act is actual. This must be heard in a specific sense. Although an assertoric utterance happens at a datable time, there is a risk—as I argued above—of understanding the actuality of assertion purely extensionally. The use of a syncategorematic ‘I’ does not function to display an event of asserting. Rather, the use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ displays a knowledge-dependent act that is understanding agential control in at least two senses. First, the act opens a practical context in which

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\(^6\) This is often referred to as Cohen’s problem. See Cohen, I.J. (1964). “Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?” *Philosophical Quarterly* 14(55). I take this argument to be a reductio ad absurdum of the view that force operators contribute truth-conditional content to what is asserted. Lewis, D. (1983). “General Semantics,” in *Philosophical Papers: Volume 1*. Oxford University Press, 224 accepts the view that force operators contribute additional truth-conditional content as “common sense.” I respectfully disagree. It is neither common sense nor required by a philosophical theory.
the speaker has made a standing commitment to the truth of some claim; and, second, that the speaker is the author of the claim shows that she is the proper locus of accountability to the claim in the face of disagreement and other epistemic interactions. Use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ allows the speaker to make this practical discursive context manifest via the self-identifying display.

The generality that is in play in such a display requires an elucidation of these practical contexts. As I suggested above, if a display is general, then it cannot make manifest some specific, purely extensionally specifiable state of affairs. If so, then in using the syncategorematic ‘I’ in an assertion such as (3) or (4), I cannot be making manifest a particular state of affairs such as an event. If not that, then what?

Notice that, if use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ allows a speaker to make manifest a practical discursive context that involves a speaker’s practical commitment to a claim, then we ought to get clear on the form of such contexts. A clue is found in the grammar of sentence-schemas of the form “By asserting ‘p,’ S is committed to the truth of p.” I am going to suggest that the correct understanding of self-identifying displays can only come into view once it is seen that these sentence-schemas are state-predications, not event-predications. The use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ functions to display a state of responsibility to a claim.

It will be helpful to briefly invoke the contrast between event-nominalizations and state-nominalizations. Although this may seem an unlikely strategy, nominalization transcriptions make a sentence’s quantification explicit. As can be shown, while an existential quantifier always governs event-nominalizations, state-nominalizations always lack an existential quantifier.61 Consider, first, an event-predication:

(A) Kameron capsized the boat

and its nominalization:

(B) There was a capsizing of the boat by Kameron.

Although it is easy to miss, the article in the event-nominalization “signals that the sentence is governed by an existential quantifier ranging over countables, i.e., particulars.”\(^{62}\) Because of this, it would be perfectly appropriate to add a cardinal count adverbial to the event-predication in (A). For instance, one might say

(C) Kameron capsized the boat three times.

One would then nominalize the event-predication as

(D) There were three capsizings of the boat by Kameron.

It seems, then, that events are, ontologically speaking, countable. Or, as Davidson has argued, events have principles of identity and individuation.\(^{63}\) Although it may not be explicit within a token event-predication, all event-predications are, at least implicitly, under the governance of an existential quantifier. But now consider the state-predication

(E) Teresa loves Maria

and its nominalization

(F) There is loving of Maria by Teresa.

In the case of state-nominalizations, addition of a cardinal count adverbial would be inappropriate. If one did place an article in the state-nominalization, then it would refer purely to “the occasion of the state rather than the state itself.”\(^{64}\) In doing so, one would simply change the subject to talk about a certain kind of event. If, however, our central quarry is the understanding of states, then no existential quantifiers are permitted. For example, one would say

(G) There is much loving of Maria by Teresa


but not

(H) There are three lovinogs of Maria by Teresa.

The introduction of cardinality in (H) does not refer to the state itself. One has simply changed the subject. I think that sentence-schemas of the form “By asserting “p,” S is committed to the truth of p” are to be treated as state-predications in this way. They represent a state of being responsive to and responsible for the truth of a claim. If this is the case, then it becomes clear that use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ does not function to display an event of “asserting.” So, if we fill in the above sentence-schema

(I) By asserting “White Pines are evergreens,” Jason is committed to the truth of *White Pines are evergreens*

then the nominalization that results is:

(J) There is commitment by Jason to the truth of *White Pines are evergreens* by his asserting “White Pines are evergreens.”

If sentences of this form are state-predications—a state of being responsive to and responsible for a claim—then we can also explain why the self-identifying display is general. Namely, the practical context opened by an agent’s assertoric act is one in which the ongoing standing authority of the speaker is put on display. One function of a self-identifying display is to display oneself as the general locus of assertoric authority. One is the general locus of authority because one’s authority for the claim is not one on the order of “fire and forget,” but of responsibility to the claim against, in principle, indefinite forms of disagreement, clarification, and other forms of epistemic interaction.65 The use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ functions to display a practical discursive context of this kind. A self-identifying display can be abstractly characterized, then, as a making-manifest of a field of sense. In the Spanish speaking example, it is one in which a whole language becomes available as a field of sense.

discursive, dialogical activity. In the assertion case, it is one in which a speaker’s authority for a claim becomes the context for discursive interaction.

This analysis of the syncategorematic use of ‘I’ brings us full circle. At the beginning of §2 I argued that assertions are essentially self-conscious acts. That they are essentially self-conscious acts presupposes that a mature speaker has the defeasible illocutionary authority to constitute a token utterance as an assertion. The form of this authority can be elucidated by noting the knowledge-dependent character of assertion: there is no way to strip the fact that I know that I’m asserting p from the fact that I assert “p.” The function of this use of the syncategorematic ‘I’—the use on display in the knowledge-schemas for assertion—is to self-knowingly display oneself as the locus of illocutionary authority. Illocutionary authority is necessary for the actuality of assertion, and the function of the syncategorematic use of ‘I’ is to display this illocutionary authority in a speaker.

We now have the resources to return to the stated topic and, especially, the two questions that opened this section.

§1.3 The Source of First-Person Immunity to Error Through Misidentification

What is the source of first-person immunity to error through misidentification? Given the above considerations, an answer suggests itself. At least when looking at syncategorematic uses of ‘I’ that are IEM, the source of first-person IEM is one’s own illocutionary authority. These claims articulate self-knowledge concerning one’s own illocutionary act. In this section I will argue that the standard cases of first-person IEM discussed in the literature—i.e., categorematic uses of ‘I’ as subject—can be accommodated within my proposed framework.

The rest of this chapter will unfold as follows. First, I quickly argue that categorematic uses of ‘I’ as object are dependent on categorematic uses of ‘I’ as subject. Second, I argue that categorematic uses of ‘I’ as subject are internally related to syncategorematic uses of ‘I’ as subject. I end by suggesting
that if there exist the conceptual linkages I discuss, then my act-based account of first-person IEM has all the resources necessary for meeting the standard desiderata.

§1.3.1 Uses of ‘I’ as Object are Dependent Upon Uses of ‘I’ as Subject

In §1 I introduced the notion of the use of ‘I’ as object via a syllogism. For any claim of the form \( \varphi a \), where \( a \) is a first-person singular term and \( \varphi \) is a predicate such that the following syllogism is constructible, that use of \( a \) is a use of ‘I’ as object:

1. The \( \psi \) is \( \varphi \)
2. \( a = \psi \)
3. \( \varphi a. \)

There are a few things to note about this inference pattern. First, this syllogism is a rational reconstruction. Although I have, for the sake of exposition, represented the thinker or speaker as actively running through these inferential steps, one who asserts (3) on the basis of (1) and (2) need not consciously go through these steps. The inferential steps may be either implicit or explicit.

Second, in premise (2) there is a first-person content on the left-hand side of the identity proposition. Though uses of ‘I’ as object are susceptible to error through misidentification, formulating a judgment or assertion that makes use of the ‘I’ as object is possible only because such a use depends upon information that can only be expressed “in a judgment [or assertion] that includes a use of ‘I’ as subject.”

To see this, consider again the case of the sugar-spooling shopper. In the situation described, Ella asserts that “I am making a mess,” but this use of ‘I’ is not immune to misidentification. This is so, let’s imagine, because her grounds for asserting “I am making a mess” are the following beliefs: (1)  

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The shopper with a torn sack is making a mess; and (2) I am the shopper with the torn sack. The mediating premise (2) is a premise that, as Longuenesse puts the point, depends “on sources of information that would be apt to justify any kind of objective knowledge (knowing of someone that she is standing next to a staircase, knowing of something that it is big, and so on).”\(^{68}\) That said, to so much as form the belief that (2) is true, there must be a point at which the search for objective grounds comes to an end. That stopping point requires the judger or asserter to make use of the ‘I’ as subject. If this were not the case, then any alleged use of ‘I’ as object would result in an infinite regress of identity propositions. Thus, to form judgments or assertions making use of ‘I’ as object, one must also be able to form judgments or assertions making use of ‘I’ as subject. The latter ability is a necessary condition on the former ability.

§1.3.2 Categorematic Uses of ‘I’ as Subject are Internally Related to Syncategorematic Uses of ‘I’ as Subject

In The Varieties of Reference, Evans notes that “the property of being immune to error through misidentification is not one which applies to propositions simpliciter, but one which applies only to judgments on this or that basis.”\(^{69}\) I have called this Evans’ observation, and I explained above that there are two insights internal to the observation: (i) a thinker or speaker is susceptible to first-person IEM only in the context of presenting a judgment or making an assertion; and (ii) a judgment or assertion is susceptible to first-person IEM only relative to a certain set of epistemological grounds—somatic proprioception or visual kinesthesis, for instance. I want here to suggest that Evans’ observation inchoately points to a relation between what I’ve called the syncategorematic use of ‘I’ as subject and the categorematic use of ‘I’ as subject. According to my account, any assertion or judgment is, in virtue of being an assertion or judgment, expandable into a form that makes use of the syncategorematic ‘I’. Trivially, this includes every statement in which one makes use of the categorematic ‘I’ as subject.

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within the predicative proposition—e.g., the assertion “I am hungry” is syncategorematically expandable into “I know that I’m asserting that I am hungry.” I have already argued for this conclusion in §2. This is a deepening of the first aspect of Evans’ observation. What about the second insight?

Evans observes that one’s judgment or assertion is IEM only relative to a certain set of epistemic grounds, and one’s grounds give rise to first-person IEM (if they do) only when they are taken as grounds in a judgment or assertion. Though this “taking as” moment has received some treatment in the literature, I want to urge that this phenomenon is the key to understanding categorematic uses of ‘I’ as subject.70 This “taking of grounds as grounds” is, I argue, internally related to the illocutionary authority that is displayed in the use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ as subject. The categorematic use of ‘I’ as subject in a statement such as “I am hungry” functions to expressively mark oneself as the appropriator of a set of epistemic grounds as one’s own, and can so function only if a speaker has the kind of illocutionary authority on display in an assertoric utterance. The act of constituting a claim as a claim and the act of appropriating a set of grounds as one’s grounds are internally related acts. The former is displayed by the use of the syncategorematic ‘I’, and the latter is marked by the use of the categorematic ‘I’ as subject. Both acts and their correlative pronominal signs are essential and internally related aspects of the phenomenon of first-person IEM.

In the literature on first-person immunity to error through misidentification, the assumed paradigmatic form of first-person IEM is the categorematic use of ‘I’ as subject.71 Examples here are legion.

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71 Where a syncategorematic use of ‘I’ as subject is discussed, it is never treated as different in kind from the categorematic use of ‘I as subject’.
Table 3. Immunity and Its Grounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Ground</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I’m hungry”</td>
<td>Feeling of hunger.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m in front of a desk”</td>
<td>Perceptual experience of being in front of a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>desk.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am seeing a tree”</td>
<td>Perceptual experience of seeing a tree.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I remember walking towards the Duomo in Florence”</td>
<td>Autobiographical memory of walking towards the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duomo.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A statement is immune to error through misidentification when it is impossible for a thinker to know that someone or something is F, but fail to know that one oneself is F. This simple characterization points to an important characteristic that needs to be accommodated within an account of first-person IEM—namely, when S’s statement that “I am F” is IEM relative to the first-person pronoun, S’s apprehension of F-ness is inseparable from S’s self-conscious attribution of F-ness. This means that when S’s statement is IEM, S must be oriented towards F-ness in such a way that allows S to non-inferentially think of the F-ness as her own. Merely being sensitive to F-ness is, then, insufficient to underwrite first-person IEM. I want to fill in this thought by suggesting that the categorematic ‘I’ as subject functions to expressively mark oneself as the appropriator of epistemic grounds, i.e., those grounds that are IEM susceptible. In cases where S’s statement is IEM, S’s apprehension of the presence of F-ness just is S’s self-conscious appropriation of F-ness as her own. The linguistic form of such self-attributive knowledge is ‘I$C_S$ am F’.

The notion of “appropriation” here ought to be heard in a two-fold sense. On the one hand, a subject’s appropriation of F is a certain kind of activity. It is, as I said above, not mere sensitivity to F-ness that underwrites a statement’s being IEM. It is only when the subject presents, that is, states or judges of herself that she* is F on grounds that are IEM susceptible that the statement is IEM. Thus, unless the categorematic use of ‘I’ is deployed with assertoric or judgmental force, that use will not qualify as a use as subject. On the other hand, since the form of appropriation here essentially involves a subject’s self-consciousness, the act of appropriation which underwrites categorematic uses of ‘I’ as subject involves a certain kind of pragmatic transformation of the subject of predication. At least in the normal range of cases, the appropriation of F in a statement that is IEM relative to the categorematic ‘I’ functions to situate the subject in a field of possible action or epistemic commitment. A subject’s use of the categorematic ‘I’ as subject in a statement brings the subject into relation with a field of normative possibilities in a way that need not be so when F is applied second- or third-personally. Take, for instance, two situations involving a simple question and response:

1st Person: “Do you intend to go out this afternoon?”

“Yes, I intend to go to Entenwerder.”

3rd Person: “Does Ella intend to go out this afternoon?”

“Yes, Ella intends to go to Entenwerder.”

Trivially, if my statement that “I intend to go to Entenwerder” is IEM, certain possibilities for action become salient for me in a way that need not be so in the third-person case. Absent further considerations that require first-personal modes of representation, the fact that Ella intends to φ does not effect my standing commitments. There is, as is often remarked, an important asymmetry between
(in this case) first- and third-person psychological discourse, which shows up as a general feature of the difference between IEM uses and non-IEM uses of the first-person.  

This all adds up, I think, to the idea that the kind of appropriation characteristic of the use of the categorematic ‘I’ is internally related to the illocutionary authority that is displayed in the use of the syncategorematic ‘I’ as subject. Insofar as a speaker has the capacity to assert, the speaker thereby has the capacity to understand and make use of the syncategorematic ‘I’. The syncategorematic ‘I’ is the linguistic mark of a speaker’s general illocutionary authority. But if the power to frame judgments/assertions that are IEM is also a mode of pragmatic self-transformation, then it is right to see this aspect as a further component of a subject’s self-conscious assertoric capacity. That is, to frame an assertion that is IEM one must be able both (a) to determine one’s illocution as an assertion and (b) to self-consciously appropriate grounds as one’s own. In an assertion that is IEM, one must be the locus of two interrelated determinations: the character of one’s illocution and the character of one’s self vis-à-vis one’s epistemic grounds.

But this should be no surprise, given the standard characterization of first-person IEM. When an assertion of mine is IEM, I know myself to be in some way or another. If I assert that “I am thinking of Eliza and Daniel,” my assertion is about myself, as myself, at least in part: it expresses something about what’s going on with me as the thinking, asserting subject. Such assertions articulate a form of agential self-knowledge. But I am also communicating my self-knowledge in the form of an assertion. If so, then such assertions indeed fit this two-fold model of self-determination. Insofar as I am articulating my agential self-knowledge, I must have the capacity to make self-attributions of this kind; insofar as I am articulating this knowledge in the form of an assertion, I must likewise have the capacity to determine the character of my illocutionary act. The categorematic ‘I’ is the linguistic mark of the

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former capacity, and the syncategorematic ‘I’ is the linguistic mark of the latter capacity. In a subject with the power to make assertions that are immune to error through misidentification relative to the first-person pronoun, these interrelated capacities are necessary.

§1.4 Conclusion

In the contemporary literature on the first-person, a dominant trend is to locate the source of first-person IEM at the level of sub-sentential sense. I have suggested here that there is another strategy available that rests on an agent’s illocutionary authority. To introduce this strategy, I made a cross-categorial distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic uses of ‘I’. I then argued that this distinction maps onto two features of first-person IEM that are not often kept conceptually distinct. The categorematic use of ‘I’ is the linguistic mark of the activity of epistemic appropriation, in a sense I articulated in §3.2. The syncategorematic use of ‘I’ is the linguistic mark of a speaker’s illocutionary authority operating within a practical discursive context. These two properties are, I’ve argued, interrelated aspects of what I’ve called Evans’ observation.

But this view comes with a variety of commitments, at least one of which we have not fully investigated. Namely, the syncategorematic ‘I’ functions, at least on the uses I’ve isolated, as a self-identifying display only within a practical discursive context, and these contexts are the media of epistemic discursive activity. I’ve argued that that an extensional characterization will fail to get the formal features of these contexts in view. Although we’ve gone a little way to positively characterizing these contexts by way of their relation to state-quantified generality, this doesn’t yet get in view the ways in which these are contexts of epistemic interaction. The logic of state-predication does not contain within itself the resources to make sense of the nature of these interactive contexts or media. In the next chapter, I will suggest that the missing element needed to fill out this account can be found in an investigation of the first-person plural and correlative phenomena. A practical discursive context is, first and foremost, the medium of our possible agreement or disagreement, and the embedded first-
person plural pronoun is an essential element of these contexts. The sort of epistemic engagement at issue here must include an understanding of what we are doing, and this sort of understanding has a particular form. The articulation of this form, and others, is now our quarry.
Chapter 2: Articulating the First-Person Plural

Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes a part of the ceremony.

—F. Kafka

In this chapter I begin to articulate some of the basic structural features of the first-person plural pronoun and correlative phenomena. I attempt to show that there are several distinct uses of the first-person plural pronoun, and that these uses can be defined inferentially. This articulation is necessary because questionable assumptions undergird a host of debates and lines of thought about the first-person in contemporary philosophy. A clear rendering of the first-person plural uncovers gaps in the cogency of these assumptions. The three principal assumptions or tendencies of thought I will be interested in are the following:

**Independence:** the first-person singular pronoun can be articulated and rendered intelligible or conceptually explicit without reference to the first-person plural pronoun or concomitant concepts.78

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**Priority:** the first-person singular pronoun is conceptually prior to the first-person plural pronoun in the sense that it, the first-person singular, is a necessary constituent in an account of the first-person plural and not vice versa. The Priority assumption is compatible with several distinct forms of constituency including additive and non-additive theories.\(^79\)

**Uniformity:** the first-person plural pronoun is logically monosemous. The appearance of semantic polysemy is, on analysis, mere appearance.\(^80\)

Although individual philosophers formulate these assumptions in various ways, a study of the literature demonstrates clearly that the three assumptions above generally manifest themselves within contemporary philosophy of the first-person.

**Independence** is arguably the most ubiquitous assumption because it underpins accounts that treat the first-person singular in isolation from the first-person plural. In these explanations, by not discussing concepts regarding the first-person plural, the theorist presupposes (usually implicitly) that the first-person singular is a phenomenon that can be made conceptually explicit without mention of the first-person plural. While accounts of this kind can take diverse forms, the common thread in these accounts is the thought that the unity of the first-person singular is distinct from—and can be explained separately from—a wider discursive context such as language, the conceptual, or the social. So long as this idea shapes an account of the first-person, that account will be structured to formally repel the possibility that the first-person plural is an equally basic form of the first-person. If an account of the first-person is to deal with the first-person plural, it cannot exclude as a priori irrelevant concepts such as SOCIALITY or MANIFOLD OF PERSONS. Peculiarly, **Independence** has a firm hold on the philosophical literature. While this assumption of independence has been questioned in practical philosophy by figures such as Anscombe, Rawls, Pippin, and Williams, it continues to play


an unquestioned role in several branches of theoretical philosophy. Following the practical philosophers’ lead, I will suggest that philosophers of the first-person have good reason for letting it go as a guiding assumption.

**Priority** is intimately linked with **Independence**. The **Priority** assumption is often in play when the first-person plural is reduced, decomposed, or analyzed into concepts that have their home solely within the scope of the first-person singular. This reduction strategy is usually motivated by ontological worries concerning entities like “plural subjects” or “group minds.” Kirk Ludwig captures this line of thinking succinctly when he writes:

> I will argue for an analysis of [...] we-intentions which does not require concepts which are not already used in describing and understanding I-intentions. Prima facie, plural agents are puzzling. They must, it seems, have beliefs, desires and intentions. But prior to collective action we have only individuals with their beliefs, desires, and intentions.

Ludwig’s analysis of we-intentions is a paradigmatic instance of **Priority**. Whatever may be correct in Ludwig’s reductionist strategy, his starting point excludes the possibility that the first-person plural has a structure that is sui generis. If we, following Ludwig, begin only with concepts such as **FIRST-PERSON SINGULAR ATTITUDE REPORT** and **INDIVIDUAL INTENTIONAL STATE**, the relation between the first-person singular and the first-person plural is prejudged: the plural is a complex construction of the singular form. It is this tendency to prejudge that I am most anxious to combat here.

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82 That this ontological worry has taken precedence in contemporary philosophy is itself a topic of some interest and is something of a recent worry arising out of often unacknowledged shifts in philosophical concern. For more on this story, see Olen, P. and Turner, S. (2016). “Durkheim, Sellars, and the Origins of Collective Intentionality,” in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23, no. 5.

Finally, an emphasis on a limited number of propositional schemas leads to further difficulties. Schemas like ‘We intend to ϕ’ or ‘We ϕ that p’ or ‘I intend that we ϕ’ function to underwrite a presupposition contained in the use of nominalizations such as “the first-person” or “the first-person plural.” Namely, that the first-person plural is logically monosemous; that the pronoun contained in the schemas is something like a Fregean object—it is a term that lacks internal categorial divisions. I have called this the **Uniformity** assumption. At this point, I want to note that starting with a single propositional schema works as a restriction on the kinds of results admissible in a mature theory of the first-person plural. By my lights, theories of this form are especially liable to equivocations in pronominal use. That the first-person plural pronoun can play several distinct logical roles is a crucial feature of the strategy I am attempting to prosecute.

In this and the following chapter, I want to question all three assumptions. The first step is to show that the first-person plural has several distinct uses, and that these uses can be articulated inferentially. If it can be shown that the first-person plural has several distinct uses some of which stand in relation to uses of the first-person singular, this will furnish an initial reason to be skeptical that a philosopher can limn the general concepts of the **FIRST-PERSON** as well as the **FIRST-PERSON SINGULAR** at their joints without considering the plural form of the first-person. I begin to work out this account in the sections below. If the inferential account can be made good, there will be good reason to abandon the **Uniformity** assumption. In Chapter 3 and the Conclusion I turn to criticizing the **Priority** and **Independence** assumptions directly.

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84 For instance, in Bratman’s (1992) “Shared Cooperative Activity,” *Philosophical Review*, 101, 327-341 the propositions “We are singing a duet,” “We are taking a trip together,” and “We are painting a house” are all analyzed together and given a common account. While it may be the case that all three of these activities have features in common, I want to suggest that this is an accidental feature of the examples on display. His account can only find superficial unities given his neglect of deeper logical differences.
§2.1 Three Forms of the First-Person Plural

Save a few notable exceptions, contemporary philosophy of the first-person is focused exclusively on the first-person singular pronoun and its correlative *I*-concept. When the first-person plural is mentioned, it is usually to set it aside as a separate topic—a topic that is conceptually downstream from the principal quarry. Here are some representative samples:

The first person concept is expressed by the word ‘I’ in English, by the first person pronoun in other languages, and by inflection of the verb in yet others.

Self-consciousness is the nature of a subject that manifests itself in her thinking thoughts whose linguistic expression requires the use of the first person pronoun, “I”.

First-person concepts, of which the singular is paradigmatic, are, I think, the only ones that fill [the] function of [fixing the locus of epistemic or practical agency] […] I lay aside the plural ‘we’.

The first thing we can say about first person thoughts is that they are the sort of thoughts one may express by using the first person: ‘I am hungry’, ‘I was born in Paris’, ‘I have crossed my knees’.

At first glance, these statements ought to appear strange. Is there just one first-person concept? Is the first-person concept exhausted (in English) by one’s use of the first-person singular pronoun? If the plural form is a form of the first-person, can it be set aside as non-paradigmatic? Taking grammar at

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face value, the answer to each of these questions seems to be “No.” Under the heading of “Grammatical Person” or “Person Forms,” grammarians place both the first-person singular and the first-person plural. They are taxonomically on par: two forms of one general category. Of course, this may be a grammatical illusion that can be dispelled by a sophisticated theory of the first-person. But this sophisticated position ought to be the result of a philosophical inquiry, not one’s starting point.

In what follows I want to cleave to these naïve grammatical appearances and suggest that the first-person plural is a genuine form of the first-person. My question going forward will be this: how many ways are there of being together, where the being of this togetherness rests, as I will say, on thinking that is epistemically first-personal? My method for isolating the various forms of our being-together will be to investigate the various ways in which we say ‘we’. As I will suggest, ‘we’ is, at least on some of its uses, the grammatical mark of a certain kind of self-consciousness, and it is this kind of self-consciousness that underwrites the possibility of our standing in the sorts of relations picked out by our various ways of saying ‘we’.

We can begin by looking at various substitution instances of the propositional schemas ‘We are \(F\)’ and ‘We are \(\phi\)-ing’ and the contexts in which in which such propositions, when supplied with content, make sense. I am going to suggest that the first-person plural pronoun admits of three distinct uses, and that each of these uses can be further articulated by way of two categorial distinctions: (a) the categorematic/syncategorematic distinction and (b) the generic versus non-generic distinction.

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90 This is in fact a gross simplification, though one that does not affect my overall point. As many linguists have noted, there are several ways in which pronominal number can be represented. Indeed, many languages do not grammatically represent numerical distinctions in person-forms—e.g., English does not grammatically distinguish between singular and plural forms of ‘you’. That said, the basic fact that number distinctions are conceptually internal to person-forms is cross-linguistic and is presupposed here. The contemporary classic on these questions is Siewierska, A. (2004). Person. Cambridge University Press.
§2.1.1 The Distributive Use of ‘We’

Suppose that Evan and I are standing around outside the Wooster Inn. We are chatting, and, at a break in the conversation, I mention “We are both wearing hats.” How ought we make sense of this use of ‘we’? I will call this the “distributive” use of ‘we’.

Let’s stipulate that ‘We__’ covers both categorematic first-person plural claims and syncategorematic first-person plural claims—for instance, “We are wearing hats” and “We both think that coffee is delicious,” respectively.

A claim of the form ‘We__’ is a distributive first-person plural claim if and only if

(i) \[ \text{We__ entails a__ (for any i such that } A_i \text{ is in the extension of ‘we’) \] and

(ii) \[ a__ (for every i such that } A_i \text{ is in the extension of ‘we’)} \text{ entails We__}. \]

To elaborate: consider two syllogisms that unfold conditions (i) and (ii) above.

Destructive Distributive Syllogism:

1. We are wearing hats.
2. Evan and I exhaustively constitute the extension of ‘we’.
∴ So, Evan is wearing a hat.
∴ So, I am wearing a hat.

Constructive Distributive Syllogism:

1. Evan is wearing a hat.
2. I am wearing a hat.
3. So, Evan and I are wearing hats.
∴ So, we are wearing hats.

For any claim of the form ‘We__’ such that correlative Constructive and Destructive Distributive Syllogisms are valid and constructible, that use is distributive. What is of philosophical significance here is that although it is perfectly intelligible that I can, based on faulty or misleading evidence, incorrectly state that “Evan is wearing a hat,” the claim that “Evan and I exhaustively constitute the extension of ‘we’”
makes use of the categorematic ‘I’ as subject and is thus immune to error through misidentification. Thus, although the distributive ‘we’ can be viewed as a restricted quantifier, it must be understood as epistemically first-personal. This is so in virtue of the fact that my thinking or claiming that this is so is not an element separate from the fact that the extension of the ‘we’ is as I state. Likewise, that the categorematic ‘I’ as subject is an ineliminable element in this inference pattern explains why an interlocutor cannot challenge the inference from “Evan and I are wearing hats” to “We are wearing hats” on the grounds that some further individual is also a part of the extension of ‘we’. While it may be true that, say, Terry, Mark, and David are wearing hats as well, these facts are—from my (current) point of view—irrelevant to the truth of the distributive first-person plural claim. Of course, these facts may cause me to revise my claim such that I then include Terry, Mark, and David within the extension of the ‘we’, but this can only happen given a change of mind on my part. The facts alone do not determine the extension of the pronoun.

§2.1.2 The Transactional Use of ‘We’

Suppose that we are dancing the tango. If I am dancing the tango with you, then you are dancing the tango with me. The antecedent of the conditional specifies the requisite bit of knowledge I have from the side of the agent, and the consequent specifies the requisite bit of knowledge on the part of the patient, as articulated from the agent side. But you, my dance partner, could formulate the exact same conditional from your point of view. My dancing with you just is your dancing with me.  

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91 Compare Frege’s claim in “Thought” in The Frege Reader: “A sentence can be transformed by changing the verb from active to passive and at the same time making the accusative into the subject. In the same way we may change the dative into the nominative and at the same time replace ‘give’ by ‘receive’. Naturally such transformations are not trivial in every respect; but they do not touch the thought, they do not touch what is true or false” (Blackwell 1997: 331). I will suggest going forward, however, that Frege’s thesis that voice distinctions are of no logical significance is wrong. Frege errs here because he recognized only two distinctions in voice: active and passive. In thinking through issues of the first-person, it will be essential to recognize a third grammatical voice, namely, the middle voice.
verb “dancing,” as used in the previous sentence, takes persons as its relata—a single transitive verb yoking together agent and patient to form a unary, transactional whole. In such a situation, it seems licit for any of the parties to assent to the claim that “We are dancing the tango.” We can analyze this use of ‘we’ as follows.

There are a set of conceptually linked frames $\varphi, \varphi', \varphi'' \ldots \psi$ and agents $a_1, a_2, \ldots a_n$ such that

(i) I (said by $a_i$) am $\varphi$-ing with $a_{i+1}, a_{i+2}, \ldots a_n$

implies

(ii) I (said by $a_i$) am $\varphi^n$-ing with $a_{i-1}, a_{i}, a_{i+1}, a_n$

implies

(iii) We (said by any $a_i$) are $\psi$-ing.

For any use of ‘we’ such that an inference of this form is valid and constructible, that use is transactional. There are a few features of this inference pattern that need elucidating. First, for any claims $C$ and $C'$ that are valid substitution instances of (i) and (ii), both (a) $C$ and $C'$ must have the same adicity and (b) the value of their adicity must be no less than two, i.e., dyadic. Moreover, a transactional claim of this kind is such that we can express the same state of affairs by reversing the order of the argument places and the terms in which the relational content is expressed. For instance, just as “5 < 6” and “6 > 5” express, logically speaking, the same content, one can flip the terms of a transaction without affecting the content expressed: “Juan is dancing with Maria” expresses the same content as its converse “Maria is dancing with Juan.” They are, as it were, two sides of one reality. Though there may be a difference in “coloring,” as Frege says, between a transaction and its converse, the semantic content is untouched by the difference. This explains, in part, the peculiar unity of (i) and (ii).

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Second, the aspectual dimension of the predicates in claim-schemas (i) and (ii) is not an accidental feature of the inference pattern. Rather, these transactions admit of formally specifiable temporal distinctions that are foreign to ordinary relations. These temporal distinctions are necessary because transactional uses of ‘we’ articulate a kind of practical knowledge, and this knowledge concerns temporally extended actions. Any claim that is a valid substitution instance of (i) or (ii) must, then, admit of aspectual distinctions. This suggests that we need to draw a distinction between two different kinds of n-adic relational predicates. On the one hand, there are static relational predicates such as ‘x is to the left of y’ or ‘x is younger than y’; on the other hand, there are dynamic relational predicates such as ‘x is dancing with y’.

According to my account, I treat the distinction between static and dynamic relational predicates as a difference in their respective forms of temporality. Static relational predicates only admit of distinctions of tense whereas dynamic relational predicates admit of distinctions of tense and aspect. For instance, the sentence “Ella is to the left of Quentin” can only be modified—with respect to the temporal structure of the predicate—by a shift in tense: “Ella was/will be to the left of Quentin.” This is not the case with dynamic relational predicates. The sentence “Juan is dancing with Maria” exhibits present progressive aspect as well as present tense. In addition to ordinary tense distinctions, the predicate’s temporal structure can be shifted to either past progressive aspect or perfective aspect—i.e., “Juan was dancing with Maria” or “Juan danced with Maria.” All valid substitution instances of (i) and (ii) must contain dynamic relational predicates.

But the distinction between static and dynamic relations does not fully characterize the unity of the inference above. Although (i) and (ii) are dynamic relations, the self-consciousness on display in such uses of ‘we’ is invariably bipolar. If my dancing with you just is your dancing with me, and both parties to the relation must self-consciously know that this is so, the dynamic relation involves

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self-consciousness of the same act on both sides. Agent and patient are united by their joint knowledge—not of two acts, but of one. In other words, it is not that (a) X knows that “I (said by X) am dancing the Tango,” (b) Y knows that “I (said by Y) am dancing the Tango,” and (c) these knowledge states are only related per accidens. Rather, it is one unified (in this case) dyadic act, where both poles of the relation are self-knowing agents performing a jointly authored act: my dancing with you just is your dancing with me. That they are united first-personally in this way explains why (i) and (ii) imply the further claim involving the first-person plural pronoun. This inference is not licit when premises (i) and (ii) contain either ordinary static relations or dynamic relations saturated by one or more terms whose denotation lacks self-consciousness. While “Adam ate the apple” implies “The apple was eaten by Adam,” that these two claims are united does not imply any claim involving agent and patient united under a first-person plural pronoun. It is, as I stated, only when agent and patient are united self-consciously under a single act that it is licit to use the transactional first-person plural.

According to my account, these first-person dynamic relations involve self-consciousness of the same act on both sides. I mean this to be heard in a strong sense: my knowledge that I am dancing the tango with you involves your knowledge that you are dancing with me. Although this raises questions about the first- and second-person, I want to note here that this claim is no more mysterious or worrisome than the fact that ordinary, non-dynamic dyadic relations are atomic—they do not have the property of variable polyadicity. Just as ordinary dyadic relations are not the additive product of distinct monadic predications—e.g., “Buck Mulligan was a host” and “Haines was a guest” does not entail or jointly produce the relation “Haines was a guest of Buck Mulligan”—a dynamic, self-conscious relation is not the product of independent, monadically specifiable mental states. Like relations of whatever form, they are not decomposable into logically simpler predications.

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94 Ibid., 309.
95 Every so often there is a dust-up over whether this is true. Kenny, A. (1963). *Action, Emotion, and Will*. Routledge is the original skeptic on this front. I’ve argued that Kenny’s master “variable
Third, claim schemas (i) and (ii) both make use of the first-person singular as subject. Therefore, both (i) and (ii) are immune to error through misidentification relative to the first-person singular pronoun. But this also means that the use of a transactional first-person plural will be immune to error through misidentification relative to the first-person plural pronoun. Given that the transactional state of affairs—e.g., Juan is dancing with Maria—is partly constituted by the agent and patient being united, self-consciously, under a single act, the transactional pronoun inherits first-person IEM from the unity of the two subjects. If so, then when one makes a first-person plural transactional statement such as “We are dancing the Tango,” certain forms of evidential challenge are de jure inapplicable. To the question, “Are you sure that it is you who are doing that?”, no substantive answer is possible. Insofar as the transaction is co-constituted by self-conscious subjects united under a single act, the fact that there is such a transaction guarantees that the united subjects are immune to error through misidentification relative to the first-person plural pronoun.

§2.1.3 The Institutional/Cooperative Use of ‘We’

Suppose that the head of the CDC states that “We, the CDC, believe that children ought to receive the Chicken Pox Vaccine.” Crucially, that this statement is true does not entail that any individual that falls under the concept ‘…is a member of the CDC’ believes that children ought to receive the Chicken Pox Vaccine. The ‘we’ contained in the statement does not refer to a mere sum of agents who happen to have like properties or like practical commitments. The peculiarity of this use of ‘we’ can be captured by the following analysis.

Again, ‘We__’ covers both categorematic first-person plural claims and syncategorematic first-person plural claims. A claim of the form ‘We__’ is an institutional first-person plural claim if and only if

(i)  

\( \text{We__} \)

does not entail

(ii) \( \text{a___} \) (for any i such that \( A_i \) is in the extension of ‘we’)

For any use of ‘we’ such that an instance of (i) does not entail (ii), that use is institutional. At the highest level of generality, institutional first-person plural claims can function in two distinct ways. Either (a) the institutional ‘we’ can be used to make an objective attribution of properties to a plural subject (e.g., “We, UCLA, are dealing with an outbreak of the flu”) or (b) the institutional ‘we’ can be used to make a subjective undertaking on behalf of the plural subject (e.g., “We, the graduate workers, have committed to consensus decision-making”). Call the (a) use of the pronoun the “acknowledging” use and the (b) use of the pronoun the “commitment-undertaking” use. On both the (a) use and the (b) use, the fact that such a statement is true does not entail that any member of the extension of ‘we’ falls under the distinct concept that is acknowledged by or undertaken by the subject of predication.

There are a few features of this use that require brief discussion.

First, the kinds of institutions and collectives that can be at issue in speech acts of this kind are myriad: hospital systems, governments, social clubs, and private companies all can fall under this form of collectivity. At a certain level of detail, the structural differences between, say, a high school film club and a state government are vast, to say the least. Without downplaying the differences, the level of generality required to make perspicuous the semantics of the institutional ‘we’ can rest at the level of inferential form. Given my specific interests here, a plurality will count as an institution or collective if and only if it can significantly feature in the inference pattern above. Such a form concerns
the relation between the plural subject itself and the properties or practical commitments of the individuals that fall within the extension of the plural subject—i.e., that which is referred to by a relevant institutional use of ‘we’.

Second, unlike the distributive and transactional uses of the pronoun, the felicity conditions governing institutional first-person plural speech acts will differ dramatically depending on the specific structures of the institution or cooperative at issue, the social or institutional status of the speaker, the content of what is claimed, and the intended perlocutionary effects of the speech act.

Putting the commitment-undertaking use into our sights, it’s easy to see how one’s social position takes on critical significance. For instance, while under ordinary circumstances an intern at the CDC cannot make authoritative claims concerning a change in institutional mission (e.g., “We, the CDC, will focus research on adolescent nutrition”), the head of the CDC can, at least sometimes, make commitment-undertaking claims of this kind. So too does the structure of the institution or cooperative take on significance when assessing felicity conditions governing institutional uses of ‘we’. In the case of a less stratified institution or cooperative, it may be the case that any member has the defeasible authority to make claims on behalf of the cooperative—e.g., “OK, that’s that. We are going to Duke’s for drinks.” Of course, whether the speech act is given the appropriate uptake will depend on the speaker’s authoritative standing (real or imagined) vis-à-vis the members of the cooperative and other sources of recognitive attitudes. This is why the authority is, in most cases, only defeasible. Whether some claim counts as a successful undertaking of a commitment will depend, crucially, on the position of the speaker within the institution, the structure of the institution itself, and the import of what is said.

Turning to acknowledging uses of the institutional or cooperative ‘we’, many of the same felicity conditions are in play. Even in what look to be straightforward acknowledging uses of the pronoun (e.g., “We are dealing with an outbreak of the flu” or “We have attempted to accommodate
the needs of our customers”), a speaker must display sensitivity to the various conditions under which such a use makes sense. While it may be true, for instance, that everyone around the dinner table desires a certain guest to leave, only certain family members (at least usually) have the authority to state “We simply need you to leave.” (Perhaps the dinner guest is considering Mom for a much-needed job.) Determining what makes it the case that a correlative third-person judgment is true (e.g., “Everyone at the table desires the dinner guest to leave”) is not sufficient for determining when it is correct for a speaker to make the correlative judgment employing the first-person plural.

Although there is much more to be said concerning the various felicity conditions governing uses of the institutional or cooperative first-person plural, the respect in which these felicity conditions are a topic of concern here rests on the following fact. The use of the institutional or cooperative first-person plural is always a matter of speaking for and (ideally) with like first-persons. Unlike uses of the third-person pronoun (e.g., He is going shopping this afternoon), the use of the institutional ‘we’ is a matter of speaking for and with persons from their own point of view—or, anyways, what might be their point of view. Since not just anyone can speak for or with anyone else, the occasion of so speaking must be normatively appropriate. Relations of authority, institutional structure, and the content of what is said all help to determine the conditions under which speech acts of this kind make sense. As I’ve mentioned, sometimes the stakes surrounding an act of speaking in this way are low and relatively harmless: “I need your help for a moment; we are going to make pasta for dinner.” But sometimes this act of taking responsibility is a matter of boundless importance and risk: “We will attempt to cross the border tonight.” In each case, the use of the pronoun is a matter of taking responsibility for and, ideally, speaking in unity with others. Nothing guarantees that this unity will come to pass, nor that any unity will continue into the future. That one does rests on both objective properties and subjective epistemic states, some of which cannot in any way be disentangled. While certain small scale collectives may come and go in a matter of minutes (“We can cross the street once
this train passes”), others may last lifetimes and rest on massive institutional structures (“We, the Supreme Court of California, sit en banc for all appeals”). How, why, and when such collectives can be spoken for, changed, and committed to various courses of action is as various as the sorts of collectives available for formation.

§2.2 Two Categorial Distinctions

The aim of the above section was to render a perspicuous overview of the various uses of the first-person plural pronoun. I have referred to these uses as categorematic uses because the differences between the three uses can be articulated at the level of pronominal sense. Different logical uses of the pronoun correspond to different inferential roles that the pronoun plays when embedded in a proposition. In this section I am going to suggest that there are two cross-categorial distinctions that apply to the three forms of the first-person plural pronoun above. The first distinction I will refer to as the “generic/non-generic distinction.” I will suggest that this distinction can only be drawn if we move to a wider contextual frame; nothing in propositional form distinguishes generic first-person plural propositions from non-generic first-person plural propositions. The second distinction is the categorematic/syncategorematic distinction, which requires recognizing a difference between operational uses of the first-person plural pronoun and non-operational (e.g., singular term) uses of the pronoun.

§2.2.1 Generic Uses

Consider the case where Juan remarks over dinner, perhaps among new graduate students, that “We, the Elvira household, play chess.” Understood in the ordinary way, the point of his speech act is not, in the first instance, to describe a certain event or events at a datable time (“We played chess every Sunday in November”). Rather, the point is to describe something that is generally done, where
‘generally’ here is not the generality of the universal quantifier, but the generality of what linguists have called generics.96

Let’s say that the following statements are true: “Cardinals are red,” “Lions (Panthera leo) hunt as a pride,” and “We go to church as a family.” Although these statements are, in some sense, generalizations, to see these as true is not to bar certain sorts of exceptions from logical space: “Indeed, Lions hunt like that, but not the lion at the San Diego Zoo”; “Cardinals are red, but did you see the albino cardinal at Stanley’s house?”; “Well, yes, we do go to church as a family, unless dad is sick.” Unlike universally quantified statements, generic statements admit of certain kinds of exceptions. The application of the classification “exception” rests on the fact that there is, in a generic statement, an asymmetric contrast of rule and exception where the rule (the true generic statement) is explanatory of the exception as an exception. That some exception is classified as an exception is intelligible only against a general rule that Xs do (generally) Φ. Exceptions call out for explanation in virtue of the fact that they (qua exceptions) are cases of deviance; they are, figuratively, de via: off the road. As can be seen, statements involving the first-person plural often do take this generic form.

Let’s begin by introducing a common contextual frame that allows for all three uses of the first-person plural pronoun above. Imagine that you and I are at the tennis court.97 Here are a variety of situations and speech acts that are intelligible in this context.

(1) Suppose that you are on court three, and I am on court one. There is a passerby, and she asks me “What are you all up to?” I respond “We are each playing tennis!” This is an instance of what I’ve called the distributive use of ‘we’.

96 Many philosophers following Leslie, S. (2015). “Generics,” in G. Russell and D. G. Fara (eds.), The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Language, Routledge, pp. 355-367 draw a distinction between statements such as “Cardinals are red” and “Jonathan goes to Temple.” The former are generics and the latter are habituals. Leslie is correct in thinking that these should not, for all purposes, be classed together, but nothing in my account is affected by these differences. What will become important going forward is the difference between generics and habituals which can be the object of essentially first-person thought and generics and habituals which cannot be thought in this way.

(2) Suppose now that you and I are playing against each other and another passerby asks me “What are you all up to?” I respond “We are playing tennis against each other.” This is an instance of what I’ve called the transactional use of ‘we’.

(3) Now, consider the case where you and I are playing casually. A passerby may ask me, pointing generally to the courts, “What are you all up to?” I might then respond that “We are starting a tennis club.” This use signals that we are united in a common effort. It is an institutional or cooperative use of ‘we’.

Before going forward, some notation. I will use ‘we_D’ to denote a distributive use of ‘we’. I will use ‘we_T’ to denote a transactional use of ‘we’. And I will use ‘we_C’ to denote a cooperative or institutional use of ‘we’. I concatenate the subscript with the subject term to signal the form of plurality exhibited by a given use of the first-person plural pronoun.

My basic idea is that an elucidation of generic first-person plural statements requires a shift of attention away from pronominal form to a wider contextual frame. What makes a statement a generic first-person plural statement has nothing to do with the particular use of the first-person plural pronoun employed in the subject position. Any form of ‘we’ can occur in a generic. That is,

(a) \( F \text{we}_D \)
(b) \( F \text{we}_T \)
(c) \( F \text{we}_C \)

can all be used, when provided with content, generically. Moreover, this is not a mere empirical possibility. It is crucial to see that each use of ‘we’ in (1), (2), and (3) above actually presupposes, as a condition of its intelligibility, true generic first-person plural propositions. This is so because first-person plural generic propositions function here to articulate the form and content of the practice from the position of a first-person practitioner, without which the actions within the game (individual or collective) would not be intelligible as tennis activities. Given that “an individual could not be playing tennis”—that is, we could not find his activities intelligible as tennis activities, nor could he, first-personally, find them intelligible—“unless there was that game or practice,” such truths must be
presupposed. Just as Wittgenstein’s explanation “This is the king” is informative of “the use of the [chess] piece only because, as we might say, the place for it is already prepared,” so too are tennis explanations of this kind only intelligible against a wider context of practice-norms articulated using the generic first-person plural. It is worth spelling out this specific case before attempting to generalize the point in Chapter 3.

In the case at hand, generic first-person plural claims can be used to articulate the form and content of the practice of which I am a part. This is done not by describing a group of individuals, but by describing the very “togetherness” of the practice, the form of our being-together. Consider, then, the specifics of the tennis case. Intuitively, if it is true, here and now, that “We are each playing tennis,” then it must also be true that “We play tennis,” where this speech act is to be classified as distributive and generic. Trivially, unless each of us can play tennis in this generic sense, there could be no tennis playing going on here and now. In the transactional case, that “We are playing tennis against each other” is true here and now presupposes that “We play tennis against one another according to a set of rules,” and this speech act is to be classified as transactional and generic. That there are rules governing the specific events and plays within the game is required for there to be such a rule-based transaction as such. These rules are what hold the specific plays within the game together as intelligible plays in the game of tennis. In the cooperative case, that “We are starting a tennis club” is true presupposes that “We play tennis according to a set of rules”, and this is to be heard as cooperative and generic. Like the transactional case, this form of play would not get a foothold unless there are rules that hold the game together as a game in this sort of way.

100 Compare Wittgenstein’s remarks from (1983). Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, MIT Press, Part VI, §34: “In order to describe the phenomenon of language, one must describe a practice, not something that happens once, no matter of what kind.”
Although there are several notions here that stand in need of elucidation, the case at hand is illustrative of a fundamental point that will be developed going forward. Generic first-person plural statements purport to describe something that is both general and actual. They describe something general in the sense that they concern practices: *what we do or what is done or what is understood*. This is, as stated, not the generality of a universal quantifier, nor a kind of statistical generality. It is, rather, a normative, rule-based form of generality. Generic first-person plural statements articulate generality of this form. But statements of this kind also describe something actual in the sense that the practices described are lived out—they describe, from the first-person perspective, how one performs, or how one is to go on, or how to project one’s understanding forward within an extant practice.\(^{101}\) These two features (the general and the actual) are on display when a member of a practice presents her action as an example of what we do—e.g., “*this* is how we hit forehand…”—or as an expression of understanding—e.g., “Now I know how to go on! The series extends like *this*.” The demonstrative is internally related to *what we do, or how to go on, or, simply, what is done*.\(^{102}\)

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\(^{101}\) It is important to note that the sense of ‘description’ used here is not the same as the sense of ‘description’ at issue in third-person representations. To see this, consider the difference between these two assertions:

(A) We, the speakers of English, mean …*is red* by the expression ‘is red’.
(B) English speakers mean …*is red* by the expression ‘is red’.

Suppose I assert (A) and (B). Although ‘We’ and ‘English speakers’ share a referent in these cases, they differ in sense. The descriptive expression ‘English speakers’ cannot be substituted into (A) without an obvious change in semantic value. This is so because (A) explicitly exhibits the self-conscious character of the asserter. When I assert (A) I refer to myself as myself among a common plurality of others—that is, as a self-knowing member of some group. This is not the case in (B). Someone can express the thought in (B) without being an English speaker. The sense of ‘description’ being used above is ineliminably first-personal.

\(^{102}\) That they involve a kind of practice-dependent display creates an internal tension within such claims. Though they articulate general rules, they also concern the projectability of a practice, which is not determined merely by the application of further rules. I want to urge, then, that these claims are exercises of spontaneity. They concern, in many cases, the projection of a practice into new instances, which are nonetheless non-arbitrary. For more on this idea, see Friedlander, E. (2011). “Meaning Schematics in Cavell’s Kantian Reading of Wittgenstein,” in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, Vol. 65, No. 256(2).
Lastly, the sense of ‘presupposition’ used in the above two paragraphs can easily lead to the thought that generic first-person plural statements play a static supporting role in the constitution of the intelligibility of a practice. We can call this the additive conception of ‘presupposition’. It is a conception that holds apart (i) that which plays a presuppositional role and (ii) that which stands in need of presuppositional content. On this conception, generic first-person plural statements are something like architectural load-beams: they “hold up” or “bear” the garden-variety claims made within the practice. But this additive conception of ‘presupposition’, however intuitive, involves a significant assumption that we would do well to reject—namely, that there is, on the one hand, a relevant class of statements that are presuppositional, and, on the other hand, there is a separate class of statements that are “supported” by the former class. I want to urge that an additive view of this kind cannot keep hold of the thought that these generic statements are ineliminably first-personal. Here is why.

Generic first-person plural statements play, as I say, a presuppositional role in the intelligibility of a practice. According to my account, determining what counts as a generic first-person plural proposition of this kind is not a question that can be answered from without the practice itself—that is, from a non-first-person practical standpoint. As opposed to the additive conception, it is only in specific situations when one finds oneself within a practice that a certain proposition can show itself as playing that kind of presuppositional role. In scenes of instruction, for instance, nearly any practice-dependent statement can play a generic role of this kind. In a moment of instruction I might present my action as an example of what we (generically) do—e.g., “this is how we hit forehand…” or “here is where we draw the lines.” On a different occasion, the very same forms of words can play a non-generic role. If the very same forms of words can play the role of a generic and a non-generic in a given context, then it is impossible to independently isolate a relevant class of statements that play a presuppositional role of the kind under discussion here.
This shows that it is not an accident that a contextual frame was introduced before the articulation of the generic first-person plural. This is so because there is an interdependence of speech situation and truth-evaluable content at issue in generic first-person plural statements. The ability to draw the relevant distinction is an ability that can be exercised only in practice, where knowledge of relevant environing circumstances is internal to the understanding of what is said. Further, given the open textured nature of human practices, new cases or scenarios are always live possibilities, and the conditions under which some first-person plural statement might be used generically can shift dramatically. What counts as a shift, of an explanation, of an ordinary description will, again, be identifiable only from the standpoint of one situated within the practice itself. If so, then there is no sense in which a principled, practice-independent distinction between that which plays a presuppositional role and that which stands in need of presuppositional content can be drawn. The distinction is, rather, one that is properly drawn only from the first-person perspective of one within a practice. They are, as I’ve said, ineliminably first-personal and generic.

§2.2.2 Syncategorematic Uses of the First-Person Plural

Like the first-person singular, the first-person plural admits, in nearly all its guises, of a distinction between categorematic uses and syncategorematic uses. To review, a claim $C$ is a categorematic first-person claim if and only if $C$ is of the form $\phi a$, where $a$ is a first-person (singular or plural) singular term, and $\phi$ is a predicate; and a claim $C$ is a syncategorematic first-person claim if and only if $C$ is of the form $(Oa)P$, where $a$ is a first-person (singular or plural) singular term, $Oa$ is some sentential operator, and $P$ is a sentence. Altogether, then, the basic divisions fit the following table:

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Table 4. Complete Forms of the First-Person Plural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Distributive Use</th>
<th>Transactional Use</th>
<th>Institutional/Cooperative Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categorematic</strong></td>
<td>“We are wearing hats”</td>
<td>“We are dancing the Tango”</td>
<td>“We are dealing with an outbreak of the flu” (acknowledging)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“We are committing ourselves to democratic procedures” (commitment-undertaking)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Syncategorematic</strong></td>
<td>“We both think that Leipzig is beautiful”</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>“We, the CDC, believe that cigarettes are carcinogenic”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In §1 I characterized the three categorematic forms of the first-person plural. My aim here is to extend, where possible, my account of self-identifying displays to uses of the syncategorematic first-person plural. Following my tripartite division of the categorematic uses of the first-person plural, each syncategorematic use will require its own specific analysis. Each analysis is related back to the form of self-consciousness internal to the pronoun’s significant use. It is this feature that is revealed by the display.

To recap, I introduced the notion of a self-identifying display as a way of understanding certain uses of the syncategorematic first-person singular. At the broadest level of specification, an expression $S$ is used as a self-identifying display if and only if the use of $S$ (a) adds no truth-conditional content to the proposition of which it is a part, (b) makes explicit the exercise of a capacity that is (c) general and (d) essentially first-personal. To take an example from my previous discussion: “I assert that the surf is 8-12 feet.” First, the ‘I’ contained in the statement is a syncategorematic use of ‘I’. Second, its function is not to describe my act, namely, my assertion (this would lead to Cohen’s problem), but to display an exercise of my standing assertoric authority. Third, since my assertoric authority is not one on the order of “fire and forget,” but of responsibility to the claim against, in principle, indefinite
forms of disagreement, clarification, and other forms of epistemic interaction, what I display is involvement in a general discursive context in which I am the general locus of first-person assertoric authority.

§2.2.3 Distributive Uses of the Syncategorematic First-Person Plural

In the categorematic case, distributive uses of ‘we’ function to constitute a unity of individual persons under a common predicate. The unity is constituted by an act of speaking that is epistemically first-personal. That is, the predicate is not common to the individuals solely because of the co-incidence of empirical properties holding in common between subjects (e.g., …is wearing a hat). Rather, the unity of common predicates across subjects rests upon an act of speaking that is epistemically first-personal—the attribution must be understood through a first-person mode of presentation. As I’ve already argued, the thought that \( \{x, x_1, \ldots, x_n\} \) and I exhaustively constituted the extension of the ‘we’ is internal to the use of the pronoun because it functions to license the entailment relations exhibited in the inferential schemas.

In the syncategorematic case, distributive uses of ‘we’ are slightly different. They function to constitute a unity of individual persons under a common propositional act type, e.g., \( \varphi: \text{that } p \). I want to suggest that syncategorematic uses of the distributive ‘we’ allow a speaker to distribute epistemic authority to a claim across a set of individuals who instantiate a common propositional act type. The syncategorematic operator ‘We \( \varphi \ldots \)’ functions to display that the discursive context of the speech situation has multiple loci of epistemic authority. The poles are constituted, again, by thinking that is epistemically first-personal, which secures the fact that not just anyone who falls under the common propositional act type is thereby a source of authority for the claim. For instance, although it may be the case that, say, twelve people in the class believe that Steve Reich is a great composer, until there is a claim of the form “We believe that Steve Reich is a great composer,” the fact of common belief does
not yet constitute the existence of a distributive ‘we’. Moreover, if I am giving a class presentation, I may claim that “We, Thomas and I, believe that Steve Reich is a great composer.” In this case, the other common-believers do not figure in the extension of the ‘we’ at all, despite their common beliefs.

As in the first-person singular case, the syncategorematic operator functions to display the exercise of a general epistemic capacity, a capacity that, when exercised, opens a discursive context. The discursive context is one which includes multiple loci of epistemic authority. This authority, distributed across multiple individuals, is again general in the sense that the authority for the claim is not “ballistic”—it is, rather, a responsibility for the claim against, in principle, indefinite forms of disagreement, clarification, and other sorts of epistemic interaction.

Lastly, as in the first-person singular case, the syncategorematic operator contributes no additional truth-conditional content to the proposition of which it is concatenated. This may seem puzzling given the fact that the syncategorematic first-person plural appears to catch in its referential net a manifold of persons who instantiate a common property. Although there is a sense in which this is true, this form of “instantiation” must be understood through a first-person mode of presentation or speaking. Here is a way of seeing the case in this light.

The distributive first-person plural statement “We each believe that Steve Reich is a great composer” seems to have the following logical form: ‘\( \text{We}_{D} \varphi p \)’. That is, it appears that we should treat …\( \varphi \_ \) as a two-place propositional attitude predicate—or anyways, a two-place “propositional act” predicate—where the left-hand side is saturated by a syncategorematic term designating a set of persons and the right-hand side is saturated by a complete propositional object. I want to suggest that this is a mistaken way of thinking. When one makes a distributive first-person plural claim of the form ‘\( \text{We}_{D} \varphi p \)’, the syncategorematic ‘\( \text{We}_{D} \)’ does not stand in a relation to ‘\( p \)’ in any sense. The logical form of a syncategorematic first-person plural assertion is not \( \alpha(z \xi) \), where ‘…\( \alpha \_ \)’ stands for the relation that \( S, \varphi p \). This analysis does not make sense given the fact that the referent of the distributive ‘we’
is not intelligible as an extensionally specifiable set. There is no set of persons that comprise the referent of the pronoun (as used in the above sentence) outside the context of this particular act of speaking (whichever it is) that is epistemically first-personal. The referent must be understood through a first-person mode of presentation. If so, then there is no way to intelligibly isolate a meaningful use of the pronoun that could then be used to saturate a relational predicate. So, a syncategorematic first-person plural statement is not an act that relates the subjects to a proposition.

But this is not to say that the operator is semantically inert. The syncategorematic operator is used as a self-identifying display. The syncategorematic operator makes explicit the exercise of a general epistemic capacity that is distributed across multiple loci of responsibility. There is one discursive field with multiple poles of epistemic authority. In a statement such as “We believe that $p$,” the subjects believe that $p$ is the case. Importantly, the veridical predicate is not an object that can saturate an argument place in a relation either. The syncategorematic parts of the statement—i.e., the operator and the truth predicate—play a revealing role. They show or display that the content is held in a certain way. This is not further truth-conditional content, but the semantic mark of a certain kind of epistemic act.

§2.2.4 There is no Transactional Use of the Syncategorematic

The transactional use of ‘we’ is a device that marks a certain kind of dynamic relation. Essentially, it involves a dynamic relational predicate that is saturated on each side by terms denoting self-conscious agents. The poles of the transactional relation must be filled-in in this way because (i) the dynamic relation and its converse are logically equivalent, and (ii) the dynamic relation and its converse jointly entail a correlative proposition with a transactional first-person plural pronoun in the subject position: e.g., my dancing with Juan just is (i.e., is logically equivalent to) Juan’s dancing with me, which, when taken
together, entail that we are dancing together. This is the most basic structural description of the pronoun’s use.

But given this structural description, it becomes clear that there cannot be a syncategorematic use of the transactional first-person plural pronoun. By definition, an expression is used syncategorematically only when it operates on an already complete propositional or sentential whole. Transactional uses of the first-person plural require just the opposite. The pronoun must be embedded within the propositional or sentential frame. If so, then all uses of the transactional first person plural will be categorematic. There is no syncategorematic use of the transactional first-person plural.

§2.2.5 Cooperative/Institutional Uses of the Syncategorematic First-person Plural

The head of the press office at the CDC is giving a media briefing. “We believe that cigarettes are carcinogenic,” she says. This is a syncategorematic use of the institutional first-person plural pronoun. Given my framework argued for above and in Chapter 1, I suggest that the syncategorematic operator here functions as a self-identifying display. My core idea is that the syncategorematic operator displays a discursive context that—unlike the syncategorematic distributive use of the pronoun—does not in itself set a limit to which persons can fall within the scope of epistemic authority. The locus of epistemic authority is, as van Roermund calls it, a discursive construct that allows for indefinite extension. According to my account, what sets the extension of the pronoun are conditions that are ineliminably normative. Like its categorematic use, who falls within the scope of the operator, who inherits authority to the claim, and who can authoritatively put the content forward are all relative to the structure of the institution and the conditions of the speech situation.

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Syncategorematic uses of the institutional or cooperative ‘we’ bring into play a discursively constructed plural subject. But why a “discursive construct”? Here is the core idea. Consider a standard airport announcement: “We prohibit smoking in all terminals.” As is almost always the case, the person making the announcement is not the authoritative person or body responsible for the policy or law—indeed, in many cases the “voice” is a computer-generated message or hired actor. What one hears is not an individual’s speech per se. Rather, one hears the prohibition as authoritative (or not). But this feature of the speech act in no way renders it infelicitous. The function of the term is to display a certain discursive context that can be engaged with in normatively appropriate ways. How one engages with an institutional first-person plural claim of one kind—e.g., “So, where can I smoke?” (said to a security officer)—will be different from other sorts of institutional engagements—e.g., “Will the head of research at the CDC be available for comments?” (said to the press officer).

Following the analysis of the categorematic form, the felicity conditions governing syncategorematic uses of the pronoun will differ dramatically depending on the specific structures of the institution or cooperative at issue, the social or institutional status of the speaker, the content of what is claimed, and the intended perlocutionary effects of the speech act. (For more on this see §1.3.) The use of the institutional or cooperative first-person plural (categorematic and syncategorematic) is always a matter of speaking for and (ideally) with like first-persons. This helps to explain why the extension of the term is ineliminably normative. There are no natural facts that guide when one can speak for or with another. That one does so speak signals that a normative stake has been laid.

§2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I articulated the various uses of the first-person plural pronoun. If I am right, the pronoun has three categorematic uses that can be further articulated by way of two cross-categorical distinctions. Moreover, the three categorematic uses are logically distinct. If true, then this is a
sufficient reason to deny the **Uniformity** assumption: the first-person plural pronoun is not logically monosemous. The appearance of polysemy is not mere appearance, but a correct view of the facts. In the next chapter I will turn to the **Independence** and **Priority** assumptions. Only once these assumptions are dismantled can the unity of the first-person come fully into view.

Lastly, it is no coincidence that I have neglected an elucidation of generic syncategorematic first-person plural judgments. As I show in the chapter to come, these judgments are significantly different, and the apparatus introduced in this chapter is insufficient for their elucidation. I turn to this task now.
Chapter 3: On the First-Person Plural Character of Linguistic Practice

What is true or false is what human beings say; and it is in their language that human beings agree.

—Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*¹⁰⁶

The aim of this chapter is to argue that speaking a language—the most common mode of engagement in a linguistic practice—requires a certain form of understanding, and that this form of understanding is irreducibly first-person plural. To isolate the target sense of ‘linguistic practice’, I focus on two essential features of linguistic practices. I then raise a puzzle concerning how to reconcile these two features. The crux of this puzzle concerns how to square the normative aspects of linguistic practice with the actual linguistic behavior of participants in the practice. I suggest that this puzzle dissolves under the following two thoughts. First, that engagement in a linguistic practice requires a first-person plural mode of understanding. Second, that the normative features of a linguistic practice show themselves in individual acts of speech, and this mode of showing must be represented by propositions

in the middle voice. I offer a novel account of the distinctive logic of the middle voice and end by noting that this account unifies features of linguistic practice that are often supposed incompatible.

§3.1 What is Said: Some Aspects of Linguistic Practice

A language is something that is characteristically used, and it is used in at least one characteristic way: it is spoken by a population. This immediately raises a question. What is the relation between a language and a population that speaks the language?

To begin, let’s reflect on some of the ways we ordinarily report that a language is in use within a given population: ‘Ss speak L’, ‘Their practice is to speak L’, or ‘We speak L’. Call whatever these propositions represent “linguistic practices.” Taking these propositions at face value, a linguistic practice is a certain kind of sociality that is general in some way. The subject term in the propositional schemas catches a set of persons under a general order. These propositions also suggest that a linguistic practice is actual; it is something in the order of reality. There is some extant linguistic practice when propositions like the ones above are applicable to a population and true.

This preliminary characterization, abstract as it is, brings out two features of the concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE that I shall call “generality” and “actuality.”

The first feature, generality, concerns the relation between a language and the individual actions or activities that ‘instance’, ‘exhibit’, or ‘show’ the language within a linguistic practice. A language is something that “might be exhibited in a potentially infinite series of acts” in a potentially infinite number of agents, each act sharing a common explanation or description. A language is, then, general in the sense that the language is never exhausted by actions that fall under it. Nor is there

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107 I use “speak” and its cognates here in a capacious sense, i.e., one that includes both verbal and non-verbal forms such as visual and manual modalities.

an internal limit to the possible scope of who falls under a language. The number of speakers who exhibit a language is indefinitely extendable, and the linguistic content available for use within a linguistic practice (hereafter, “practice-dependent content”) can be grasped by an indefinite number of speakers.\(^\text{109}\)

To get this feature in view, consider first a simple case. Suppose \(F\) is a predicate in some language that is in use within a population. Since \(F\) is available for use, \(F\) can be deployed in an indefinite number of speech acts—\(Fa, Fb, \ldots Fx\)—across an indefinite number of speakers who share the language. For instance, if both \(S_1\) and \(S_2\) assert that \(Fa\), then both speech acts exhibit the \(L\)-predicate \(F\). These linguistic acts share, as Evans puts it, a common partial explanation.\(^\text{110}\) Given that these speakers share a language, namely, \(L\), we can deploy descriptions like the following: They, the speakers of \(L\), use \(F\)—in fact, \(S_1\) and \(S_2\) used \(F\) to say “\(Fa\).” What’s more, this sort of description has application to an indefinite number of further speakers who use the language. We can provisionally dub this “description by exemplification.”

This is a general scheme for which myriad sorts of content can be filled-in. Suppose, for instance, your aunt calls to report some bad news:

> “Uncle Manuel bought the farm,” she says.
> —“I don’t understand. What do you mean?” you ask.
> —“Oh, that’s what we say around here. It means he died.”

Leaving aside questions of tact, this exchange fits the form of description by exemplification introduced above. The first speech act is described by showing that it exhibits something general, namely, “what we say” or “what we say around here.” To regiment things a bit, this description, in


one line, is: “We say ‘bought the farm’ to mean …is dead—in fact, that’s what I’m saying now.” The
description functions to show a relation of exemplification between a speech act and the linguistic
practice of which it is a part.111 It thereby attempts to account for the intuitive sameness of act-types—
in this case, using a certain expression—across agents and distinct linguistic performances.112

Common to these cases is a distinctive form of description. Although such descriptions by
exemplification are not unique to linguistic practices, I restrict the discussion here to my central quarry.
The following chart represents some of the most abstract relations between a linguistic practice and
an individual activity or action that exemplifies the practice.

Table 5. Descriptions by Exemplification

| They, the speakers of $L$, say x to mean $\phi$ | …in fact… | She is saying x now |
| It is their practice to say x | …in fact… | He said x today |
| It is their practice to use x | …in fact… | She used x to say $\varphi$ in C |
| We, the speakers of $L$, use x to mean $\phi$ in C | …in fact… | I use x in C |
| We, the speakers of $L$, say x in C | …in fact… | I say x in C |
| We, the speakers of $L$, understand that x means $\phi$ | …in fact… | I understand that x means $\varphi$ |

To each proposition representing a general linguistic practice (or part of a linguistic practice) in the
left-hand column, a proposition representing an action that exemplifies that practice is supplied in the
right-hand column. So, for instance, we can fill-in the variables in the first row like so: “They, the
speakers of Amharic, say “selam” to mean hello—in fact, Blain is saying “selam” now.” Or, we can fill-

Concepts of Rules,” *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 64, No. 1. p. 27
112 Following authors such as Gareth Evans, Irad Kimhi, and John McDowell, it is tempting to explain
this intuitive sameness by invoking the Aristotelian notion of capacity or ability. At this point, I think
these notions are merely labels for what needs to be understood. Unless we understand the way in
which a particular act exemplifies something general, such notions cover over the explanandum.
113 I use a minuscule x and $\varphi$ as variables to range over linguistic entities and meanings, respectively. I
use a majuscule C to denote circumstances of a speech situation as in “She said x at the party yesterday”
or “I used x today.”
in the third row like so: “We, the speakers of English, say “bought the farm” to mean … is dead—in fact, I said “bought the farm” last week because of the senator’s passing.” It is also the case that propositions in the right-hand column can be paired up with any of the propositions in the left-hand column given appropriate circumstances. For instance, one might claim: “We, the speakers of French, say “J’ai faim” to mean I’m hungry—in fact, he is saying “J’ai faim” in the next room.” Although I will argue that the final row is, in a sense to be explained, conceptually more fundamental than the other rows, I will leave it an open question at this point whether the rows stand in any sort of priority relations.

What about the middle column? The “in fact” at play here naturally leads to our second feature.

The second feature, actuality, also concerns a relation between a language and individual actions within a linguistic practice, though this time in an ontic register. That a population acts on, is disposed to act in accordance with, and commonly exemplifies a linguistic practice is part and parcel of what it is for a linguistic practice to exist.¹¹⁴ In the terminology I have introduced, some linguistic practice \( L \) is actual only if the sorts of propositions displayed in the chart above can be given determinate content and are applicable and true with respect to \( L \). That is, it must be the case that an actual population exemplifies a practice in such a way that the practice is sustained and shaped by those linguistic acts. If some abstract linguistic scheme is never instantiated by actual speakers at any time, then there is no linguistic practice.¹¹⁵

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¹¹⁵ For some interesting *a posteriori* evidence that this is the case, see the case studies in Harrison, K. (2007). *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the World’s Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*. Oxford University Press, esp. Ch. 5.
But it is here that philosophical problems tend to arise. Although it is widely acknowledged that linguistic practices have these two features, it can seem mysterious how to hold them together in a single account.\(^{116}\) One of the chief problems here follows from the following intuitive line of thought. Between the description of a linguistic practice and the individual activities endemic to a practice, there always exists the possibility of a gap. There is nothing that guarantees that the behavior of an individual in a practice will align with the generalizations that articulate the linguistic practice (or a part thereof). As is common, practice-dependent linguistic content can be used non-standardly, e.g., ironically, artistically, stipulatively, and so on. Although these non-standard uses are perfectly licit within the practice, they require some explicit or contextual explanation, and these explanations must be given in terms that are understood in standard ways. None of this, then, rules out idiosyncratic or non-standard uses of language. But it does mean that one can only engage in idiosyncratic linguistic proposals by relating those proposals to something that is not idiosyncratic, and thus the specific performances of speakers in a practice cannot be matched one-to-one with the general features of the linguistic practice. Rather, that members of a practice ‘fall under’ the general norms of a practice constitute their linguistic attunement and the possibility of idiosyncratic proposals.

This suggests a negative result, the interpretation of which will be paramount going forward. The sort of generality at play here is not first-order universal quantification, and descriptions by exemplification are not instances of universal instantiation. If it is true that “It is their practice to use \( x \) to mean \( \varphi \),” it is not entailed that for all \( a \), if \( a \) is a member of the practice, \( a \) uses \( x \) to mean \( \varphi \). Perhaps \( x \) is a slur or against one’s aesthetic sensibilities. If so, then generalizations like “It is their practice to use \( x \) to mean \( \varphi \)” are in some way normative; and yet, the activities of individuals within

\(^{116}\) Reconciling these two features is, for instance, one of the central aims of David Lewis’ extremely influential “Languages and Language,” in *Philosophical Papers, Vol. 1*. Oxford University Press.
the practice are not disconnected from the content of these generalizations. Seeing how this thought could be true raises real philosophical difficulties. Let me explain.

Generalizations like “It is their practice to use x to mean \( \varphi \)” are not normative in virtue of an explicit contentful act.\(^\text{117}\) The source of their normativity cannot be grounded in an explicit act (e.g., a contract or explicit agreement) because one must presuppose the normativity of the relevant linguistic standards in order to engage in the relevant sorts of acts. Neither will explanations along the lines of natural law do the trick. For, the content of generalizations like “It is their practice to use x to mean \( \varphi \)” are both arbitrary (it is arbitrary that any natural language assigns meanings to certain words and not others), and they are liable to undergo shifts in content precisely in virtue of the linguistic behavior of people in the linguistic practice.

Since neither an explicit contentful act nor something along the lines of natural law will proffer the right kind of normativity, it must come to be, I will argue, that we engage with one another in a way that implies that we are engaged in a common project of making linguistic sense. There must be something about the nature of the way we speak to one another that constitutes that speaking as a collective shaping and sustaining of the norms of language. And yet, this shaping cannot be understood on a quantificational model of collective engagement, on pain of regress. We need, in other words, to make sense of the following possibility: that a linguistic practice shows itself or exemplifies itself in the singular activities that actualize the practice in such a way that the practice is thereby sustained and shaped by those activities but is not reducible to those activities. Key to understanding this possibility will be a proper philosophical comprehension of descriptions by

exemplification. In the sections below I attempt to make sense of this possibility. I will argue that this requires holding fast to two thoughts.

First, although it is true that a linguistic practice does not exist apart from the actual linguistic behavior of speakers, the relationship between speakers and the practice of which they are a part must be understood as having a first-person plural character. The sort of engagement in linguistic practice at issue is first-person plural. It must include an understanding of what \textit{we are doing}, and this understanding has a particular form. Without such an understanding, there could not exist the kind of actual regularities constitutive of a common language that exert normative authority on us. Second, the way in which a linguistic practice shows itself in the singular activities of agents must be made explicit using propositions in the semantically middle voice. Neither a contractual, act-based account nor a natural law, passive-reception account can get the specific ‘mode of dependence’ between a linguistic practice and the specific performances that instance the practice correctly in view. On my understanding, there is an internal relation between particular linguistic acts and the linguistic practice

\footnote{It is worth remarking that the philosophical apprehension of this thought leads to two standard forms of philosophical recoil that I am eager to avoid. On the one hand, there are those like Frege and his followers who suggest that the generality of linguistic content must be wholly divorced from its potential use in actual linguistic practice. On the other hand, there are those like Grice and Brandom who attempt to “build up” the generality of language and linguistic practice from the individual activities of speakers—classically, from individual communicative intentions, mental states of speakers, or normative attitudes. Both strategies attempt to hold both features in view, though they end up inflating one of the features at, I would argue, the expense of the other feature. Although this can only come into view towards the end of the chapter, both forms of philosophical recoil are beholden to a common metaphysical assumption rooted in a restricted conception of grammatical voice. To understand the unity of generality and actuality requires reflection on, among other things, the middle voice and its philosophical significance. For Frege’s classic statement on this separation see (1918/1997). “Thought,” in \textit{The Frege Reader}, Ed. Michael Beaney, Blackwell. For Grice’s initial attempt to build up the generality of language from the intentions of speakers, see his (1957). “Meaning,” \textit{Philosophical Review} 66: 377-88. For a contemporary working-out of this project, see Davis, W. (2003). \textit{Meaning, Expression, Thought}. Cambridge University Press. See also Brandom, R. (1994). \textit{Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment}. Harvard University Press, esp. pp. xiv, 25, 35, 37, 50, 599-601.}
of which they are a part. Although these two elements are distinguishable, they are not separable. This mode of dependence must be understood through the distinctive logic of the middle voice.

§3.2 The Form of Linguistic Understanding

I will take the two aspects of linguistic practice as my starting points. They are the features my account seeks to hold together.

Commonly, philosophical discussion of linguistic practices takes a certain theoretical setup as given. We are asked to imagine a “community of versatile and interactive creatures” or “individuals characterized behaviorally” with various “stimulus responses” or “behavioral dispositions,” the specification of which does not presuppose concepts such as LANGUAGE, THOUGHT, or RATIONALITY. We are then asked some form of the following question: “What more is needed for x to take hold?” where x may take a number of different values depending on which aspect of the discursive is taken as primary, e.g., language, reasoning, or thought. Insofar as this strategy is followed, it must be assumed what the question itself assumes: namely, that there is some describable addendum in virtue of which some bit of behavior or some minimal conception of practice is a linguistic practice. This is, I think, not a trivial assumption and immediately raises difficult questions concerning the relation between the minimal conception and the additional discursive component.

I here want to consider a different point of departure. Instead of asking “What more is needed?” given some minimal conception of practice, I am going to start with the thought that a linguistic practice is—whatever else it is—developed, sustained, endorsed, and justified by self-

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conscious agents. The fact that a linguistic practice is sustained in this way must be incorporated into its description because it is integral to and transforms the phenomenon itself. Like Perry’s analysis of the first-person singular concept, the concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE does not admit of a fully extensional description. Just as thought and action require a locus of authority that is fixed by an irreducibly first-person component (i.e., a component not derivable from any set of third-person, extensional pieces of theoretical knowledge), the first-person perspective of the agents within a linguistic practice is integral to and not separable from a characterization of the phenomenon as such. If so, then we ought to begin with a form of description that locates this perspective character at the ground level. The knowledge that articulates this form of unity will involve a use of the first-person plural pronoun. This opposing point of departure can, I hope, be justified by its ability to unify the desiderata introduced at the outset.

I propose that we start with the following thought: for a linguistic practice to exist at all, it must be the case that members of the linguistic practice—simply in virtue of being members of the practice—can assent to claims of the form ‘We, the speakers of $L$, understand that $x$ means $\varphi$’, where the ‘we’ in these propositional schemas is a syncatégorematic use of the first-person plural pronoun, the claim is semantically generic, and the variables are filled-in with practice-dependent content. According to this account, the perspective from which the concept LINGUISTIC PRACTICE initially comes into view is not a perspective from outside linguistic practice. The initial relation we have to linguistic practice is through first-person participation. I will claim that from this internal,

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participatory perspective, the relation users of a language have to their linguistic practice is first-person plural possessive: a linguistic practice is ours in the sense that it is we who are responsible for and to its significance and content.

Claims that articulate linguistic content or meaning from within a linguistic practice paradigmatically take a syncategorematic generic first-person plural form: i.e., ‘We, the speakers of $L$, understand that $x$ means $\phi$’. Such claims are made from within the language under discussion, and they exhibit the self-conscious character of the claimant. This use of the first-person plural pronoun in this logical employment captures and expresses the two features of linguistic practice introduced above. Consider the difference between these two claims:

(1) We, the speakers of English, understand that ‘…is red’ means $\ldots is\ red$.
(2) English speakers understand that ‘…is red’ means $\ldots is\ red$.

Although ‘we’ and ‘English speakers’ share a referent in these cases, they differ in sense. When I assert (1) I refer to myself as myself among a common plurality of others—that is, as a self-knowing member of some group. This is not the case in (2). The content and referent in (2) can be arrived at through empirical investigation. For instance, one can learn this fact by reading a book about English usage, or one might go out and collect, through observation, empirical evidence concerning the linguistic behavior of English speakers.

Consider now a case where language $L_1$ is under discussion, and that I am a self-knowing speaker of $L_1$—i.e., I can truly affirm the proposition that ‘I am a speaker of $L_1$’ in the normal way. The fact that I am a speaker of $L_1$ allows me to comprehend and assert propositions of the form ‘We, the speakers of $L_1$, understand that $x$ means $\phi$', where the second variable ranges over practice-

concept has significance because it “functions to normatively structure our lives together” (issue not yet assigned; pagination n/a).

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dependent content. This follows from the fact that being the member of some determinate linguistic practice brings me under a general linguistic order that includes a potential plurality of common subjects—a ‘we’ of which I am a part. To be the user of some determinate language is “always already” to be a member of some linguistic practice one may appropriately refer to using the first-person plural pronoun. This helps to get in view the generality requirement. One must be under a general linguistic order if linguistic content can be exhibited in a potentially infinite series of acts in a potentially infinite series of agents. If I assert a proposition of the form “We, the speakers of \(L_1\), understand that \(x\) means \(\varphi\),” then I think of myself as myself among a common plurality of others—that is, as a self-knowing member of some group.

Importantly, the movement in thought from the first-person singular claim to the first-person plural claim is not an inference based on ordinary empirical or observational evidence. That practice-dependent linguistic content is graspable and can be exemplified by a plurality of speakers is not an empirical hypothesis about linguistic practice. At least in normal cases with proficient speakers, understanding the meaning of some expression \(F\) is the same as knowing (at least implicitly) that we understand that \(F\) means \(\varphi\) in \(L\). This is the case because an expression \(F\) could not be an expression available for use in \(L\) unless the participants in the linguistic practice can understand \(F\) as an intelligible expression in \(L\). But if this is the case, then we have good reason to affirm the claim that linguistic content is something that might be exhibited in a potentially infinite series of acts in a potentially

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125 This condition is a development of the social practice accounts of linguistic understanding in Dummett, M. (1993). “What Do I Know When I Know a Language?” in The Seas of Language. Oxford University Press, pp. 100-101 and McDowell, J. (1998). “Anti-Realism and the Epistemology of Understanding,” in Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality. Harvard University Press, pp. 332-334. If the “facts that […] understanding a language makes available [are…] facts about what people are saying” (McDowell, 333) and “a theory of meaning is not a description from outside the practice of using a language” (Dummett, 100), then a description of this form of understanding ought to be social and first-personal. It must be social to accommodate “what people are saying,” and it must be first-personal to capture the internal perspective on language use.
infinite number of agents. Though this claim is now rightly relativized to a definite, though infinitely expandable set of speakers in a linguistic practice.\textsuperscript{126}

Suppose the above argument is sound. What, then, is the function of these sorts of claims? When a proficient speaker of $L_1$ makes a claim of the form ‘We, the speakers of $L_1$, understand that $x$ means $\phi$’, she is exemplifying and endorsing a move in the linguistic practice of which she is a part. In other words, these claims function to articulate and endorse (through exemplification) the constitutive rules and commitments that govern what it is to use the language. Given that these constitutive rules are instituted through the actual use of language and are not given from without, what justifies some move in a linguistic practice is both internal to and reliant on the actual use of the language in practice.\textsuperscript{127} Proficient speakers of $L_1$ are, then, the source of the correctness for claims of the syncategorematic generic first-person plural form. To be bound by, sensitive to, and in a position to make rationally justifiable claims about practice-dependent linguistic contents just is, all other things equal, to be a member of the linguistic practice at issue. It is the actual use of language by members of the linguistic practice that constitutes what we say and understand in $L_1$.\textsuperscript{128} The content of what we understand in $L_1$ is not, as I’ve put it, given from without, through practice-independent investigations.

This may sound strange given that one can learn what we understand by listening to and observing what others say. This is true, but it must be understood in a certain way. When I articulate

\textsuperscript{126} Although the scope of a linguistic practice is indefinitely extendable (\textit{vide} §1), there must be some conditions on the extension of the scope if the claim is to have determinate sense. My thought is that a weak condition on scope is supplied by these reflections on the first-person plural. Although this is a further topic, whether some individual is recognized as a member of a linguistic practice will rest on countless normative and political considerations—some just, some not. To use Honneth’s apt phrase, recognition is often a struggle.

\textsuperscript{127} This is a corollary of Perry’s point that first-person concepts cannot be substituted \textit{salva veritate} in action-explanation contexts by any non-first person concepts. See Perry, J. (1979). “The Problem of the Essential Indexical,” \textit{Noûs}, Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 3.

my linguistic understanding in a claim of the form ‘We, the speakers of \( L_1 \), understand that \( x \) means \( \varphi \),’ it is a mistake to think that the expression-variable is filled-in by the mentioning of a name. The expression is not an object that is the subject of an empirical act of reference. Rather, the expression must be understood through the form of self-consciousness marked by the first-person plural pronoun. The use of the expression (as opposed to a mere mentioning) is an attempted exemplification or displaying of our form of understanding. When I say “We understand that \( x \) means \( \varphi \),” I am exemplifying or exhibiting our understanding, which also functions to show my participation in the linguistic practice itself. The sign is, as Sellars claims, not mentioned but used—used in a unique way; exhibited, so to speak.”

If this exhibition or displaying is successful, my linguistic act is understood—from the perspective of others in the practice—as what we understand in saying \( x \). The first-person plural claim is itself an enactment in the linguistic practice. A linguistic practice is first-personal all the way down, and thus the form of linguistic transmission must equally be understood as first-personal.

This account leaves room for the possibility that one’s understanding of some expression or propositional content is only an apparent understanding, even if one is a proficient user of a language. That my competence in a language may, at times, fall short is an ever-present possibility. The possibility of illusions of semantic understanding are explained by the essentially social nature of linguistic practice. Between any individual act of understanding in language and the general linguistic content articulated by syncategorematic generic first-person plural claims, there always exists the possibility of a gap. There is nothing that guarantees that in every case my linguistic act will successfully show that an intelligible practice-dependent linguistic content has been deployed. But this

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possible gap—i.e., the possible gap between an individual’s first-person singular understanding and what we understand—is not one that can be understood through an empirical theory of speakers’ performances. As I’ve suggested above, the transmission, use, and reception of linguistic content must be understood through the form of self-consciousness marked by the first-person plural pronoun. An empirical theory such as a statistical generalization over speaker performances will lose this relation to the form of self-consciousness internal to linguistic content. Linguistic content, insofar as this content is part of a linguistic practice, secures its validity only by its intelligent use within a linguistic practice, the content of which is, again, articulated by claims involving the first-person plural.

Does this account help to make sense of the features of linguistic practice introduced in §1? In part, yes. At this point, we have the resources to make sense of the left-hand column re-presented here.

**Table 6. Left-Hand Side of Descriptions by Exemplification**

| They, the speakers of \( L \), say \( x \) to mean \( \phi \) |
|------------------|------------------|
| Their practice is to say \( x \) |
| Their practice is to use \( x \) |
| We, the speakers of \( L \), use \( x \) to mean \( \phi \) |
| We, the speakers of \( L \), say \( x \) |
| We, the speakers of \( L \), understand that \( x \) means \( \phi \) |

In this section, I’ve argued that claims of the form ‘We, the speakers of \( L \), understand that \( x \) means \( \phi \)’ are the paradigmatic way in which generalizations that represent linguistic practices are articulated. Moreover, for a linguistic practice to be, it must be the case that members of the practice—simply in virtue of being members of the practice—can assent to these claims. This is sufficient to show that the bottom row of the left-hand column is conceptually more fundamental than the other modes of representation. Of course, there is a sense in which the column stands or falls en masse. If a claim of the form ‘We, the speakers of \( L \), understand that \( x \) means \( \phi \)’ is true, then it is also the case that that
linguistic practice can be referred to using third-person modes of representation. These third-person modes of representation are conceptually downstream from the fundamental, first-person plural form.

It may help to end this discussion with an example. In the case of describing someone as speaking a determinate language, we cannot separate the third-person description from the general practice-dependent content. That is, to identify an act of speaking, say, English, Spanish, or Amharic, we must look to a wider context than can be seen in a single speech act. Just as bilingual homophones such as ‘Hans leaped_{English}’ and ‘Hans liebt_{German}’ are only identifiable in terms of a more general interpretive linguistic order, the description of some act as, say, asking a question in English presupposes a general linguistic order in light of which her behavior is apt for description and evaluation. That this general linguistic order is available for thought and applicable to concrete acts is an aspect of the actuality of linguistic practice and is internal to our conception of what the speaker is doing. My thought is that this linguistic order only becomes available once members of a practice can assent to claims involving the linguistic order in the first-person plural. This condition helps to explain how linguistic content can be non-quantifiably general; normative; and relativized to a definite, though indefinitely expandable set of speakers in a linguistic practice.

We can thus characterize in a preliminary way the sort of generality in operation in the left-hand column. The generality of these propositions consists of two main components:

(A) They are all semantically generic; and
(B) they each employ a plural subject term, i.e., ‘they’, ‘their practice’, or ‘we’.

Honing in a bit further, the propositions in the bottom two rows have a further component. They are first-personal. I’ve argued that it is this aspect of the articulation of linguistic practices that secures the fact that practice-dependent content can be grasped, exemplified, and articulated by a plurality of speakers in a non-arbitrary distribution. I will return to this below once we have the whole picture in the viewfinder.
What about the right-hand column and the exemplificatory nexus between the right- and left-hand columns? It is one thing to analyze the generality of linguistic practices. It is another thing to show how practice-dependent linguistic content manifests itself in and is shaped by particular linguistic acts, as the actuality condition requires. At the heart of this concern with actuality is the following question: how is it possible that a linguistic practice shows itself in the singular activities that actualize the practice in such a way that the practice is thereby sustained and shaped by those activities but is not reducible to those activities?

In the following section I will argue that there is an internal relation between particular linguistic acts and the general linguistic practice of which they are a part. I'll argue that reflection on verbal diathesis and the medial grammar of “showing” gives us a model to understand how the generality of a linguistic practice shows itself in linguistic acts. Indeed, the unity of the generality and actuality of linguistic practice is to be found in this expressive medium. This will be the clue that leads to a correct understanding of actuality and thus a full understanding of descriptions by exemplification.

§3.3 The Unboundedness of the Linguistic Medium

Verbal diathesis refers to the way in which participants or “actants” of a verbal process stand to that verbal process within a sentential whole. Traditionally, grammarians and syntacticians recognize three distinct verbal diatheses: active diathesis, passive diathesis, and middle or medial diathesis.\(^{131}\) Although there is a long philosophical tradition that treats of the distinction between the active and the passive

\(^{131}\) Alternatively, though less traditionally, one can treat the tripartite verbal division between intransitive, transitive, and ditransitive verbs as the principal categories under which the various diatheses fall unevenly. For instance, under “transitive verb” one would find the active and passive diatheses, while the middle diathesis would be found under “intransitive verb.” See, for instance, Tesniere, L. (1959). *Eléments de syntaxe structurale*. Paris: Klinksieck, Chapitre 97. This way of categorizing the diatheses raises taxonomic difficulties that are irrelevant to my aims here.
diatheses, philosophers have largely neglected the middle diathesis. I want to suggest here that we can make progress in the above discussion by focusing on the middle diathesis. I begin with a quick characterization of the active and passive diatheses and then move to the middle form.

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In an active diathesis construction, the grammatical subject performs the action denoted by the verbal phrase. In a passive diathesis construction, the grammatical subject is acted upon by the verbal process. The bipolarity of the active and the passive revolves essentially around the acting versus acted-upon distinction. The grammatical subject in active diathesis constructions is represented as the originator of the verbal process; in passive diathesis constructions, the grammatical subject is represented as the occasion of the verbal process. At least in English, the passive diathesis can be identified by a set of semantic marks. A passive construction contains a be auxiliary along with the participial form of the verb: Adam was given an apple by Eve. That said, this is an accidental feature of the English language, and other languages lack such semantic marks. In fact, the active diathesis is not marked by any distinctive features in English at all.

In both cases, however, it is essential that the grammatical subject is external to the verbal process itself. By this I mean: a single state of affairs, a single way for the world to be, is representable by correlative active and passive constructions. That ‘Ella’ in the sentence “Ella sautéed the broccoli” falls into the grammatical subject position as opposed to the object position is, logically speaking,

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arbitrary. There is, in both constructions, a single state of affairs that is representable in two different ways depending on one’s point of view. Following Frege, such changes do not touch the truth-conditional semantic content of the sentence expressed: “It is the very same thing here that is capable of being true or false.”

According to my account, the bipolarity of the active and the passive revolves essentially around the position of the grammatical subject vis-à-vis the verbal process—that is, either in the actor or the acted-upon position. The position of the grammatical subject in relation to the verbal process is arbitrary in the sense that a sentence in the active diathesis can be transformed into a sentence in the passive diathesis (and vice versa) without affecting the truth-conditional content expressed. In this sense, the grammatical subject is external to the verbal process.

Table 7. Active and Passive Diatheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active Diathesis</th>
<th>Passive Diathesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ella sautéed the broccoli.</td>
<td>The broccoli was sautéed by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ella.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve gave an apple to Adam.</td>
<td>Adam was given an apple by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eve.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§3.3.1 The Middle Diathesis

It is sometimes said that English lacks the middle diathesis. This is presumably because English lacks a morphological middle diathesis category. But this is no reason to think that English lacks the

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136 Sometimes a transformation from active to passive diathesis is not possible because the governing verb is intransitive. Once the distinction between the active/passive and the middle diathesis comes into view, it will be clear that the grammatical subject in an intransitive sentence such as “Kameron sneezed” is external in just the same sense as above: sneezing overtook Kameron. Or, generally, F was instantiated in Kameron.

137 Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., and Svartvik, J. (2012). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman Publishing, p. 159. As an aside, the linguistics literature on the middle diathesis is mired in controversies that in many cases rest on a confusion between morphology and semantics. For instance, debates about the “mark” of the middle diathesis result in stalemates because certain parties treat reflexives as middle diathesis constructions following, e.g., Ancient Greek morphology while other parties treat the reflexive as a species of the active voice.
expressive resources for semantically middle constructions. Just as German lacks a morphological category for verbal aspect, English lacks a morphological category for the middle diathesis. What English speakers express by way of temporal distinctions within the verb, German speakers express by way of time adverbials. We may, then, prescind from questions of language-specific morphology and focus solely on the expression of semantically middle sentences and their differentia. Here are some semantically middle, English constructions:

(1) The bureaucrat bribes easily.
(2) This book reads quickly.
(3) That Jason speaks French shows itself.

To begin, it should be clear that sentences (1), (2), and (3) are not in the active diathesis or the passive diathesis. The questions “Who is bribing the bureaucrat?” or “Who reads this book quickly?” or “The bureaucrat was bribed by whom?” are, strictly speaking, inapplicable. Such questions—in asking after an actor or something acted upon—miss the mark and presuppose that there must be an agent or a patient playing what I’ve called an external role vis-à-vis the verbal process. As far as surface semantics go, sentences (1) through (3) fall into neither the active diathesis nor the passive diathesis.

I want to suggest that the mark of a semantically middle diathesis construction concerns how the grammatical subject is situated in relation to what I will call the “general verbal medium.” Unlike either the active or the passive diatheses, the subject in a middle diathesis construction is involved in the general verbal medium itself. To put the point in the terminology introduced above, the grammatical subject is internal to the general verbal medium. This suggests that the middle diathesis ought to be located on an axis separate from the active diathesis/passive diathesis bipolarity. The division of verbal forms is not an equal tripartite division; rather, the middle diathesis stands against the bipolar division of active and passive. The distinction between the middle and the active/passive

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is a distinction having to do with the location of the subject “in relation to the verbal sphere.”\textsuperscript{139} For the active and passive diatheses, the subject is external to the verbal medium. In the middle diathesis, the subject is internal to the general verbal medium. Let me explain.

There is, in the middle diathesis, a unity of being and activity that is exhibited grammatically as a unity of grammatical subject and medial verbal activity. In contradistinction to the active/passive bipolarity, the middle diathesis is used to highlight that the \textit{whatness} of the grammatical subject is internal to its characteristic \textit{activity}.\textsuperscript{140} For instance, in the same way that we might say that a living being \textit{lives}, employing the verb form of the generic noun, we can say that the bureaucrat \textit{bribes} easily. Speaking in a slightly artificial way, we might say that that’s the activity of the bureaucrat—bribing easily—and that’s part of what he is.\textsuperscript{141} The point is thus that the character of the subject is internally related to the verbal activity or sphere of activity.

To get this idea more fine-grained, consider the difference between two seemingly closely related sentences:

(4) The book reads easily.
(5) The book is easily read.

We might gloss (4) like this. The book, in and of itself, reads easily—its what-it-is is internal to its characteristic activity or what-it-does. As I’ve claimed, the whatness of the grammatical subject is internal to or part and parcel with what it does or its characteristic activity in a middle diathesis construction. This is not so in sentence (5). Although the passive nature of (5) recedes, as it were, into the background, it is easy to append a prepositional phrase such as “by high school students” to bring


\textsuperscript{141} How artificial is this way of talking? I think there is a perfectly ordinary concept at hand, though no one English word seems to capture its full connotation. Here is an example: “What does the skeg do for the surfboard? Well, it stabilizes. That’s its “job” or “activity” or “what-it-does.”
out the suppressed actor. The suppressed actor is external in that it can be switched into the grammmatically active position without changing the truth-conditional content of the proposition expressed, e.g., “The high school students read the book easily.” This sort of transformation is not possible in (4) for a simple reason. There is no actor that is acting or being acted upon in the sentence. The sentence represents a wholly different form of subject-verbal nexus.

But this characterization does not yet get our principal quarry wholly in view. We need to make sense of the general verbal activity or verbal medium introduced above. How ought we make sense of this notion? Any attempt to make sense of the middle diathesis must keep in view its non-eventive character. The temporality of a general verbal activity is something time-general: it exhibits tense-generality and aspect-generality. It signifies neither a particular position in time, nor a temporal duration or extension. Rather, it signifies a medium of possible action. Like a chemical medium that allows for both the existence of and behavior of a particular chemical substance, a general verbal medium allows for the possibility of a certain kind of subject and its characteristic types of action. The character of the grammatical subject is determined (at least in part) by its involvement in the verbal activity, which is represented as characteristic of the subject.

How might this abstract description help us understand the other examples? Let’s take sentence (3). Consider a context in which Jason is taking a foreign language oral exam. In the successful

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143 It is interesting to compare Hegel’s metaphor of speculative concepts being “alive” or “interanimating” with these reflections on the middle diathesis. In a passage characteristic of Hegel’s reflections on logic, he writes, “Were the logical forms of the concept actually dead, ineffective, and indifferent receptacles of representations or thoughts, then familiarity with them would be a historical record […] superfluous for the truth. In fact, however, as forms of the concept, they are, to the contrary, the living spirit of the actual, and what is true of the actual is true only by virtue of these forms, through them, and in them.” Hegel, G.W.F. (2010). The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline, part 1: Science of Logic, trans. K. Brinkmann and D. Dahlstrom. Cambridge University Press, §162.
case, what shows itself, namely, that he speaks French, is only made manifest in his use of the French language. Even if Jason explicitly claims “Je parle français” (understood in the generic sense), that this is true is only seen in his practical mastery of the language in use. Two implications of this description need to be understood together to make sense of the sentence as a whole. First, that which shows itself, namely, that he speaks French, does not name an event, whether particular or general. What shows itself is a general rational capacity that can be exercised on an indefinite number of occasions. Second, that which shows itself is “essentially involved in the process through which it shows itself.”

In other words, what shows itself cannot be abstracted from the medium of its expression. In this case, the medium of expression is the discursive context opened by the very act of speaking French. This is, in the terminology introduced above, the general verbal medium or activity. If Jason did not (in general) exercise this linguistic capacity, then there would be little sense in claiming that “He speaks French.” What shows itself in speaking French cannot be understood as fully separate from his acts of speaking French (i.e., that which opens and exists in the discursive medium). In the formalized language introduced above, the semantically middle sentence “That Jason speaks French shows itself” represents a unity of being (i.e., Jason’s being a French speaker) and activity (i.e., speaking French) such that what he is and what he does are internally related.

§3.4 The Distinctions Applied and Our Problem Resolved

Correct understanding of linguistic practice depends on holding the generality and actuality features together. To effectively hold them together, I suggested that we need to make room for the thought that a linguistic practice shows itself in the singular activities that actualize the practice in such a way that the practice is thereby sustained and shaped by those activities but is not reducible to those

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activities. My suggestion now is that we can make room for this thought only by reflecting on certain semantically middle propositions. The common philosophical difficulties in reconciling these two features is in large part the product of a suppressed metaphysical assumption rooted in a restricted conception of grammatical voice. My view can be formulated as follows.

That we understand that \( \times \) means \( \phi \) shows itself. It shows itself in the process through which the showing itself is manifested: in acts of speaking English, for example. First, ‘that we understand that \( \times \) means \( \phi \) shows itself’ is a proposition that is in neither the active diathesis nor the passive diathesis. It is in the middle diathesis. Second, because a linguistic practice shows itself in the activities through which the showing is manifested, the practice is sustained and shaped by those activities. But, third, a linguistic practice is not reducible to the activities that sustain the linguistic practice. Although what shows itself cannot be abstracted from the medium of its (semantic) expression, that which shows itself is importantly not the product of an accomplished action—i.e., that which would be represented by a sentence in the active diathesis. If linguistic practices were conceptual products of accomplished linguistic actions, then there might be some hope of offering a reduction of linguistic contents to these productive acts. Here, however, the desire for reduction is given no quarter.

I take these three features in turn.

Feature (1)—that the above formulation is a semantically middle proposition—can be understood like this. ‘That we [the speakers of \( L \)] understand that \( \times \) means \( \phi \) shows itself in acts of speaking’ represents a unity of being (i.e., being a socially extant linguistic practice) and activity (i.e., so and so’s speaking \( L \)). That which shows itself is the actuality of the linguistic practice, and the medium of the showing is the discursive context opened by acts of speaking \( L \). Like other semantically middle propositions, the grammatical subject is internal to its characteristic activity. Just as the bureaucrat bribes easily, we can say that the linguistic practice shows itself in linguistic acts, and that’s how it works and sustains itself. In my technical vocabulary, that’s its characteristic activity. Outside
of any relevant discursive linguistic contexts, there would be no linguistic practice: a linguistic practice amounts to nothing if not generally in use and caught up in the activities of linguistic exchange. That said, a linguistic practice is not a product of these activities nor exhausted by them. A linguistic practice is—like a chemical medium—a medium that allows for the existence of and performance of certain kinds of actions. What shows itself cannot be abstracted from the medium of its expression, but there would be no medium absent the existence of the linguistic practice. There is, then, an internal relation between particular linguistic acts and the general linguistic practice of which they are a part.

Feature (2) follows from feature (1). Given that there is an internal relation between particular linguistic acts and the general linguistic practice of which they are a part, a linguistic practice is sustained and shaped by these linguistic acts. In the formal register, the grammatical subject is internal to its characteristic activities. In this case, the particular linguistic activities constitute the conceptual trestles for the general linguistic practice. As I have already argued, claims of the form ‘We understand that x means $\phi$’ (qua normative generalizations) are normative endorsements from within the language. However, it is a mistake to think that this kind of normative-cum-linguistic endorsement is only happening when these explicit claims are put forth. Since linguistic acts are internal to linguistic practices and linguistic practices show themselves in linguistic acts, there is a sense in which all linguistic acts contribute to the shaping and sustaining of linguistic practice. We can thus say that linguistic practices are—in normal cases—self-sustaining wholes.¹⁴⁵ Since the norms of linguistic practice are not given from without, the task of making sense, of projecting concepts in the language, of clearing up confusions or honing our possibilities of expression are all matters negotiated and litigated, implicitly or explicitly, in the use of language itself.

I want to bring attention to a feature of the account that can now be made clear, given the above paragraph. In §2 I argued that generalizations about linguistic practices are paradigmatically of the form ‘We understand that x means \( \varphi \)’. I have now argued that linguistic practices are sustained and shaped by particular linguistic acts. Taking these two thoughts together, it should be clear that this is not an account of content creation or production. Because the account focuses on the first-person plural articulation of content, the relevant content is not wholly within the control of the speaking subject. And because these claims are first-order speech acts, they are just as implicated in medial showing as any other sort of claim. Speech acts of the form ‘We, the speakers of \( L \), understand that x means \( \varphi \)’ articulate the content of linguistic practices in the sense that they elucidate the content that normally shows itself in linguistic activities. These claims do not stand apart from other sorts of language in use. If so, then the primary way in which linguistic practices come into view is through the sorts of showings discussed here.

Finally, feature (3)—that a linguistic practice is not reducible to the activities that sustain the practice—follows from the nature of the relation between a linguistic practice and the acts that exemplify the practice. As I have said, these two phenomena are internally related. Given that they are internally related, there is no sense in which one could be reduced to or into the other. This shouldn’t give us pause. Like the distinction between noun and verb or parent and offspring, that the existence of an element in a pair presupposes the existence of the other is perfectly common. This in no way threatens to obliterate the various distinctions between the two phenomena. It is only to claim that they are necessarily intertwined. Additionally, descriptions by exemplification themselves presuppose the distinguishability but inseparability of these elements. Indeed, if such descriptions are truth-evaluable at all, then there can be no reduction of one to the other. They are inseparable—and thus not reducible, one to the other—since that which shows itself is necessarily involved in the act through
which it shows itself.\(^{146}\) There is, to be sure, a distinction to be drawn between that which shows itself (i.e., the linguistic practice) and that medium of the showing (i.e., the discursive context of the speech act), but this in no way threatens the claim that they are internally related, inseparable phenomena.

This concludes my focused discussion of the actuality of linguistic practices. Linguistic practices are actual in the sense that they show themselves in the linguistic acts of members of the practice without being reducible to those acts. This follows, I’ve argued, because the form of showing here is distinctive; it is medial showing. A linguistic practice is sustained and shaped by the verbal activities of individual speakers in the practice, but this is not, I maintain, because any given speaker or set of speakers produces the practice. The linguistic practice medially shows itself in individual acts in such a way that the practice is not reducible to nor a product of these acts. We are now able to finish the account and elucidate the unity of descriptions by exemplification.

In the linguistic register, a description by exemplification functions by revealing a relation of exemplification between a speech act and the practice of which it is a part. So far, the term ‘exemplification’ has been left merely as a label for what needs to be understood. For that reason, the only specification of this exemplificatory nexus was negative: it is not an instance of first-order universal instantiation. Here, now, the positive specification is at hand. Exemplification ought to be understood as a kind of medial showing, in the sense I’ve articulated. What is exemplified is the general linguistic practice or a certain aspect of the linguistic practice—that we understand that ‘bought the farm’ means \textit{is dead} or they say ‘die Welt’ to mean \textit{the world}, for instance. The generality of these propositions representing linguistic practices ought to be understood as semantically generic. Moreover, it must be the case that these propositions, if they in fact catch a linguistic practice in their

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referential nets, can be assented to by members of the targeted practice in the first-person plural. Here then is the explicit form of descriptions by exemplification.

**Description by Exemplification:** That [proposition left-hand column] shows itself in that [proposition right-hand column].

As explained, the left-hand column contains propositions that represent a linguistic practice (or part of a linguistic practice), and the right-hand column contains propositions that represent linguistic acts.

Moreover, it is not the case that a linguistic practice will show itself always and everywhere in linguistic acts. As I argued above, there always exists the possibility of a gap between the “We understand:” and the “I understand:”. My contention is simply that descriptions of this form must for the most part be applicable to linguistic acts, given that the generalizations that articulate a linguistic practice are a precondition of there existing a common language that exerts normative authority over its bearers.

Finally, note that descriptions by exemplification need not wear this form on their grammatical sleeves. For instance, descriptions by exemplification are open to view when a member of a practice presents her action as an example of what we do—“*this* is how we denote the subjunctive in a conditional…”—or as an expression of understanding—“Now I know how to go on! The series extends like *this*” or “The predicate applies here, to this range of cases.”

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147 This is, I think, how we ought to understand Wittgenstein’s dissolution of the rule-following paradox in *Philosophical Investigations* §201. Wittgenstein’s point is that the grasp of a rule is something that “is exhibited” in what “we call “following the rule” and “going against it”” (§201). The intelligibility of a rule is not separate from what is it is to follow the rule. But this is not a reductionist thesis. (That would be the route of psychologism.) That one is following a rule shows itself or exhibits itself in the act of following the rule. Note that philosophical problems arise here only when one envisions the following of a rule as either a passive reception (e.g., “rails to infinity” (§218)) or an act of interpretation or insight (e.g., “What you are saying, then, comes to this: a new insight – intuition – is needed at every step to carry out the order ‘+n’ correctly” (§186). To dissolve the paradox is to see that the grasp of a rule is neither an independently intelligible act nor a passive state of comprehension. It is, in my terms, to see the philosophically significant of the middle voice: that one grasps a rule shows itself in one’s acts of following the rule (or going against it).

true, the demonstratives here are to be understood as internally related to what we do, or what is done, where both propositions have a first-person plural form.

§3.5 Conclusion

The upshot of these considerations is that we can account for the unity of the intuitive characteristics of linguistic practice. The locus of this unity can be found in what I’ve called descriptions by exemplification, which bring together the two characteristics of linguistic practice: generality and actuality. These features, though intuitive when taken singly, present puzzles when considered jointly. From the perspective of one who restricts their attention to the active/passive bipolarity, it can seem mysterious how a linguistic practice could show itself, be sustained by, and shaped by acts of individual speakers. It can likewise appear mysterious how a linguistic practice could be made up of the individuals who instantiate the practice, given that linguistic practices seem to possess a form of non-quantificational generality that can be exhibited ad infinitum. This latter thought can look puzzling, I’ve argued, if one restricts attention (i) solely to first-order quantificational models of generality and (ii) to non-first-person modes of representation. I have herein attempted to avoid these intellectual restrictions and to supply the beginnings of a novel account.
Conclusion

My own existence is social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being

—K. Marx

At the outset of Chapter 2, I brought to light three assumptions that dominate thinking about the first-person in contemporary philosophy.

**Independence:** the first-person singular pronoun can be articulated and rendered intelligible or conceptually explicit without reference to the first-person plural pronoun or concomitant concepts.

**Priority:** the first-person singular pronoun is conceptually prior to the first-person plural pronoun in the sense that it, the first-person singular, is a necessary constituent in an account of the first-person plural and not vice versa. The Priority assumption is compatible with several distinct forms of constituency including additive and non-additive theories.

**Uniformity:** the first-person plural pronoun is logically monosemous. The appearance of semantic polysemy is, on analysis, mere appearance.

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148 Marx, K. (1978). *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, translated by Martin Milligan, edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W. W. Norton, p. 86. Quite extraordinarily, Marx’s conclusion here follows from his rejection of something like the Priority assumption. As Marx writes, “What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of “Society” as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual” (86). I suspect that Marx is here following Aristotle. “Society” is not a concept that is cognized apart from, nor is it a concept that is an abstraction from a prior understanding of, what Marx calls, our “species being” (*Gattungswesen*). Rather, the human is, by nature, a political animal. Being social is our particular manner or form of being—it is not, according to Marx, something that befalls us accidentally.
At the end of this essay, I can now recommend the rejection of all three assumptions. Although each assumption is the target of extended criticism at various points herein—and I briefly outline these criticisms below—there is a uniform criticism of the assumptions running through the essay. At each stage in the essay, there is a moment when concepts that have their home within the scope of a target phenomenon point ineluctably to a wider context of some sort. Whether it be, for instance, a practical discursive context or a linguistic medium, it is always this wider context that requires a move beyond the scope of first-person singular concepts and conceptions. By locating this “wider context” as a necessary constituent in an account of the target phenomenon, I thereby identify a conceptual structure that was latent in the investigation from the outset. It would thus, as I’ve argued, be a mistake to think of these wider contexts as mere additions to what is allegedly already understood in the prior investigation(s). A constant theme in this work is that the first-person must be understood as a non-additive whole, and that recognition of the ineliminably plural aspects of the first-person have a transformative effect on our understanding of the first-person as such. I turn now to a brief discussion of the assumptions taken singly. I end with a summary note.

Concerning the Uniformity assumption: that assumption was summarily rejected in Chapter 2. The first-person plural is not logically monosemous. There are many distinct uses of the first-person plural, and these uses can be articulated inferentially. Notably, some of the conceptually most fundamental uses of the first-person plural are largely absent from contemporary accounts. I aimed to remedy these omissions by, first, investigating the various uses of the first-person plural and, second, by following out a puzzle that arises in the investigation of the conceptually most basic use of the first-person plural.

What about Independence? This too can be rejected. I started with the claim—commonplace in contemporary philosophy—that one essential mark of the first-person singular is
that certain uses of the pronoun are immune to error through misidentification.\textsuperscript{149} According to my account, a use of the first-person singular with the property of IEM functions to display the speaker as the locus of a certain kind of authority within what I call a “practical discursive context.” The philosophical articulation of practical discursive contexts requires, however, uses of the first-person plural. If so, then the first-person plural must be included in an account of the first-person singular, at least on those uses that have the property of first-person IEM. This line of reasoning begins in Chapter 1, and parts of the supporting lines of reasoning are then developed over the course of Chapters 2 and 3.

I want to spend a little more time on the Priority assumption. It is this assumption that has exercised the greatest influence on contemporary accounts. The tendency to assume Priority results from (i) a usually implicit philosophical commitment to ontological parsimony as well as from (ii) the lack of a viable alternative.

Let’s begin with (i). It is often supposed, incorrectly, that our ordinary uses of the first-person plural encode a commitment to mysterious entities like “group minds” or “plural subjects.” These are often thought to be ontologically profligate, and a sound philosophy of the first-person ought to do without them. On this score, I am in partial agreement. A sound philosophy of the first-person ought to do without \textit{entities} such as “group minds.” That said, it is a mistake to think that our ordinary uses of the first-person plural commit us to such \textit{entities} or \textit{things}, and that there is some explanatory burden that must be met here.\textsuperscript{150} I have tried to disarm this line of reasoning in the following way.

\textsuperscript{149} Note that if my account is correct, first-person IEM is a property of the first-person full-stop. Certain uses of the first-person singular and the first-person plural have the property of first-person IEM. As far as I can tell, I am the first to point out that certain uses of the first-person plural can be immune to error through misidentification. See Chapter 2 for more on this theme.

All the ordinary uses of the first-person plural are articulated by their inferential norms. Further, these inferences all features a judgment or assertion stroke. As I discuss, an epistemic notion of judgment or assertion is internal to these inferences. This was my way to suggest that the first-person plural requires an epistemological rendering. The first-person plural is a specific mode of judging or asserting, not an entity which is the object of an independently intelligible cognitive state. Over the course of these analyses, there was never a moment in which recourse to different sorts of entities was needed or helpful.

Moving to (ii): The Priority assumption is often accepted because there is allegedly no viable alternative. Whatever the first-person plural is, it must be a construction of various aspects of the first-person singular plus, perhaps, some additional conceptual resources—for instance, perceptual demonstratives. Over Chapters 1 through 3, I have proposed a wholly different way of thinking about the first-person. I endeavored to reject the Priority assumption wholesale. The formal conditions governing uses of the first-person singular presuppose a form of linguistic attunement that belongs to an essentially first-person plural mode of understanding. But, such a form of understanding is not separate from the capacity to use the first-person singular. According to my account, the first-person singular and the first-person plural are internally related; they form a non-additive unitary structure. Moreover, and this ties in with the rejection of (i) above, the first-person—considered at its conceptually most basic level—shows itself in the medium of language.

151 In the contemporary linguistics literature, there is a syntactic argument against this sort of additive analysis. I have my doubts about the power of this argument. Briefly, it is argued that ‘we’ cannot be the plural of ‘I’ since ‘we’ is not a mere collection of ‘I’s. In order to make this line of reasoning plausible, one must provide a positive analysis of the various uses of ‘we’. In this literature, it is often stated that there are only two uses of ‘we’: inclusive uses and exclusive uses. I am skeptical that this distinction is characteristic of the first-person as such. It thus cannot be used as a premise in an argument against someone who holds the Priority assumption. I have attempted to provide a different account in Chapter 2. For more on this argument, see Descombes, V. (2016). Puzzling Identities, Harvard University Press, pp. 174-177 as well as Benveniste, E. (1971). “Relationships of Persons in the Verb,” in Problems in General Linguistics. University of Miami Press, p. 148.
This is, as articulated in Chapter 3, a medial sort of showing. The first-person singular shows itself, first and foremost, in the actuality of linguistic practice and in an individual’s speech behavior. The first-person plural shows itself, first and foremost, in the generality of linguistic content and linguistic practice. The first-person is not, at its most basic conceptual level, an individually achieved performance nor a piece of static content or object passively received or cognized.

This, then, is the picture on offer. My normative point of view is internally related to our point of view. At the most fundamental level of analysis, this relatedness—of my point of view on our point of view and vice versa—shows itself in our activities of sense-making. It is only in our collective self-determining activities as discursive sense-makers that the normative contours of discursive activity show themselves. On the singular side, it is the activity of speaking and imbuing speech acts with illocutionary significance that functions to delimit (at least partly) the scope of discursive authority within a practical discursive context. The syncategorematic ‘I’ (which is the most basic form of the first-person singular) functions to display oneself as the locus of authority within a practical discursive context. On the plural side, the generic syncategorematic use of ‘we’ functions to articulate the conceptual trestles of a practice of which one is a part. That said, the first-person singular and plural are only intelligible taken together, and this dual character of the first-person only shows itself in our real activities of sense-making. The most basic forms of the first-person are not given from without normative practice, nor are they the intentional products of individual acts. There is an original unity to the first-person, which shows itself in our discursive activities. My aim in this work has been to achieve a perspective from which this unity can be understood.
References


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