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## **Privileges of First-Person-Reference and of Third-Person-Reference**

[Final Draft]

**Abstract** It is a widely held view that persons have privileged knowledge about their own minds, although there exist numerous different views, what this privilege exactly consist in. One possible way of interpreting it is to claim that persons can *refer* to their own mental states in a privileged way. I will argue that this view has to be extended. Our common-sense view about reference to mental states implies that besides privileges of first-person-reference to one's own mental states, there also exist privileges of third-person-reference to mental states of others: Other persons can refer to *all* mental states of a person in a way the person cannot. In a next step, I will explain that persons can take two perspectives towards their own mental states, a first-person-perspective and a third-person-perspective. I will conclude that the possibilities of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective are limited.

**Keywords** Reference—Intentionality—Self-Knowledge—Self-Reference—Perspectives

### **1 Introduction**

Intentionality is the capacity of minds to be directed at something. Most of the discussion about intentionality concerns the question how minds or mental states can be about something. In these cases the starting point of philosophical investigations are mental states and the question discussed is how they can refer to things or facts, which are typically distinct from the referring mental state. However, my starting point will be the assumption that there exist certain entities and I will investigate how persons can refer with mental states to these entities. In this respect, I will invert the usual direction of investigation.

Franz Brentano (1874) who re-established the scholastic notion of intentionality, regarded intentionality as a mark of the mental. According to this view, we refer with mental states to entities such as things, properties or states of affairs. However, those entities to which a person can refer can be mental states as well: At least human beings and higher animals are able of having mental states such as beliefs, hopes or fears about mental states such as beliefs, hopes or fears. Those mental states to which the higher-order mental states refer can be one's

own mental states or mental states of someone else. I will call any reference to one's own mental states *first-person-reference* and any reference to someone else's mental states *third-person-reference*. According to these definitions, first-person-reference and third-person-reference do not exclude each other, since it is possible that someone refers to her own mental states and to mental states of someone else, for instance by being convinced that all our fears are unjustified.

In the following, I will discuss how, given certain mental states, person can refer to them. Hence, I am rather interested in the question how persons can refer to particular mental states than concerned with the problem how we can refer with mental states to objects or facts.

I will proceed in the following way: Firstly, I will introduce a short common-sense theory about reference to mental states. Secondly, I will show that this theory implies that there exist privileges of reference to one's *own* mental states as well as privileges of reference to mental states of others. Thirdly, I will compare these two privileges of *first-person-reference* and *third-person-reference*. Fourthly, I will introduce the notion of first-person-reference from a third-person-*perspective*. I will conclude that the possibilities of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective are limited. Finally, I will investigate briefly, which alternative theories about reference do not imply the existence of these privileges and problems.

The point, I want to make here, is a minor one, which only concerns privileges of first-person-*reference* and of third-person-*reference* and problems of first-person-*reference* from a third-person-perspective. However, I think that the way these privileges and problems are formulated, cannot only be applied to *reference* to mental states, but to *inferential knowledge* about mental states as well. Therefore, my view is that the privileges and problems presented here are part of a larger phenomenon, which also concerns privileges of first-person-*knowledge* and of third-person-*knowledge* and problems of first-person-*knowledge* from a third-person-perspective.

## 1.1 Privileges of Self-Knowledge

According to a common philosophical view, there are asymmetries between self-knowledge about one's own mental states and third-person-knowledge about mental states of others: There exists a privilege of self-knowledge on the one hand and a problem of third-person-knowledge i.e. a problem of knowing other minds on the other hand.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For discussions of different accounts of self-knowledge see Gertler (2008) and Wright, Smith and Macdonald (1998).

Although there is broad agreement that privileges of self-knowledge exist, there is remarkable disagreement what these privileges exactly consist in. According to one intuition, they are primarily a matter of epistemic security like epistemic infallibility or epistemic omniscience. According to an alternative view, the distinctiveness of self-knowledge is a matter of first-person-authority and beliefs about own mental states are rather *in corrigible* than *in fallible*.

The distinctiveness of self-knowledge is often based on the idea that persons can have *access* to own mental states in a way through introspection they cannot have access to mental states of others. This privileged access can also be interpreted as a matter of reference: Persons who possess mental states, more or less automatically, refer to these mental states, at least in cases of conscious mental states. Theories about reference to one's own mental states can vary in different ways. Firstly, there exist alternative views whether reference to own mental states happens through higher-order mental states or through these mental states themselves because of their self-referential respectively self-presentational character. Secondly, higher-order mental states can be interpreted as beliefs or thoughts, as proponents of higher-order thought theories (HOT) claim, or as perceptions as representatives of higher-order perception theories (HOP) like Armstrong (1968 and 1984) or Lycan (1996) claim. Furthermore, proponents of HOT-theories can disagree whether the higher-order mental states are actually realized (Rosenthal 1986 and 2005) or only dispositional (Carruthers 2000 and 2005).<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I shall argue, not in contrast, but in addition to these approaches, that there is not only a privilege of referring to one's own mental states, but also one of referring to mental states of others, which might be a neglected fact in the philosophical debate.

Reference to existing entities or facts can, but need not be an essential component of knowledge. If I know that the earth is round, then it is plausible to assume that my knowledge basing belief refers to the existing entity earth or to the fact that the earth is round. However, if I know that unicorns do not exist, then it is subject of philosophical discussion whether there exists an entity or a state of affairs to which my knowledge basing belief that unicorns do not exist refers. But if the way we refer to things in the world is one aspect of having knowledge about them, then facts about *reference* to mental states imply facts about *knowledge* about mental states. I will argue that there exist privileges of first-person-*reference* to one's own mental states as well as privileges of third-person-*reference* to mental states of others. Hence, with respect to reference there also exist privileges of first-person-*knowledge*

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<sup>2</sup> For a more extensive discussion of higher-order theories of consciousness see Carruthers (2009).

about own mental states as well as privileges of third-person-*knowledge* about mental states of others.

## 2 A Simple Theory about Reference to Mental States

My view is that we have to extend our common-sense philosophical picture about privileges of first-person-reference and resulting problems of third-person-reference: There exist privileges of third-person-reference and problems of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective as well. I think that these additional privileges and problems are consequences of our common philosophical picture, which we tend to ignore. They do not result from conceptions of reference, which one can accept in addition to our common-sense view. Therefore, this paper aims at arguing that those theories about reference to mental states we are typically inclined to accept imply privileges of first-person-reference and third-person-reference and a problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective. It does not aim at offering a convincing argumentation for the truth of this common-sense theory.

In a first step, I will introduce a simple theory about reference *with* mental states *to* mental states. I use the term “mental state” to denote all sorts of mental phenomena such as beliefs, experiences, hopes or fears, although the following argumentation will be mainly relevant for beliefs. The theory RMS about reference to mental states consists of the following theses:

### **RMS:**

- RMS1: Persons can have mental states.
- RMS2: Persons can refer with mental states to something.
- RMS3: Persons can refer with mental states to their own *single* mental states and to *all* their *own* mental states (of a specific type).
- RMS4: Persons can refer with mental states to *single* and to *all* mental states (of a specific type) of *other* persons.
- RMS5: Mental states can be self-referential.
- RMS6: Every mental state belongs to exactly one person.

The theory RMS is redundant, since the claim that persons are able to refer with mental states to *mental states*, as RMS3 and RMS4 states, trivially implies the weaker claim RMS2 that

persons can refer with mental states to *something*. However, it is illustrative for my further argumentation in part 5, to make these single premises more explicit.

I will now give simple examples for each of these single theses of RMS. Most of these examples might be uncontroversial, but possibly some are not.

Examples for persons with mental states are:

- Peter believes that Mary's car is green.
- Robert is convinced that the earth is flat.

If Mary and her car exist, then Peter's belief refers, under certain conditions, to Mary and her car. Robert's conviction refers to the earth. Reference does not imply truth. Peter's belief can refer to Mary's car, even if it is blue and Robert's conviction can refer to the earth although it is round.

Examples for persons who refer with mental states to *single* mental states are:

- Michael's conviction that he has currently an experience of a hand refers to his experience of a hand.
- Henry's belief that Mary's belief that the earth is flat is true refers to Mary's belief that the earth is flat.

In the first example a person refers to an own mental state, in the second example a person refers to a mental state of someone else.

Again, reference to mental states does not imply the truth of the referring mental state. Henry can refer to Mary's belief that the earth is flat by believing that Mary's belief is true although Henry's belief is false in this case.

Here are two examples for persons who refer with mental states to *all* beliefs of a person:

- Michael's hope that all his beliefs are justified refers to all his beliefs.
- Michael's belief that everything the pope believes is true refers to all beliefs of the pope.

In the first example, Michael refers to all *his own* mental states of a specific type, in the second example he refers to all mental states of a specific type of someone else. The first example is also an example for a self-referential belief. It is not only possible to refer to all mental states *of a specific type* of a person, but to all mental states *at all* no matter to which type they belong, for example by believing that every mental state of Bruno is a result of taking LSD. However, these cases are less interesting than those cases of reference to all *beliefs* of a person.

It is a common-sense assumption that persons can refer with mental states to their own mental states or to mental states of others. However, it might be more controversial, whether persons are able to refer to *all* mental states of someone. One could argue that P<sub>1</sub> actually

cannot refer to all beliefs of  $P_2$  by believing that every belief of  $P_2$  is false, because there might always exist beliefs of  $P_2$  such that there is no causal connection between  $P_1$ 's belief and  $P_2$ 's beliefs. In the following, I will assume that there is a way, in which  $P_1$  refers to all beliefs of  $P_2$ , if  $P_1$  believes that every belief of  $P_2$  is false. In part 5, I will discuss alternative views about reference to all mental states of someone and their implications briefly.

In the examples presented until now, persons refer to all mental states of someone by quantifying over mental states of a person. The quantifying notions one can use are notions such as “all beliefs...”, “Everything he believes...”. However, one should note that reference to all mental states of a person does not demand such quantifications. One can also do this by using singular terms. If Mary is a very careful philosopher and her only two beliefs are that she is and that she exists, then Peter can refer to all her beliefs by believing that Mary's belief that she is and that her belief that she exists are both certain. In this example, Peter refers to all of Mary's beliefs by using singular terms.

The fact that a person can refer to all beliefs of someone by using quantifications as well as by using singular terms has the following implications: Persons whose beliefs involve quantifying notions like “All beliefs of ...” usually know the meaning of these notions and know that they refer to all beliefs of someone by using the quantifying notions. In these cases the fact that she refers to all mental states of someone is *transparent* to the referring person. However, persons need not and usually do not exactly know which mental states other persons possess. Therefore, it is possible that someone uses singular terms or conjunctions of singular terms for referring to all mental states of someone else without being aware of this very fact. This is at least possible, if the number of mental states, which a person possesses, is finite. Peter for example can refer to all beliefs of Mary by using singular terms as in the example above without being aware of doing so. In this case, Peter's reference to all beliefs of Mary is *opaque* to him.

RMS6 states that every mental state belongs to exactly one person as its bearer. On the one hand, this claim excludes the possibility that there exist mental states, which are free floating and which do not belong to any person at all. The view that any mental state needs a person as their bearer seems quite uncontroversial to me. One possibility of denying this view is to argue that persons are only bundles of mental states and that they actually do not exist as independent entities. In this case, there would be free-floating mental states, which do not belong to any person, because persons do not exist at all.

On the other hand, RM6 implies that two persons cannot share one and the same mental state: If two persons  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  believe, for example, that the earth is round, they possess

mental states of the same modus “belief” and with the same content, “the earth is round”, nevertheless the beliefs of  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are not identical according to RM6. They might be two mental state tokens of the same type concerning the modus of believing and concerning their content, but one token belongs to  $P_1$  and the other token belongs to  $P_2$ .

To sum up, the presented theory RMS is a concise theory about reference to mental states. I think it corresponds widely to the philosophical common-sense concerning this topic.

### 3 Implications of RMS

I will now show that the simple theory RMS implies various differences and asymmetries between the possibilities and limits of reference to one's *own* mental states and of reference to mental states of *others*. On the one hand, I will argue that there is a privilege of first-person-reference in the sense that a person  $P_1$  can refer to her own mental states in a way another person  $P_2$  cannot refer to the mental state of  $P_1$ . On the other hand, I will also demonstrate that there exists a privilege of third-person-reference:  $P_2$  can refer to mental states of  $P_1$  in a way  $P_1$  cannot refer to her own mental states.

#### 3.1 Privileges of *First-Person-Reference*

Firstly, I will present and discuss the privilege of first-person-reference to one's own mental states. Generally speaking, there are two possible ways for a person to refer to her own mental states:

Case 1:

- $P$  refers with mental state  $MS_e$  to her own mental states  $MS_1, MS_2\dots$  and  $MS_e$  is *not* identical with one of the mental states  $MS_1, MS_2\dots$  to which it refers.

Case 2:

- $P$  refers with mental state  $MS_e$  to her own mental states  $MS_1, MS_2\dots$  and  $MS_e$  is identical with one of the mental states  $MS_1, MS_2\dots$  to which it refers.

In the first case,  $P$  refers by definition *with* an *additional* mental state to her own mental states. In the second case,  $P$  refers *without* an additional mental state to them.

Since both cases are possible for first-person-reference, it holds:

- A person can refer *with* an additional mental state to her own mental states *and* she can refer *without* an additional mental state to them.

This thesis only states that in cases of first-person reference there are mental states, to which a person can refer without additional mental states; it does not state that this is possible for reference *with* every mental state or for reference *to* every mental state. It has to be understood as a claim about the possibilities of reference to one's own mental states in general, not as a claim about reference to any own mental state.

Whether a reference to mental states is one with or without an additional mental state is always *relative* to the class of mental states to which it refers. If  $MS_e$ , for example, refers to  $MS_1$ ,  $MS_2$  and  $MS_e$ , then the reference with  $MS_e$  to  $MS_1$  and  $MS_2$  is one *with* an additional mental state, but the reference to  $MS_1$ ,  $MS_2$  *and*  $MS_e$  is one *without* an additional mental state. If  $MS_e$  is my belief that all my current beliefs are true and  $MS_1$  is my belief that I am right now sitting at a computer and  $MS_2$  is my belief that I am getting hungry, then the reference to  $MS_1$  and  $MS_2$  with  $MS_e$  is one *with* an additional mental state, but the one to  $MS_1$ ,  $MS_2$  and  $MS_e$  is one *without* an additional one.

In cases of reference without additional mental states, the referring mental state is identical with one of the mental states to which it refers. Therefore, the referring mental state is self-referential in cases of first-person-reference without additional mental states. However, reference without additional mental states is defined relative to a class of mental states  $MS_1$ ,  $MS_2$ ,... *Given* certain mental states, it is possible that a person refers with an additional *and* self-referential mental state to each of these mental states. Here is an example: P refers with  $MS_e$  to  $MS_1$ ...  $MS_n$  and  $MS_e$  is self-referential, but not identical with one of the mental states  $MS_1$ ...  $MS_n$ . Therefore, P refers with an additional mental state to  $MS_1$ ..., although  $MS_e$  is self-referential. Hence, self-referentiality is *necessary*, but *not sufficient* for reference without additional mental states. However, if the given class of mental states is  $MS_1$ ...  $MS_n$ ,  $MS_e$ , then P refers without an additional mental state by referring with  $MS_e$ .

In a next step, I will investigate the possibilities of third-person-reference, which is a person's reference to mental states of other persons. RMS6 states that every mental state belongs to exactly one person. Hence, two persons cannot share one and the same mental state: Mental states of two persons are never identical. This fact has the following implication for reference to mental states: If a person  $P_1$  refers with  $MS_e$  to mental states  $MS_1$ ... of another person  $P_2$ , then  $MS_e$  is not identical with one of the mental states of  $P_2$ , to which it



refers. The reason is simply that  $MS_e$  is a mental state of  $P_1$  and  $MS_1\dots$  are mental states of  $P_2$ . Therefore, it holds:

- $P_1$  can refer with an additional mental state to mental states of another person  $P_2$ , but  $P_1$  *cannot* refer to them without an additional mental state.

Nobody can use someone else's mental states for referring to something. Hence, the possibilities of reference to someone else's mental states are restricted to reference *with* additional mental states.

There are two possible ways for a person to refer to her own mental states: *with* and *without* additional mental states. However, there is only one way a person can refer to mental states of others: *with* an additional mental state. If  $MS_1\dots$  are mental states of  $P_2$ , then  $P_2$  can refer to these mental states with or without additional mental states, but  $P_1$  can only refer to them with additional ones. Therefore, there is a way, a person can refer to her own mental states, but another person cannot refer to them, namely *without* additional mental states. I call this the *privilege of first-person-reference*. This privilege follows directly from the theory RMS. Hence, I have shown that the small theory RMS implies that there exists a privilege of first-person-reference.

### 3.2 Privileges of *Third-Person-Reference*

It might not be surprising that a common-sense theory about reference implies that persons can refer to their own mental states in a privileged way. However, I will next show that RMS also implies a privilege of *third-person-reference*: Other persons can refer to mental states of a person in a way the person herself cannot refer to them. Here is the way, this privilege arises: RMS3 states that persons can refer to their single *own* mental states as well as to *all* their own mental states. RMS4 claims that the same holds for reference to mental states of other persons. If a person  $P$  refers with a mental state  $MS_e$  to all her own mental states, then  $MS_e$  is also a mental state of  $P$  and  $P$  refers to  $MS_e$  as well. The referring mental state and one of the mental states to which it refers are identical in these cases. Therefore, it holds:

- A person can only refer to *all* her own mental states *without* an additional mental state, but *not with* an additional mental state.

This restriction only holds in cases of reference to *all* own mental states. There are no general problems for persons to refer with an additional mental state to their single own mental states or to classes of them, as long as these classes do not include *all* mental states of the person.

A person  $P_2$  can *only* refer to all her own mental states *without* an additional mental state. But another person  $P_1$  can refer to all the mental states of  $P_2$  *with* an additional mental state. Therefore, other persons can refer to all mental states of a person in a way the person herself cannot refer to them, namely *without* an additional mental state. Hence, the possibilities for persons to refer to their own mental states are restricted in cases of reference to *all* own mental states. This restriction does not hold for other persons analogously. I call a person's ability to refer to all mental states of someone else with an additional mental state the *privilege of third-person-reference*.

When speaking of privileges of self-knowledge or privileged accesses, we usually have a kind of privilege of directness or immediateness in mind, as it is the case for the privilege of first-person-reference, when we refer without additional mental states by using self-referential mental states. However, the privilege of third-person-reference is one of reference *with* additional mental states and therefore rather one of independence or detachment. This might not be the kind of privilege, which we have in mind when we think about privileges of reference, but I do not see any reason, why we should not regard it as privilege as well.

### **3.3 Privileges of *First-Person-Reference* and of *Third-Person-Reference* Compared**

I have argued that the simple common-sense theory RMS about reference implies that the possibilities for persons to refer to mental states of others and the possibilities to refer to their own mental states are both restricted, but they are restricted in different aspects. The possibilities of first-person-reference and of third-person-reference can now be summarized and contrasted in the following way:

#### **The possibilities of first-person-reference:**

- Persons can refer *without* additional mental states to their *single* own mental states and to *all* their own mental states.
- Persons can refer *with* additional mental states to their *single* own mental states, but *not* to *all* their own mental states.

#### **The possibilities of third-person-reference:**

- Persons *cannot* refer *without* additional mental states to single mental states or to all mental states of someone else.
- Persons *can* refer *with* additional mental states to single mental states and to all mental states of someone else.

There exist different possibilities of reference to one's own mental states and of reference to mental states of someone else. Hence, there exist privileges of first-person-reference and of third-person-reference. They can be summarized as following:

**The privilege of first-person-reference:**

- P<sub>1</sub> can refer *without* an additional mental state to her single own mental states and to all her own mental states, but another person P<sub>2</sub> cannot refer to these beliefs of P<sub>1</sub> without an additional mental state.
- This is the privilege of first-person-reference.
- Hence, there exists a privilege of first-person-reference for persons concerning reference to their single own mental states and concerning reference to all their own mental states.

**The privilege of third-person-reference:**

- P<sub>2</sub> can refer *with* an additional mental state to all mental states of P<sub>1</sub>, but P<sub>1</sub> can only refer to all her own mental states *without* an additional mental state.
- This is the privilege of third-person-reference.
- Hence, there exists a privilege of third-person-reference for persons concerning reference to *all* mental states of someone else.

The privilege of first-person-reference that persons can refer without additional mental states to their own mental states, but not to mental states of others, concerns reference to *single* mental states as well as reference to *all* mental states. However, the privilege of third person reference, that other persons can refer *with* an additional mental state, but the person herself cannot, only concerns reference to *all* mental states of other persons. There does not exist any privilege of third-person-reference to single mental states. In this respect, the privilege of third-person-reference has a holistic character and it is more specific than the one of first-person-reference.

#### 4 The Problem of First-Person-Reference from a Third-Person-Perspective

I have argued that persons can refer to their own mental states with or without additional mental states, but they can only refer to mental states of other persons by having an *additional* mental state. Therefore, reference with additional mental states is a mark of third-person-reference, but not of first-person-reference. Considering this fact, one can argue that persons do not refer to their own mental states in a way, in which they can refer to mental states of others, if they refer *without additional* mental states to them. The way persons refer to their own mental states can be regarded as a *perspective*, a person takes towards her own mental states. If persons refer to their own mental states in way, they can also refer to mental states of others, then one can say that they refer to them from a third-person-perspective. However, if persons refer without additional mental states to their own mental states, then they refer to them in way they *cannot* refer to mental states of others. Therefore, one can argue that a person does not refer to her own mental states from a *third-person-perspective* if she refers to them without an additional mental state: First-person-reference from a third-person-perspective excludes reference without additional mental states.

I think that first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective is one aspect of a more general and more complex phenomenon. My underlying intuition is the following: Persons take an ordinary view towards the world by perceiving it or by having ordinary mental states such as beliefs, hopes or fears about it and they can also take this ordinary view towards themselves. However, we are also able of taking a detached point of view towards ourselves, by reflecting on ourselves in a way we reflect on others or in a way, others reflect on us. I think this happens in cases of meditation, where we watch our experiences, thoughts and emotions arising and passing, without getting involved or in therapeutic contexts, when we intend to reflect on our desires or fears by sometimes taking a “distant” point view towards them. However, we can also take a third person's perspective on ourselves in everyday contexts, when we ask ourselves what others would think about us or how we appear to others in certain situations. Hence, my intuition is that persons can generally take two perspectives towards themselves, an ordinary one and a third-person-perspective.<sup>3</sup>

I think the reason, why we are capable of taking a third-person-perspective is that we are social beings, who have numerous experiences, beliefs, hopes, fears etc. about other persons and interact with them on the basis of these mental states. Furthermore, we realize at a certain stage of our psychological development that *we* as persons take a specific view on others in

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<sup>3</sup> For an alternative account of two perspectives see Bilgrami (2006).

reflecting on them and others take a specific view in reflecting on us. Having this knowledge about ourselves and about others, we become able to reflect on ourselves in a way we reflect on others or in a way others reflect on ourselves. From this point of view, self-reflection from a third-person-perspective can be regarded as an imitation of reflecting on others. This explanation is rather a working hypothesis than a worked out theory, but offering a full explanation why we are capable of taking a third-person-perspective towards ourselves is not essential for my further argumentation.

I think that taking a third-person-perspective towards oneself is a rather complex phenomenon and that reference to one's own mental states is one aspect of it. In cases of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective, persons step, metaphorically speaking, outside themselves in order to refer with mental states to their own mental states in a way they refer to others or others refer to them. Again, by doing this, persons imitate the reference to others. In the following, I will link my intuition about the two perspectives, which persons can take towards themselves with the facts about possibilities and limits of reference with and without additional mental states, which I elaborated above.

We can only refer to mental states of others with additional mental states, but we can also refer to our own mental states without additional ones. I argued that self-referentiality of the referring mental state is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for reference without additional mental states. Therefore, one can only refer without an additional mental state, if this referring mental state is self-referential. For being self-referential, the mental state has to have a specific content such as "All my beliefs are true." However, mental states about one's own mental states are typically not self-referential. One example for a non-self-referential mental state is my hope that my belief that today is Wednesday is true. Therefore, first-person-reference is typically one with additional mental states. Taking a third-person-perspective towards one's own mental states is distinct from typical self-reflection. For this reason, reference with additional mental states cannot be *sufficient* for first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective, because in this case any typical first-person-reference would be one from a third-person-perspective. However, reference with an additional mental state is *necessary* for first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective. There are many instances of first-person-reference with additional mental states, which are *not* from a third-person-perspective, but there is no instance of first-person-reference *without* additional mental states, which *is* from a third-person-perspective.

I will now argue that the possibilities of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective are limited and that, therefore, there exists a *problem* of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective.

I have argued that there exists a privilege of third-person-reference: Persons can refer with an additional mental state to all mental states of others, but they can only refer to all their own mental states without additional mental states. However, first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective excludes reference without additional mental states. Therefore, it holds:

- Persons can refer to their single own mental states from a third-person-perspective, but not to all their own mental states.
- No reference of a person to all her own mental states is a reference from a third-person-perspective.

The possibilities of first-person-reference from a third-person-*perspective* are limited: Nobody can step totally outside oneself in order to refer to all her own mental states with an additional mental state. I call the impossibility for a person to refer to all her own mental states from a third-person-perspective the *problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective*. This problem can be reformulated for mental states of a *specific type* such as beliefs, hopes or fears as well: Nobody can refer with an additional mental state of a specific type like a belief to all her own mental states of this very type, like to all her beliefs.

If a certain context demands that persons can only refer to their own mental states correctly, if they refer to them from a third-person-perspective, then a person cannot refer correctly in such a context to all her own mental states.

I already noted earlier that reference to existing entities or facts can be an essential component of knowledge. In this case, one can argue that there exist privileges of first-person-*knowledge* and of third-person-*knowledge* with respect to reference as well. Furthermore, one can distinguish different kinds of self-knowledge about one's own mental states based on distinct forms of first-person-reference: According to this approach, there self-knowledge is from a third-person-perspective, if the reference of the knowledge-basing belief is one without an additional mental state. In this case, there does not exist any self-knowledge about all own mental states from a third-person-perspective.

## **5 Alternative Conceptions of Reference to Mental States**

I have argued that the concise theory RMS about reference to mental states implies that there exist, first, privileges of first-person-reference, second, privileges of third-person-reference, and, third, problems of first-person-knowledge from a third-person-perspective. I think that RMS is in accordance with our common-sense view about referring *with* mental states *to* mental states. Nevertheless, for achieving a better understanding of the implication relations between RMS and the implied privileges and problems, it is useful to investigate briefly, which modifications of RMS do not imply the existence of these privileges and problems of reference. Some of the following alternatives to RMS are actually defended philosophical positions some are rather hypothetical.

This paper aims at arguing that those theories about reference to mental states we are typically inclined to accept imply privileges of first-person-reference and of third-person-reference and a problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective. It does not aim at offering a convincing argumentation for the truth of this common-sense theory. Therefore, I will present in the following briefly, which alternative conceptions of reference do not imply these privileges and problems, without offering convincing arguments against those conceptions.

There is a privilege of first-person-reference because  $P_1$  can refer *without* an additional mental state to her own mental states, but another person  $P_2$  can only refer with an additional mental state to the mental states of  $P_1$ . Which theories do not imply that this privilege exists? If there do not exist mental states, like some radical eliminativists might claim, then there neither exists reference *with* mental states nor reference *to* mental states at all and, therefore, there is, for trivial reasons, no kind of privilege of reference to one's own mental states. If there exist mental states, but no persons as their bearers, then one cannot make sense of speaking about reference to a person's mental states or of speaking about privileges of first-person-reference. If there is no reference with mental states to any kind of entities, i.e. if there is no such thing as intentionality at all, then there is trivially no privilege of reference to one's own mental states as well. The same is true if one denies the possibility of referring with mental states to mental states in particular. If persons cannot refer with mental states to their *own* mental states in particular, which would be a strange position to defend, then no privilege of first-person-reference would exist either. If there are no self-referential mental states, then persons can only refer with additional mental states to their own mental states. In this case, they are in the same situation as they are concerning reference to mental states of others. Under these assumptions, there exists no privilege of first-person-reference. The same is true,

if persons can share the same mental state. In that case  $P_2$  can refer without an additional mental state to mental state  $MS_i$  of  $P_1$ , if  $MS_i$  is a mental which belongs to  $P_1$  as well as to  $P_2$ .

These presented theories of reference and intentionality all imply that there is no privilege of first-person-reference. Each of those theories, which deny the existence of mental states, of persons or of intentionality in general, is a radical, but at least a general philosophical view. In these cases, there is no privilege of first-person-reference for the general reason that there is no reference to a person's mental states at all. However, if we assume the existence of mental states, of persons and the possibility of reference with mental states, then there does not exist any privilege of first-person-reference, only if one cannot refer to mental states in general, or not to one's *own* mental states in particular, or if mental states cannot be self-referential or if two persons can share one and the same mental state. Each of these views seems either ad hoc or philosophically strange or both to me. If we want to avoid such ad hoc explanations, then there is no privilege of first-person-reference, only if we abandon the view in general that persons can refer with mental states to something.

The privilege of third-person-reference is the fact that  $P_2$  can refer *with an additional* mental state to all mental states of  $P_1$ , but  $P_1$  cannot. Under which conditions does this privilege not occur? For trivial reasons, there is no privilege of third-person-reference, if there are no mental states at all, if there are no persons as bearers of mental states, if there is no such thing as reference with mental states at all or if there is reference, but not to mental states. Under these conditions, there exists neither a privilege of *third*-person-reference nor one of *first*-person-reference. Denying the existence of mental states, of persons or of reference is a radical, but at least a general philosophical view.

To abandon reference to mental states *only* is again ad hoc. However, there are more interesting cases, which exclude privileges of third-person-reference: If persons can only refer to their own mental states, but not to mental states of *others*, then they cannot refer to other's mental states in a way, they cannot refer to their own ones and no privilege of third-person-reference exists. This view can be adopted, if one assumes that reference to mental states demands a privileged access by introspection, which we only have to our own mental states.

The privilege of third-person-reference only concerns reference to *all* mental states of a person. I already argued that it can be discussed whether persons are actually capable of referring with mental states to all mental states of a person and how this can be achieved. One can for example argue that reference to mental states demands knowledge that this mental state exists, but that persons do not have knowledge about their own unconscious mental states or knowledge about all mental states of others. If one cannot refer to all mental states of



a person, then one cannot refer to all mental states of someone else in a privileged way and, therefore, there is no privilege of third-person-reference. The same is true if not reference to all mental states of a person is generally denied, but only reference to all mental states of *others*. In this case, a person's capacity to refer to all her own mental states can be regarded as a second privilege of first-person-reference.

The privilege of third-person-reference is the fact that persons can refer to all mental states of someone else with an additional mental state, but that they cannot do the same concerning reference to all their own mental states. This conclusion is based on the assumption that every mental state belongs to exactly one person. If one denies this assumption, then no privilege of third-person-reference exists. This can be done by assuming that persons can refer to something with mental states, which are not their own ones, but mental states of someone else or mental states, which are free-floating and which do not have any person as bearer at all.

To deny that there is a privilege of third-person-reference by denying the existence of mental states, or of persons or of reference with mental states is again a radical, but a general philosophical view. In these cases, there is no privilege of *first*-person-reference either. To claim that persons can refer *with* mental states, but not *to* mental states seems ad hoc to me. To me, the same is true for the view that we are only able to refer to our *own* mental states. The claim that persons can refer to something with mental states, which are not their own, seems strange to me. Therefore, the only arguable thesis, which implies that there is no privilege of third-person-reference without denying persons' reference with mental states in general seems to me the view that there is no way in which we can refer to *all* mental states of a person.

A person does not refer to her own mental states from a *third-person-perspective* if she refers to them without additional mental states. From this and from the privileges of third-person-reference follows the existence of problems of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective that persons cannot refer to all their own mental states from a third-person-perspective. In the following, I will briefly investigate which modifications of RMS would not imply the existence of these problems.

There exists a problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective if there exists first-person-reference to one's own mental states, if there exists a third-person-perspective towards one's own mental states and if there is a specific problem of referring to one's own mental states from this perspective. If one of these three conditions is not fulfilled, then this problem does not exist.

If it is not possible that persons refer with mental states to something because there are no mental states or because there are no persons as bearers of mental states or because there is no such phenomenon as reference at all, then there is no *specific* problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective, for the simple reason that there are no persons who refer with mental states to anything at all. If persons cannot refer with mental states to *mental states*, then there exists neither a *specific* problem. If persons cannot refer with mental states to their *own* mental states, then there is no first-person-reference at all and, therefore, no specific problem of first-person-reference *from a third-person-perspective*. If persons cannot refer with mental states to mental states of *others*, then there is no third-person-perspective at all and, therefore, no specific problem of *first-person-reference* from a third-person-perspective. There only exists a problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective concerning reference to *all* own mental states. If persons cannot refer to all mental states of a person or at least not to all their *own* mental states, then there exists again no specific problem of first-person-reference *from a third-person-perspective*.

There is a problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective because persons cannot refer with additional mental states to all their own mental states, but to all mental states of someone else. If there are mental states, which do not belong to a person as their bearer and if persons can use these free-floating mental states for referring to something, then a person can refer with an additional mental state to all her own mental states. In this case, again there does not exist a problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective. This is also true, if persons can use someone else's beliefs for reference.

I have argued that the simple theory RMS about reference to mental states implies that there is a problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective. I have now presented alternatives to RMS, which do not have this implication. Denying the existence of mental states, of persons or of reference with mental states, is a radical, but a possible philosophical view one can take. Accepting reference with mental states in general, but denying reference to *mental states* in general or reference to *one's own* mental states or reference to mental states of *others*, seems strange and ad hoc to me. The same holds for the view that persons can use free-floating mental states or someone else's mental states for referring to all their own mental states. However, it is disputable whether persons are actually able to refer to *all* their own mental states. A possible objection, which I already mentioned, is that persons cannot refer to their own unconscious mental states. In these cases, there exists no specific problem of first-person-reference *from a third-person-perspective*.

We can now sum up the conclusions concerning the problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective as following: If we accept RMS, then we have to accept that there is a specific problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-*perspective*. If we give up the general view that persons can refer with mental states to something, then the problem does not exist any more for the general reason that there are no such phenomena as first-person-reference or third-person-perspectives. If we deny reference to one's own mental states, then we deny first-person-reference, if we deny reference to someone else's mental states, we deny third-person-perspectives. In each of these cases, we abandon the existence of the problem for a more general reason. We only avoid the specific problem exclusively, if we accept reference to all own mental states with free-floating mental states or with someone else's mental states. Both alternatives seem highly implausible to me. Therefore, either we have to avoid the problem of first-person-reference from a third-person-perspective by denying a more general thesis or we have to accept its existence.

## **Conclusion**

I introduced a concise common-sense theory about reference to mental states and showed that this theory implies that there exists a privilege of *first*-person-reference concerning reference to one's own mental states on the one hand and a privilege of *third*-person-reference concerning reference to all mental states of other persons on the other hand. I introduced the notion of a third-person-perspective as a specific perspective, which persons can take towards their own mental states. The privilege of *third*-person-reference implies that there also exists a problem of first-person-knowledge from a third-person-*perspective*. It is philosophically well-known that we are privileged in referring to our own mental states. However, it might be neglected, that there is, according to our common-sense view, a way in which others are privileged in referring to our mental states as well.

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