



The Second Person in Dialogue

Leclerc A*

University of Brasilia, Brasil

*Corresponding author: André Leclerc, University of Brasilia, SQN 405, Bloco F, 106, Asa Norte, Brasilia-DF, 70846-060, Brazil, Tel: +55 (61) 99661-0373; Email: andre.leclerc55@gmail.com

Investigation Paper

Volume 6 Special Issue 1

Received Date: January 02, 2023

Published Date: February 03, 2023

DOI: 10.23880/phij-16000S1-011

Abstract

I first present a conception of the *relata* involved in the dialogic relation. I and thou are persons endowed with a first-person perspective and concepts through which they can represent themselves as distinct of anyone or anything else. Then I briefly discuss the epistemology and metaphysics of persons as agents. I adopt a realist view against any epistemological projects denying (or feigning to deny) the existence of the second person. Then I expose the complementary view of the second-person perspective, which close the gap between the first- and third-person perspectives. I expose some historical milestones recognizing the importance of the second-person perspective in dialogue. After an examination of the conditions for the use of mental terms, I propose an analysis of dialogue in sequences of illocutionary acts, stressing the importance of perlocutionary plans. Any dialogue worthy of the name involves mutual understanding. In my reconstruction, I use distinctions proposed by Burge, Dummett and Austin. There are degrees of understanding in dialogue. In the highest degree, we have a real “meeting of minds.” Finally, a genuine dialogue is different from a fictional dialogue. I also suggest, taking side with Descartes, that the interaction man-machine cannot be classified as genuine dialogue.

Keywords: Dialogic relation; Perlocutionary plans; Epistemology; Metaphysics

The Second Person

The little epistemic autonomy we can conquer in our lives comes after a long road. We are all born in a state of total dependency. That’s a simple truth. A woman breastfeeding a newborn baby illustrates perfectly the principle. What is known today as “the second person”¹ is there from the very beginning: in our family life, then in the neighborhood, at school, at work – real people everywhere along the way. They raise us, teach us, encourage us, oppose us, criticize us,

and share the world with us. The acceptance of these simple truths amounts to a rejection of methodological solipsism. Heidegger was right: *Mitsein* is an essential part of what being-in-the-world is.² The second person is not a theoretical construct resulting from a solipsistic epistemological project of the type developed by Descartes³ or Husserl⁴. The second

1 Donald Davidson, “The Second Person”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XVII (1992). Also, Naomi Eilan, “You Turn”, *Philosophical Exploration*, 2014, pp. 1-14, republished in N. Eilan (ed.), *The Second Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, London, Routledge, 2017; and Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2006.

2 Martin Heidegger [1927], *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962, chapter IV.

3 René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* [1937], presented by Étienne Gilson. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin: 1966, Fifth Part, in which Descartes establishes the criterion to decide if an extended thing is also a thinking thing. Animals have no reason; this is why they do not speak. And it is ‘morally impossible’ for an automaton to speak as we do to express our thoughts. After being excluded by the methodic doubt, the “other” is finally encountered through normal use of speech.

4 Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*.

person is an undeniable presence that imposes itself from the beginning. It is the presupposition you cannot put in doubt without turning incomprehensible how we acquired language and other social abilities. Descartes could not explicitly and seriously apply his methodic doubt to the meaning of words, and simply carry on with his meditations as if nothing has happened. Descartes' epistemological project obliges him to feign the inexistence of others until the end of the investigation. But this causes strangeness because the existence of others is something given quite clearly, distinctly, and constantly. Furthermore, all natural languages have a diachronic or historical dimension that has been studied since the XVIIIth century. What we call languages (abstract objects like French, English, Latin, etc.) are abstracted from the idiolects of the speakers-hearers of linguistic communities. Each one's idiolect is a sufficient proof, not only that other people taught us the social art of communication, but also that there were people teaching to the younger ones a long time ago and for many generations. Believing that one can feign that other people do not exist, and just writing down one's opinions on the subject in one's mother tongue, has a ring of contradiction.

I and thou are persons, and persons, above all, are agents. They have the capacity to make things happen according to plans. A personality is a set of dispositions somehow realized in the brain. It is, therefore, a second order disposition. Persons supervene on these dispositions. The way we act and react, feel, and face problems, all this is determined by dispositions. We all have, to some degree, capacities, abilities, repertoires of concepts and knowledges, competences, tastes, virtues, etc., that determine who we are for ourselves and the others. In dialogues, speaker and hearer, I and thou, are *participants* in the sense given to the word by Strawson, persons with responsibilities and capacity for "reactive attitudes" (see note 10 below).

The Second-Person Perspective

Those familiar with the literature in the philosophy of mind are well-aware of the structuring opposition between the first-person and the third-person perspectives. We have a privileged access to our own mental states, acts, or events, and there is clearly an asymmetry between the way we know our own mental states and the way we know the mental states of other persons. The first-person perspective is *subjective*.⁵

Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Prof. Dr. S. Strasser. Husserliana. Band I. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973. In the Fifth Part, Husserl reconstructs the idea of intersubjectivity through his complicated method of reduction-constitution. Reduction requires the suspension of judgment about any posit, including other people re-encountered through an "intentional penetration."

⁵ For a similar characterization, see Michael Pauen (2012) "The Second-Person Perspective", *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 55:

From that perspective we think of ourselves as conscious and rational beings, with responsibilities, commitments, and values. The knowledge we have about ourselves from that perspective is not scientific and does not require any special training, but it is the obliged starting point of everybody. We can never abandon that view of ourselves; it does not even make sense to believe we can.

The third-person perspective is the one of natural sciences. It is *objective*. From that perspective, we are organisms caught in the causal network of the world, like any other object around us. When natural sciences examine the human body, they reveal layers of an endless, astonishing complexity. Just the complexity of human brain is a constant source of admiration. We have a third-person perspective when different persons belonging to the same (scientific) community, can investigate the same objects, consider and weight the same evidence, share the same (regimented) language, the same methods, and reach the same conclusions. The third-person perspective presupposes the possibility to engage in the same sort of activity (investigating, theorizing, testing) and to agree with other people. Thus, it also presupposes accessing, somehow, and assessing, other people's beliefs. Without that (imperfect) access to other's beliefs, there wouldn't be objectivity. But this is precisely what we call *intersubjectivity*.

So, objectivity is grounded in intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is also based on the capacity to put oneself in someone else's skin. This is a first-person, metarepresentational capacity, that of representing other people's mental states, an ability grounded in the first-person perspective.⁶

It is now easy to see why the idea of introducing a second-person perspective became conceptually mandatory. The second-person perspective is intersubjective, rooted in the first-person perspective, and grounding the third-person perspective of science. The second-person perspective was needed to complete the picture, to close the gap, and to explain genetically how we can get outside the close circle of subjectivity by sharing languages, beliefs, and methods. The second-person perspective appears as indispensable for a better understanding of ourselves as agents provided with abilities to communicate and to use mentalist terms.

1, 33-49.

⁶ Thomas Nagel, in *A View from Nowhere*. Oxford: O.U.P. (1986) saw the problem quite clearly: "This book is about a single problem: how to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of the same world, the person and his viewpoint included. It is a problem that faces every creature with the impulse and the capacity to transcend its particular point of view and to conceive of the world as a whole." P. 3

Why did it take so Long?

If the recent introduction of a second-person perspective is so important, how to explain it was overlooked for centuries? As a matter of fact, it is not quite true. A long time ago, in Port-Royal, the great Arnauld saw clearly that *our minds are not completely opaque*. We can “penetrate imperfectly” each other’s minds, and this is what we do in any verbal interaction. We speak the way we do because we have that “imperfect penetration” of each other’s minds: “We cannot reflect, however little, on the nature of human language, without recognizing that it is entirely founded on this imperfect penetration of the mind of the others. This is why, in talking, there are so many things we do not express.”⁷ Today, we call that capacity “mind reading”.⁸ According to developmental psychologists, it starts developing very soon, at about 18 months, and is completed around 48 months, when children pass the false belief test.

One century after Port-Royal, Thomas Reid introduced the idea of *social operations of the mind*:

By [‘social operations’] I understand such operations as necessarily suppose intercourse with some other intelligent being. A man may understand and will; he may apprehend and judge and reason, though he should know of no intelligent being in the universe besides himself. But, when he asks information or receives it; when he bears testimony or receives the testimony of another; when he asks a favour, or accepts one; when he gives a command to his servant or receives one from a superior; when he plights his faith in a promise or contract – these are acts of social intercourse between intelligent beings, and can have no place in solitude. They suppose understanding and will; but they suppose something more, which is neither understanding nor will; that is society with other intelligent beings.

All languages are fitted to express the social as well as the solitary operations of the mind. Indeed, it may be affirmed, that, to express the former, is the primary and direct intention of language. A man who had no intercourse with any other intelligent beings, would never think of language.⁹

7 Arnauld A. & Nicole P. (1669-1672). *La grande Perpétuité de la foi de l’Église Catholique sur l’Eucharistie*, ed. by l’Abbé M***, Paris, Imprimerie de Migne, chez l’éditeur rue d’Ambroise, Hors la Barrière d’Enfer, 1841, Vol. 2, Book I, p. 81; my translation).

8 See Alvin Goldman, *Simulating Minds. The Philosophy, Psychology and Neuroscience of Mind Reading*. Oxford: O.U.P., 2006. The book is still one of the main sources of information on the subject.

9 Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* [1785], in *The Works of Thomas Reid*, Vol. 1, facsimile of the 1872 edition. Elibron Classics, 2005; p. 244 for the first quote, and p. 245 for the second. A close friend of Reid,

It is noteworthy that it is a commonsense philosopher, a critique of methodological solipsism, that elaborated such ideas.

The Use of Mental Terms

Ostensive teaching does not work for mental concepts. How do we learn to apply mental concepts at all? How do we come to use “I feel a pain”? And then “You are in pain”? A few decades ago, Peter F. Strawson raised an interesting hypothesis: “that it is a necessary condition of one’s ascribing states of consciousness, experiences, to oneself, in the way one does, that one should also ascribe them, or be prepared to ascribe them, to others who are not oneself.”¹⁰ The ability to apply mental concepts to other people depends on the ability to apply them to oneself, and *vice versa*.

According to Rudder-Backer, the first-person perspective comes in two degrees. In the first degree, it is something we share with other animals, that is, having an original standpoint on the world around us. But a human being needs more to become a person. A first-person perspective in the full sense of the word (second degree) is needed, and to get there she must have at her disposal a repertoire of concepts through which she can think of herself as distinct of any other thing or person.¹¹ Having a first-person perspective is then a property one cannot have in isolation.

We have learned from Externalism that the instantiation of relational or extrinsic properties presuppose the existence of something or someone else.¹² In “The Second Person,” Davidson, another externalist, exposes once more his idea

James Gregory, used the idea of social operation of mind in a surprising anticipation of speech acts theory. J. Gregory, “The Theory of the Moods of Verbs”, *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 1790.

10 P. F. Strawson (1959), *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London: Routledge, 1959, p. 99. Strawson’s influential paper, “Freedom and Resentment,” is an important source for the debate on the second-person perspective, in which he drew a famous distinction between participant and objective standpoint. The later refers to people and things in the deterministic natural world, i.e. from an objective point of view, whereas the former, on the contrary, presupposes other people and their responsibility, introducing into the ethical debate the notion of “reactive attitudes” like gratitude, indignation, shame, anger, resentment, sympathy, guilt, and moral blame, which involve, for their activation, the presence of another person or other people. “Freedom and Resentment,” *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 48, 1962, pp. 1–25, republished in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, London, Methuen, 1974.

11 Lynne Rudder Baker, *Person and Bodies. A Constitutive view*. Cambridge: C.U.P., 2000: “the first-person perspective is relational in that it would be impossible for a being truly alone in the universe to have a first-person perspective.” Pp. 69-70.

12 See Susana Nuccetelli (ed.), *New Essays on Semantic Externalism and Self-Knowledge*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press, 2003, for a presentation and explanation of the variety of extrinsic properties.

of triangulation: a learner (usually a child), a teacher, who can be anyone (a family member, a neighbor, etc.), and a common background. Triangulation is a way to explain how we acquire our basic concepts, the meanings of words, and our propositional attitudes. Here is the idea: “. . . [I]f I am right, the kind of triangulation I have described, while not sufficient to establish that a creature has a concept of a particular object or kind of object, is necessary if there is to be any answer at all to the question of what its concepts are concepts of.”¹³ “. . . [W]ithout a second creature responding to the first, there can be no answer to the question.” (*Ibid.*). Triangulation establishes the public character of language: “if anyone is to speak a language, there must be another creature interacting with the speaker.” (*Ibid.*) Davidson goes further and defends the social character of thought: “Belief, intention, and the other propositional attitudes are all social in that they are states a creature cannot be in without having the concept of intersubjective truth, and this is a concept one cannot have without sharing, and knowing that one shares, a world and a way of thinking about the world with someone else.”¹⁴ The second person is as real as the first person; both must have a repertoire of concepts rich enough to conceive themselves as distinct from anything or anyone else. Both are the *relata* in any verbal interaction, conversation, or genuine dialogue.

Illocutionary Points, Perlocutionary Plans

I approach dialogue as a collaborative activity whose ultimate constituents are illocutionary acts. My approach is grounded in action theory and speech act theory. A first important point: none of this, actions in general, and speech acts, can be described adequately without the use of mental concepts.

In action theory, I defend the following thesis about human agency: agents very rarely perform isolated actions. Our actions, most of the time, are parts of *plans*. I take it as an important fact about human agency. Naturally, this holds for illocutionary acts. An isolated illocutionary act is usually of an expressive type (like “Ouch!”, “Oups!” or “Hello!”); these are easy to understand. Or it can be a reaction to another illocutionary act (like “No!” or “Not again!”), or to a situation (“Seat belt, please!” “Be quiet!”), but then they are not completely isolated after all. Someone asserting, out of the blue, “I have five fingers in my right hand” (Searle’s example), will cause perplexity (why calling attention to something standard?). The same sentence, used in front of two policemen searching for the murderer with four fingers in his right hand, will be easily and immediately understood.

Actions are performed for reasons and when the reasons are not easily grasped, the interpretation is at best precarious. Most of the time, illocutionary acts are understood as parts of a whole discourse or sequence of illocutionary acts. Normally, in dialogues, sequences of illocutionary acts are produced by different agents engaged in a conversation. A whole sequence can be divided in subsequences, each one ultimately produced by a single agent. But a dialogue involves *turn takings*: I speak, you listen; you speak, I listen.

Illocutionary acts are the bedrock of conversational analysis. They are the minimal unit of communication and understanding in natural languages. They usually have the form F(P), “F” being an illocutionary force, and “P” a propositional content. Illocutionary acts are conventionally generated by utterance acts, which are the basic actions essential to human language.¹⁵ They are always performed – at least in serious discourse – *with expectations about the success and satisfaction of these acts*. Any real action or activity can fail, and any action or activity has an internal criterion of success, thence conditions of success. When we form the intention to do something, we automatically have a representation of what would count as success. Illocutionary acts have an illocutionary point¹⁶ which is the intention with which the act is performed. When acting, naturally, we expect success. Expecting is just believing that something will happen soon in a certain way. But success is not everything. We also expect that our illocutionary acts (or those of other trustable speakers engaged in the same dialogue) will be satisfied (that assertions will be true, that promises will be kept, that orders will be obeyed, etc.). Of course, satisfaction cannot be guaranteed. I can issue an order successfully (with the required authority), and the order not be obeyed; I can put myself successfully under the obligation to do something (a promise), but an event could prevent me to honor my promise. In cases like these, an illocutionary act is performed with success, but is not satisfied. An ideal illocutionary act is performed with success, is satisfied and sincere.

Moreover, most of the time, we perform illocutionary acts with perlocutionary intentions. The perlocutionary is, so to speak, the motor of human communication. We expect

15 Alvin Goldman (1970) *A Theory of Human Action*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, p. 26: “Act-token A of agent S conventionally generates act token A’ of agent S only if the performance of A in circumstances C (possibly null), together with a rule R saying that A done in C counts as A’, guarantee the performance of A.” An utterance-act (token) generates the assertion that it is raining in virtue of conventions associating the sentence “It is raining” to the propositional content of the assertion that it is raining.

16 See Searle, J. and Vanderveken, D. (1985) *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*. Cambridge: C.U.P., p. 87: “... illocutionary point is the internal point or purpose of a type of illocution. Illocutionary point always determines direction of fit; that is the illocutionary point determines how the propositional content is presented as relating to the world of utterance.”

13 Davidson, op. cit., p. 263.

14 *Ibidem*, p. 265.

all the time that our *perlocutionary plans* will be fulfilled. I assert successively different propositions P_1 , P_2 , etc., with the perlocutionary intention to *convince* you that another proposition is true, or with the intention to irritate you, to amuse you, to cause you to act, and I do that because, somehow, it matters to me. Sometimes, when performing illocutionary acts, we expect a determined perlocutionary effect, but the shot backfires, and the opposite of the expected happens. You tell jokes with the intention of amusing the hearer, but the jokes irritate her. You perform assertions with the intention to convince, but the hearer disagrees and presents a strong counterargument. The satisfaction of perlocutionary plans, as we can see, is not regulated by clear-cut conventions. Nonetheless, with a few exceptions, speaker's main intention is always perlocutionary. Most of the time, illocutionary acts are means to an end and this end is the satisfaction of perlocutionary intentions.

With all this in mind, I suggest, as a first approximation, the following analysis of what a serious dialogue is:

A sequence S of illocutionary acts performed (alternately) by agents A and B constitutes a *serious dialogue* =_{def.} 1) A and B , each one in his turn, do everything necessary to perform each element of S ; 2) A and B have good reasons for expecting that the conditions of success and satisfaction of the acts in S will be fulfilled; 3) A and B performs (each one in his turn) the acts in S expecting the satisfaction of his/her perlocutionary intentions and plans.

Non-serious dialogues are those happening in movies or on the stage of a theatrical play when the actors have no real expectations about the conditions of satisfaction of their speech acts. Nothing is at stake in these dialogues, which is not to say that fictional works cannot teach us very serious lessons.

Spontaneous Understanding

Consider for one moment the internal accusative of the verb "understanding". The list covers almost everything that is intelligible. We are told that people can understand sentences, languages, cultures, books, face expressions, persons, attitudes, expectations, arithmetical series, problems, strategies, musical phrases, paintings, narratives, situations, physical systems, mechanisms, and certainly much more. My suggestion is that linguistic understanding is only a part of it, and not an autonomous (modular) part. As a contextualist in philosophical semantics, I also claim that *linguistic understanding relies on more primitive forms of understanding, especially the understanding of situations*.

Let me use here a distinction between *comprehension*

and *interpretation*, introduced by Tyler Burge¹⁷ two decades ago:

Comprehension understands that is epistemically immediate, unreasoned, and non-inferential. First-person comprehension is the minimal understanding presupposed in any thinking, in beings that understand their thoughts at all.

[...] I include words, in a derivative sense, as things one can comprehend in the first-person way. One comprehends the words in one's idiolect as one uses them. The comprehended words are the direct expression of thoughts one comprehends. They express one's thoughts without mediation of further words or thoughts.

[...] Interpretation arises out of there being a question or issue about how to understand a candidate object of interpretation. Interpretation is always from the third person point of view. I conjecture that it is always epistemically inferential.

According to Burge, the first instance of understanding is the understanding of our own thoughts, and they are understood, mainly, in a non-inferential way. Of course, there are exceptions. After all, sometimes, people get confused; they don't know exactly what they want, for instance. And there can be degrees of understanding, or an incomplete grasping of a proposition. One may discover that one's belief that P has some unexpected presupposition or logical consequences. This corresponds usually to a deepening of our understanding. Thoughts readily expressible by linguistic means (full-fledged thoughts) and expressed by others are understood immediately when there is no need to interpret them. This happens when there is a strong convergence between idiolects. On the other hand, interpretation is reflexive and inferential, and certainly does not correspond to what I call "spontaneous linguistic understanding." Comprehension, in Burge's sense, does.

Another important distinction is due to Michael Dummett, that between *occurrent* understanding and *dispositional* understanding.¹⁸ First, we have a dispositional understanding, a capacity to understand sentences, expressions, bits of language. In that case, we understand what *sentences* mean, and they mean what they do in virtue of conventions, that is, social regularities of a certain type. Then we have *occurrent* understanding of utterances. In

17 Tyler Burge, "Comprehension and Interpretation", in L.E. Hahn (ed.): *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*. Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1999, 236-237.

18 Michael Dummett, *Origins of Analytic Philosophy*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1993. Especially chapter 10.

that case, what we understand is what *speakers* mean; in the context of utterance. The understanding of utterances is not only the understanding of sentences-token; it is also and more basically the understanding of actions performed for such and such a reason in a highly specific context. The second kind of understanding clearly depends on the first kind of understanding. Quick occurrent understanding presupposes the existence of a huge set of dispositions acquired along the first years of a child's life (in the case of mother tongue). Segmentation and discourse recognition would be impossible without that set of dispositions. It represents the knowledge we have of a language (at least of our idiolect), that is, the abilities to speak and understand, to write and read. Basically, this is the knowledge of sound patterns (phonological knowledge) and the knowledge of what these sound patterns are regularly used to mean (semantic knowledge). Consequently, *our concept of spontaneous linguistic understanding is tied to that of occurrent understanding*. Dispositional understanding is not "spontaneous". Occurrent understanding is the autonomous exercise of an ability that always takes place in a specific context of utterance.

What is the direct object of spontaneous linguistic understanding? To answer this question, we need one more distinction, that between two kinds of conventions: *descriptive* and *demonstrative* conventions. Austin introduced the distinction in his famous article, "Truth" [1950].¹⁹ Descriptive conventions are general in nature; they describe social regularities. We find them in dictionaries. The lexicographer tries to capture the standard use of a word in a linguistic community. The semantic value determined by these conventions is not definitive. We always speak in highly specific contexts, where we can possibly refer to singular things in our immediate environment. Demonstrative conventions close the gap between the generality of meaning and the singularity of things (events, facts) encountered haphazardly. When I say, for instance, "My table is full of books," I use the word "table" to refer to my table in my room. I am not speaking of tables in general; I'm referring to the one present in the context of use. Descriptive conventions fix standing meanings. Demonstrative conventions give us occasion meaning. The object of dispositional understanding is standing meaning. It is the knowledge we have of the meaning of words in our idiolect. The object of occurrent understanding is occasion meaning, the enriched meaning derived in context. It represents the knowledge we have of the meaning of a sentence uttered on a given occasion. Spontaneous linguistic understanding is always understanding of occasion meaning. Therefore, it is always context-sensitive.

19 John L. Austin, "Truth" [1950], in *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979, pp. 121-122.

Occurrent understanding of sentences is quick and proceeds, first, by identifying the derived semantic values of the sub-sentential parts of the sentence; this always precedes any act of predication. It is enough to know the situation we are in, the objects around us, and the agents of the context to derive the semantic values of the words used. The next step consists in identifying the act of predication, I mean, what is predicated of what. This is the same as grasping a proposition. When the proposition grasped is a general one or a complex one, the identification of the first and second order predication is required; otherwise, the argument must also be identified in case of atomic proposition of the form F(a). In case of relations, especially asymmetric relations, the order of predication is, of course, important.²⁰ Predication (or functional application) is the cement of propositions. The identification of various constituents and structural elements looks like a complex process, but this is just a product of analysis. When I see an old friend in a crowd, I do not pay any special attention to her eyebrows, chinks, hairs, the color of her eyes, etc. All this is familiar, and it is enough. I recognize her at once. The same holds for the spontaneous understanding of a sentence: if I know the words, and if the structure is not too complex, the truth conditions are grasped at once.

Here the following contrast can be helpful. Suppose you are a tourist visiting a country speaking a language you do not master very well. Setting aside segmentation problems, you can understand, at least on some occasions, what the natives *mean*, but the understanding of what they *say* exactly is a painful and frustrating process. You must pay attention constantly at every word in every sentence. You have the impression that the natives speak very fast all the time, and to form a less than secure interpretation of an utterance, you must make a lot of inferences based on analytical hypotheses – to fill the gaps for the words you do not know yet – and on contextual clues. At night, you're back at the hotel, usually with a headache. After a few weeks, you return to your homeland and speak with the members of your family. Here is the contrast: at home, you enjoy fluent, effortless experiences of linguistic understanding. Very much like perception, these experiences are almost passive. You continuously get an "automatic," fast and direct access to intuitive satisfaction conditions for any sentence of any syntactic type. This is spontaneous linguistic understanding. Far from exceptional, it is the normal conditions of communication of most people on Earth!

20 See Daniel Vanderveken, *Meaning and Speech Acts*. Volume II: Formal Semantics of Success and Satisfaction. Cambridge: C.U.P., 1991, p. 50 and ff, for a theory of propositions especially designed for speech act theory.

The Second Person in Dialogue

Fictional works are full of dialogues. We understand dialogues involving fictional characters pretty much as we do for real dialogues between real persons. By “real persons” here I mean any person worrying about daily activities, not actors on the stage. Fictional characters are abstract artefacts, roles that can be played by different actors. Real persons are *concreta*, occupants of tridimensional space. They are bearers of all kinds of mental states, acts and events. They have sensations, desires, beliefs, emotions, and memories they do not express. But all this is relevant for explaining people’s behavior. Only a very small part of our mental life is expressed in dialogues. I and thou have a “thickness” that fictional characters do not have. I and thou recognize each other as persons. What fictional characters do not express on the stage or in front of cameras is simply irrelevant. What they do is all in the script.

Mutual understanding comes in degrees. Familiarity, of course, favors mutual understanding, but the convergence of the idiolects is also a highly favorable condition. Between two persons of the same family speaking their mother tongue, we can expect a very high degree, a “direct meeting of minds.”²¹ However, between two strangers using a language not fully mastered, the score expected should be low. What we *hear* in a dialogue is a voice. The meanings always belong to each one idiolect. Meanings do not ride on sound waves from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the hearer. When we hear a sound-word, it has the meaning it has according to our idiolect. There is no other meaning at our disposal.

What about automata and robots? Can we have a genuine dialogue with a machine? Is the dialogue between Hal 9000 and the astronaut David Bowman in *2001. A Space Odyssey* a genuine dialogue? A lot of work has been done to develop a man-machine interaction in a way that simulates as much as possible a man-man interaction. To construct intelligent machines capable of interacting naturally with potential users, we need to develop a language with a very powerful syntax, enabling the machine to simulate on many occasions what would be a usual interaction between competent

speakers. We saw (note 2) that Descartes gave a negative answer to our question. I take side with him. The language used by the machine needs to be highly *regimented*, while ordinary language has an irreducible “open texture.”²² The normal use of language is inseparable from our encyclopedic knowledge and supposes a great deal of it. Using a sentence in a new context supposes judgments of similarity and reasonableness. But, according to Hilary Putnam, there is no algorithm corresponding to reasonableness.²³ There are no universal criteria of reasonableness. Reasonableness is itself determined contextually. So, as Putnam noticed, it cannot be reduced to an algorithm. We do things machines can’t do. Differently from machines, we commit a lot of mistakes. This makes us human. We correct them and go forward facing constantly new situations. If machines could have sentiments, they would envy our versatility.

References

1. Arnauld A, Nicole P (1669-1672) *La grande Perpétuité de la foi de l’Église Catholique sur l’Eucharistie*. l’Abbé M (Ed.), Paris, Imprimerie de Migne, chez l’éditeur rue d’Ambroise, Hors la Barrière d’Enfer.
2. John L Austin (1979) “Truth” [1950]. In: *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
3. Tyler Burge (1999) *Comprehension and Interpretation*. In: Hahn LE (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*. Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, pp: 236-237.
4. Stephen Darwall (2006) *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press.
5. Donald Davidson (1992) *The Second Person*. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 17(1): 255-267.
6. Michael Dummett (1993) *Origins of Analytic Philosophy*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
7. Naomi Eilan (2014) “You Turn”, *Philosophical Exploration*, pp: 1-14, republished in Eilan N (2017) *The Second Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. London, Routledge.

21 Barry C. Smith, “Speech Sounds and the Direct Meeting of Minds”, in Matthew Nudds & Casey O’Callaghan (eds.) *Sounds and Perception: New Philosophical Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2009), chapter 9, 183-210. “In listening to your voice, I am directly in contact with you as a person; but in hearing you say certain things, I supply meanings for the words I recognize you to be uttering. I simply always experience these words, at first, as said or heard with the meanings they have for me—the meanings I have endowed them with. The immediacy of the experience I have in hearing what you say is due to the inseparability for me of these words and these meanings. If my immediate understanding of you does not work, and the default condition—where you and I have attached the same meanings to these words—fails, I need to distance myself from my immediate understanding and engage in interpretation.” P. 208.

22 Friedrich Waismann, “Verifiability”, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume XIX (1945).

23 Hilary Putnam. *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body and World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 125: “The meanings of the words does (sic) restrict what can be said using them; but what can be said using them, consistently with the meaning of the words, depends on our ability to figure out how it is reasonable to use those words, given those meanings (given a certain history of prior uses), in novel circumstances. And, pace Chomsky, the idea that reasonableness itself can be reduced to an algorithm is a scientific fantasy.”

8. Alvin Goldman (2006) *Simulating Minds. The Philosophy, Psychology and Neuroscience of Mind Reading*. Oxford: O.U.P.
9. Alvin Goldman (1970) *A Theory of Human Action*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
10. James Gregory (1790) *The Theory of the Moods of Verbs*. Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.
11. Martin Heidegger (1927) *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1962.
12. Edmund Husserl (1973) *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*. Herausgegeben und eingeleitet von Prof. Dr. S. Strasser. Husserliana. Band I. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
13. Thomas Nagel (1986) *A View from Nowhere*. Oxford: O.U.P.
14. Susana Nuccetelli (2003) *New Essays on Semantic Externalism and Self-Knowledge*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.
15. Michael Pauen (2012) *The Second-Person Perspective*. *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 55(1): 33-49.
16. Hilary Putnam (1999) *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body and World*. New York: Columbia University Press.
17. Thomas Reid (1788) *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*. In: *The Works of Thomas Reid*. 1st (Vol.), facsimile of the 1872 edition. Elibron Classics, 2005.
18. Lynne Rudder Baker (2000) *Person and Bodies. A Constitutive view*. Cambridge: C.U.P.
19. John Searle, Daniel Vanderveken (1985) *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*. Cambridge: C.U.P.
20. Barry C Smith (2009) *Speech Sounds and the Direct Meeting of Minds*. In: Matthew N, O'Callaghan C (Eds.), *Sounds and Perception: New Philosophical Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 9th Chapter, pp: 183-210.
21. Peter F Strawson (1959) *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*. London: Routledge.
22. Peter F Strawson (1962) *Freedom and Resentment*. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48: 1-25. republished in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, London, Methuen, 1974.
23. Daniel Vanderveken (1991) *Meaning and Speech Acts. Volume II: Formal Semantics of Success and Satisfaction*. Cambridge: C.U.P.
24. Friedrich Waismann (1947) *Verifiability*. *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 12(3): 101-101.

