

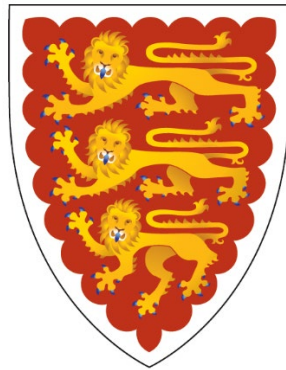
IS SECOND-PERSON RELATEDNESS A FACTOR IN THE FACULTY OF UNDERSTANDING? A PHILOSOPHICAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY

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Word Count

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Short Abstract

This thesis explores whether there are certain aspects to the faculty of understanding which are enabled (perhaps uniquely) through “second-person relatedness,” a mode of relation which purportedly obtains in situations where “I” relate to “you” in distinct ways. This relational mode was the theme of Martin Buber’s celebrated book *I and Thou*, and in more recent years, it has become an increasingly important focus in experimental psychology, social neuroscience, philosophy, and theology.

Some accounts suggest that second-person relatedness aids in the achievement of *understanding* in a manner that cannot be substituted by other forms of learning. Understanding is usually characterized as a more holistic and interrelated quality than knowledge, yet, due to the rise of skepticism, modern epistemology has primarily focused on justification, namely, the issue of grounding certainty in knowledge, typically expressed in propositional form. On the other hand, some scholars have begun to orient their focus on what they view as the more difficult, yet superior, epistemic achievement of understanding – regarding natural truths of all kinds, and, purported Christian revelation.

On some accounts, situations involving second-person relatedness are important and may even be essential to the communication of understanding. These situations can be described in terms of joint attention, a phenomenon in which two persons “share awareness of the sharing of [their] focus” (Hobson, 2005). In what follows, I survey a range of objections to this view, before offering my own account, and responding to the objections.

In the account I develop, drawing from various researchers, I determine that joint attention is constitutive of second-person relatedness, and I showcase this special type of relatedness in diverse contexts of epistemic success, including theology, by means of Thomas Aquinas’ account of the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit. I conclude that second-person relatedness is indeed a crucial aspect of the communication of understanding, a conclusion which has implications for a wide variety of fields, including artificial intelligence.

Long Abstract

Is second-person relatedness a factor in the faculty of understanding? Another way of asking the question is this. Are there aspects to us coming to *understand* which rely on or are enhanced by situations in which “I” relate to “you” in distinct ways? In chapter 1, I introduce this question and explain what I mean by various terms, especially “understanding.” In short, to understand “one must not only know a thing, one must also grasp its cause or explanation. This is to understand it: to know in a deep sense what it is and how it has come to be” (Lear, 1988). Then in chapter 2, I outline the following range of objections, or arguments which in different ways state that second-person relatedness is *not* a factor in the faculty of understanding.

First, the philosophers Christopher Peacocke, Richard Heck and Daniel Dennett, and the psychologists Robert Gordon, Alvin Goldman, and Axel Seemann among others argue that the second-person perspective is reducible to forms of the first- and/or third-person perspective(s), and therefore there is no distinct reality corresponding to the second-person perspective. This objection emerges out of the predominant Anglo-American analytical philosophy of mind, typically associated with the philosophical and psychological umbrella-term “Theory of Mind.”

Second, even if second-person relatedness exists, it may not be a factor in gaining understanding. There seems to be a commonsense case, taken from experience and history, that teaches that the cognitive benefits of understanding can be and often are achieved without reference to other persons. Prominent examples include Archimedes, who reputedly had a flash of insight while in the baths of Syracuse, and modern mathematical “lone geniuses” who spend long periods alone. Moreover, some hermits or solitaries have emphasized the importance of isolation – as opposed to sociality – in gaining epistemic successes of all kinds.

Third, even if second-person relatedness does exist and can in principle contribute to understanding, this contribution is not unique, when considering the trajectory of advancement in artificial intelligence. According to AI-futurists such as Nick Bostrom and Anders Sandberg, artificially intelligent machines, regardless of whether they will ever have subjectivity or consciousness (let alone personhood), will one day in the (near) future nevertheless be able to outperform humanity’s intellectual abilities across all intellectual domains. This claim about hypothetical AI capability implicitly or explicitly encompasses either the faculty of understanding, or at least the results associated with this faculty in practical situations. Yet AI, at least at present, operates via stepwise, discursive processes, performable by impersonal computer chips that do not stand in second-person relationships. Therefore, on this reasoning, second-person relatedness is at the very least dispensable with regards to the faculty of understanding.

Finally, fourth, second-person relatedness may indeed exist, and such relatedness may indeed contribute to understanding, but communications from second persons may nevertheless enable understanding without actual, rich or perfective, second-person relatedness. A situation of this kind can be discerned in the biblical example of Balaam in Numbers chapters 22-24. Balaam was a pagan prophet who was used by God to deliver truthful insights about the Israelites. On this account, Balaam gained genuine understanding from a second person (God). According to the full biblical witness and commentators, including St. John Henry Cardinal Newman, however, Balaam was quite the opposite of a saint, and therefore he did not enjoy the kind of second-person relatedness that is plausibly constitutive of a covenantal relationship with God. Balaam, therefore, serves as an example of someone who gains understanding from a second person, but without second-person relatedness.

In chapters three and four, I outline the arguments for my case and respond to these objections as follows.

First, that the second-person perspective does exist is plausible due to the existence of distinct second-person grammatical forms, with rules of grammar that are different from the rules for objects. Furthermore, the existence of these forms plausibly arises in the context of a specific kind of interpersonal interaction called *joint attention*. Joint attention is obtained when people co-attend *to* one another, called dyadic joint attention, or *with* one another in reference to some third object, called triadic joint attention (where the “object” is not necessarily a physical item, but can be an immaterial concept, a sports game, a piece of music or a movie, etc.). For example, when two people are in the same room and each is staring at a lit candle, there can be a *mutual* awareness of the other person *and* a mutual awareness of the other person attending to the candle. In instances like these, “when there is another person with whom you are jointly attending to...the existence of that other person enters into the individuation of your experience” (Campbell, 2005). Another way of encapsulating the idea is provided by Peter Hobson, who describes joint attention as a sharing of “awareness of the sharing of the focus” between two persons (Hobson, 2005). In this thesis, I draw from inspiration from Martin Buber and others to argue that this joint attention does exist and gives rise to a specific kind of interpersonal relation that can appropriately be called *second-person relatedness*.

Second, the faculty of understanding does seem to be associated with second-person relatedness. I begin this line of argument by making a commonsense case, namely, that the second person is closely associated with the process of learning – across a huge range of human situations. Some everyday examples include (1) children learning in the context of their interaction with parents, caregivers, or siblings during upbringing, (2) schoolteachers teaching young adults, and (3) the example of military training instructors instilling competency and understanding into their troops. I employ a mix of academics and

laypeople/resources to make these points. Second-person relatedness via joint attention, furthermore, seems to be plausibly important in a child's cognitive formation of the faculty of understanding, showcased by at least two critical occurrences of joint attention: gaze-following and pointing. Phenomena like these are what Hobson calls a "psychological orientation" or synchronization of perspectives between the child and the parent (or caregiver, or sibling/peer), and one scholar remarks that joint attention activities account for the "crucial difference between human cognition and that of other species" (Tomasello, 2005). Moreover, some recent literature on teaching helps to link second-person relatedness/joint attention and understanding. Philosopher Will Small argues that teaching, or the communication of understanding in educational contexts, occurs when the teacher and the student are both psychologically engaged such that the teacher helps the student envision something "from her [the teacher's] own vantage point" (Small, 2014). Something similar is obtained in the case of military training, namely, that the ability to make sense out of, or understand, a combat situation seems to rely on what could be described as joint attention between the commander and his troops. Additionally, I look at second-person relatedness and theological understanding. Understanding Christian revelation, i.e. theology, is ultimately a matter of *knowing persons*, namely, knowing the personal God. Furthermore, on Thomas Aquinas' account, and drawing from Andrew Pinsent's research, an essential kind of theological understanding is only secured by means of the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit, where these divinely infused gifts might best be understood as second-personal *habitus*, via their metaphorical correspondence to joint attention. According to this interpretation, the second person is God the Holy Spirit in the salvific communication of an understanding of revelation.

Third, this contribution does not seem to be replaceable by means that are impersonal and that do not involve second persons, namely, advanced AI. I argue this case by examining those instances where people have difficulty engaging in second-person relatedness, via joint attention, specifically, people with autism spectrum disorder. I examine an extended case-study carried out by Peter Hobson, as well as the personal account of late autistic author Donna Williams (in her autobiography *Nobody Nowhere*) to show that in these cases, effected persons lack various cognitive developments early in their lives, plausibly due to phenomena which might be described as a lack or a difficulty in engaging in this joint attention, or, the ability for "I" (the autistic person) to relate to "you" (other people) in interpersonally rich ways. This difficulty inhibits the synchronization of psychological orientation between the autistic person and his or her caregivers or peers, resulting in cognitive shortfalls that negatively affect the faculty of understanding. Finally, however, I show that this lack of a holistic grasp of wholes, pertinent to the faculty of understanding, has at least partially accounted for why an artificial general intelligence (AGI) has yet to be attained by those seeking to engineer one. For a machine to have general intelligence, it must possess "the ability to understand, learn and apply knowledge across a wide range of tasks and domains" (Sullivan, 2023). Yet, all current forms of AI share this fundamental inability to *understand*, in a manner that in some ways resembles the condition of those with autism.

In both cases, moreover, there is a related shortfall in second-person relatedness that seems to be crucial in securing understanding. In other words, these varied accounts corroborate the proposal that second-person relatedness plays a role in the faculty of understanding that cannot be replaced by impersonal means.

Fourth, this role likely cannot be substituted by communications from second persons that lack the kind of second-person relatedness associated with certain forms of joint attention. In the specific case regarding Balaam, there is something essential missing in his non-relational (non-second-personal or imperfectly second-personal) interactions with God. Balaam understands some things, clearly, but fails to grasp other truths – such as God’s ability to render judgment upon him despite Balaam strictly adhering to God’s injunction in Numbers 22-24. Other biblical examples display something similar, such as the merely piecemeal understanding which demons seem to enjoy in their interactions with Christ. A more complete account of Aquinas’ treatment of the faculty of understanding, however, helps to explain cases like these instances. On Aquinas’ account (*ST* 2a2ae, q.8, and other places), understanding of a certain kind is a “requisite for prophecy,” and “is a kind of enlightenment of the mind with regard to the things revealed to the prophet,” but this enlightenment may only be partial, and not necessarily second-personal by virtue of the divine *gift* of understanding, a *habitus* which regards “a right estimate about the last end.” Aquinas remarks that this gift can be absent in a person “however much the Holy Spirit may have enlightened it [the person’s faculty of understanding] in regard to other truths.” In other words, on this account, Balaam’s faculty of understanding was divinely enlightened on specific matters, but he lacked the understanding associated with the life of grace, illuminating all aspects of a person’s life. For this reason, in the biblical account, Balaam’s understanding did not lead him to make decisions conducive to the wisdom associated with ultimate personal success (eternal redemption), nor did he understand certain other truths – resulting in some practical implications – that he would have were Balaam in a second-person relationship with God. By implication, therefore, communications from other persons, without second-person relatedness, probably *cannot* deliver full understanding.

I end the thesis in chapter five and propose that the communication of understanding from a second person, in the manner of second-person relatedness, is plausibly irreducible to other modes of learning. I therefore conclude that, yes, second-person relatedness is a factor and probably even an indispensable factor in the faculty of understanding. I then discuss some key implications from this conclusion, which are significant and far reaching for philosophers, scientists, theologians, and those responsible for setting the future direction of training for the US Armed Forces.

To Leroy Hill, mentor and friend, and his wife Margy.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Is second-person relatedness a factor in the faculty of understanding? Another way of asking the question is this. Are there aspects to us coming to *understand* which rely on or are enhanced by situations which are distinctively interpersonal, in which “I” relate to “you” in certain ways? The nature of this question is somewhat specialized and requires explanation.

First, the concept of *understanding* is a concept that is not easily defined or described. On the other hand, there seem to be many good reasons to suppose that understanding is an important epistemic achievement, and a topic worth exploring. Although I provide a more thorough examination and identification of the term “understanding” below, the overall sense or spirit of the term is captured by a famous quote attributed to Albert Einstein: “any fool can know. The point is to understand.”¹ Additionally, many different languages have their own word for understanding, distinct from other epistemic achievements like knowledge or insight.² In other words, there seems to be an old and common instinct that understanding is something special, something to be sought after. As philosopher Jonathan Lear describes it, for Aristotle, to understand “one must not only know a thing, one must also grasp its cause or explanation. This is to understand it: to know in a deep sense what it is and how it has come

¹ There is some debate over the attribution of this quote; however, because it has become widely regarded as a truism, the quote remains useful for my point. “Any Fool Can Know. The Point Is To Understand – Quote Investigator,” November 20, 2021, <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2021/11/20/fool-know/>.

² The most well-known is arguably the German *verstehen* (understanding) vs *wissen* (knowledge). But many other languages also have similar distinctions. See Alison Hills, “Understanding Why,” *Noûs* (Bloomington, Indiana) 50, no. 4 (2016): 661–88.

to be.”³ Although these observations might not clear up the murkiness surrounding the precise definition of understanding, they do have some intuitive appeal.

Second, the notion of a distinctively interpersonal perspective, an “I-you” mode of thought, as it were, might be a total fiction – at least, according to some accounts (explored in chapter 2), it is fiction. Additionally, even if there is something unique about the “I-you,” perhaps it has nothing to do with understanding. In either case, such an outcome would help galvanize some critics targeted against those methods of learning that are motivated by a high regard for the interpersonal domain.

Take the Oxford University tutorial system, for example (the context in which this thesis developed). The purpose behind the historic tutorial system – a famed method of learning which involves lots of one-on-one interpersonal interaction – is to impart *understanding* to students, at all academic levels. The time and financial investment required for such a method, however, is costly – especially when compared to other teaching methods that use large-audience lectures (which have minimal two-way interaction), or pre-packaged lessons – increasingly accessible online – that are completely absent interpersonal interaction. Some have insisted, even, that places like Oxford and Cambridge should rid the British taxpayer of the costly tutorial system, so that those tax funds can be used towards other ends.⁴ After all, on certain critics’ account, the tutorial system is a bygone of an age that did not have the technical wonders of modernity, now available to today’s educators.

³ Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 6.

⁴ At a popular level, see this complaint from an opinion piece: Alexander Rankine, “We Must End Our Love Affair with the Tutorial System,” *Cherwell* (blog), March 6, 2015, <https://cherwell.org/2015/03/06/we-must-end-our-love-affair-with-the-tutorial-system/>. For a more researched perspective, see Paul Tristen Balwant and Roshnie Doon, “Alternatives to the Conventional ‘Oxford’ Tutorial Model: A Scoping Review,” *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 18, no. 1 (June 3, 2021): 1-24.

Indeed, this notion of technology brings up the related, evolving cultural consciousness which surrounds artificial intelligence, or AI. Instead of addressing new challenges by forming competent thinkers (through the allegedly outmoded, inefficient, and costly methods of the tutorial system, for example), perhaps society should seek to outsource its cognitive labor entirely to advanced artificially intelligent machines. Many AI have, in fact, been able to produce some rather impressive outcomes: there are AI that can outperform human chess champions, there are AI that can generate language at a relatively sophisticated level, other AI can generate stunning and creative-looking pictures, videos, and even harmonious music. Perhaps, then, humanity should be focusing its cognitive efforts towards the safe, but successful, creation of an AI “superintelligence,” a machine so advanced that it will perform any intellectual task that humanity might need, thereby launching the world into a technological utopia (so long as the risks of a rogue AI can be appropriately managed...perhaps, even, by another AI).

In the words of well-known transhumanist, AI-specialist, and philosopher Nick Bostrom, humanity should adopt this approach towards the creation of a superintelligence because, optimistically, “we could have this superintelligence and it could do everything [solve any problem, such as climate change, or disease].”⁵ If successful, Bostrom is confident that humanity will be able to reach this utopia, a “quest” achieved by humanity becoming “master builders” to “build themselves up.”⁶

⁵ Quote is from a published interview with Bostrom. Will Knight, “Nick Bostrom Made the World Fear AI. Now He Asks: What If It Fixes Everything?,” *Wired*, <https://www.wired.com/story/nick-bostrom-fear-ai-fix-everything/>.

⁶ Nick Bostrom, “Letter from Utopia,” *Studies in Ethics, Law, and Technology* 2, no. 1 (2008): 6.

These latter remarks are somewhat striking; they are taken from Bostrom’s “Letter from Utopia,” and this letter contains several phrases that are quite reminiscent of what one might come across in a Christian homily or a theological reflection concerning man’s ultimate, desirable end.⁷ Indeed, what might second-person relatedness have to do with specifically theological understanding? Perhaps all that is required for one to gain theological understanding is an apprehension of the right “facts,” the right beliefs to be adhered. On this account, there does not seem to be any kind of theological understanding which cannot be obtained, in principle, through self-study of the relevant theological texts, and/or interactions with theological scholars. In other words, what need is there to maintain physical seminaries – let alone monasteries (which were once considered indispensable) – when popular institutions such as Liberty University (USA) claim to offer a fully furnished Master in Theology postgraduate degree, “100% online”?⁸

Admittedly, my present characterization of these concerns is rudimentary. In chapter 2, however, I rigorously present certain concerns as a specified set of objections. Nevertheless, the story or scene I am trying to set is this. On various accounts, second-person relatedness is *not* a factor in the faculty of understanding, at least not indispensably. And if this belief turns out to be true, it should, expectedly, help motivate the significant criticisms emerging from a wide variety of fields that are aimed against methods of gaining understanding that depend on this relatedness.

⁷ Ibid, 1-6. “Heaven, yes! I Didn’t realize it could be like this... to become fully what you now are only in hope and potential... you must discover the means to three fundamental transformations... May there come a time when rising suns are greeted with joy by all the creatures they shine upon.... Seek the Light!... Be not afraid...”.

⁸ Enrollment Team, “Master of Theology Online | (Th.M.) | Liberty University,” Liberty University Online, May 13, 2024, <https://www.liberty.edu/online/divinity/postgraduate/theology/>.

Effectively, considerations like the ones just described have motivated this current research project, especially (but not exclusively) the concern over the hypothetical abilities of AI.⁹ Consequently, this thesis aims to examine whether second-person relatedness is a factor in the faculty of understanding, by exploring key areas of philosophy, of science, and of Christian theology. In this introductory chapter, I will accomplish two primary tasks. First, I will more formally introduce the main topics pertinent to this project, namely second-person relatedness, and the faculty of understanding. Because the bigger gap in scholarship resides specifically in the *relation* between second-person relatedness and understanding, this area is where the thesis aims to contribute the most. Thus, second, I will list the specific ways in which this thesis aims to offer a genuine contribution to existing scholarship, and I will finish the chapter by outlining the overall structure of the thesis.

Introduction of Terms

Regarding second-person relatedness, the principal contemporary introduction into research into the second-personal is Naomi Eilan's compilation of related essays, *The Second*

⁹ My employer, the US Air Force, is sponsoring me to study for a doctorate, via a program called "The CSAF [Chief of Staff of the Air Force] PhD Program." This program is designed with the goal of creating a cohort of strategically minded officers who study for a PhD at a top-tier civilian university, *specifically* in a discipline within either the humanities or social sciences (e.g., non-STEM). In my application to the CSAF selection panel, I argued that the Air Force needs more focused study on the philosophy of artificial intelligence. Although this thesis project is not solely focused on the philosophy of AI, it addresses an issue that is "upstream," as it were, of some questions surrounding AI and AI's hypothetical capabilities. Whatever capabilities one takes AI to have hypothetically, it will shape how one views "AI and ethics": an area of expertise that the USAF has expressed considerable interest in developing. For example, see Joseph Clark, "DOD Committed to Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence," Air Education and Training Command, June 20, 2023, <https://www.aetc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3433907/dod-committed-to-ethical-use-of-artificial-intelligence/>. By the end of this thesis, there will, in fact, emerge several notable military-specific considerations, beyond merely those pertaining to AI.

Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives.¹⁰ In her introductory chapter, she offers a dynamic description of what the phenomenon is supposedly all about:

Suppose you and I are having a conversation, about anything – a book, a philosophical problem, the state of the world, someone we are both looking at. In virtue of having such a conversation we are each in position to use the second person pronoun to address each other. Conversations are not the only kind of exchange that makes use of the second person pronoun possible and appropriate simply in virtue of engaging in the exchange. Any form of verbal communication does this, but so too do jointly attending to an object, sharing a smile, exchanging gifts and so forth. I will call instances of the relation in which two people stand to each other, in virtue of which use of the second person is possible and appropriate, ‘second person relations.’¹¹

In other words, second-person situations are those situations in which “I” relate to “you” in various ways, and some, at least, insist that this mode of interpersonal relation is something special, unique, and indispensable.

For instance, in the early 20th century, this mode of relation, the “I-you,” was the theme of the thought-provoking and widely celebrated book *I and Thou*, written by Jewish continental philosopher and theologian Martin Buber.¹² Therein, and evocative of several other continental philosophers,¹³ Buber boldly insists that man’s most fundamental mode of

¹⁰ Naomi Eilan, *The Second Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (Routledge, 2017). This volume is a reprint of the papers from the original publication, *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 3 (2014): 265-387. Further citations from these contributors will derive from the *Philosophical Explorations* issue, per the guidance set forth in *The Second Person*, vii.

¹¹ Naomi Eilan, “The You Turn,” *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 3 (2014): 266.

¹² Martin Buber and Walter Kaufmann, *I and Thou*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1970). The book was originally published in German in 1923, titled “Ich und Du.” For its wide reception and significant impact, see Kaufmann’s prologue.

¹³ Examples of continental philosophers who also wrote, with high regard, on the topic of the interpersonal include Fichte, Feuerbach, Gadamer, Levinas, Heidegger, Husserl, Sartre, and Schelling. Although, these thinkers’ insights are notoriously opaque, and are rarely explicitly systematic. As one researcher remarks regarding Sartre’s theory of intersubjectivity, for example, “[it] has a puzzling way of going in and out of focus,” where “the nature of his argument is equally uncertain.” Sebastian Gardner, “Sartre,

existence is one that is inherently relational, and intersubjective. By considerable contrast, most modern Anglo-American analytical philosophy has typically been characterized by a method of exploring the world and our place in the world through a detached objectivity – a resoundingly third-person perspective.

As Eilan describes the situation, however, there has recently been something of a “You Turn” (her phrase) in philosophy, especially in philosophy’s allied disciplines pertaining to philosophy of mind. This “You Turn” can be seen by the recent exponential uptick in scholarship and interest into the second-person, based on the exciting possibility that the second-person perspective may open the door to “something like a paradigm shift in the way we address questions” in these related fields.¹⁴ One contributor boldly endorses Buber’s suspicion (inspired by Feuerbach) that this potential, this “laying hold of *Thou*,” could introduce a kind of “Copernican revolution” in the way we understand ourselves and the world.¹⁵ Regardless of its eventual or potential impact, this topic has been drawing lots of attention by researchers from a wide variety of fields.

One may still be wondering what this mode of relation is really all about, and indeed, there is much to say on the topic. To be sure, in chapter 3 I devote significant attention towards describing and developing a thorough and rigorous account of what is meant by “second-person relatedness,” so for now, a mere brief introduction will have to suffice.

Intersubjectivity, and German Idealism,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 43, no. 3 (July 2005): 325. Indeed, in a video call I had with Naomi Eilan (31 October 2022), Eilan regrets especially Buber’s lack of analytic and systematic precision, wishing that he had been given at least some training in analytic philosophy of mind. Consequently, although this thesis’ focus on the second-personal has been inspired by Buber and the continental tradition, I do not draw heavily from their writings or attempt to incorporate methodically their thoughts into the account I develop.

¹⁴ Eilan, “The You Turn,” 265.

¹⁵ Douglas Lavin, “Other Wills: The Second-Person in Ethics,” *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 3 (2014): 280–81.

Nonetheless, I wish to emphasize that, for Eilan, in the field of second-person studies, there are two primary questions that loom large:

The first is the question of what makes something a second person this or that – how do we distinguish between stipulation and substance? Call this the ‘existential question’. The second is the question of why it matters whether there are such things, what kind of difference does one answer or another to the existential question make? Call this the ‘significance question’.¹⁶

So, the “existential,” or “existence” question is the one which asks: is the second-person perspective fundamentally real? And the “significance” question asks: if so, why does it matter? In effect, this thesis can be thought of as an attempt to advance the discussion on both questions, and thereby offer a contribution to the field, where these contributions, in turn, impact the epistemological areas of science, of philosophy, and of Christian theology that will be examined.

Having given a brief primer of second-person relatedness, I will now introduce the second key topic of the thesis, the faculty of understanding.

The view that understanding is or should be considered its own epistemic category distinct from *knowledge* is quite recent within the field of contemporary epistemology, as evidenced by its appearance as a dedicated topic in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* only since mid-2021.¹⁷ According to the article’s survey, understanding, as opposed to propositional knowledge, is generally conceived as having to do with grasping the different

¹⁶ Eilan, “The You Turn,” 265. She also remarks, “Of course, how one answers the latter depends, in part, on answers to the existential question, which in turn can, and arguably should, be influenced by the significance question...” Ibid. This situation will be made readily apparent as the investigation into the second-personal develops.

¹⁷ Stephen Grimm, “Understanding,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2021 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2021), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/understanding/>.

cause(s) of something, knowing the *explanatory* reasons for something, and/or apprehending its overall *structure*.

Linda Zagzebski, one of the topic's early and longstanding proponents, helped steer the direction into understanding with her 2001 essay, "Recovering Understanding."¹⁸ Therein, Zagzebski sketches a brief history, showcasing how, according to her account, different periods of Western philosophical thought focused either on certainty (in periods where skepticism was viewed as a primary concern), or on understanding (in periods where, overall, the threat of skepticism was not center stage). According to her analysis, since about the time of the Enlightenment epistemic focus has primarily been on certainty (a facet of justification), whilst understanding has, comparatively, been set to one side. This approach was not always the case; for example, Zagzebski argues that according to the early Hellenistic philosophical mindset, the term *episteme* aligns much closer to "understanding" than it does mere [propositional] knowledge.¹⁹

She delves further, offering a few helpful remarks: "Understanding is the state of comprehension of nonpropositional structures of reality,"²⁰ based on the reflection that "one does not understand a part of a field without the ability to explain its place within a much larger theoretical framework, and one acquires the ability to do that by mastering a skill."²¹ Zagzebski takes this "skill" aspect of understanding as something which reaches back to the

¹⁸ Linda Zagzebski, "Recovering Understanding," in *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ For a more careful mapping of the ancient Greek conception of not only *episteme*, but other important epistemic concepts like *nous*, *phronesis* (practical wisdom), and *sophia* (theoretical wisdom), see Part I in Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-76.

²⁰ Zagzebski, "Recovering Understanding," 242.

²¹ *Ibid*, 241.

Greek conceptions of *episteme* and *techne* (or, *scientia* and *ars* in Aquinas' Latin). Both involve command over a whole area, concerning theoretical knowledge or technical skill, respectively. *Episteme* is an organized body of knowledge, not disjointed facts. Sculpture, as a *techne*, requires much more than propositions about how to chisel someone's likeness; a good sculptor "understands," in a rich sense, how to do so.²² In other words, the association of skill with understanding suggests that this type of epistemic good has more to do with someone acquiring a disposition, instead of obtaining propositional knowledge.

Additionally, there is significant emphasis on an apprehension of "structures" or "frameworks," instead of on mere "facts" or "true beliefs." These reflections compel Zagzebski to make the conclusion that:

Understanding is not directed toward a discrete object, but involves seeing the relation of parts to other parts and perhaps even the relation of part to a whole. It follows that the object of understanding is not a discrete proposition.²³

On this account, understanding is not reducible to knowledge, and in fact it is a different kind of epistemic success altogether. It is more desirable than mere knowledge, yet also more difficult to acquire.

This core idea about the difference between knowledge and understanding has been expressed by other thinkers approaching the topic from different starting points than contemporary epistemology. For example, on C.S. Lewis's view, proper pedagogical training

²² Zagzebski's account of *episteme* and *techne* in "Recovering Understanding" draws from both Plato and Aristotle. For example, she quotes approvingly of Gail Fine, who says that "knowledge [*epistme*], for Plato, does not proceed piecemeal; to know, one must master a whole field, by interrelating and explaining its diverse elements..." Ibid, 238. For further study into the ancient Greek conceptions/distinctions of/between *episteme* and *techne*, one may wish to consult Richard Parry, "Episteme and Techne," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Spring 2024 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2024), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2024/entries/episteme-techne/>.

²³ Zagzebski, "Recovering Understanding," 241.

involves the *handing down* of sacred norms, truths, and values (what he calls “the Tao”) to the younger generation, instead of inventing new ones (which, for him, are ultimately illusory).²⁴ Furthermore, these norms, truths, and values are not mere social constructs, rather they exist as an objective feature of the world. They are not themselves physical “objects,” and cannot be explicitly reasoned *to*, but instead they are grasped by a properly formed *intellectus* – the seat of understanding (as opposed to *ratio*, the seat of rationality). The *intellectus* deals with the ability to apprehend brute facts and values (“brute” in the sense of being so basic that they do not admit of any deeper explanation), whereas the *ratio* concerns building logical systems of thought from these base fundamentals.²⁵ This reason is why Lewis insists that formal reasoning issues *from* the Tao, and never *to* it.²⁶ As Lewis believed, however, obtaining understanding – a mental grasp of the Tao – is inseparable from a life of piety and virtue.²⁷ For him, this coupling had been prevalent among the pre-modern world all over; it is only until recently that modern man has confused, if not denied, the relationship.²⁸

Moreover, this insistence that there is a categorical distinction (and value gap) between propositional knowledge and the objects of the faculty of understanding is not unique to continental philosophers like Buber, or contemporary epistemologists like Zagzebski, or

²⁴ C. S. (Clive Staples) Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (London: Fount, 1999), 27. “The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary colour...”

²⁵ Michael Ward, *After Humanity: A Guide to C.S. Lewis’s The Abolition of Man* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire Academic, 2021), 94.

²⁶ Lewis, *Abolition*, 25.

²⁷ Ward, 94.

²⁸ For example, see C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964). The relationship between piety, virtue, and understanding will be most explored in section 3.4, on theological understanding.

Christian writers like Lewis. Instead, this insistence enjoys some empirical support within the cognitive sciences as well.

The cognitive scientist and philosopher Iain McGilchrist, in his provocative work *The Master and His Emissary* (new edition, 2019), artfully and through many examples illustrates how he believes the evidence points to the conclusion that the human brain cognizes the world in at least two distinctively different modes.²⁹ McGilchrist uses the findings in neurobiology to pin these two modes on the left and right hemispheres, although he is sure to include several disclaimers concerning the holistic nature of the brain, and that the left/right dichotomy is only approximate.³⁰ Furthermore, even if these distinctives were, in fact, discovered not to reside in the physical location of each hemisphere, this discovery would primarily affect physiological instead of philosophical concerns. The idea that the brain operates with these distinctives, regardless of whether the physiological underpinnings of these distinctives are centered in the two hemispheres, is what is most pertinent.

Concerning these two modes, McGilchrist repeatedly emphasizes the idea that “the right hemisphere has precedence, in that it underwrites the knowledge that the other comes to have.”³¹ The right hemisphere, he argues, apprehends “the entity as a whole” as opposed to the left hemisphere which distills the “whole” into individual (and only *representational*) units for further, idealistic or discrete, analysis.³² It is worth quoting the following, which summarizes the important differences regarding the hemispheres:

²⁹ Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, New expanded edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

³⁰ See in “preface” to new edition, xiv.

³¹ Ibid, 176.

³² Ibid, 4.

The world of the left hemisphere, dependent on denotative language and abstraction, yields clarity and power to manipulate things that are known, fixed, static, isolated, decontextualised, explicit, disembodied, general in nature, but ultimately lifeless. The right hemisphere, by contrast, yields a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world, but in the nature of things never fully graspable, always imperfectly known – and to this world it exists in a relationship of care. The knowledge that is mediated by the left hemisphere is knowledge within a closed system. It has the advantage of perfection, but such perfection is bought ultimately at the price of emptiness, of self-reference. It can mediate knowledge only in terms of a mechanical rearrangement of other things already known. It can never really ‘break out’ to know anything new, because its knowledge is of its own representations only. Where the thing itself is ‘present’ to the right hemisphere, it is only ‘re-presented’ by the left hemisphere, now become an idea of a thing.³³

On this account, then, we apprehend or encounter the world before us through a mode of cognition that is fundamentally different, and logically prior to any subsequent discrete or discursive analysis. The re-presentation and discrete operations McGilchrist associates with the left-brain, denote those operations typically associated with obtaining knowledge where knowledge is conceived as “justified true belief.” On the other hand, these descriptions of the right-brain prerogatives pertain most closely to the operations associated with the faculty of understanding.³⁴

For McGilchrist, these distinctives between the cognitive modes are readily highlighted through a closer look at *metaphor*. Metaphor is fundamentally important to understanding and other epistemic goods, because for language to ultimately have any

³³ Ibid, 174.

³⁴ Ibid, 16. “Greek physicians in the third century BC held that the right hemisphere was specialised for perception, and the left hemisphere for understanding.” And, “Using the familiar information-processing terminology, the left hemisphere favours analytic, sequential ‘processing’, where the right hemisphere favours parallel ‘processing’ of different streams of ‘information’ simultaneously. This is what I have expressed as the left hemisphere’s way of building up a picture slowly but surely, piece by piece, brick on brick. One thing is established as (apparently) certain; that forms a platform for adding the next little bit of (apparent) certainty. And so on. The right hemisphere meanwhile tries to take in all the various aspects of what it approaches at once. No part in itself precedes any other: it is more like the way a picture comes into focus – there is an ‘aha!’ moment when the whole suddenly breaks free and comes to life before us.” Ibid, 228.

meaning, language must “bottom-out” in the currency of phenomenological embodiment. In saying that someone mentally “grasps” something, for example, “grasp” cannot merely be a linguistic token acting as a symbol that refers to other symbols, *ad infinitum*. The word in-context only communicates meaning because of its likeness to the spatiotemporal counterpart of “grasping” something in the physical world. Drawing from its original meaning in Greek, “metaphor” means to transfer, or to carry over. In McGilchrist’s words, “metaphoric thinking is fundamental to our understanding of the world, because it is the only way in which understanding can reach outside the system of signs to life itself.”³⁵ Still, it remains crucial to point out that the meaning which is communicated through metaphor cannot be reduced nor exhaustively described or circumscribed by the left-brain’s system of symbols (e.g., words, or propositions).

In other words, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson observe, “Eliminating metaphor would eliminate philosophy.”³⁶ They agree and emphasize that metaphors are needed to bridge the gap between different conceptual domains. And this importance is not limited to philosophy, in fact, “it is true of all abstract human thought, especially science. Conceptual metaphor is what makes most abstract thought possible.”³⁷ Furthermore, it is characteristically with the right hemisphere that we understand metaphor, and this understanding of metaphor “comes *before* denotation (subserved by the left).”³⁸

³⁵ Ibid, 115.

³⁶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 129.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ McGilchrist, *Emissary*, 118. Emphasis and parenthesis original.

McGilchrist elaborates. Whereas the left hemisphere can only make analogous idealizations (“symbols”) and manipulate them in an internal, closed-loop system, the right hemisphere apprehends the world as-it-is, as phenomenological “wholes” (or frameworks/structures) which are not in-themselves reducible to digital (discrete), context-free “bits” of information.³⁹ Take, for example, the well-known illustration of a duck-rabbit.⁴⁰ Purposefully ambiguous, this illustration calls to our attention the difference between *data* (or propositions) and understanding. At first glance, one might perceive a duck, only to take another look and see, instantaneously, a rabbit (or vice versa).⁴¹ The *data* which constitutes the illustration does not change, but one’s holistic grasp of the conceptual whole depends on the way the perceiver *understands* the illustration.

Importing this relevance of the right-brain vs left-brain is not to deny that understanding involves the cognitive activity of the whole brain – both hemispheres (as if it was only with the right hemisphere that we understand). Rather, the aim is to point out that certain cognitive prerogatives that are deeply associated with understanding, at least according to McGilchrist, arguably rely on the unique and sometimes neglected facets of right-brain functionality.

Nevertheless, from the standpoint of those researchers who have taken a specific focus on understanding, like Zagzebski, but also Michael DePaul, Jonathan Kvanvig, John Greco, Stephen Grimm, and Wayne Riggs, there seems to be some consensus on what

³⁹ Ibid, 47.

⁴⁰ This illustration has prompted much philosophical reflection. Notably, Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote about this phenomenon at some length in Ludwig Wittgenstein and G. E. M. Anscombe, *Philosophical Investigations* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 199-215.

⁴¹ Ibid, 82, 151.

understanding is all about. John Greco, in his most recent book *The Transmission of Knowledge* (2021), summarizes what these field experts of understanding all seem to agree:

- One can have knowledge without having understanding. One can know that something is the case without understanding why or how it is the case.
- Understanding cannot be isolated or episodic.
- Understanding can have different objects, such as economies, ecosystems, people, theories, stories, equations, and models.
- Understanding is closely tied to explanation.
- Understanding is closely tied to being able to answer “Why” and “How” questions.
- Understanding involves grasping coherence, or seeing patterns, or seeing how things “fit” or “hang” together.
- Understanding is in some important way valuable, and at least sometimes more valuable than mere knowledge.⁴²

Although Greco’s observations lack reference to some other important aspects of understanding, such as the cognitive satisfaction of a “Eureka!” moment, they do highlight a growing sense of the unitary meaning and importance of the phenomenon of understanding.⁴³ The broader point being made, however, is that there has been recent and significant success in the understanding of *understanding*, and these reflections seem to point towards the

⁴² Bullet-points all quoted from John Greco, *The Transmission of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 130.

⁴³ This aspect of understanding (“Eureka!”), and others, such as intuition, insight, and the apprehension of brute facts (facts which are so fundamental they can only be assumed), are explored in Bernard Lonergan’s lengthy work on understanding. See Bernard J. F. Lonergan et al., *Understanding and Being: The Halifax Lectures on Insight*, 2nd ed., rev.augm., Lonergan, Bernard J. F. Works (Lonergan Research Institute); 5 (Toronto: Published by University of Toronto Press for Lonergan Research Institute of Regis College, 1990). This volume is notoriously dense, but worth the effort for those willing to take their time.

general suggestion that *understanding is epistemically unique from, and superior to, mere knowledge*.⁴⁴

To conclude, this thesis uses the term “understanding” to refer generally to the wide set of epistemic objects which are non-propositional in nature, especially structures or wholes, skill competency, and what will later be described as “personal knowing.”⁴⁵ By “non-propositional,” I mean irreducible to a set of “justified true beliefs.”⁴⁶ On the contrary, understanding is claimed exclusively by persons, often using the metaphors of seeing or light, and is often associated with a sense of satisfaction.⁴⁷ Moreover, just as “understanding” as used here is wider than any one of Aristotle’s or Aquinas’ “intellectual virtues,” so the term “faculty,” in the phrase “the faculty of understanding,” is used in a wider sense than the “power” (*dunamis, potentia*) Aristotle and Aquinas call *nous* or *intellectus*. By “faculty of understanding” I denote both the *formation* or *development* of the faculty or power itself (by

⁴⁴ For two resources from the perspective of a contemporary epistemologist which surveys the recent literature on this exact topic, see Michael Hannon, “Recent Work In The Epistemology Of Understanding,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* (Oxford) 58, no. 3 (2021): 269–90, and Michael Hannon and James Nguyen, “Understanding Philosophy,” *Inquiry* (Oslo) ahead-of-print, (2022): 1–37.

⁴⁵ Whether all forms of epistemic success can be ultimately reduced to propositional knowledge is a matter explored somewhat in Hannon’s works (above), as well as by plenty of other epistemologists. It is not, however, the primary question of this thesis. Although, as this thesis develops, there will emerge a clearly discernable suggestion towards one of these two options.

⁴⁶ I.e., this phrase is usually offered as the definition of knowledge, at least on many contemporary analytical accounts. Many examples abound; for one instance, see Job de Grefte, “Knowledge as Justified True Belief,” *Erkenntnis* 88, no. 2 (2023): 531–49.

⁴⁷ I recognize that many other epistemological taxonomies seek to define and distinguish different kinds of epistemic success, such as knowledge, understanding, wisdom, insight, and other terms, much more finely. Aristotle and Aquinas are two notable examples. For example, “understanding,” as used by Zagzebski and the other thinkers mentioned, and as used in this thesis, is a much wider concept than the intellectual virtue Aristotle calls *nous* (*intellectus* in Aquinas’ Latin), which may better be translated as “insight” (namely, into “first principles”). My purpose with this project, however, is not to delve too deeply into the precise definition and the precise boundaries of what constitutes “understanding.” Hence, I am encompassing a lot by anchoring “understanding” to the kinds of epistemic successes which cannot be wholly circumscribed by propositional knowledge or achieved by discrete, stepwise logical argumentation. As will emerge though, the emphasis is nevertheless on “understanding” conceived as epistemic success concerning, especially, integrated wholes, skills, and knowing persons.

what Aquinas would call “intellectual virtues” and “intellectual Gifts”), and the proper use of the faculty in various epistemic achievements throughout human life. For the purposes of this thesis, “faculty” refers generally to what is encompassed by terms such as capacity, ability, capability, facility, sense, etc.⁴⁸ Consequently, this thesis tests the specific claim that second-person relatedness is a special context for stimulating this epistemic success.

Thesis Contributions and Structure

Having briefly introduced and defined the terms “second-person relatedness,” and “understanding,” I wish to list the ways in which this thesis strives to contribute to existing scholarship. First, the thesis provides a systematic framework and presentation of the topic, namely, the relationship between second-person relatedness and the faculty of understanding. To date, there has not been such a systematic presentation of the relation between these two concepts, at least not in this way.

Second, the thesis addresses certain key objections, head on, and it brings into discussion a variety of sources drawn from a broader base than has been seen yet – for example, as will be shown, sources which examine non-developmental cases of the highly significant phenomenon of *joint attention*.

Third, it extends existing discussion, treatment, and defense of the claim that the second-person perspective is irreducible, or in other words, that the second-person perspective “exists” in the sense that it denotes a genuine distinct reality. This question is a

⁴⁸ I am also not inextricably wed to the term “faculty,” and I do not mean to be overly technical with its use in my thesis. This word was added to my thesis title to avoid the confusion of interpreting “understanding” as a transitive verb. I am thankful to Shaun Henson for pointing out this potential confusion.

contested issue, especially in analytical philosophy of mind, and the examination set forth in this thesis aims to shed further light on the question.

Fourth, this thesis applies the “apparatus,” so to say, of second-person relatedness as regards the faculty of understanding to shed light on certain questions/concerns/areas in a novel way. One prominent example is this “apparatus” being used in the service of analyzing recent attempts at the creation of an artificial general intelligence (AGI), a hypothetical machine with the defining characteristic that it has human-type intelligence. Another example is the thesis’ in-depth explanation of deficient cases of theological understanding, such as certain biblical cases where, as will be reviewed, the character is presented as understanding many divine matters, but without a second-person relationship with God.

Finally, as far as how this thesis is structured, the structure is inspired by the medieval-scholastic method of dialectics. This method, aimed at simulating a real-life conversation between two interlocutors, proceeds in five steps, which correspond to the thesis’ five chapters. First, the topic or question at hand is raised (the introduction, this first chapter). Next, the main objections against an affirmative answer to the thesis question are laid out (primary objections, chapter 2), then an alternative account in the light of other pertinent considerations is offered (the main case, chapter 3). Lastly, before wrapping up the discussion and giving a plausible answer to the thesis question (conclusion, chapter 5), the original objections presented at the outset are revisited, with the intent to reveal whether and in what way(s) these objections are or are not valid (responses to objections, chapter 4).

In this way, the thesis structure, in the style of dialectic, can be seen as a sort of metanarrative that sits atop the thesis content. What I mean is that the structure, in and of itself, is designed to simulate a kind of second-person situation or experience for the reader (an “I-you” back-and-forth between the two interlocutors, as personified by chapter 2 in

discussion with chapter 3 and then chapter 4).⁴⁹ The purpose behind such method is to communicate to the reader a better understanding as to what might be the best answer to the topic in question.

Without further introduction, it is now time to begin the critical examination of the thesis question, and I will proceed by setting forth the primary objections which, in different ways, argue that second-person relatedness *is not* a factor in the faculty of understanding.

⁴⁹ I am thankful to Richard Conrad for this insight.

CHAPTER 2: PRIMARY OBJECTIONS

Four Arguments that Second-Person Relatedness is Not a Factor in The Faculty of Understanding

2.1: First, The Second-Person Perspective Does Not Exist

The first objection to the claim that second-person relatedness is a factor in the faculty of understanding is the argument that the second-person perspective is not fundamentally real. This objection does not mean that those who hold it do not refer to “I” and “you” relations, but instead that these references are mere terms of convenience. These objectors in fact hold that the second-person perspective is in principle reducible to something else more fundamental, and if they are correct, this perspective does not really exist, and therefore it is not a factor in the faculty of understanding.

The different approaches to this objection all argue, in some way, that the second-person perspective is reducible to the first and/or third-person perspective(s). Consider philosopher Karsten Stueber’s belief that “claims about a uniquely second-person form of knowledge or...perspective...as going too far.”⁵⁰ Stueber’s focus on what he sees as a misplaced “allure of the second-person perspective”⁵¹ emerges from a broader philosophical and psychological view called “Theory of Mind.” Theory of Mind “refers to the cognitive capacity to attribute mental states to self and others,”⁵² and different Theories of Mind argue that the way we accomplish this attribution is by mentally describing people “in terms of

⁵⁰ Karsten Stueber, “Social Cognition and the Allure of the Second-Person Perspective: In Defense of Empathy and Simulation,” in Axel Seemann, *Joint Attention: New Developments in Psychology, Philosophy of Mind, and Social Neuroscience* (Cambridge, Mass.; MIT Press, 2012), 271.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Alvin I. Goldman, “Theory of Mind,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Cognitive Science*, ed. Eric Margolis, Richard Samuels, and Stephen P. Stich (Oxford University Press, 2012), 42.

their beliefs, desires, emotions, and personalities” in order to “explain their actions in terms of these and other such states.”⁵³

All versions of Theory of Mind, however, are at odds with what the literature has dubbed the intersubjective or the interactionist account of other minds, an account which “emphasize[s] the second-person perspective” in contrast with the “first-person and third-person perspective...exemplified in the traditional theory of mind positions.”⁵⁴ Another way of framing the issue is to say that the debate turns on whether when we stand in perspectives which qualify as second-personal, “the existence of that other person enters into the individuation of your experience.”⁵⁵ That is, the perceiving of the second person in “shared engagement” with another is, in Stueber’s words, “an *essentially social* accomplishment.”⁵⁶

Thus, the debate over the “existential question” – whether there is a distinct reality which corresponds to the second-person perspective in an irreducible fashion – turns on the question of, in what way are the two minds in these supposed second-person scenarios involved? If the second person is essentially accidental to these social situations (and cognitive accomplishments which result), then there is no reason to view any such second-person perspective as something which corresponds to a distinct and irreducible second-person reality.⁵⁷

⁵³ Adam Morton, “Folk Psychology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Ansgar Beckermann, Brian P. McLaughlin, and Sven Walter (Oxford University Press, 2009), 713.

⁵⁴ Stueber, “Social Cognition,” 271.

⁵⁵ John Campbell, “Joint Attention and Common Knowledge,” in Naomi Eilan, *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology*, Consciousness and self-consciousness (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 288.

⁵⁶ Stueber, “Social Cognition,” 271. Emphasis original.

⁵⁷ This talk of a second-personal “reality” might be unclear. In chapter 3, however, I attempt to address certain metaphysical concerns and anchor this description more soundly.

Theory of Mind is separated into two main subtheories. The first, called simulation-theory, argues that we predict “others’ behavior by answering the question, ‘What would *I* do in *that* person’s situation?’⁵⁸ Take for instance the simulation-theorists oft-cited example of a seasoned chess player, who testifies that during a chess match he visualizes the chess board from the opponent’s perspective and imagines the layout of the different pieces from the other side’s point of view.⁵⁹ The chess player in this way can be said to be “running a simulation” in his own mind, *as if* he was the person in the observed situation (his opponent).

Furthermore, some simulation-theorists, such as Stueber, insist that “our grasp of the other person contains an irreducible egocentric [first-person] moment,”⁶⁰ as opposed to any irreducible second-person moment. Instead, on this account, we “grasp the subjectivity of other minded creatures only as long as I understand it as the experience of a self – that is, as experiences that I could potentially have.”⁶¹ Stueber calls this “like-me familiarity,” and on his view it is what accounts for the phenomena of intersubjective (second-person) exchanges: “intersubjective interaction is grounded in and is delineated by the experience of like-me familiarity in the encounter with the other.”⁶² He attempts to advance simulation-theory by proposing *empathy* as a primary factor that contributes to our understanding of other minds. On this account, one gleans the goal-directed intentions of the other by, essentially, identifying with the other’s emotions and feelings. When someone watches someone else

⁵⁸ Simulation-theory is viewed as originating with Robert M. Gordon, in his “Folk Psychology as Simulation,” *Mind & language* 1, no. 2 (1986): 158–171. Emphasis original. Other prominent proponents include Jane Heal and Alvin Goldman.

⁵⁹ Goldman, “Theory of Mind,” 410.

⁶⁰ Stueber, “Social Cognition,” 279.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid, 279-280.

shirk and recoil at the sight of something frightening, for example, the observer immediately understands the meaning of the frightened person's actions through a sort of emotion-simulation type mindreading.

On this point, simulation theorists are apt to bring into the discussion the potential role for *mirror neurons*, drawing upon a large (and contested) body of neuroscientific/neurophysiological literature.⁶³ Mirror neurons are cognitive mechanisms that have been found to re-create the same or similar emotions of an observer who is watching someone emotionally react, thus serving, allegedly, as the neurological correlate to first-person simulation.

Moreover, simulation-theorists' primary stockpile of empirical support emerges out of studies which involve the "false-belief test." Shaun Gallagher's summary and remarks of this test are helpful:

In such experiments a subject (usually a child) is asked to observe the behavior of two other children (or sometimes dolls or puppets). For example, Sally puts a marble in a basket and leaves the room; another child Anne moves the marble from the basket to a box. Sally comes back into the room and the subject is asked where he thinks Sally will look for the marble. 4-year-olds tend to answer correctly that Sally will look in the basket, where she still believes (falsely) the marble to be located. This is successful mindreading. However, 3-year-olds on average tend to answer incorrectly that Sally will look in the box, where the marble actually is. This is taken as evidence that 3-year-old subjects (and some autistic subjects) are unable to appreciate that having a different perspective could lead to Sally's false belief; 4-year-old children apparently have developed a theory of mind that can deal with false beliefs.⁶⁴

Yet, some studies have suggested that children younger than four years are able to pass the test, or at least (if they are pre-linguistic), show that they have an awareness of the correct

⁶³ For a representative (and recent) sample, see Stephanie N. L. Schmidt et al., "The Human Mirror Neuron System—A Common Neural Basis for Social Cognition?," *Psychophysiology* 58, no. 5 (2021): e13781.

⁶⁴ Shaun Gallagher, *Action and Interaction*, First edition (Oxford, United Kingdom, 2020), 73-74.

answer. It is unlikely, however, that one day the child does not have a theory of mind and then the next day, he or she does have one. Thus, simulation-theorists “doubt that infants...have metarepresentational ability or a concept of belief,”⁶⁵ and insist that implicit, first-person simulation is the most probable Theory of Mind. The empirical contentions notwithstanding, there is also support for simulation-theory in analytic philosophy, found in the writings of Daniel Dennett.

Dennett takes up simulation-theory – or at least, something very similar to it – in the position he coined the “intentional stance” view of other minds. Dennett states that the intentional stance “is the strategy of interpreting the behavior of an entity (person, animal, artifact, whatever) by treating it as if it were a rational agent who governed its ‘choice’ of ‘action’ by a ‘consideration’ of its ‘beliefs’ and ‘desires.’”⁶⁶ The intentional stance is the most sophisticated of his trifold scheme of stances. The first stance is the physical stance, where we simply “use whatever we know about the laws of physics and the physical constitution of the things in question to devise our prediction.”⁶⁷ For example, we know that by dropping a rock it will hit the ground in virtue of this “physical stance.” The second and more complex stance is the “design” stance, in which we consider how something has a “particular design” to function a certain way. On this stance, we reason that an alarm clock will ring at the time we set it to go off not because of the underlying physical structures (electric flow in the circuit board, etc.), but at a higher level of complexity: the alarm clock is

⁶⁵ Ibid, 75.

⁶⁶ Daniel Dennett, “Intentional Systems Theory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*, 339.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 340.

an entity which is designed to beep at the set-programmed time, regardless of the physical design structures which underlie and enable the function.⁶⁸

Finally, as a “subspecies” of design stance is the intentional stance, “in which the designed thing is treated as an agent of sorts, with beliefs and desires and enough rationality to do what it ought to do given those beliefs and desires.”⁶⁹ This stance accounts for how we predict what both computer chess players and human chess players will do: “Consider chess-playing computers, which all succumb neatly to the same simple strategy of interpretation: just think of them as rational agents who want to win, and who know the rules and principles of chess and the positions of the pieces on the board.”⁷⁰ Likewise, with regards to human agents, “we treat each other as intentional systems, using attributions of beliefs and desires to govern our interactions and generate our anticipations...”⁷¹ Dennett contrasts this view with other versions of Theory of Mind which suppose that we “learn dozens or hundreds or thousands of ‘laws of nature’” to predict others’ behavior.⁷² Instead, consistent with simulation-theory, Dennett asserts his view that “the natural question to ask” when trying to make sense of others’ mental states and behavior is: “What would *you* do if that happened to *you*?”⁷³ He goes on, saying that we mentally respond to this internal inquiry by responding with different options of “*I* would do” this or that.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid, 342.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Emphasis added.

Having reviewed some of the key literature on simulation-theory, it is helpful to draw out a few implications. The idea behind simulation-theory is that when we interact with other people, in order to understand the other mind, we internally reexperience or mentally recreate the observed situation,⁷⁵ and in this manner, the theory suggests that there is no need to posit a unique second-person concept or perspective. Furthermore, on this account, our cognitive infrastructure – as evidenced via so-called mirror neurons and the empirical interpretation of false-belief tests – is said to enable our understanding of other minds through means which may require a philosophy of the first-person perspective, but not necessarily the second-person perspective. In other words, simulation-theorists posit the first-person perspective as the fundamental explanans of how we come to know others' mental states and behavior, and insist that, as a result, there is no need to invoke a unique second-person perspective.

There are others, however, who take up a different Theory of Mind, one which reduces the second-person perspective somewhat differently, or at least entails its reduction. Further elaboration on Dennett's view will act as a worthwhile introduction to Theory of Mind's other primary subtheory.

Dennett's intentional stance theory is part of his larger project on consciousness, which Dennett, a materialist, sees as exhaustively reducible to third-person science. In contrast to David Chalmers' widely discussed argument that there is and will always be the "hard problem of consciousness"⁷⁶ (the "problem" that any investigation into consciousness will always have something left over which cannot be reduced to scientific description –

⁷⁵ Simulation theorists are sure to stress that these simulations are often run "off-line," that is, implicit and automatic. The theory places a large role for both the subconscious and the imagination.

⁷⁶ David J. Chalmers, "Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness," in *The Character of Consciousness* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

namely first-person or subjective experiences), Dennett is well known for taking up a strict empiricist view of consciousness, reducing *both* the first- and second-person perspectives to a third-person reality.⁷⁷ Commenting on the situation of a person interacting with his experimenter, Dennett states, “at first blush it may seem to be a first-person (or, with its emphasis on communicative interaction with the subjects, second-person) methodology, but in fact it is still a third-person methodology...”⁷⁸

He continues, and with some boldness says that “I have defended the hypothesis that there is a straightforward, conservative extension of objective science that handsomely covers the ground — *all* the ground — of human consciousness...”⁷⁹ This empirical, third-person, objective approach – Dennett insists – can “incorporate *all* the purported exotica and hard cases of human subjectivity. I want to put the burden of proof on those who insist that third-person science is incapable of grasping the nettle of consciousness.”⁸⁰ So, for Dennett, proponents of the first- or second-person perspective have considerable hurdles to overcome if they are to demonstrate the existence of something ultimately beyond third-person reality.

Notwithstanding Dennett’s radical commitment to an all-encompassing third-person reduction of consciousness, the idea that at least the second-person perspective is reducible to the third-person perspective emerges from the other Theory of Mind subtheory relevant to this review, called “theory-theory.” Theory-theory originated with Wilfred Sellars’ seminal

⁷⁷ Thus, Dennett’s intentional-stance view is one expression of simulation-theory only to a point. Ultimately, Dennett does not believe in the fundamental existence of the first-person perspective, either.

⁷⁸ Daniel Dennett, “Who’s On First? Heterophenomenology Explained,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10, no. 9 (2003): 19. Parenthesis original. Dennett’s main target is the idea of a privileged (irreducible) first-person perspective, but he includes the second-person perspective as likewise entirely non-privileged.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 24. Emphasis original.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Emphasis original.

essay, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind.”⁸¹ Sellars was operating within the broader empiricist tradition of logical positivism that dominated analytical philosophy in the Anglosphere during most of the 20th century. Sellars, in his essay, is viewed as trying to advance the naturalized psychology and naturalized epistemology of W.V.O. Quine, A.J. Ayers, and others.⁸² This school of thought and its progenitors were motivated by a desire to:

Provide an account of mental concepts that fits with traditional empiricist notions of cognitive or semantic respectability...So one component of the core conception of [theory-theory] is that the content of mental concepts should be empirically definable, where this means that the basic terms of the definitions should refer to *publicly observable* events.⁸³

Researchers in this tradition, in other words, have been trying to realize Dennett’s vision, and according to Jane Heal, this approach has been the “dominant” approach to the issue of other minds among Anglo-American analytic philosophers, at least for several decades after Sellars.⁸⁴

Theory-theory works out this mentalizing of others by supposing “that there are certain inner states of persons which are typically caused by such and such external events, which interact among themselves to cause further inner states and events, and which finally combine to cause behaviour. To possess the concept of some particular mental state is to grasp the particular causal-explanatory role associated with that state.”⁸⁵ This description is

⁸¹ Goldman, “Theory of Mind,” 43.

⁸² James R. O’Shea, “The ‘Theory Theory’ of Mind and the Aims of Sellars’ Original Myth of Jones,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 11, no. 2 (2012): 175–204. O’Shea, interestingly, argues for a more nuanced understanding of Sellars than how Sellars has generally been received.

⁸³ Alvin I Goldman, “Folk Psychology and Mental Concepts,” *Proto Sociology* 14 (2000): 8.

⁸⁴ Jane Heal, “Understanding Other Minds from the Inside,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 43 (1998): 83.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

encapsulated another way by Robert Gordon, who provides a useful summary of what theory-theory proponents are arguing:

1. Our capacity for anticipating and explaining human behavior depends primarily on our capacity to apply mental concepts.
2. Our capacity to apply mental concepts depends on our possession of an implicit theory.⁸⁶

Therefore, on theory-theory, one regards the mental state of other minds as “primarily derived from the detached perspective of an unengaged observer,”⁸⁷ who applies an implicitly or explicitly formulated ascription to explain someone else’s mental states and behavior. For example, suppose you are watching someone in the kitchen pick up a teacup, and you are predicting what the person is going to do with the cup. On theory-theory, you mentally theorize to yourself in a way such as the following: I see the teacup has just been washed and dried, which makes it ready to go in the cupboard, at least in normal circumstances. These circumstances count as normal. Therefore, the person likely wishes to open the cupboard to put the teacup away.⁸⁸

Alternatively, from an empirical point of view, Gallagher remarks that “[theory-theory] approaches are most often framed in terms of understanding others from a third-person observational stance,” which are “clearly seen in the paradigm experiments of false-

⁸⁶ Robert M. Gordon, “Beyond Mindreading,” *Philosophical Explorations* 11, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 220.

⁸⁷ Stueber, “Social Cognition,” 270.

⁸⁸ It should be noted, however, that on theory-theory this “theorizing” need not happen explicitly, but it nevertheless occurs one way or another. Implicit and/or subconscious theorizing is often cited in the more contemporary accounts of theory-theory, and there is also less downplaying of interaction. The more explicit, “detached observer” types of theory-theory, so to say, were taken up especially by early advocates of theory-theory, such as Paul Churchland and Jerry Fodor. For some representative examples see: Ned Joel Block, *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology* (London: Methuen, 1980). Nevertheless, on theory-theory, in whatever way engaged interaction may be relevant, it is not evidence for a distinct and irreducible second-person perspective.

belief tests typically cited to support TT [theory-theory].”⁸⁹ In opposition to simulation-theorists, theory-theorists interpret the results of these tests to argue that at a certain age (about 4 years old), the child’s cognition is developed enough to employ “folk psychology” to the degree of sophistication required to attribute the appropriate mental states in others.⁹⁰ On this interpretation of the evidence, the second person is not part of the “individuation of [one’s] experience” (ref. Campbell), but only mentalizing, in third-person terms, *about* the second person.

In analytic philosophy, theory-theory finds support in the writings of British philosopher Christopher Peacocke. Peacocke’s scholarship is pertinent because he is well-known, and he directly critiques or seeks to explain the second-person perspective in strictly third-person terms. Peacocke allies himself with the position of Richard Heck, both of whom are neo-Fregean, when Peacocke says that “I myself am in agreement with Richard Heck, when he writes, ‘there is no such thing as a second-person belief’.”⁹¹ Peacocke’s quote is from Heck’s journal article, “Do Demonstratives Have Senses,” a passage of which has caused a lot of commentary and is worth citing in full:

Consider the indexical ‘you’. As a matter of its standing meaning, an utterance of ‘you’ refers to the person addressed in that utterance. But in the sense that there is such a thing as a self-conscious, first-person belief, there is no such thing as a second-person belief, or so it seems to me. Of course, I can identify someone descriptively, as the person to whom I am now speaking, and may have beliefs whose contents involve that descriptive identification. But that is not what I mean to deny: I mean to deny that there is any such thing as an essentially indexical second-person belief. The phenomenon of the second-person is a linguistic one, bound up with the fact that utterances, as we make them, are typically directed to people, not just made to the

⁸⁹ Gallagher, *Action and Interaction*, 73.

⁹⁰ “Folk psychology” is exemplified in the above scenario concerning the teacup. In other words, folk psychology denotes modes of thinking that are implicitly or explicitly propositional and metarepresentational.

⁹¹ Christopher Peacocke, “Interpersonal Self-Consciousness,” *Philosophical studies* 170, no. 1 (2014): 10.

cosmos. (If there were speakers of a language who never directed their utterances to their fellows, they would have no use for the second-person.) The word ‘you’ has no correlate at the level of thought: if not, then the contents of the beliefs we express using the word ‘you’ have very little to do with its standing meaning.⁹²

In this way, as Heck clarifies, “if you want an analysis of ‘you’, try ‘That person to whom I am speaking.’”⁹³ This remark squarely reduces second-person concepts to third-person concepts, as evidenced by his collapsing the former into a demonstrative. Within this tradition, Peacocke states quite bluntly that, “The thesis that there is no distinctive second person concept is equivalent to the proposition that any occurrence of ‘you’ in thought can equally be explained in terms of other concepts that do not involve an irreducible second person concept.”⁹⁴

So, in line with the neo-Fregean school, Peacocke also says that “This description of what is involved in using and understanding the second person does not invoke a special second-person concept or way of thinking. It uses only third-person and first-person concepts, and concepts of those concepts (and further concepts thereof, up the Fregean hierarchy).”⁹⁵ Peacocke, however, strongly suggests that second-person concepts are reducible to primarily the former when he states that it is “impossible to accept the thesis of the penultimate sentence of Sebastian Rödl’s book, which states that ‘second person thought is first person thought.’”⁹⁶ Instead, Peacocke’s reasoning bottoms out in his assertion

⁹² Richard G Heck, “Do Demonstratives Have Senses?,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 2 (2002): 12. Heck’s segment is quoted and engaged with in different ways by almost half of the contributors to Eilan’s *The Second Person*.

⁹³ Ibid, 15. Quote contained in footnote 39 in Heck’s article.

⁹⁴ Christopher Peacocke, “Interpersonal Self-Consciousness,” *Philosophical studies* 170, no. 1 (2014): 11.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 9. Parenthetical original.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 11.

(consistent with Heck) that in the case where one says “if you go on driving like that, you will be involved in an accident,” the concept invoked with the use of “you” is the *same* concept contained in the clause “that driver.”⁹⁷ On this account, to the extent that there is no “you” concept, there is likewise no “you” (second-person) perspective.

Peacocke’s motivation in addressing the second-person concept is that he sees social interactions as one example of what he has coined “ascriptive interpersonal self-consciousness,” defined as “awareness that you are being represented by another person as a self-representing subject.”⁹⁸ This definition suggests a commitment to the metarepresentational theory of cognition, a theory which enjoys many defenders in contemporary psychology/cognitive science. Peacocke’s theory of the interpersonal is one that conceives of other minds as something which relies on nested representations (representations of representations), precluding any need to invoke a kind of special second-person concept or thought.

This nested, or iterative, representations conception is most explicitly seen in Peacocke’s treatment of the phenomenon of *joint attention*. Joint attention is a topic which will be explored at length in chapter 3, but for now, suffice it to say that joint attention is the phenomenon of two people co-attending to the same thing with one another – such as a mother reading a picture-book aloud to her child, who is sitting on the mother’s lap looking at the book with her. On Peacocke’s account, joint attention emerges when there is sufficient iteration of certain *embeddings* of this sort of nested representation. Take his example, an analysis of two people sitting at the same table and who are noticing one another:

⁹⁷ Ibid, 10.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 4.

I am aware I am seated next to a table
 You are aware I am seated next to a table
 I know that you are aware that I am seated next to a table
 You know that I am aware that I am seated next to a table
 I know that you know that I am aware that I am seated next to a table
 .
 .
 .⁹⁹

Peacocke asserts that interpersonal self-consciousness is achieved at the fifth line or iteration, yet this recursive process does in some way continue in the minds of both subjects. An extended explanation of Peacocke’s insistence in “arbitrarily high iterations of knowledge” present in situations involving joint attention is found in “Nature, Reflexivity, and Common Knowledge,”¹⁰⁰ but his discussion need not sidetrack this summary. The point is that in philosophy of mind/philosophy of language, Peacocke serves as one formidable contemporary scholar who directly addresses the second-personal “existential question” in negative terms.

It will now be helpful to make a few comments on the implications of theory-theory. As stated before, theory-theory emerged out of the motivations of the analytical tradition, motivations which are readily seen in the writings of Gottlieb Frege – who is regarded as the father of analytic philosophy. In his *Logical Investigations*, Frege – a century prior to Dennett – goes so far as reducing even first-person thought to third-person thought: “What I

⁹⁹ Ibid, 13. Three vertical dots original, which indicate further iterations.

¹⁰⁰ Christopher Peacocke, “Joint Attention: Its Nature, Reflexivity, and Relation to Common Knowledge,” in *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 298-324.

call ideas are then independent objects. No reason remains for granting an exceptional position to that object which I call ‘I’.... Therefore the thesis that only what belongs to the content of my consciousness can be the object of my awareness, of my thought, is false.”¹⁰¹

On theory-theory, then, our knowledge and engagement with other minds can, at least potentially, be exhaustively captured in complete propositional form; that is, entirely expressible in terms of a set of fundamentally third-person phenomena and therefore compatible with a fully naturalized epistemology. In other words, theory-theory is consistent with a philosophy of mind that conceives all mental operations as able to be probed by the tools of empirical science, and if this Fregean project has the correct starting points, it is not difficult to see how any such concept of an irreducible second-person perspective simply evaporates.

Consistent with Dennett’s treatment, furthermore, is that according to theory-theory, talk of the second-person perspective may be useful, but ultimately every facet of one’s “individuation of experience” (including interpersonal experiences) is reducible to third-person, empirical phenomena. If theory-theory is correct, in other words, proponents of the second-person perspective are incorrect when they insist on an irreducible second-person principle or reality.

This section has covered a significant amount of ground, and before concluding it will be beneficial to neatly encapsulate the core issues which unite the various expressions of the objection that the second-person perspective is not fundamentally real. As this review has summarized, the main arguments against the existence of the distinct second-person

¹⁰¹ Gottlob Frege, *Logical Investigations*, Library of Philosophy and Logic (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 21-22.

perspective can be loosely categorized under two headings, both of which fall under Theory-of-Mind: (a) a reduction to the third person (theory-theory); and (b) a reduction to the first person (simulation-theory).

Shaun Gallagher admits, however, that this taxonomy of first- and third-person reduction (simulation-theory and theory-theory), should not be interpreted as presenting two separate “theoretical monoliths” which are completely mutually exclusive with one another.¹⁰² There are many hybrid theories that contain or try to incorporate some elements of both approaches, and furthermore, there is constant internal debate in each camp over a variety of issues. Hence this categorization is ‘loose’ because both approaches – especially the more recent formulations of each – incorporate a mix of both first- and third-person reductions. The first/third taxonomy does remain useful, however, because in virtually all Theory of Mind accounts, either the first- or the third-person reduction receives more emphasis and is considered as the more fundamental explanans.

To cut through the intricacies of these debates and get to the essence of what *both* simulation-theory and theory-theory have in common, Gallagher provides the following as the “three basic suppositions” that “ST and TT share.” These suppositions also map onto the more philosophical approaches of Dennett and Peacocke, and together they will serve as the target contention to which chapter four will respond:

(1) The unobservability principle: social cognition is a problem due to the lack of access that we have to the other person’s mental states. Since we cannot directly perceive the other’s thoughts, feelings, or intentions, we need some extra-perceptual

¹⁰² Gallagher, *Action and Interaction*, 74. This 2020 volume is tremendously valuable, as Gallagher provides a recent review of the state of the literature of this debate. Gallagher’s overall point with his book is to argue for his “enactivist interactionist” approach to other minds, an approach which is consistent with an irreducible second-person perspective.

cognitive process (mindreading or mentalizing) that will allow us to infer or simulate what those mental states are.

(2) The observational stance: our normal everyday stance toward others is an observational one. We observe their behaviors, and based on what we observe we mindread their mental states. We do this in order to explain their behaviors, or predict what they will do next.

(3) The supposition of universality: our primary and pervasive way of understanding others is by way of one of these processes, either theoretical inference or simulation.¹⁰³

In other words, the fundamental assumption of both simulation-theory and theory-theory is that since we do not have any direct, unmediated, access to another person's mental states, we must take that which we can observe (actions, speech, facial expressions, gaze, etc.) and somehow transform the data in our own minds into a plausible conclusion about the other person's mental state and behavior.

This view should be contrasted with those who advocate for the second-person perspective, namely, that somehow the other person "enters into the individuation of [one's] experience," such that the two subjects are engaged in a bipolar and irreducible cognitive phenomenon, thus requiring philosophical resources that are not afforded by reflections on the first- or third-person perspectives alone.¹⁰⁴ According to the various accounts of Theory of Mind, however, talk of a second-person "perspective" should, at most, be viewed as a linguistic device which may be convenient, but one that nevertheless fails to denote a genuine distinct reality. On this objection, the first- and/or third-person perspectives do correspond to a distinct first and/or third-person reality, as it were, but simultaneously, there is no such corresponding reality for the second-person perspective. So, on this approach, the

¹⁰³ Ibid, 71.

¹⁰⁴ Specifically philosophical reflection and analysis on the second-person perspective will be offered in chapter 3.

second-person perspective cannot yield insight into shared understanding because, in fact, strictly speaking there is no second-person perspective.

2.2: Second, Understanding is Regularly Achieved Alone

A second objection now arises, one which encroaches regardless of whether the second-person perspective is fundamentally real. According to this objection, second-person relatedness may be real, but it is not necessary for understanding, because fundamentally, understanding is an achievement that is acquired on one's own. This view emerges in consideration of the ways in which people seem to receive incredible amounts of insight and perform acts of understanding by themselves, without any apparent relatedness with others. Thus, even if the second-person perspective exists, this perspective is not, in fact, necessary to all kinds of actual insights.

For example, consider the well-known story of ancient mathematician Archimedes. It is said that Archimedes came to understand, in a sudden flash of insight, how to solve the problem he had been tasked with while bathing by himself in the baths of Syracuse.¹⁰⁵ Sometime beforehand, king Hieron II of Syracuse had taken control of the city-state through a military coup, rendering the newfound king's authority somewhat tenuous. He was crowned as king with a golden wreath dedicated to the gods, but an informant told the king that the king had been duped and insulted – the crown, the informant assured, was secretly mixed with silver by a disingenuous goldsmith. Not wanting his honor to be impugned or authority to be questioned – or to sacrilegiously desecrate something which had been

¹⁰⁵ This account of Archimedes is taken from Mary Jaeger, *Archimedes and the Roman Imagination* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 17-31.

dedicated to the gods¹⁰⁶ – Hieron commissioned Archimedes to determine the crown’s true contents while keeping it intact.

The tale culminates with Archimedes, after some time being unable to solve the problem, stepping into a hot bath after the day’s intellectual frustrations. He then serendipitously notices that the water-level in the bath rises proportionally to the amount that he submerges his body in the tub. In what is recounted as one of the earliest recorded “aha!” moments in history, Archimedes purportedly yelled “eureka!” as he suddenly, at once, apprehended that the concept which we call density could solve the king’s seemingly intractable problem. Namely, Archimedes realized that each element displaces water according to its specific properties, and so he could compare the crown’s displacement of water to that of a lump of pure gold weighed out to the same mass, and any difference in displacement betrayed a difference in the crown’s composition.¹⁰⁷ The pertinent point of the story, however, is that Archimedes’ insight came to him while he was alone, so the story goes, suggesting that powerful acts of understanding like his do not require second-person relatedness.

Even if the story of Archimedes is somewhat apocryphal, there are several other accounts which corroborate the same core theme. For example, René Descartes apparently got the idea of cartesian coordinates while lying awake in his bed and watching a fly buzz around his room. It is told that he noticed that he could systematize the fly’s location and

¹⁰⁶ “What had been dedicated could not be mutilated. Indeed, as Hannibal the Carthaginian learned, taking a core sample from a votive offering for this purpose could invoke divine wrath.” Ibid, 17.

¹⁰⁷ Archimedes apprehended this causal and explanatory nexus in a moment or flash of insight while in the bath. Archimedes then experimented with different mixtures of silver and gold to create the same displacement as the crown, enabling Archimedes to show the king not only that the crown was mixed with silver, but precisely what percentage of silver it had been mixed with. Hieron subsequently honored Archimedes for his brilliance and punished the goldsmith for his dishonesty.

trajectory by calculating its distance from the walls and ceiling.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Isaac Newton was allegedly prompted to formulate his theory of universal gravitation because of the flash of insight he had after an apple fell on his head (i.e., the force which pulled the apple to the ground is the same force which causes the planets to orbit). Or similarly, German chemist August Kekulé reported that he discovered the structure of the benzene molecule while having a daydream about a snake eating its own tail, which prompted him to imagine the benzene molecule as similarly *ringlike* (hexagonal).¹⁰⁹ This conception finally made sense and cohered with the other properties of benzene, and it demystified for Kekulé this scientific puzzle he had been greatly laboring over.

Apocryphal or not, these accounts nevertheless center around an acknowledged psychological phenomenon, what contemporary psychology literature calls “aha! moments” or “eureka events.”¹¹⁰ As it relates to insight or understanding, a few research-based observations have been made from examining these phenomena, including the association of joy with coming to understand, the importance of rest to cognitive labor, the sudden, discrete manner in which these acts of understanding occur, and the nature of what is grasped being about more than mere propositional knowledge *that*, but holistic and explanatory understanding *how* and *why* – understanding, in other words, which connects an array of

¹⁰⁸ “Descartes was a late riser. His habit, when possible, was to stay in bed till around noon—musing. One day, according to legend, he was watching a fly zoom around above his head when, suddenly, he realized that he could track its position by measuring its distance from the walls and the ceiling. He understood how to plot its flight path in space . . . and voilà! We get Cartesian coordinates, or so the story goes.” Michael Patrick Lynch, “Understanding and Coming to Understand,” in *Making Sense of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 201.

¹⁰⁹ Albert Rothenberg, “Creative Cognitive Processes in Kekulé’s Discovery of the Structure of the Benzene Molecule,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 108, no. 3 (1995): 419–38.

¹¹⁰ For a representative psychological treatment of the topic, see Robert J. Sternberg and Janet E. Davidson, *The Nature of Insight*, Bradford Book (Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 1995).

several concepts in a relevant fashion.¹¹¹ What could also be gleaned from the story of Archimedes, and others like it, is the lesson that coming to understand is fundamentally a solo activity, to be achieved when one secludes oneself from others and allows his or her mind to produce the necessary cognitive accomplishments. On this account, second-person relatedness does not seem to have any essential relation to achieving understanding.

These preceding examples, though, encompass singular, momentary acts of understanding that occur in isolation, regarding essentially standalone questions or difficulties. On the other hand, are there cases which involve the more impressive achievement of acquiring mastery over an *entire intellectual field*, seemingly by oneself? An objector might have a less formidable argument were this not the case. As it happens, however, one magisterial example of such an achievement could be taken from the famous twentieth-century Indian mathematician, Srinivasa Ramanujan. For those not familiar with the history of mathematics, it is difficult to express the incredibly high level of mathematical capability Ramanujan acquired, a feat even more impressive given his personal history and the apparent way he acquired this capability.

Ramanujan was born to a poor, traditional Indian family and he did not receive any special training in mathematics as compared to his peers, but, somehow, he was able to teach himself – primarily through textbooks – a wide range of highly advanced mathematical principles.¹¹² Eventually, Ramanujan's skills were noticed by his tutors, and through written correspondence with Cambridge scholar G.H. Hardy, Ramanujan was able to secure a

¹¹¹ Ref. chapter 1, the overview of contemporary definitions and conceptions of the faculty of understanding.

¹¹² Biographical information taken from K. Srinivasa Rao, *Srinivasa Ramanujan: Life and Work of a Natural Mathematical Genius*, Swayambhu (Singapore: Springer, 2021).

research post at Trinity College, Cambridge. Later, Dr. Hardy provided other curious mathematicians his assessment of Ramanujan's talent, through Hardy's comparative "personal ratings of mathematicians." Hardy suggests: "suppose that we rate mathematicians on the basis of pure talent on a scale from 0 to 100." Hardy assigns himself "a score of 25, [J.E.] Littlewood 30," and he gives David Hilbert, considered the most eminent mathematician of the day, a score of 80. Finally, Hardy ranks Ramanujan and assigns him the astonishing score of 100, the maximum amount on Hardy's scale.¹¹³

But was Ramanujan's ability to understand mathematics at the highest levels genuinely disconnected, fundamentally, from phenomena of second-person relatedness? The Indian national memory of Ramanujan, at least, is that he was a "self-taught mathematical genius," not unlike (supposedly) other legendary mathematicians in the past.¹¹⁴ On the uptake of Ramanujan's understanding, Hardy remarks,

All that is plain is that Ramanujan found the form of the Prime Number Theorem *by himself*. This was a considerable achievement; for the men who had found the form of the theorem before him, like Legendre, Gauss, and Dirichlet, had all been very great mathematicians, *and Ramanujan found other formulae which lie still further below the surface*.¹¹⁵

These "other formulae" Hardy references are catalogued in the Ramanujan "Notebooks," which contain some 4,000 theorems, many of which constitute new discoveries in the field. The discoveries, it is told, were revealed by nothing other than Ramanujan's own genius.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid, 89.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, vii, 8

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 132. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 90-92.

Ramanujan was clearly a man who had profound understanding, and there seems little evidence, so far, to argue that second-person relatedness was a factor. This position is perhaps most strongly suggested by emphasizing that Ramanujan did not merely come to understand the mathematical truths of his own day, an impressive achievement by itself, but he was also able to advance the field of knowledge by *his own lights*. That so many of his contributions were *new* discoveries – instead of existing concepts which could hypothetically be taught from a more advanced tutor – serves to strengthen the image of Ramanujan as the fundamentally “self-taught” talent.

In other words, an account of human intelligence taken from the example of those like Ramanujan does not seem to correlate understanding with second-person relatedness, and consequently, second-person relatedness may not be a factor in the faculty of understanding after all. This position, moreover, would be bolstered if Ramanujan was not a one-off, purely isolated case of purported self-taught genius.

Indeed, it turns out that Ramanujan, or at least his reputation, is a fine example of what had earlier become known as the concept of the “lone genius.” This concept in its modern form developed in the early eighteenth-century and has lasting purchase today, and on this account, Ramanujan is not a one-time exception or *sui generis* whose example can easily be set aside. Marjorie Garber comments on what she sees as today’s “genius problem,” and observes that:

Joseph Addison’s essay ‘On Genius,’ published in *The Spectator* in 1711, laid out the terrain of genius as we use the term today, to denote exceptional talent or someone who possesses it. According to Addison, there were two kinds of genius – natural and

learned (*the greatest of geniuses were the natural ones, whose inborn gifts freed them from dependence on models or imitation*).¹¹⁷

In fact, a closer look at Addison's essay reveals that he repeatedly asserts that learned genius is acquired through one's immersion into the contemporary "Rules of Art" and the "imitation" of greater figures,¹¹⁸ modes of learning which are suggestive of *being taught by others*. Learned genius, in other words, is at least consistent with the idea of second-person relatedness playing a role in understanding. On the other hand, the natural genius, hasn't been "disciplined and broken" by these norms, but is "hurried on by a natural Fire..."¹¹⁹ These phrases suggest that in the case of the natural genius, intellectual ability is acquired on one's own.

One author, Daniel Cook, sees this Romantic conception of genius being bookended first by Addison, and last by a man named William Hazlitt (who was born sixty year's after Addison's death).¹²⁰ Addison's popularization of "genius" drew upon the ideas of his own day, with Cook commenting that "Sir William Temple's claim in *Of Poetry* (1690), following Longinus, [is] that genius 'cannot be taught by Precepts or Examples, and therefore is agreed by all to be the pure and free Gift of Heaven or of Nature'."¹²¹ Joseph Wolf Shenk says it another way, that the concept of the lone genius is the person who is "lit up by an inner light and freed from dependence on previous models."¹²²

¹¹⁷ Marjorie Garber, "Our Genius Problem," in *Loaded Words* (United States: Fordham University Press, 2012), 129. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Addison, "On Genius," *The Spectator*: 1711, Vol. 2: N. 81-n. 169 (Ireland: J. and R. Tonson, 1711-1714, 1711), 297-300.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Daniel Cook, "On Genius And Authorship: Addison To Hazlitt," *The Review of English studies* 64, no. 266 (2013): 610-629.

¹²¹ Ibid, 612.

¹²² Joshua Wolf Shenk, "The End of 'Genius': Op-Ed," *The New York Times*, 2014.

Addison illustrates this idea through a colorful anecdote in the conclusion of his exposition on genius, portraying a picture of genius which Shenk, Garber and others see as having a lasting influence:

I once saw a Shepherd, says a famous Italian Author, who used to divert himself in his Solitudes with tossing up Eggs and catching them again without breaking them: In which he had arrived to so great a degree of Perfection, that he would keep up four at a time for several Minutes together playing in the Air, and falling into his Hand by Turns. I think, says the Author, I never saw a greater Severity than in this Man's Face; for by his wonderful Perseverance and Application, he had contracted the Seriousness and Gravity of a Privy-Councillor; and I could not but reflect with myself, that the same Assiduity and Attention, had they been rightly applied, might have made him a greater Mathematician than Archimedes.¹²³

One should notice what Addison takes to be the key ingredients for the kind of genius that could surpass even that of Archimedes: perseverance, application, focused attention, severity of personal effort, etc. Namely, these ingredients denote modes of learning which predominantly rely on self-willed discipline and inborn disposition.

Furthermore, although his comparison of Archimedes is suggestive, the kind of genius Addison *primarily* has in mind in his essay is the literary genius; he mentions by name William Shakespeare, Homer, and Pindar as representative examples.¹²⁴ The development of the concept of the lone genius, in other words, not only applies to mathematicians or scientists (such as Archimedes or Newton; and later, Ramanujan), where the intellectual subject matter could be described as sort of rigid, or rules based; that is to say, analytic, and internally self-sufficient – “closed off,” as it were, to the world outside itself. Instead, the concept of the lone genius extends to intellectual achievement in the humanities and the social sciences as well, thus encompassing the vast range of human intellectual achievement.

¹²³ Addison, “On Genius,” 300.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 297-298.

In short, therefore, the Romantic-turn-contemporary conception of the lone genius does not seem to include or describe second-person relatedness as a *necessary* correlate to acquiring (all kinds of) understanding, and in the superlative case of the “natural genius,” second-person relatedness may even be detrimental. On this account, one is left wondering what role, if any, might second-person relatedness have in relation to the faculty of understanding. Perhaps, though, these examples of geniuses have been too limited. After all, most people do not have the intellectual abilities usually associated with the term “genius,” and so perhaps these examples only apply to a very limited subset of cases.

On the other hand, there is the case of secluded hermits: individuals who seek solitude on the belief that solitude and isolation enables understanding, self-knowledge, and insight. These individuals are not geniuses, *per se*, and are more likely to have closer to average levels of inborn intellectual disposition. There exists a long tradition and large body of literature on the lifestyles of hermits, where different terms are used to refer to the same or similar practice. These terms include the general label hermit, as well as recluse, and solitary. There are also tradition-specific terms like anchorite and eremite (Christian), the Japanese practice of Hikikomori, Buddhist monasticism, and several others. For the purposes of this overview, however, I will focus on notably *secular* solitaries and accounts of solitude, out of concern that some may insist that religious hermits acquire understanding through second-person relatedness nonetheless, where the second person in these instances is a divine person and the relatedness is mystical or spiritual but nevertheless present.¹²⁵ Hence, I will begin by examining the writings of Henry David Thoreau.

¹²⁵ This theme, second-person relatedness with God, is explored in 3.4.

It has been said that Thoreau “is the most representative non-religious Westerner to comprehend solitude and the hermit life.”¹²⁶ On the topic of solitude, Thoreau makes several remarks such as “I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude,”¹²⁷ and that “I thrive best on solitude....[company with others] dissipates my days, and often takes me another week to get over it.”¹²⁸ Elsewhere Thoreau expresses his belief that “Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations,”¹²⁹ and finally, he insists that “You think that I am impoverishing myself by withdrawing from men, but in my solitude I have woven for myself a silken web or chrysalis, and, nymph-like, shall ere long burst forth a more perfect creature, fitted for a higher society.”¹³⁰ These quotations reveal that, on Thoreau’s account, isolation and solitude is necessary for enlightenment, whereby relatedness with others is seen as not only unnecessary, but often detrimental towards enlightenment and understanding. Thoreau may not be a philosopher or cognitive scientist, but taking his self-attestations at face value, it appears that Thoreau’s literary achievements and “astute observations on society, politics, and nature”¹³¹ were accomplished through the catalyst of solitude.

¹²⁶ “Thoreau on Solitude - Articles - House of Solitude - Hermitary,” <https://www.hermitary.com/solitude/thoreau.html>. This website contains prolific material and academic references on the topic of willed seclusion.

¹²⁷ Henry David Thoreau and J. Lyndon Shanley, *Walden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), xi.

¹²⁸ Henry David Thoreau, John C. Broderick, and Elizabeth Hall Witherell, *Journal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 200.

¹²⁹ Thoreau and Shanley, *Walden*, 171.

¹³⁰ Thoreau, Broderick, and Witherell, *Journal*, 246.

¹³¹ “Thoreau on Solitude.”

A similar attitude is taken by French Enlightenment thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his unfinished book *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. “A reverie, in Rousseau’s conception, is a certain way of thinking that refuses to give up the richness of meaning for the sake of order and systematization... [and is] inherently a solitary endeavor...”¹³² In other words, for Rousseau, the path to self-knowledge is solitary contemplation about oneself and one’s situation. A fictional representation of this idea, moreover, can be found in Daniel Defoe’s famous story, *Robinson Crusoe*, where a marooned and isolated Crusoe discovers self-knowledge and enlightenment.¹³³

What is most pertinent, however, is that if the account of understanding that these attitudes reflect is true, it calls into question the purported role that second-person relatedness might be said to have as regards understanding, or at least the significance of such a role. These examples of solitaires, however, which may be more everyday than the “natural genius,” nevertheless primarily rely on first-hand accounts and anecdotal evidence from individuals who are not seeking to give an objective or scientific account of understanding and solitude.

But contemporary academic research has also explored the relation between solitude and cognitive goods such as understanding. These insights serve to balance out the primarily poetic statements on solitude from figures like Thoreau and Rousseau. David Jones’ compilation of essays called *The Philosophy of Creative Solitudes* (Bloomsbury, 2019) is a

¹³² Roy Brand, “Communicating Solitude,” in *LoveKnowledge* (Columbia University Press, 2012), 65. I note in passing that Rousseau’s existence was scarcely entirely solitary, however, not least because he fathered five children with Thérèse Levasseur, his domestic partner, leaving them all to a Paris orphanage.

¹³³ For an extended treatment of this message in *Crusoe*, see Mohammed Naser Hassoon, “Loneliness As Self-Improvement: Ibn Tufail’s Hayy Ibn Yaqzan and Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe,” *Philologia (Belgrade, Serbia)* 18, no. 18 (2020): 109–23.

useful companion which explores this topic from a modern philosophical and psychological point of view. One contributor, philosopher David Farrell Krell, argues that contrary to the notion that many hours spent in “creative solitudes” is a waste of time, these solitary spaces are utterly essential to the creative process. He writes, “Yet I suspect that aloneness and loneliness are essential components of creative solitudes,”¹³⁴ and even that “without creative solitudes, however, we cannot read or write or teach...”¹³⁵ Philosophical and literary work, on his account, demands a “haunted solitude” that cannot be dispensed with.¹³⁶

Indeed, another contributor Charles Scott observes that, in Krell’s case, Krell has only been able to understand his academic field, continental philosophy, because he has engaged in “periods of intense isolation, a continuous leaving of the element that defined his native culture’s life....[and he] is able to find commonality with the isolation of some other writers...”¹³⁷ In other words, according to these contemporary scholars, solitude is seen as a necessary escape from the trappings that one’s culture, relationships, and obligations often create. These trappings inhibit one’s ability to produce cognitively creative works such as philosophy or literature, or the ability to *understand* modes of thinking that are not native to one’s own historical situation.

A real-life application of this approach can be found in the life of renowned mathematician Alexander Grothendieck – a French mathematical hermit who lived many

¹³⁴ David Farrell Krell, “Creative Solitudes,” in *The Philosophy of Creative Solitudes*, ed. David Jones, 1st ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 22.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 23.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Charles E. Scott, “Solitude, Creativity, Delinquency,” in *The Philosophy of Creative Solitudes*, 77.

years alone in order to produce new advances in mathematics.¹³⁸ Grothendieck “is said by some to be the most powerful and visionary mathematician now alive [2008],”¹³⁹ and in his memoirs he claims that these advances were enabled by periods of isolation and accompanying departure from the “consensus,” a departure which was necessary for true understanding and ingenuity. He writes,

In those critical years I learned how to be alone.... these 3 years of work in isolation [1945-1948], when I was thrown onto my own resources, following guidelines which I myself had spontaneously invented, instilled in me a strong degree of confidence, unassuming yet enduring, in my ability to do mathematics, which owes nothing to any consensus or to the fashions which pass as law... By this I mean to say: to reach out in my own way to the things I wished to learn, rather than relying on the notions of the consensus, overt or tacit, coming from a more or less extended clan of which I found myself a member, or which for any other reason laid claim to be taken as an authority.¹⁴⁰

So, for Grothendieck, his mathematical insight was achieved not only *despite* isolation (ref. Ramanujan), but *because* of it. Perhaps in the light of these considerations, a stronger claim is warranted: perhaps second-person relatedness should be seen primarily as a detractor, instead of a factor, in understanding.

In any case, this section has outlined several ways in which acquiring understanding appears at least unrelated to second-person relatedness, regardless of whether the second-person perspective fundamentally exists. First, there are singular instances of insight or understanding which appear to happen suddenly – when one is by oneself. Second, there are

¹³⁸ According to reports, Grothendieck began living as a hermit in the Pyrenees in 1991, and lived this way, frequently producing mathematical works, until his death in 2014. Rivka Galchen, “The Mysterious Disappearance of a Revolutionary Mathematician,” *The New Yorker*, May 9, 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/16/the-mysterious-disappearance-of-a-revolutionary-mathematician>.

¹³⁹ Lee Smolin, *The Trouble with Physics: The Rise of String Theory, the Fall of a Science and What Comes Next* (London: Penguin, 2008), 327.

¹⁴⁰ Alexander Grothendieck, “Récoltes et Semailles, Part I,” <https://uberty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/RS-grothendieck1.pdf>.

supposed “natural geniuses”: those who, through the medium of their own talents and not that of another person, are able to understand and even master entire intellectual disciplines. Finally, there is both the anecdotal and the scholarly witness of the cognitive benefits which solitude supposedly secures, especially via the example of hermits or solitaries who credit isolation for their understanding and enlightenment.

Therefore, apart from further examination, the evidence so far reveals that acts of understanding *are* regularly and non-trivially achieved in isolation, and some accounts suggest that seclusion from others – not relatedness with others – is the true catalyst for insight and understanding. If this position is accurate, then regardless of whether second-person relatedness exists, it should not be seen as something necessary for understanding. On this account, anyone who is investigating the essentials of coming to understand should look elsewhere than a supposed “I-you” mode of relation.

2.3: Third, Advanced AI Can Replace the Epistemic Role of Second-Person Relatedness

An objector might grant for sake of argument, however, that second-person relatedness does exist and that it normally contributes to understanding. But according to a third objection, this contribution is not unique, when considering the trajectory of advancement in artificial intelligence (AI). On this account, the achievements of AI have shown that understanding can be acquired through machines or by machines, apart from second-person relatedness. If this view is correct, then second-person relatedness should be seen as playing a dispensable role, at most, regarding the faculty of understanding.

Proponents of this view argue that understanding – as regards truths of all kinds – can be secured by outsourcing human cognitive labor entirely to artificially intelligent machines. Particularly, recent advances in AI have encouraged some experts to suppose that machines,

in principle, are able to produce all the epistemic benefits that understanding delivers: either via machines that become conscious and can genuinely “understand,” or instead, via non-sentient machines which can nevertheless produce “the correct answer” to any question. On this latter account, understanding is reducible to the ability to produce correct answers, which means that all the results consistent with understanding can somehow be “calculated.” In either case, though, acquiring understanding would not depend on relatedness with other people, because fundamentally, understanding can be technologically manufactured.

For instance, consider the confident prediction by Oxford philosopher, self-proclaimed transhumanist, and futurist, Nick Bostrom. According to Bostrom, a “seed AI” (a rudimentary algorithm that is programed to recursively self-improve) may begin to progress in a specific domain, until eventually:

At its later stages, however, a seed AI should be able to *understand* its own workings sufficiently to engineer new algorithms and computational structures to bootstrap its cognitive performance. This needed understanding could result from the seed AI reaching a sufficient level of general intelligence across many domains...¹⁴¹

Accordingly, a machine only needs to be programmed with the correct algorithm and given access to enough information databases and *voilà*: understanding is acquired. Bostrom is sure to qualify, however, that machine “understanding” could be in the sense described above, namely, the kind that purportedly does not require sentience.¹⁴² This conceived distinction between sentient and non-sentient “understanding” is quite nuanced and warrants further explanation.

¹⁴¹ Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 34. Emphasis original.

¹⁴² Ibid, 15. He says that belief in a plausible so-called superintelligence is “noncommittal regarding qualia,” and whether it has “subjective conscious experience.”

The distinction can be parsed out by drawing some implications from the recent phenomenon of game-playing AI: programs that are designed to win games, such as chess, against human opponents. A famous example is Deep Blue, the first computer to ever defeat a grandmaster at chess (Garry Kasparov, in 1997). More recently, an AI called AlphaGo has become notable due to its success with the game of “Go,” an ancient Chinese board game, now globally popular through the aid of digital versions playable on the internet.¹⁴³ The basic rules and overall objective of Go are simple:

Go is a strategic board game for two players...[it] is played by two players who alternately place black and white pieces (called stones) on the empty intersections of a grid of black lines (called goban) within a 19×19 grid. The aim of the game is to control a zone of the goban greater than that controlled by the adversary; for this purpose the players try to arrange their stones so that they cannot be captured, carving out at the same time the territories that the opponent cannot invade without being captured.¹⁴⁴

So, like chess, moves in Go are exhaustively describable in mathematical terms, where each move is constituted by a certain, finite number of playable options. In 2016, AlphaGo made history by being the first AI to defeat a human Go-champion. AlphaGo, however, accomplished more than just winning the match. It also surprised spectators and experts when it incorporated moves and techniques that both the players and the computer programmers considered to be new, inventive, and genuine contributions to Go strategy.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ “Go originated in China, where it has been played for at least 2,500 years; it is very popular in East Asia, but has spread to the rest of the world in recent years. It is a very complex game strategically despite its simple rules; a Korean proverb says that no game of Go has ever been played twice, which is likely if you think that there are 2.08×10^{170} different possible positions on a 19×19 goban.” Giuseppe Ciaburro, “Playing the Board Game Go,” in *Keras Reinforcement Learning Projects* (United Kingdom: Packt Publishing, Limited, 2018).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ See “AlphaGo,” Google DeepMind, December 23, 2020, <https://deepmind.google/technologies/alphago/>, and “Google AI Software Beats Go World Champion in Man vs Machine Battle” (London: GlobalData plc, 2016).

Almost nobody argues, however, that AlphaGo is conscious and that it mentally understands these contributions, as, say, a human Go-strategist would understand. Instead, the standard interpretation of the nature of AlphaGo is that AlphaGo is not categorically different than any other computer. It is merely complex enough to successfully calculate what moves in a Go match give it a strategic advantage. *Mutatis mutandis*, on the futurist interpretation exemplified by Bostrom, humanity can engineer other machines as advanced as AlphaGo – applicable to different intellectual domains – and produce similarly impressive results.¹⁴⁶ On this conception, the epistemic goods which understanding affords can be technologically manufactured, in a manner that does not require machine sentience (let alone, second-person relatedness). With this distinction in view, further insights into the purported capabilities of AI can now be examined.

Particularly, the scientific and cultural phenomenon “ChatGPT” has caused many people to become more concerned about the hypothetical capabilities of AI. ChatGPT is a publicly accessible language-learning platform developed by OpenAI, and its abilities so far have driven people in various professions to be concerned about an AI “takeover,” so to say.¹⁴⁷ This concern stems from both a safety and security standpoint, and from fears that machines will soon outstrip humanity’s ability to produce intellectual goods.¹⁴⁸ If the epistemic presuppositions which entail this account of understanding are true, then not only is the objection a substantiated argument that undermines a positive answer to the thesis

¹⁴⁶ Alternatively, for Bostrom, one or more of these domain-specific AI will morph (by themselves or as a group, if/when combined) into a general intelligence (AGI), and subsequently, a superintelligence.

¹⁴⁷ Alejo José G. Sison et al., “ChatGPT: More Than a ‘Weapon of Mass Deception’ Ethical Challenges and Responses from the Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HCAI) Perspective,” *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction* ahead-of-print (2023): 1–20.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

question, but further existential fears which are becoming more and more prevalent may also be sound.

Therefore, in what follows, I will first provide a brief *historical* survey of how the understanding and development of AI has been shaped by certain philosophical movements and assumptions. This review will enable me to then, secondly, outline the background motivations behind this *contemporary* concern over AI superintelligence, using Bostrom as an effective representative of this mindset. Taken together, this approach aims to explain in detail the thinking which accounts for the futurist understanding of *understanding*, an approach which is gaining more popularity by the day, but which also has a decoupled conception between the faculty of understanding and any such purported second-person principle.

In 1956 there was a famous conference on AI at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the conference lead, John McCarthy, coined the term “artificial intelligence.”¹⁴⁹ In 1970 one of McCarthy’s close colleagues, prolific AI author and researcher Marvin Minsky, predicted that “in from three to eight years we will have a machine with the general intelligence of an average human being.”¹⁵⁰ Minsky’s prediction failed, due in large part to AI-researchers’ optimistically simplified conception of the human mind. On this account, a theory called computationalism, the mind matches internal semantic symbols to its respective real-world counterparts, enabling the mind to manipulate (or “process”) these symbols towards any and every sophisticated mental task. On this assumption, *all* of reality can be represented by a list of stepwise coding functions, on the

¹⁴⁹ Stan Franklin, “History, Motivations, and Core Themes,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Artificial Intelligence* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 18.

¹⁵⁰ Vivek Wadhwa, “Keep AI in Your Teaching Tool Kit,” *ASEE Prism* 27, no. 8 (2018): 21.

more fundamental presupposition that reality *itself* is an amalgamation of content ultimately reducible to discrete, context-free, propositions.¹⁵¹

Then came a formidable challenger to this view, philosopher Hubert Dreyfus. Dreyfus, brought up in the phenomenological school championed by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, severely criticized the philosophy of mind assumed by most of the AI theorists of his day (computationalism). Throughout his analysis, Dreyfus demonstrated how the human mind simply does not exclusively operate through discrete, stepwise processes. Instead, there are cognitive abilities that are not adequately accounted for by computationalism, such as fringe consciousness, global awareness, the role of embodiment, and relevance selection, also infamously called the “frame problem.”¹⁵² He imported both philosophical arguments and then-current empirical findings in cognitive science and psychology to demonstrate these shortfalls (for example, Gestalt psychology). Dreyfus’s criticisms are laid out in his 1972 publication, *What Computers Can’t Do*, which quickly became a watershed contribution to the field of AI.¹⁵³

Dreyfus’s insights were received by critics (albeit somewhat reluctantly, mainly due to his aggressively polemical attitude), and AI-researchers began to focus on a different kind of

¹⁵¹ The idea that the mind holds “representations” was itself an idea born out of the watershed revolution in psychology away from behaviorism. This revolution was due in large part to Noam Chomsky’s seminal work on linguistics (late 1950’s), which argued for a representational/semantic-manipulation model of the mind. In other words, early-AI only got off the ground because developers mirrored their approach (computationalism) to the foremost psychological/philosophy-of-mind theories of the time. Sam Freed, *AI and Human Thought and Emotion*, 1st ed. (Boca Raton: Auerbach, 2019), 12-13.

¹⁵² This hallmark issue for AI is the persistent inability for machines to sift through all the facts available efficiently, effectively, and consistently and select just those facts which are relevant to the particular situation at-hand.

¹⁵³ The revised/updated 1992 version is called Hubert L. Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can’t Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason*, [3rd ed] (Cambridge, Mass; MIT Press, 1992). This book remains the principal introduction to the philosophical critiques against AI, and many experts consider these critiques applicable to today’s AI landscape.

artificial mind: neural-net AI. This approach applies the theory of “connectionism,” with researchers attempting to model an AI after something of the biological neural nets in the human brain. Neural nets do not operate in as much of a discrete, stepwise manner, but instead, they produce outputs based on a variety of inputs delivered to multiple “nodes,” where each node depends on the activity of the other nodes, and the end-product is a complex and more interdependent sum of the total activity.¹⁵⁴ This shift in approach reflected AI-researchers’ desire to better accommodate these philosophical and scientific critiques.

Despite researchers’ efforts, neural-net technology did not advance machines towards human-level intelligence in any significant sense. This disappointment caused the AI industry to go through various “winters,” resulting in lack of research money and corporate interests. In terms of money and research focus, AI has since entered a new spring, if not summer, but mainly because both neural-net and symbol-AI have been shown to be effective and progressive only in domain-specific areas (i.e., a chess playing AI is only good at chess, a language model AI is only good at modelling language, etc.). To date, there does not exist a machine which can, on its own lights, as it were, “learn” how to perform tasks outside of the domain it has been determinately programmed to operate.¹⁵⁵ This re-directing has become so pronounced that the efforts to advance towards general or human-level intelligence has become something of a subfield within AI research.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Franklin, Cambridge Handbook, 17.

¹⁵⁵ This includes ChatGPT and all other manner of current AI. “Yann LeCun, Meta’s Chief AI Scientist, argues that large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Google’s Gemini, or Meta’s Llama won’t ever reach human levels of intelligence.... AGI doesn’t exist yet and remains a hot topic among AI researchers and executives.” Kate Irwin, “Meta AI Chief: Large Language Models Won’t Achieve AGI,” PCMag UK, May 22, 2024, <https://uk.pcmag.com/ai/152445/meta-ai-chief-large-language-models-wont-achieve-agi>.

¹⁵⁶ Currently, much of the research into this kind of AI is encouraged and showcased by the international “Conference on Artificial General Intelligence” (AGI), which has nearly fifteen years continuous running.

Within this subfield (but not limited to it), the effects of Dreyfus's critiques have since given rise to a novel approach to AI, termed "Heideggerian AI."¹⁵⁷ On this approach, serious consideration is given to the role of *embodiment* that Dreyfus so thoroughly emphasized, and it helped encourage the emphasis on mobile AI-robots: machines with bodies modeled something after the human physique, and this for the express purpose of enabling the machine to "situate" itself in the world in a way that a disembodied software program simply cannot do.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, and motivated by similar Heideggerian sympathies, there have been efforts to create "developmental robots" – robots with software modeled to mirror the stage of brain development of a young child, in an attempt to enable cognitive progress in some analogous way that a child learns and grows.¹⁵⁹

Recently, one of the foremost ideas encouraged by Heideggerian AI is for programmers to find a way for AI machines to somehow enable them to engage in "introspection." AI specialist Sam Freed, in his recent book, *AI and Human Thought and Emotion* (2019), takes seriously the claims made by Dreyfus's school-of-thought, and insists that AI be engineered to be able to introspect – or to think and reflect about one's thoughts.¹⁶⁰ Freed's contribution has seen real-world application; "introspective robots" is now a pervasive research aim.¹⁶¹

In other words, the direction of AI research – time and again – has been significantly shaped by insights from certain philosophers and philosophical mindsets. Despite the various

¹⁵⁷ Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Why Heideggerian AI Failed and How Fixing It Would Require Making It More Heideggerian," *Artificial Intelligence* 171, no. 18 (2007): 1137–60.

¹⁵⁸ Franklin, *Cambridge Handbook*, 26.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Freed, *AI And Human Thought*, 97.

¹⁶¹ Oxford's Computer Science Department hosts researcher Yarin Gal, who is working towards building introspective robots. P.D.R. Griffiths, "Ethics of Governance in Science: How Relevant Is Its Application to AI," *The Philosophical Society* (Oxford) no. 43 (2021): 75.

ingenuities, however, machines still suffer from the key shortfall that John Searle explained in his seminal 1980 paper introducing the famous Chinese Room Argument (CRA).¹⁶² In Searle's own summary, the thought experiment is as follows:

Imagine a native English speaker who knows no Chinese locked in a room full of boxes of Chinese symbols (a data base) together with a book of instructions for manipulating the symbols (the program). Imagine that people outside the room send in other Chinese symbols which, unknown to the person in the room, are questions in Chinese (the input). And imagine that by following the instructions in the program the man in the room is able to pass out Chinese symbols which are correct answers to the questions (the output). The program enables the person in the room to pass the Turing Test¹⁶³ for understanding Chinese but he does not understand a word of Chinese.¹⁶⁴

The ingenuity of the thought experiment is that, unlike a computer, the person locked in the room can later report that he did not know what the symbols meant, thereby completely undermining the experimenters' presumption that he – and by implication, an AI in the place of a person – understands Chinese.

In the light of these philosophical criticisms, most, if not all, philosophically informed AI researchers insist that machines do not truly (consciously) understand. Nevertheless, those such as Bostrom do not think “true” (sentient) understanding is required for either AI general intelligence or superintelligence. Yet, on Searle's influential account, what an AI crucially

¹⁶² John R. Searle, “Minds, Brains, and Programs,” *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3, no. 3 (1980): 417–24.

¹⁶³ Named after Alan Turing, who is considered the founder of modern computing. The “test” that he devised concerned being able to find out whether a machine had acquired genuine intelligence. For a clear overview, see Kevin Warwick and Huma Shah, *Turing's Imitation Game: Conversations with the Unknown*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). Many, however, do not consider this test to be difficult enough to substantiate general intelligence. See Selmer Bringsjord, Paul Bello, and David Ferrucci, “Creativity, the Turing Test, and the (Better) Lovelace Test,” *Minds and Machines* 11, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 3–27.

¹⁶⁴ John R. Searle, “Chinese Room Argument,” in *The MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 115–116.

requires for it to be truly intelligent is understanding of the kind that is only applicable to entities which have consciousness, intentionality, subjective experience, etc.¹⁶⁵

With this historical survey in view, it is now worth exploring what the AI futurists are saying regarding the so-called immanency of AI acquiring human-level and beyond human-level intelligence, the kind which can either be an existential threat, or, if managed by humans appropriately, an intellectual summer.

Bostrom serves as a worthy representation of this position, given his role as the founding director of the Oxford Future of Humanity institute, a “world-leading research centre that works on big picture questions for human civilisation and explores what can be done now to ensure a flourishing long-term future.”¹⁶⁶ The “world-leading” aspect of FHI can be clearly seen by Bostrom’s global reception among scholars and policy-makers alike.¹⁶⁷ He is the most cited philosopher under the age of 50 in the entire world,¹⁶⁸ and his most recent book *Superintelligence* has attracted international attention, along with enthusiastic endorsements by figures such as Bill Gates and Elon Musk.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ This inability, or lack of focused attention towards understanding within AI research, may in part be due to an eclipse of intellectual reflection on understanding in recent centuries (ref. Chapter 1). It should not be surprising, then, that achieving machine understanding remains elusive, especially when *defining* understanding is relatively new ground among contemporary epistemologists. Contributors to the 2017 AGI conference have even noticed the lack of focused research efforts into AI and understanding, based on their observation that “Discussions of understanding proper have been mainly limited to the field of philosophy.” Kristinn R. Thórisson and David Kremelberg, “Understanding and Common Sense: Two Sides of the Same Coin?,” in *Artificial General Intelligence*, ed. Tom Everitt, Ben Goertzel, and Alexey Potapov (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 201–11.

¹⁶⁶ “Future of Humanity Institute,” The Future of Humanity Institute, <http://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/>. The FHI closed as recently as April 2024, but according to the current website, its projects are ongoing throughout different organizations of the university.

¹⁶⁷ See description in “Nick Bostrom,” The Future of Humanity Institute, <http://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/>. See above about its recent closing. One might have to search for these web pages on Internet Archive.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Bostrom, *Superintelligence*. Gates’ endorsement is on the cover.

The main point of *Superintelligence* is to make the case that humanity is on the brink of an existential crisis due to the inevitable emergence of an artificial superintelligence which will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for mankind to control.¹⁷⁰ Bostrom proposes a few strategies on how to pre-empt and best prepare for this emergence, and the associated risks. Across the corpus of his published works, Bostrom suggests that these strategies include but are not limited to: creating a global governance platform (what he's dubbed as a "singleton") to control the research into and subsequent application of superintelligence,¹⁷¹ implementing a mass-scale eugenics program to manage population growth and to produce smarter offspring who have a higher likelihood of managing the risks associated with superintelligence,¹⁷² deploying widespread pharmaceutical drug-use for the purpose of enhancing AI risk-theorists' cognitive capabilities,¹⁷³ and overcoming the cultural, religious, and legal barriers that would preclude any of these endeavors.¹⁷⁴

It should be stressed that Bostrom's recommended ethical approach to preempt an upcoming AI superintelligence – as well as this approach's accompanying epistemic assumptions – has been highly influential to policy-makers, decision boards, think tanks,

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, v. "This is quite possibly the most important and most daunting challenge humanity has ever faced."

¹⁷¹ Nick Bostrom, "What Is a Singleton," *Linguistic and Philosophical Investigations* Vol. 5, no. No. 2 (2006): 48–54.

¹⁷² Bostrom, *Superintelligence*, 232; Carl Shulman and Nick Bostrom, "Embryo Selection for Cognitive Enhancement: Curiosity or Game-Changer?," *Global Policy* 5, no. 1 (2014): 85–92.

¹⁷³ Nick Bostrom, "Drugs Can Be Used to Treat More than Disease," *Nature (London)* 451, no. 7178 (2008): 520–520; Nick Bostrom and Anders Sandberg, "Cognitive Enhancement: Methods, Ethics, Regulatory Challenges," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 15, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 311–41.

¹⁷⁴ Nick Bostrom, *Technological Revolutions: Ethics and Policy in the Dark* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007); Nick Bostrom, "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity," *Bioethics* 19, no. 3 (2005): 202–14.

conferences, and research paths.¹⁷⁵ Whereas someone like Ray Kurzweil – who has voiced similar sympathies for decades (albeit viewing the emergence of superintelligence from a characteristically optimistic point of view)– is perceived as something of a fringe figure, Bostrom is viewed (or has been in the past)¹⁷⁶ as a serious strategist and his suggested approaches are given real consideration.¹⁷⁷ The crucial issue acting as the source for the concern over superintelligence is whether such emergence truly is a foregone conclusion, to be thrust upon us via the current methods and trajectory of AI research, which are founded on certain key epistemic assumptions.¹⁷⁸

In chapter two of *Superintelligence*, Bostrom defines what he means by superintelligence and provides the epistemic underpinnings that justify its plausibility. Superintelligence is “any intellect that greatly exceeds the cognitive performance of humans in virtually all domains of interest,” and settles on machine-based superintelligence as being the most likely.¹⁷⁹ Bostrom is keen to point out that this kind of intelligence must be *generally* applicable, and not merely intelligent in specific domains – like Deep Blue, the

¹⁷⁵ “At the age of forty-two, Bostrom has become a philosopher of remarkable influence.” Raffi Khatchadourian, “The Doomsday Invention. (Nick Bostrom on Artificial Intelligence)” (New York: Conde Nast Publications, Inc., 2015), 64.

¹⁷⁶ In January 2023, Bostrom was involved in a scandal over controversial e mails he had sent to his colleagues, the details of which were disclosed by Bostrom himself to pre-emptively renounce his past statements and make amends, if necessary. It is worthy to note that Bostrom’s position at the University has not been affected by the scandal, at least not in a major way that is readily apparent.

¹⁷⁷ “Nick Bostrom is perhaps the most influential thinker on safety concerns associated with the march toward artificial intelligence.” Peter High, “Nick Bostrom On The Single Most Important Challenge That Humanity Has Ever Faced,” Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/peterhigh/2016/06/27/nick-bostrom-on-the-single-most-important-challenge-that-humanity-has-ever-faced/>.

¹⁷⁸ When reading Bostrom’s proposed ideas, or those of his close colleague/frequent co-author Anders Sandberg (former FHI research fellow, current Oxford postholder, and self-described transhumanist), one cannot help but be saturated with thoughts reminiscent of many a dystopian fiction novel. The program outlined above might invoke images from Huxley’s *Brave New World* or the 1997 science-fiction film, *Gattaca*.

¹⁷⁹ Bostrom, *Superintelligence*, 26.

first chess program to become superior to human chess players, but *only* at chess.¹⁸⁰ What makes intelligence general is that it can be readily adapted towards several domains, thereby bridging different ways-of-thinking through a sort of practical reason that relies on a flexible cognitive toolkit.¹⁸¹

Although a specific-intelligence can pose unique threats of its own – for instance a “rogue” power-optimization program that hijacks an entire country’s electrical grid – Bostrom is concerned with an intelligence that has the general competency across all relevant human domains (an advanced artificial general intelligence, or AGI), thereby causing a *global* threat of subjugation.¹⁸² On the fundamental epistemic nature of superintelligence Bostrom takes a clear stance:

[a superintelligence is] noncommittal regarding qualia: whether a superintelligence would have subjective conscious experience might matter greatly for some questions (in particular for some moral questions), but our primary focus here is on the causal antecedents and consequences of superintelligence, not on the metaphysics of mind.¹⁸³

The conditions necessary and sufficient to cause the emergence of superintelligence, on Bostrom’s account, have no essential relation to certain ontological realities of *mind*. Such ontological realities only pertain to certain ethical concerns, says Bostrom.¹⁸⁴ This position is

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 15.

¹⁸¹ Whether an artificial (machine) intelligence – even of the domain-specific type – constitutes “real” intelligence, remains an open question. In the AI literature and therefore assumed throughout this section, domain-specific intelligence (also called specialized or narrow-AI), refers at least to the ability for a machine to produce specific outputs or achieve specific goals designed/desired by the engineers.

¹⁸² Another definition of AGI is as follows: “a form of AI that possesses the ability to understand, learn, and apply knowledge across a wide range of tasks and domains. It can be applied to a much broader set of use cases and incorporates cognitive flexibility, adaptability, and general problem-solving skills.” Mark Sullivan, “What Is AGI in AI, and Why Are People so Worried about It?,” Fast Company, December 1, 2023, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90990042/agi-ai-explained>.

¹⁸³ Bostrom, *Superintelligence*, 26.

¹⁸⁴ Whether a superintelligence deserves civil rights, etc.

asserted rather than argued for, as Bostrom appends an endnote to this sentence in which he stresses his opinion that it is “irrelevant” whether a superintelligence needs to have true intentionality, and that internalist/externalist concerns are likewise tangential to its hypothetical emergence.¹⁸⁵

Bostrom’s summary dismissal of issues within philosophy of mind (at least as far as they concern a superintelligence’s potential capabilities and emergence), flavors the entire rest of the book. For example, in chapter six (“Cognitive Superpowers”), Bostrom is confident that:

With sufficient skill at intelligence amplification, all other intellectual abilities are within a system’s indirect reach: the system can develop new cognitive modules and skills as needed— including empathy, political acumen, and any other powers stereotypically wanting in computer-like personalities.¹⁸⁶

The “indirect reach” is Bostrom’s earlier thesis that different *forms* of superintelligence can emerge – speed superintelligence, collective superintelligence, or quality superintelligence – and that these forms are, in essence, all on the same qualitative level of intelligence.¹⁸⁷

Therefore, the emergence of one form entails the emergence of the others, as if the other forms of superintelligence were like different goods on the same factory floor, equally accessible so long as the floor is reached. In both Bostrom’s sense of “indirect reach,” and his sense of a superintelligence developing “new cognitive modules and skills as needed” – including phenomenologically mysterious modes like empathy – a superintelligence need only enough power, speed, and material resources to affect its instrumental ends.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 330.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 111.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 70-71.

Arguably, the most foundational guiding myth for Bostrom and the futurist perspective is naturalistic neo-Darwinian evolution (“myth” insofar as myths can act as *engines of imagination*, and in this case, the governing engine, regardless of whether the myth is “true”).¹⁸⁸ If blind evolutionary forces were able to produce human intelligence from a purely material substrate, this thinking goes, then it seems possible that another intelligence or even a superintelligence could emerge. The chances increase if evolutionary processes are guided by intelligent human beings. Bostrom concludes that, given the rate of technological advancement in the last one-hundred years or so, humanity could be on the brink of an AI “explosion.” This explosion could or will be achieved, on his account, through the hypothetical (and readily plausible) self-bootstrapping “seed AI” referenced earlier.

On an AI attaining this kind of intelligence, Bostrom does not lay out a roadmap, but does include several features that it must have. These features include the ability to learn, the ability to deal with uncertainty or probability, and the ability to extract “useful concepts from sensory data and internal states,” and manipulate these acquired concepts in order to arrive at “flexible combinatorial representations for use in logical and intuitive reasoning.”¹⁸⁹ In other words, a superintelligence needs to be able to understand. Bostrom is somewhat agnostic as to whether general intelligence will be gained through modeling artificial intelligence after the human brain, or if it will be gained via synthetic cognitive architectures that are wholly different than those of biological brains. Nevertheless, based on AI’s historical indebtedness to insights from cognitive science, Bostrom sees it likely that any advance towards general intelligence will involve at least a hybrid of the two approaches.

¹⁸⁸ Mary Midgley, *The Myths We Live By*, Routledge Classics (Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge, 2011).

¹⁸⁹ Bostrom, *Superintelligence*, 27.

On uncovering the biological mechanisms of human cognition, Bostrom seems quite confident that “advances in neuroscience and cognitive psychology...should eventually uncover the general principles of brain function” on the basis that “there is a limited number...of distinct fundamental mechanisms that operate in the brain, continuing incremental progress in brain science should eventually discover them all.”¹⁹⁰ This claim reveals that Bostrom assumes a physicalist account of mind.

This physicalist account of mind, which drives Bostrom’s predictive posture, is also assumed throughout the entire book. For example, in chapter four, Bostrom points to the evidence that engineers are close to fully modeling an insect brain, which is a significant waystation to modeling full-blown human cognition because, for him, the human mind *simply is* a more complex version of an insect’s.¹⁹¹ Additionally, the advanced nature of a digital mind is due to there being “enormous” advantages to the characteristics of “hardware and software,” such as more memory storage, faster processing of information, greater editability, and shelf-life.¹⁹² Because each of these hardware and software components and capabilities are increasing every year, Bostrom thinks that an advance towards general intelligence is likely. Once general intelligence is achieved, then it is only a matter of time before a synthetic AI uses these highly plentiful and fungible resources to bootstrap itself towards superintelligence (through more recursive, closed-loop, self-improvement).¹⁹³ In other words, Bostrom reduces “intelligence” to the physical, mechanistic processes in the human brain, and which can obtain in an isolated, disembodied “machine mind.”

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 33-34.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 83.

¹⁹² Ibid, 71-74.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 76.

In summary, on the increasingly popular and culturally influential futurist account, the human mind *essentially is* the human brain, and a more thorough, even if incomplete, model of brain function – fused with synthetic counterparts – could be well on its way (followed shortly by an exponential increase of intelligence). Although Bostrom at different times speaks of both sentient and non-sentient machine “understanding,” he and others like him nevertheless insist that a superintelligence will be developed solely through bolstering a machine’s hardware and software endowment. This mindset strongly suggests the idea that all intelligence lies on the same spectrum, and that categorical differences either do not exist, or can be overcome by the methods which enable the advancement in a lower category of intelligence.¹⁹⁴ If the epistemic assumptions fueling this account are true, in other words, the emergence of machines Bostrom is both concerned and optimistic about¹⁹⁵ should be conceived as not only epistemically plausible, but alarmingly imminent.

Most pertinent, finally, is that a vindication of the futurist outlook would entail that the achievement of understanding, or at least all the relevant outcomes associated with understanding, do not rely on certain second-person phenomena. Instead, understanding can be delivered by machines with the correct hardware and software combinations that either become conscious and can genuinely “understand,” or which can nevertheless “compute” whatever answers are being sought. On this account, arriving at understanding is a

¹⁹⁴ There exists much terminological debate over whether narrow-AI, or any type of domain-specific “intelligence,” should be called “intelligence” at all. On the other hand, the qualifier “artificial” in the term “artificial intelligence” is a correct descriptor: the entity (regardless of whatever it should be called) is, in fact, “man-made.” These finer points are something that came up in a discussion with John Lennox (February 2024), to whom I am grateful.

¹⁹⁵ For example, see Yuval N. Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (London, 2017). Also, see Bostrom, “Letter from Utopia.” Futurists are not only concerned about the existential risk that AI presents but are also sure to point out the upshot of AI (epistemic and otherwise) if it is developed and regulated appropriately.

technologically manufacturable achievement which can be obtained apart from second-person relatedness, and therefore, second-person relatedness is not a factor in the faculty of understanding in a unique way.

2.4: Fourth, Communications from Other Persons, without Second-Person Relatedness, Can Deliver Full Understanding

Finally, and building from the previous three objections, the fourth objection states that communications from other persons, without second-person relatedness, can sufficiently deliver full understanding. This objection admits that there are communicative aspects of humans' coming to understand, but it questions the necessity that these aspects be uniquely *second-personal*. On this account, regardless of whether second-person relatedness exists and is or can be a factor in the faculty of understanding (even, perhaps, irreplaceable by advanced AI), understanding – regarding truths of all kinds – may be acquired through communication that is nonetheless absent second-person relatedness.

In what follows, I shall present an example of this objection using a well-known biblical narrative. First, though, I will say a brief note about my methodology concerning the approach taken to the biblical texts throughout this chapter and the rest of the thesis. My treatment of the biblical narrative follows the methodology of Eleonore Stump, showcased most clearly in her book *Wandering in Darkness*.¹⁹⁶ Stump leaves largely to one side the issues of historical textual criticism when interpreting the biblical narratives, inasmuch that

¹⁹⁶ Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010), 22-38. Also see Stump, "Revelation and Biblical Exegesis: Augustine, Aquinas, and Swinburne," in *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne*, ed. Richard Swinburne and Alan G. Padgett (Oxford University Press, 1994). I am also grateful to Sean Biggins, for our discussion of Stump's methodology.

she sees the narratives as remaining theologically and philosophically useful despite various historical-exegetical issues or disputes that loom large in the field of biblical studies.

Although the field of biblical studies has immense importance to the interpretation of the biblical texts, I follow Stump's approach and treat the narratives as they are presented in the standard editions on the basis that these narratives represent a unified or unifiable body of literature which can stimulate useful theoretical reflection. A main benefit of this approach is that it does not require the reader to view the interpretation I present as the most correct or the only correct interpretation. In other words, setting to one side the fascinating and worthwhile historical discussions over the origins, transmission, and stability of the biblical texts, the following analysis should nevertheless provide a reasonable argument built from a narrative that is philosophically coherent. In this way, I am not engaging in biblical criticism *per se* but am using the text almost as a kind of *technology*, to formulate a coherent argument that serves the purpose of this chapter.¹⁹⁷

The example examined below is taken from Numbers 22-24. These chapters recount the story of the somewhat perplexing biblical character of Balaam – a seer who reveals divinely inspired insights about God and Israel, but who is a gentile pagan not part of the commonwealth of Israel. I will first provide a brief sketch of the overall story, and then I will highlight a tension that exists in the full biblical account of Balaam, an account which includes passages beyond Numbers 22-24. This tension will bring into sharp focus the core contention of this fourth objection.

¹⁹⁷ This description of using the text as a kind of “technology” was suggested by Old Testament scholar Katherine Southwood. I thank Professor Southwood for her other insights as regards this section, based on her expertise in Old Testament studies.

The background to the story in Numbers is that the nation of Israel is nearing the end of its forty-year exile in the wilderness, and God begins to move the camp towards the Promised Land. Under Moses' leadership, the nation is placed by God on the footsteps of the land of Canaan, in preparation for the upcoming conquest under Joshua – to be launched once the generation of Israelites led out of Egypt have died (including Moses). The Israelites set up camp in the plains of Moab (Num. 22:1), in the Transjordan, immediately after defeating the mighty Amorites (Num 21:31-35).

The book of Numbers then sets out to tell the story of Balaam in three distinctively identifiable scenes, spanning chapters 22 through 24. The first scene centers around the Moabite king Balak seeking out Balaam, an Aramean sage, to curse Israel on his behalf.¹⁹⁸ Balak, upon seeing the successful Israelite army on the borders of his Moabite kingdom, conspires with the elders of Midian – who are otherwise Moab's enemies – to commission Balaam's services.¹⁹⁹ Apparently, Balaam has an "international reputation as a true prophet,"²⁰⁰ as evidenced in the text by Balak (through his emissaries) confessing to Balaam: "for I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed" (Num 22:6).²⁰¹ Balak's men approach Balaam and plead with him to go with them to Moab. In response, Balaam seeks God in prayer and tells him about Balak's request, but God forbids

¹⁹⁸ Num 22:2-21. Curses and blessings were viewed as more than merely symbolic or psychological, but ontologically efficacious and irrevocable. See *Gordon J. Wenham, Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 4*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (InterVarsity Press, 1981), 191.

¹⁹⁹ Num 22:3-4. Balak allying with Midian is the first of several examples which show Balak's intense desire to weaken Israel.

²⁰⁰ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (InterVarsity Press, 2000), Nu 22:6.

²⁰¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Containing the Old and New Testaments*, [Standard text ed.] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Balaam from accepting the offer. After a more compelling attempt by Balak to convince him,²⁰² Balaam asks the Lord once more and this time, he is finally permitted to go, but with the caveat that he may only tell Balak the message that God puts in Balaam's mouth to say. Balaam unequivocally declares this condition up-front to his employers, and then starts on his way to king Balak.

The second scene of the story unfolds during Balaam's journey and contains the notorious story about the donkey that miraculously speaks. Balaam is riding his donkey on the road to Moab, and it keeps swerving off the road because it sees a formidable character, the "angel of the Lord," up ahead (Num 22:23). What the donkey sees that Balaam does not see is the angel standing in the road to oppose Balaam. Balaam strikes the donkey on three separate occasions to get it back on the road, and after the third strike, God miraculously opens the donkey's mouth, and it talks back to Balaam – protesting Balaam's physical abuses (Num 22:25-29). God then opens Balaam's eyes so that he too sees the angel, and a brief exchange between Balaam and the angel ensues. After what appears to be reconciliation, Balaam is allowed to continue his journey, and he meets with Balak.

The story in Numbers culminates with Balaam consorting with Balak and delivering a series of four divinely inspired prophecies which are proclaimed over the Israelite camp (Num 23-24). None of the four prophecies curse Israel, despite Balak's wishes and attempts to effect otherwise. In the first prophecy, Balaam uses very positive language about Israel, reminiscent, in fact, of God's covenant language with Abraham (Num 23:10).²⁰³ In the

²⁰² The second time around, Balak promises more money and uses men of nobility to send for Balaam.

²⁰³ "Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the dust-cloud of Israel?" Cf. 2 Chron 1:9, Gen 16:10, Gen 13:16. God's covenant-making with Abraham is one of the most revered and alluded themes throughout the Old Testament.

second prophecy, Balaam proclaims a famous phrase, “God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind.”²⁰⁴ This concept is approvingly repeated throughout Scripture, after the Balaam event, in places such as 1 Samuel 15:29, Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:13, and others. In the third prophecy, Balaam, overlooking the Israelite camp, gets caught up into a sort of divine ecstasy when “the spirit of God came upon him” (Num 24:2). In a sort of prelude to the oracle, Balaam describes himself as someone whose “eye is clear,” that he “hears the words of God,” and that he “sees the vision of the Almighty” (Num 24:3-4). He then tells of Israel’s future prosperity and geopolitical strength, language which results in a very enraged Balak.

Balaam, despite his employer’s fury and promise of non-payment, doubles-down and delivers a final vision, during which he confesses in the prelude that he “knows the knowledge of the Most High” (Num 24:16). During this last oracle, Balaam speaks a prominent line which has historically been received as referring to both king David, and the eventual messiah: “a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel.”²⁰⁵ Balaam continues his vision, telling Balak of Israel’s future military successes over her enemies – including Moab, Balak’s very own dominion. The furious Balak dismisses Balaam without pay or honors, thus ending the story in Numbers 22-24.

These prophecies all demonstrate that Balaam had access to profound truths which were divinely revealed. The Spirit of God is even said to come “upon him” at one point – a similar phraseology that is used in reference to future Israelite judges, kings, and prophets

²⁰⁴ Numbers 23:19.

²⁰⁵ Num 24:17. “But from very early times Jewish and Christian interpreters have applied this prophecy to the Messiah.” From P.P. Saydon, “Numbers,” in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (Thomas Nelson, 1953), 257.

under divine inspiration.²⁰⁶ Indeed, R. Dennis Cole observes that Balaam is “endowed with divine insight as he observed the Israelites below.”²⁰⁷ Furthermore, Balaam’s telling of Israel’s military success shows that God uses Balaam to turn the tables on Balak, Israel’s enemy, by using Balaam as an inspired mouthpiece.²⁰⁸ God’s use of Balaam in this way is not unlike that of the Old Testament prophets generally. So far, much of the narrative seems to present Balaam in a strikingly positive light, suggesting that he may have been a holy person. There are at least two other ways in which Balaam seems to exhibit qualities that are usually associated with holiness: his obedience to God and his religious piety.

Balaam displays steadfast obedience to God even when there is ample incentive to do otherwise. He turns Balak’s men away on their initial request to go with him, thereby obeying God’s injunction, despite Balaam having been promised great fortune and honor should he oblige. Even after their second attempt to convince him, Balaam only agrees because he is given God’s permission, yet he promises that “although Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the Lord my God, to do less or more” (Num. 22:18). Balaam also obeys God when there is ample pressure, or threat of reprisal, to do otherwise. Balak is a powerful king, and kings were known to kill those who did not fulfill their requests.²⁰⁹ When Balaam delivers his prophecies over Israel, effectively *blessing* Israel, Balak expresses immense outrage, yet Balaam does not waver in

²⁰⁶ Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 487.

²⁰⁷ R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, vol. 3B, The New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 416.

²⁰⁸ Also, the oracles successively become more and more explicit about Israel’s fortune and her enemies’ misfortune. It is almost as if the more Balak tries to convince God (via Balaam) to curse Israel, the more his attempts are frustrated.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Prov. 16:14 “A king’s wrath is a messenger of death, and whoever is wise will appease it.”

proclaiming God's message exactly as received. Balak's earthly powers coupled with his tremendous fury rendered Balaam at real risk of mortal danger. Nevertheless, Balaam holds fast to God's prohibition.

Furthermore, Balaam is presented as a man of religious piety. When Balak's men approached Balaam at the start of the story, each time Balaam seeks God in prayer and asks what he is supposed to do. Balaam also refers to God as "the Lord *my God*," implying that his obedience is out of a kind of personal commitment and not just fear of punishment. Furthermore, when Balaam is on the road to Balak, and the angel of the Lord stands in his way in disapproval (Num 23:32), Balaam responds piously without hesitation. He bows to the ground, confesses his sins, and promises to turn back if that is what the angel asks (Num 22:31, 34). In other words, Balaam appears to repent, an action which is usually associated with those who are seeking righteousness. Balaam is nevertheless permitted by God to continue and meet Balak, where he continually professes declarations which seem to reflect steadfast loyalty to the God of Israel. For example, in the first prophecy Balaam proclaims that he wishes to "die like the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!" (Num 23:10).

Finally, peppered throughout the rest of the prophecies, Balaam shows consistent reverence for God, even when it directly undermines Balak and Moab. For example, Balaam says "How can I curse whom God has not cursed?," tells Balaam that "Did I not tell you, 'Whatever the Lord says, this is what I must do'?", and emphasizes to Balak that he cannot "do either good or bad of my own will," but only the will of God.²¹⁰

All these observations elucidate in Balaam an ability to discern appropriately the word of God, respond to God's commands in obedience notwithstanding Balak's demands,

²¹⁰ Num 23:8, Num 23:26, Num 24:13.

and prophecy concerning divine truth and future events. In the words of John Henry Newman, “Not only had he [Balaam] the grant of inspiration, and the knowledge of God's will, an insight into the truths of morality, clear and enlarged, such as even we Christians cannot surpass; but he was even admitted to conscious intercourse with God, such as we Christians have not.”²¹¹ Newman also remarks on Balaam's expressed piety, when Balaam seeks God in prayer in response to Balak's call: “he brought the matter before God in prayer. He *prayed* before he did what he did, as a religious man ought to do.”²¹²

Furthermore, Puritan theologian Richard Sibbes reflects that Balaam correctly apprehends the fact that the righteous enjoy an afterlife full of reward, and Balaam appears to show sincere desire to attain it (Num 23:10).²¹³ The prophecies are perhaps most noteworthy in that they leave behind a legacy which is significant throughout Israel's redemptive history; later biblical writers often quote or allude to Balaam's prophecies. As a result of Balaam's exhibited qualities, some have supposed that Balaam had at one point been a part of the commonwealth of Israel, and that he continued to worship God throughout his life. G.W. Coats, for example, remarks “the Balaam story presents Balaam ... as a saint who intended from the beginning to do nothing other than obey Yahweh's word.”²¹⁴

On this account so far, one may be tempted to conclude that Balaam was a holy man who worshiped the one true God and was used by God as a faithful prophet. One may even suppose that Balaam is a character not unlike Melchizedek: a foreign gentile, who, somehow

²¹¹ John Henry Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 4 (Rivingtons, 1868), 21.

²¹² Ibid, 22. Emphasis original.

²¹³ Richard Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, D.D. Edited, with Memoir, by Alexander Balloch Grosart* (Scotland: J. Nichol, 1862-64, 1864), 1-15.

²¹⁴ George W. Coats, “Balaam: Sinner or Saint?,” *Biblical Research* 18 (1973): 22.

is simultaneously an authentic priest of “God Most High,” and who is remembered in the biblical account for praising God and blessing his chosen people (Gen 14:18-20). Surely, if there are other biblical references to Balaam, they should at least be consistent with a positive appraisal of Balaam and his legacy, if not supplemental to this appraisal. After all, Newman observes, Balaam appeared to be a “high-principled, honourable, conscientious man,” who “professed, and he acted according to his professions.”²¹⁵

Based on the examination so far, Balaam seems to be a man of his word, obedient to God, and a courageous mouthpiece through which God spoke blessings on Israel amid Israel’s powerful enemies. In fact, anyone who should think poorly of Balaam (or others like him) might rightly be “called by the world uncharitable and bigoted.”²¹⁶ In short, Balaam appears to have been an icon of righteousness, thus accounting for his divinely endowed understanding. Furthermore, as will emerge in chapter 3, most Christian accounts of theology insist that there exists a certain kind of understanding that is only had by those who are in a covenant relationship with God, and according to some interpreters, this covenant relationship necessarily includes rich instances of second-person relatedness. On this account, Balaam’s profound understanding must have been had on the basis of such second-personal, covenantal union.

But this presentation is not all that Scripture has to say about Balaam. Scriptural commentary outside of Numbers 22-24 presents, startlingly, the polar-opposite characterization of the man, thus establishing the rival theme that Balaam was regarded as not only short of holy, but as a kind of icon of evil. The author of 2 Peter says Balaam “loved

²¹⁵ In terms of the “sense in which we commonly use the words.” Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 4, 23.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 34.

the wages of doing wrong” (2 Pet. 2:15), and the author of Jude describes certain evildoers as those who “abandoned themselves to Balaam’s error for the sake of gain” (Jude 11). The Pentateuch elsewhere sheds similar light on Balaam, as well as the rest of the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 23 says Balaam tried to curse Israel, but God would not allow it, and intervened to change the outcome of what Balaam truly intended.²¹⁷ In Joshua 13, we learn that Balaam was killed by the Israelites during their subsequent conquests (Josh 13:22), giving the impression that Israel clearly considered him an enemy.

In fact, a closer look at the original account in Numbers might reveal more clarity along these lines. For example, when Balaam is eventually given God’s permission to leave with Balak’s men, “God’s anger was kindled because he [Balaam] was going” (Num 22:22). From this text, Newman observes that Balaam “was displeasing to God *amid* his many excellences.”²¹⁸ God had already forbidden Balaam from going with the men once, yet Balaam (perhaps upon promise of a bigger fee and greater honor), seeks God’s permission a second time. Newman suggests that Balaam’s persistence betrays the fact that Balaam is not as godly as a superficial reading of the text might suppose.²¹⁹

In the scene with the talking donkey (Num 22:22-35), the angel stands in Balaam’s way sword in-hand, postured to strike Balaam down, and tells Balaam that “your way is perverse before me”. This divine accusation corroborates the thesis that Balaam was never holy, even at the beginning of Numbers 22. Furthermore, in light of the Balaam references in 2 Peter and Jude – where Balaam is said to have sought gain through wickedness – and

²¹⁷ Deuteronomy 23:4-5, “they hired against you Balaam...to curse you. Yet the Lord your God refused to heed Balaam; the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you...” Nehemiah 13 and Joshua 24 confess the same (Neh 13:2, Josh 24:9-10).

²¹⁸ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 4, 25. Emphasis original.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 35-36.

Deuteronomy 23, Joshua 24, and Nehemiah 13, where Balaam is said to have desired to curse Israel but God intervened, some have supposed that Balaam's resistance to issue curses and his "constant harping on money matters," "might suggest that Balaam's apparent indifference was really an oblique demand for a huge fee."²²⁰ In other words, according to this hypothesis, Balaam *wanted* to curse Israel, and only for suspicious reasons did he not go beyond what God put in his mouth to say. Indeed, throughout his time with Balak, we see Balaam giving conspicuously detailed instructions to Balak that represent outstanding (and costly) ceremonial rituals – almost as if Balaam is deploying his most daring tricks of divination to try to obligate or force God into cursing Israel (thereby rendering Balaam worthy of Balak's promised fee).²²¹

Despite these failed efforts, Balaam *does* show a steadfast resistance to assuage Balak. This posture, however, is likely due to the vexing reminder that to cross the Almighty would mean almost certain death – e.g., the preceding confrontation with the angel of the Lord still fresh in Balaam's mind. This interpretation is reflected in Sibbes' account, who believed that Balaam's obedience was out of an unholy fear of punishment instead of a righteous desire to please God.²²²

Finally, in what is the clearest indictment of Balaam, Christ himself, in the letter to the angel of the church of Pergamum, rebukes those who "hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat

²²⁰ Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, 188.

²²¹ The sacrifices were, curiously, crafted after the shape of Israel's tabernacle cult: *seven bulls and rams to be wholly burned*. The number seven, the use of bulls and rams, and sacrifice by burning on an altar, represent a thoroughly Israelite-type attempt to appease the God of Israel, on His own terms, and thereby effect a transformation of blessing into cursing. *Ibid*, 194.

²²² Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, 9-10.

food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication” (Rev. 2:14). Christ’s rebuke draws from a tradition about Balaam initially recounted in Numbers 31, but remembered in other passages such as Deuteronomy 4, Psalm 106, and Hosea 9. These passages all reference Israel’s apostasy at Peor, when the Israelites “yoked” themselves to the foreign god Baal,²²³ and a severe plague was poured out on Israel as divine judgment.²²⁴

The incident of Peor is told in Numbers 25, when the Israelites began to “have sexual relations with the women of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.”²²⁵ Incidentally, this verse is in curious juxtaposition to the end of Numbers 24; the book of Numbers having just recounted Balak’s total failure and frustration and Balaam’s persistent obedience.

Nevertheless, although unsuccessful throughout Numbers 22-24, Balak ends up securing wicked use out of Balaam in the end. Balaam eventually finds a way to harm Israel (and perhaps recompense part of Balak’s fee) without explicitly disobeying God’s direct orders. Josephus imagines a very cunning Balaam, guiding Balak to “[send beautiful foreign women] till they have persuaded them [Israelite men] to leave off their obedience to their own laws and the worship of that God who established them, and to worship the gods of the Midianites and Moabites; for by this means God will be angry at them.”²²⁶ In other words, the complete biblical witness regarding Balaam reveals that he cunningly advised Balak to deploy Moabite women, who worshipped foreign gods, to entice the Israelites to commit

²²³ Deut 4:3, Psalm 106:28-29, Hos 9:10.

²²⁴ Num 31:16.

²²⁵ Num 25:1-3. Divine plague ensued and resulted in 24,000 Israelite deaths (Num 25:9).

²²⁶ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Hendrickson, 1987), 110-112.

covenant infidelity.²²⁷ This transgression manifested through sexual immorality of an idolatrous (religious) nature, thereby wounding Israel's relationship with God (Num 25).²²⁸

Crucially, though, is the fact that Balaam was both wise enough to understand that this covenant-breaking disobedience would render the nation vulnerable to divine punishment – thus weakening Israel against Moab – and he was simultaneously malicious enough to devise this damaging course of action for the benefit of Balak, Israel's enemy. In other words, Balaam's actions show that he had the requisite understanding necessary to appreciate the importance of covenantal fidelity. In the biblical account, God's divine covenants are more than mere agreements or contracts, they instead constitute God entering relationship with others. These covenants outline the terms that enable this relationship to endure and to flourish, terms which contain mutual commitments that are not motivated by servile fear of punishment or forced obligation, but instead, *love*.²²⁹ With these considerations in mind, one can see how Balaam is better seen as a counterpart not to Melchizedek, but rather to the wise serpent in the garden of Eden, who – like Balaam – used his intellectual acumen to try to destroy the relationship between God and God's beloved.

In short, on a more complete biblical account of the character, Balaam is recorded as an enemy of God who probably had nefarious motives from the very beginning and throughout the original story in Numbers. For all these reason, we can better understand Christ's rebuke in Revelation 2, and why St. Augustine of Hippo considered Balaam "a very

²²⁷ It need not be assumed these Moabite women were willingly complicit, even though they followed Balak's orders.

²²⁸ A similar pattern is seen in the story of king Solomon. 1 Kings 11:1-8.

²²⁹ For example, see Jon D. Levenson, "ONE A Covenantal Love," in *The Love of God*, vol. 8 (United States: Princeton University Press, 2015).

bad man.”²³⁰ In fact, one early church father (Andrew of Caesarea) goes so far as attributing to Balaam direct satanic possession.²³¹ The seemingly positive presentation of Balaam in Numbers 22-24 and the negative descriptions of him in other passages should probably not be understood as two independent traditions, but instead, the entire biblical witness plausibly represents a unified – albeit somewhat perplexing – literary narrative. Hence, when the entire Scriptural witness of Balaam is taken into consideration, we see that despite all his supposed qualities, Balaam is nevertheless remembered as being a devil, on the side of evil.

Consequently, on the one hand, as the previous examination has shown, Balaam has an incredible uptake in understanding through his communications with God. On the other hand, Balaam is nevertheless *opposed* to God, and in fact, according to the Scriptural account, he clearly stood outside of a covenantal relationship with God. Regardless, Balaam is still remembered as having a profound sense of divinely inspired understanding. Whatever kind of understanding Balaam enjoyed, however, it must be distinct from the kind of understanding that some have supposed is unique to a life sanctified by grace, where this grace indispensably involves second-person relatedness with God.

Yet, the following objection is now raised: perhaps Balaam was nevertheless able to enjoy the *products* of covenantal understanding, without the covenant relationship itself – that is, without the second-person relatedness found only within the context of covenantal union. By implication, therefore, perhaps all forms of understanding are attainable through communications with another person, yet without second-person relatedness.

²³⁰ Saydon, “Numbers,” 255.

²³¹ William C. Weinrich, *Revelation*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament; 12 (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 30.

CHAPTER 3: THE MAIN CASE

The four preceding objections constitute the primary arguments against an affirmative answer to the thesis, each challenge more specific and focused than the previous. In effect, these objections strike doubt over the idea that certain forms of epistemic success, e.g. the achievement of understanding, require second-person relatedness.

Having outlined these objections, it is time to consider an alternative account, one which draws from the various fields which pertain to this debate. The goal with chapter 3, therefore, is to develop just such an account, with the intent to further explore the topic at-hand, in service of providing a substantive response to the original objections (chapter 4) and, finally, offer a plausible answer to the thesis question (chapter 5).

In what follows, I begin developing this alternative account by first examining some every day or commonsense examples which suggests that the faculty of understanding is enabled through interpersonal interaction of at least some kind, thereby inviting subsequent, more rigorous investigation.

3.1: An Argument from Commonsense

The idea that an interpersonal phenomenon – of some kind, at least – is a factor in the faculty of understanding is first suggested by briefly examining a few every day, common phenomena which are regularly experienced or observed throughout a normal life. These examples include parents and caregivers rearing infants and young children, schoolteachers instructing adolescents and adults, and military training instructors forming new cohorts of

competent service members. These three examples,²³² at least when taken at face value, may be seen to support the intuitive motivation driving those who believe that at least some kind of interpersonal phenomenon is a key factor in understanding – either by contributing to the development of the faculty of understanding, and/or, by helping the person successfully accomplish specific acts of understanding regarding truths of all kinds.

In other words, these examples are meant to invite one to consider whether there seems to be something epistemically significant about “interpersonal” and “social” interaction, setting aside, for now, whether these interpersonal instances are most accurately associated with the term “second-person relatedness” (and whatever is meant by it). If this invitation is successful, then it will encourage a more rigorous examination.

Young Children and Parents

Starting with the example of parents and caregivers raising young children, psychologist Peter Hobson captures what many parents and caregivers have observed:

Yet the fact that we become able to reflect...does not mean that it was all by ourselves that we acquired the ability to think in the first place. Nor does it mean that the psychological mechanisms by which we think – the tools of thought, as it were – are things that arose in our own brains by some individualistic process like gene-determined brain growth. I shall be arguing that on the contrary, the tools of thought are constructed on the basis of an infant’s emotional engagement with other people. *To put it bluntly, if an infant were not involved with other people, then she would not come to think.*²³³

²³² There are many other true-to-life examples which could be used to make the point. Another potential example is that of coaches training or mentoring adults, both in an athletic context and otherwise (life coaching, for example). One recent volume which explores the benefit of interpersonal interaction in the context of coaching is Jonathan Passmore and David Tee, *Coaching Researched: A Coaching Psychology Reader*, Ebook Central (Hoboken, New Jersey, 2021).

²³³ R. Peter Hobson, *The Cradle of Thought* (London: Macmillan, 2002), xiv. Emphasis added.

In this way, Hobson is reacting against other schools of thought²³⁴ which deny or downplay the belief that not only is our mind embodied, but that we are naturally social creatures – the process of mental development, on Hobson’s account, thus relies on our interactions with other people, especially early on.

Hobson captures this idea again when commenting on humans’ ability for language as compared to primates; he says that “The links that can join one person’s mind with the mind of someone else – especially, to begin with, emotional links – are the very links that draw us into thought...[and] social engagement is what provides the foundations for language.”²³⁵ In these introductory statements made by Hobson, he leaves his reader with little mystery at what he’s trying to get at with his follow-on psychoanalytic examination throughout the book, *The Cradle of Thought*: we rely on others, most especially during our childhood development, in order to form the very capacity for thinking. Hobson then spends the rest of his book outlining the ways in which clinical psychiatry, developmental psychopathology, and contemporary psychoanalysis lend credence to this idea. His aim is to show that our interaction with other people during childhood development – or rather, something about or inherent in these interactions – is the *unique* factor which sets our mental abilities apart from that of primates and other animals.

Across the rest of the book, he cashes out this idea by outlining several specific cognitive abilities which, he believes, are best accounted for by this unique social factor. These abilities include our precursors to thought, the formation of initial thought, the

²³⁴ Philosophies of mind such as individualism or those allied with the distinctives of individualism. William Ferraiole, Joseph Owens, and John Heil, “Individualism and Descartes,” *Teorema* 16, no. 1 (1996): 71–86.

²³⁵ Hobson, *The Cradle of Thought*, 2.

intentional aspect of thought (that we think *about* things), our ability to distinguish subjective from objective and subjects from objects, and finally, our understanding of other minds.²³⁶ In other words, using predominantly clinical psychoanalysis, Hobson cashes out in some scientific detail the commonsense view that children require interaction with others in order to develop their mental abilities (especially adult caregivers, e.g., parents).

Now, whether Hobson's non-technical descriptions such as "relying on others," or "social engagement," denote something which is genuinely bound up with a philosophically distinct reality – the second-person perspective – is a matter for further analysis in later sections. For now, however, if Hobson's straightforward suspicions are correct concerning the formation of thought depending on our engagement with other people, then *mutatis mutandis*, the achievement of understanding should likewise be seen as plausibly related to such phenomena – if for no other reason than the fact that whatever is denoted by "thought," in Hobson's examination, it is likely a precursor to understanding, and/or an aspect of it.

His psychoanalytic perspective, furthermore, is also buttressed by the written accounts of everyday mothers and caregivers. The accounts of these individuals, the majority of whom are non-specialists in childhood development, help substantiate this argument from commonsense. One account is particularly useful, that of Clara Claiborne Park. Mrs. Park wrote her personal account of what it was like to raise one of her daughters, referred to as "Elly" in Park's book *The Siege*.²³⁷ Elly was born in 1958 and at some point, in her very early childhood (and possibly since birth), Elly developed autism spectrum disorder, or ASD.

²³⁶ Hobson dedicates at least a chapter on each of these topics.

²³⁷ Clara Claiborne Park, *The Siege: A Family's Journey into the World of an Autistic Child* (Boston, Mass.; London: Little, Brown, 1995).

The book recounts, in both personal and scientific detail, how Elly's family and especially her mother – an educated woman yet a layperson with respect to the field of psychology and psychopathology – dealt with the challenges unique to those caring for children with ASD. Regarding those who suffer from ASD, Hobson gives a brief and useful summary of the shortfalls that children with autism have: "The abnormalities it [autism] presents are these: a profound and characteristic impairment in social relations; a severe limitation in communication with other people, often including abnormalities in language; an impoverishment in imagination, including play; and unusual repetitive preoccupations and rituals."²³⁸ In Hobson's description of those with ASD, there can be seen clear cognitive shortfalls, shortfalls that inhibit more complex thought such as the acquisition and sophisticated manipulation of language.

Although much more will be said about ASD in later sections, the salient point is to showcase how Park's account as a mother raising *both* Elly *and* four other normal children is especially useful.²³⁹ Thus, Park, in her clearly written and thorough account, communicates a very acute awareness of *what was different* about Elly's behavior and achievements, as compared to her four other experiences raising Elly's siblings. Furthermore, even though there have been significant advances in the medical and psychological approaches to treating children with ASD (relative to when Park was raising Elly), her book nevertheless contains a direct account of an extended personal experience. On this basis, at least, Park's account is and will likely continue to be a relevant resource.

²³⁸ Hobson, *The Cradle of Thought*, 6.

²³⁹ "Normal" is the term used in the literature by psychologists, and they are aware (as am I) that the term could be interpreted unfairly, as if there is something essentially "wrong" with other children. The term is meant as a clinical descriptor and not meant to be in any way derogatory towards children suffering from ASD, or other conditions.

Early in the book, Park remarks that, “Deep inside us, unspoken and unanalyzed until Elly made us analyze it, is the conviction that all good learning is at last a matter of what is now called, with a show of scientific objectivity, ‘interpersonal relations.’”²⁴⁰ Park fills-in what she means by this term with a few everyday examples, offered upon reflection of her rearing Elly’s three older siblings before Elly was born: “There had been so much to do. I had looked at books with them and later read them aloud....I had taught them letters and numbers and how to sound out words...I had punished and rewarded....Anyone would have said – many people did say – that I had three lovely children.”²⁴¹ Park surveys a range of interpersonal activities with her children that many mothers throughout history would attest to engaging in, as part and parcel of the cognitive formation of the child.

As far as raising Elly was concerned, Park goes at pains to describe how she and the rest of the family desperately attempted to “seduce her [Elly] into the human condition,”²⁴² to get Elly, like the rest of her siblings, to *care* about things, to desire them, and to engage with others. In Park’s estimation, the existence of these factors – including and especially “interpersonal relations” – was what helped explain the formation of the abilities of Elly’s normal siblings, and likewise, this lack is what helped explain the gap of formation in Elly.

These abilities, from Park’s observations as a mother, include the development of speech, the ability to recall (e.g., memory), the competent pursuit of various external goals, and the recognition of *wholes* in pictures as well as the ability to draw wholes on paper – as opposed to recognizing or drawing mere, singular aspects, or facets of the whole. Elly, on the

²⁴⁰ Park, *The Siege*, 13.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 15.

²⁴² Ibid, 12.

other hand, due to what Park viewed as a lack of the ability to engage in interpersonal relations, could almost never throughout childhood, for example, seem to recognize a cartoon picture of a teddy bear in a picture book *as a teddy bear*.²⁴³ Elly could only pick out certain distinguishable factors about the colorful, furry-looking thing on the page. In Park's words,

Elly was not blind, but sight is more than images on the retina. The organism must record, but it must also interpret before it can be said to see. As eighteen-month-old Elly flipped the pages of her colored picture books, what did she see? Did her mind integrate the reds and browns and blacks and blues and greys into a kitten or a car? I could not say. I could only observe that she flipped the pages rapidly, steadily, with never a pause. Once – once only – she had shown she recognized a picture of a blue teddy bear like her own. That was at seventeen months. Months passed, one year, another, and never did Elly give another sign that she could see a picture.²⁴⁴

As Park reflects in this passage, Elly may have had some integrated perception of pictures, but there was little to no external evidence that this was the case. Instead, it was as if Elly could only ever make out piecemeal shapes, colors, and sizes. Likewise, when prompted to draw a picture of her house and family, Elly drew oddly one-dimensional stick figures and structures, sometimes only drawing half of the person or mixing categories, such as oddly combining figures of people with figures of numerals.²⁴⁵ In other words, Elly had profound difficulty being able to holistically apprehend artificial forms, or representations of things in the real world such as pictures, sculptures, and drawings.²⁴⁶

In summary, Park's predominantly narrative account thus presents the reader with a heightened awareness of a mother's sense that children require regular interaction with others for normal cognitive development. Hence, the accounts of specialists (like Hobson) and non-

²⁴³ Ibid, 55.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, figures are in between pages 152-153.

²⁴⁶ In this way, Park's description seems similar to McGilchrist's overview of "left-brain" operations.

specialists (like Park) regarding the interaction of parents and caregivers with infants and young children seem to help the commonsense case that social interaction is plausibly a factor in the faculty of understanding (in the sense of the development of the faculty itself, as well as the exercise of the faculty in various contexts).

Schoolteachers and Students

The next example for the argument from commonsense is taken from schoolteachers instructing adolescents and adults. Consider the following statement, a section of the forward to the most recent National Curriculum Framework of the Republic of India (2005), written by Yash Pal, a nationally acclaimed scientist, and educator, who was well-known in India as a prominent public figure and successful communicator of leading scientific ideas:

We need to give our children some taste of understanding, following which they would be able to learn and create their own versions of knowledge as they go out to meet the world of bits, images and transactions of life. Achieving some degree of success in this area would also signify that we have learnt to appreciate the capacity for learning and the futility of filling up children's memory banks with information that is best kept as ink marks on paper or bits on a computer disc....Education is not a physical thing that can be delivered through the post or through a teacher. Fertile and robust education is always created, rooted in the physical and cultural soil of the child, *and nourished through interaction with parents, teachers, fellow students and the community.... There is a mutuality to the genuine construction of knowledge.*²⁴⁷

So, according to Pal, it is readily apparent that what schoolchildren crucially require for effective schooling is ongoing interpersonal engagement with tutors and peers. Furthermore, from Pal's perspective, the kind of learning that schools should be seeking to instill in their children is the kind that extends beyond knowledge of facts, the sort of which can be represented by "ink marks on paper," or "bits on a computer disc." Pal sees the construction

²⁴⁷ Yash Pal, "National Council of Educational Research and Training" (NCERT: New Delhi, 2005), iii-iv. Emphasis added.

of a different kind of knowledge – the kind which delivers “understanding” – as relying on “societal learning,” where “the teacher remains central” (as opposed to “media and educational technologies”).²⁴⁸

The Framework which follows is a project headed by numerous Indian experts and educationalists, in addition to Yash Pal. Throughout the publication, one can readily see the fingerprints of Pal’s sentiment in many ways. In a section outlining what the Framework means by “knowledge and understanding,” it supposes that in order to confer upon the child “experience organized through language into patterns of thought, thus creating meaning, which in turn helps us to understand the world we live in,” there must be a corollary “dynamic engagement with the world through observing, feeling, reflecting, acting and sharing.”²⁴⁹ The rest of the document is peppered with references to the importance of such interactive engagement with the world, including other people, as being foundational to the education of a child – a process conceived by the Framework as the gradual transmission of the type of knowledge which secures understanding.

The idea that education relies on interpersonal interactions is more than an intuitive feeling experienced by teachers and educationalists. Instead, the idea has, at least since the early 1970’s, also enjoyed some considerable attention in the academic fields of sociology and psychology. In 1972 psychologist David Hargreaves wrote *Interpersonal Relations and Education*, a book in conversation with prominent twentieth-century psychologist and educationalist Carl R. Rogers.²⁵⁰ Since Hargreaves’ contribution, furthermore, there has been

²⁴⁸ Ibid, iii.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, 25.

²⁵⁰ David H Hargreaves, *Interpersonal Relations and Education*, International Library of Sociology (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972).

ongoing and increased interest in this field, showcased by the annual *International Conference on Interpersonal Relationships in Education: ICIRE*, which first convened in 2010. Three notable, and recent, monographs on the topic which were encouraged by the ICIRE are *Interpersonal Relationships in Education: An Overview of Contemporary Research* (2012), *Interpersonal Relationships in Education: From Theory to Practice* (2014), and *Teacher-Student Relationships and Interactions as a Factor in Learning Environments* (2017).²⁵¹ As Zandvliet, et al, remark in *From Theory to Practice*, the overall tone of this entire field is that “clearly, positive teacher-student relationships also contribute to student learning.”²⁵² The literature in these works and in the larger field examine from various angles the cognitive (and other) phenomena and benefits of fruitful teacher-student interaction, building from Hargreaves contribution.²⁵³

In his book, Hargreaves outlines his “symbolic interactionist” account applied to education in some analytic detail. On Hargreaves’ account, the best kind of classroom learning is that which contains numerous “proactive-reactive” interactions between the teacher and student, where these interactions are what he calls “learner-centred.”²⁵⁴ In these situations (I will call them learner-oriented), the teacher teaches “indirectly,” where this means the teacher is willing to adopt the student’s ideas as a springboard for further investigation into the subject matter.²⁵⁵ He cites research which shows that students taught by

²⁵¹ Th. Wubbels, *Interpersonal Relationships in Education: An Overview of Contemporary Research*, Advances in Learning Environments Research; v. 3 (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012).; Th. Wubbels, *Teacher-Student Relationships and Interactions as a Factor in Learning Environments*, Vernon-Wall Lecture; 36th (Leicester, 2017).

²⁵² Zandvliet et al, *From Theory to Practice*, 2.

²⁵³ It remains to be explored, however, what the *active ingredient* (as it were) to these cognitively beneficial interactions might be.

²⁵⁴ Hargreaves, *Interpersonal Relations*, 132-137.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

this method outperform their counterparts taught by the “teacher-centred” (or teacher-oriented) method.²⁵⁶ This method is where teachers teach the subject material “directly,” treating the students more as passive receivers.²⁵⁷

In learner-oriented settings, the teacher and student are both, at different times, active or passive, and the teacher’s goal is to establish a classroom climate where the ideas he or she is aiming to teach, and the ideas of the student, are allowed to interact. In this way, if the learner-oriented method of teaching is carried out successfully, the student’s original ideas gradually and organically become more synchronized with those ideas the teacher is seeking to impart. It is worth emphasizing that on this account of teaching, which stresses the importance of the learner-oriented method as *uniquely* successful, the teacher and the student are co-engaged on a topic and the student’s understanding gradually comes into synchrony with the teacher’s understanding, through reciprocal dialogue and interaction. This notion of there being a “synchronization” of intellectual perspectives through interaction and dialogue sounds like it could prove fruitful, especially if it develops into a recurring theme.

Military Training

In any case, the last commonsense example to be reviewed is the example taken from military training instructors forming new cohorts of competent service members. This example will be outlined by showcasing some findings in contemporary academic literature on military psychology, followed up with a supplementary personal account.

²⁵⁶ He cites Edmund J. Amidon and John B. Hough, *Interaction Analysis: Theory, Research, and Application*, Addison-Wesley Series in Education (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1967).

²⁵⁷ Hargreaves, *Interpersonal Relations*, 132-137.

The modern field of military psychology began during World War 1, where the findings from psychologists analyzing soldiers who had seen combat were published by Lincoln Andrews in 1920.²⁵⁸ According to contemporary Stephen Goldberg, one primary method of training was and has been the “apprentice approach.”²⁵⁹ The apprentice approach is one method of securing the desired goods of military training, where these goods are conceived as producing soldiers “capable of achieving their assigned missions....[and] progresses from learning of individual skills to collective skills.”²⁶⁰ In other words, one of the primary goals of military training is the acquisition of skill knowledge. The apprentice approach is the method whereby new practitioners assigned to a specific military unit that specializes in certain skills are instructed by more experienced mentors, so that the soldiers can become effective battlefield practitioners of these skills themselves.

One example outlined by Goldberg concerns studies on marksmanship training. These studies show that soldiers who received training from “highly trained instructors who would provide a considerable amount of individualized instruction” performed with higher marks than those who did not.²⁶¹ Furthermore, one of the qualities of these “highly trained” instructors is that they were able to communicate more than basic tenets of marksmanship, but also the understanding of more nuanced factors such as “wind or gravity.”²⁶² In other words, these instructors, through their interaction with soldiers, were able to effectively

²⁵⁸ Lincoln C. Andrews, *Military Manpower; Psychology as Applied to the Training of Men and the Increase of Their Effectiveness* (New York: E. P. Dutton & company, 1920).

²⁵⁹ Stephen L. Goldberg, “Psychology’s Contribution to Military Training,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Military Psychology*, Oxford Library of Psychology (Oxford University Press, 2012), 243. Goldberg outlines other methods which are now being used, but the apprentice approach remains as a tried-and-true method of military training.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 241.

²⁶¹ Ibid, 243.

²⁶² Ibid.

confer both skill knowledge and the type of holistic theoretical knowledge necessary to secure certain tangible results. These tangible results were not secured by a one-sided imprinting of facts or ability, but by two-way interpersonal engagement in which each trainee received individualized attention and had mutual interaction with his instructor.

A related kind of military understanding is called “sense-making.” According to Uzi Ben-Shalom, et al, “sense-making” can be defined as “a motivated, continuous effort to understand connections (which can be among people, places, and events) in order to anticipate their trajectories and act effectively.”²⁶³ One example that illustrates sense-making is taken from an infantry company commander as he was storming into a settlement infiltrated by terrorists:

. . . I have three minutes driving in the vehicle during which I try to understand what is happening before I arrive at the fight. On the radio I talk with [the] scout who was there in the morning and he says that there was shooting there, near the palm tree, but the war room reports terrorists inside “Eley Sinay” [settlement] and not where he is saying. What’s running through my mind is that there are terrorists inside “Eley Sinay” and not where he said, and the incident two years ago when they entered this place and killed three civilians. . . . I then receive a battle report that there is one dead civilian and that our forces are in contact. . . . The only thought in your head is that you must end this and kill this terrorist. It is your responsibility, you don’t want to have casualties in your unit. At this moment I see the terrorist clearly . . . I work according to the drill and assault to close in on the terrorist. The driver stays in the car . . . and my radio operator is running after me. I’m focusing on the terrorist and don’t understand that there fire directed into me. During all this the radio operator shouts “you’re under fire,” and then I see that the bullets near me are not from the terrorist but rather the other force and then, in a split second, I understand that I’m entering a fratricide, that the other force is firing and that we’re running directly into their fire. I then decided to go back to the Jeep, and advance from another direction, so as not to

²⁶³ Uzi Ben-Shalom, Yitzhak Benbenisty, and Yechiel Klar, “Characteristics of Sense-Making in Combat,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Military Psychology*, Oxford Library of Psychology (Oxford University Press, 2012), 218. Here, the authors are quoting this definition from G. Klein, B. Moon, and R.R. Hoffman, “Making Sense of Sensemaking 1: Alternative Perspectives,” *IEEE Intelligent Systems* 21, no. 4 (2006): 70–73.

die from our fire. I arrive and both forces are throwing hand grenades. I'm calling the other force to stop and assault the terrorist and end this. . .²⁶⁴

From this example, one can see how sense-making is required to make good decisions effectively while in a battlefield environment, because sense-making is what secures a holistic grasp of the various factors at play, and how they interrelate. This requirement remains at various levels of military engagement – operational, tactical, and strategic.

Sense-making is thus, at least in part, a cognitive process that delivers certain desirable cognitive goods, and given the description about the holistic nature of interrelated suppositions, sense-making in military psychological literature maps on to the academic concept of understanding in certain distinctive ways. Furthermore, according to these experts, although sense-making does rely on cognitive processes, it also relies on “emotions” or affective processes. This reason is because sense-making is bound up with affording soldiers not only a kind of battlefield situational awareness, but also providing them with *meaning* – in other words, why it is that what they are doing is morally valuable and ethically important. Ben-Shalom, et al, discuss the ways in which both the cognitive and non-cognitive factors “have an impact on the sense-making process.”²⁶⁵

How do military leaders help communicate the ability for sense-making in their troops? According to the study, based on the current research:

In order to lead, *one must connect one's sense of the situation to one's followers' sense of it, thereby ensuring their understanding*, enhancing their motivation, and promoting their resilience. A sense of trust and togetherness are vital in stressful situations, and they *result from the interaction of subordinates with their leaders....* When commanders were involved in combat, their ability to make sense of the

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 221.

²⁶⁵ Some affective or non-cognitive factors include “surprise, confusion, and bewilderment; [and] related emotions such as fear, joy, or numbness.” Ibid, 220.

combat situation served their leadership role by enabling them to motivate and *provide meaning* for their fellow officers and subordinates.²⁶⁶

On this account, a commander can instill sense-making in his troops when he successfully gets them to see the situation as he sees it – to conceive of the environment from his point of view, as it were. This “connection” (or, synchronization) of the commander’s sense with that of his troops, furthermore, presupposes that the commander appreciates whatever kind or quality of sense they currently enjoy (and likewise what sense they currently lack). In other words, the commander sees the situation from his troops’ point of view, and subsequently strives to better synchronize their view with his own (superior) sense, through a process that is inherently interactive.

More than just a cognitive engagement, or meeting of minds, it also tremendously helps if the commander has personal experience from similar combat situations, a feature which his troops see as enabling between them a sense of “trust and togetherness.”²⁶⁷ The idea in these cases is that the commander’s guidance and orders are not coming from a place of mere theoretical knowledge, nor from a purely detached objectivity. There exists in combat a real risk of mission failure, along with the risk of loss of life or limb. In these cases, a commander with combat experience is better able to connect with his troops in multiple ways and deliver sense-making more effectively. Thus, the communication of sense-making is therefore dependent on the one’s personal experience, history, affect, and other qualities unique to *persons*. In other words, sense-making – the military psychology term for getting soldiers to *understand* – is an achievement which involves not only the cognitive meeting of

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 228. Emphasis added.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

disembodied minds, but the two-way meeting of whole persons, towards the synchronization of *sense*.

Finally, these ideas concerning both effective military skills-training and battlefield sense-making enjoy personal endorsement by the present author. I am an American-trained fighter pilot for the US Air Force and have spent close to a decade engaged in military flight operations, with more than six years flying in operational F-16 units. In both my years as a trainee and my years as a deployable (and deployed) fighter pilot, I have found the above academic findings and conclusions quite accurate. I will offer a few examples.

Throughout “Undergraduate Pilot Training” (UPT) – a thirteen-month training program which begins shortly after officer commissioning and culminates in the trainee getting his or her “basic pilot wings” – one of the essential skills one must obtain is the ability to properly handle an airborne emergency. As one can imagine, the prospect of having to successfully recover an aircraft that is suffering from a critical systems-malfunction can be quite daunting, especially in the context of solo flights where the only one who can issue the appropriate actions is oneself.

The instructor cadre knows that students need far more than book knowledge of *what* to do concerning each checklist item – for example, which switch to flip, which handle to pull, etc. What we crucially need to know is how to acquire and employ an extensive and holistic systems-knowledge of the aircraft, combined with various air traffic regulations, and specific details unique to that situation (the weather, time of day, location, and other details. This interrelated knowledgebase is in addition to the required skill knowledge of flying the aircraft; the “stick and rudder” skills, as it were). The instructors, at least once each training day, would sit each of us down and with one-on-one attention and interaction – building off our own independent study of various “facts” in flight manuals – would slowly, yet

gradually, mentor us and bring us up into a tradition, one that delivered the sort of *understanding* required to properly handle airborne emergencies. This interaction comprises of discussions as well as role-play of the emergency scenario, where the trainee must play-act – while on the ground and sometimes in a mock cockpit or simulator cockpit – exactly what he would do as if he were truly in the air.

Furthermore, in various settings throughout the program, we would discuss the Air Force publication *The Road to Wings* – a sort of compilation of experiences of the pilot trainees who had gone before us.²⁶⁸ One of the most memorable things about this booklet is how it recounts the ways in which student pilots were killed in various accidents (oftentimes these accidents included the instructor as well). The point being made – quoting from the publication and reiterated by the instructors – was that many of these checklist items are “written in blood.” Meaning, much of the checklist exists only because of the findings of safety investigations after many fatal crashes throughout the years.

In other words, as a trainee I was given more than mere flight manuals and textbooks concerning the proper procedures. I was being encultured into a certain way of thinking. In addition to the self-study and one-on-one instruction, my reading the stories of those in *Wings* and talking about them with my instructors, who had themselves gone through the program before me, enabled my ability for cockpit sense-making – to see an emergency from a very special point of view, the point of view of a competent pilot. This vantage point is one

²⁶⁸ This military-produced booklet is shared at training bases, and it is not the one with the same title available for retail written by Julie Tizard. The most recent version is *Road to Wings* (Air Education and Training Command, USAF, 2023) <https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/aetc/publication/aetch11-210/aetch11-210.pdf>.

that – at least from my experience and that of many other students– can only be delivered through cognitive *and* affective interaction with other persons.

I graduated from UPT in late 2013 and proceeded to fighter-specific training programs for the next eighteen months, culminating in my becoming a new, qualified, deployable, and combat-ready F-16 pilot. After a couple of years of operational flight experience, I upgraded to F-16 flight leader, and then a few years after that, I upgraded to F-16 flight instructor. I am therefore able to comment on researchers’ claims about military training and sense-making from both a trainee and an instructor perspective.

As an instructor in a fully operational fighter squadron, the epistemic goods we are trying to deliver upon less experienced fighter pilots go far beyond the handling of emergency procedures.²⁶⁹ Instead, the situations we spent most of our time giving instruction on are full-fledged training exercises, the kind which involves more than eighty various aircraft in a multi-service, multi-national, mock “wartime” environment (a staple exercise of such nature is called “Red Flag,” which takes place a few times each year in both Nevada and Alaska, USA). The missions are therefore incredibly complex – especially when compared to basic flight training – and instructors in this setting must somehow communicate to their students a much more complicated kind of understanding, or sense-making.

In these situations, the most valuable instruction occurs after the mission, when the specific mistakes have already been made (and there are always some to point out and learn from; there is no such thing as a truly perfect mission or perfect flight). In what is called the “debrief” – a process which can last anywhere from one hour (basic missions) to sometimes

²⁶⁹ Although it hardly seems like it at the time, the incredibly large amount of understanding (including skill) gained during UPT merely acts as the barebones foundation for the corollary competency required to effectively employ a fighter in actual combat or combat-training scenarios.

six hours (large exercises) – the events of the mission are reconstructed using the data from various electronic flight recording devices. In recent decades, the reconstruction essentially comprises of the video recording of the heads-up-display, alongside another screen, one with a top-down view playback of the flightpath of *all* aircraft involved in the mission.

With this setting, I sit the student down, and depending on his experience and qualifications (thus determining his role in the mission), I pinpoint the exact moments where any tactical mistakes were made (including any of my own) – the critical ones receiving the most attention. With both the student and I watching the playback together at and around critical time slices, I talk through and play-act “what to fix” for next time. It is especially helpful if the instructor has himself made the same or similar mistakes in the past, as is often the case, because this personal history enables him to better understand in a unique way the situation from the student’s point of view – in particular, the ways in which the student’s point of view is deficient and in need of correcting.

Assuming the debrief is going well and the student is appropriately engaged, there is a noticeable meeting of minds between us, where his understanding slowly becomes more harmonized with my own. The student, in this example a new “wingman” (in other words, neither a flight leader nor instructor, but one who follows and obeys his mission-assigned leader), has less hope of correctly identifying and fixing his own mistakes without instruction. This type of debrief format is ubiquitous across all mission types, and in the case of “large force exercises” such as Red Flag, where the mission is a complex and interrelated nexus of assets and events, my primary goal with the student during the playback is to get him to see how his actions – for better or for worse – impacted the rest of the mission. This impact is sometimes very limited and sometimes it shapes the outcome of the entire mission. Discussions and instruction of this kind are equipped to ensure that for the next flight, the

student better understands what to do, as well as appreciates the *meaning* associated with these actions.

In summary, although much more could be said about my experiences, I can confidently say that my profession has found that to communicate understanding upon student pilots, at all stages of training and development, there requires recurring instances of continuous and attentive, one-on-one interaction where both the student and the instructor are jointly focusing on the relevant materials and prerogatives, together.

3.2: Joint Attention and Understanding

The preceding section surveyed three contexts in which understanding seems to be enabled through interpersonal interaction, or cognitive cooperation with others. The kind of cooperation in all the cases reviewed, moreover, seems to be more than isolated *mental* co-engagement, but co-operation which involves two persons interacting with one another in ways that are unique to persons, such as emotional exchange.

Certain psychologists have explored a unique phenomenon which fits this description, a phenomenon called *joint attention*. This section, therefore, seeks to explore the ways in which joint attention may, in fact, be correctly described as the precise psychological factor that unites whatever – relative to the thesis topic – is common to the examples showcased above. This psychological review should serve as an invitation for a rigorous philosophical investigation into whatever factor or factors seem to be so prevalent and indispensable in instances of joint attention, and this theoretical analysis will follow, in section 3.3.

3.2.1: What is Joint Attention?

What exactly is joint attention? Specialist Peter Mundy defines joint attention as “the social coordination of one’s own attention with that of another person to better adopt a

common point of reference and share information.”²⁷⁰ Saying it another way, joint attention is when two people co-attend to the same object, and this “object” need not be a physical item, but can be an immaterial concept, a sports game (as observers or as participants), a movie, a sunset, a mathematical proof, etc. There is a bit to unpack, however, from these brief gestures or descriptions of joint attention. For example, what exactly is meant by “attention”?

“Attending” can be described as the focusing of one’s psychological orientation towards a particular object, for the purpose of mentally engaging with it in some way. In other words, it means what is implied by the common-sense notion of “attention.” Peter Hobson gives further explanation of what is meant by “attention” in joint attention:

‘Attention’ is a term that comes easily to our lips. We seem to know what it means... Often we take it that attention is basic to conscious awareness.... The description of you as attending implies that there is something you are attending to. In other words, the concept of attention is not one that refers to a state of being in an isolated individual. In the typical case, at least, attention is a concept that refers to one particular quality of the relation between an individual and the world-as-experienced.... [we can] grasp the concept of attention as (a) referring to an ‘internal’ quality common to a variety of conscious mental states that (b) includes the idea of someone having a selective psychological focus, so that something is attended to under a description for that person, and even (c) sometimes may be applied to people and animals for whom/which it is difficult or impossible to discern what their state or focus of attention is...²⁷¹

So, attention is simply the psychological engagement with something else in the world, material or immaterial. It can be extant even if there are no outward signs of attending – the so called, showing “attentiveness” – however, real instances of attention are directed towards

²⁷⁰ Peter Mundy, “A Review of Joint Attention and Social-Cognitive Brain Systems in Typical Development and Autism Spectrum Disorder,” *European Journal of Neuroscience* 47, no. 6 (2018): 498.

²⁷¹ R. Peter Hobson, “What Puts the Jointness into Joint Attention,” in Naomi Eilan (editor), *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology* (Consciousness and Self-consciousness, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 185-186.

something and in some way. Attention, therefore, can be reasonably understood as a facet of basic consciousness and the kind of thing proper to one experiencing.

As for the kind of attention which qualifies as “joint,” an immense source for insight into this phenomenon can be found in Naomi Eilan’s compilation, *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds*. Therein, John Campbell (tenured philosophy professor at UC Berkeley and former philosophy chairholder at Oxford) provides further description of what constitutes joint attention:

Just as the object you see can be a constituent of your experience, so too it can be a constituent of your experience that the other person is, with you, jointly attending to the object. This is not to say that in a case of joint attention, the other person will be an object of your attention. On the contrary, it is only the object that you are attending to. It is rather that, when there is another person with whom you are jointly attending to the thing, the existence of that other person enters into the individuation of your experience. The other person is there, as co-attender, in the periphery of your experience.²⁷²

On Campbell’s account, then, the experience on the part of both persons is indispensably constitutive of joint attention. One example the literature makes use of is a situation where two people are in the same room and each is staring at a lit candle. In this situation, there is an awareness of the other person, an awareness that the other person is attending to the candle, *and* an awareness by both persons that the other is aware of his/herself.²⁷³ The object of attention, however, is *not* the other person, even though there exists an awareness of the other person. The object of attention for both observers is still the candle.

There seems to be something psychologically and philosophically unique about this experience, as compared to that of attending to the candle in a room by oneself, or, attending

²⁷² John Campbell, “Joint Attention and Common Knowledge,” in *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 288.

²⁷³ Stephen R. Schiffer, *Meaning*, 1st pbk ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

to the candle that someone else is also attending, but where one (or both) persons are unaware of the other person's presence. One example of this situation is where a one-way mirror separates the two individuals, both are attending to the candle, but only one person knows that there is another person attending to the candle.²⁷⁴ Despite this knowledge or awareness, joint attention does not obtain because the one person is not aware of the other's presence. The same lack would obtain if they were both attending to the candle, but separated by a window, and only made to believe it was a one-way mirror. In other words, in both cases, they are not attending *with* the other person.²⁷⁵

Joint Attention in Developmental Contexts

The psychological literature surrounding joint attention usually centers around joint attention in infants and young children, in the subfield of developmental psychology. According to Mundy, children develop the ability to engage in joint attention starting at about six months; the principal example of this is known as "gaze following."²⁷⁶ Gaze following is where the child begins to shift his or her attention towards the object that the parent or caregiver is looking at. In this way, the child is responding to an external solicitation to engage in joint attention. A bit further along in development comes "pointing" – another large area of psychological focus. When the child points, it is one of the first

²⁷⁴ Christopher Peacocke, "Joint Attention: Its Nature, Reflexivity, and Relation to Common Knowledge," in *Joint Attention*, 299.

²⁷⁵ Just as there is a difference between two people walking to a restaurant *together*, and two people who are simply on the same path to the restaurant, walking at the same close relevant distance to one another – as opposed to *with* the other person (which implies intentionality). Margaret Gilbert, "Walking Together: A Paradigmatic Social Phenomenon," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (1990): 1–14. Nevertheless, this issue of mutuality, and whether it requires infinite iterations of "recursive mindreading" is dense – cf. Peacocke's treatment in 2.1. Instead, I attempt to draw out an alternative view of joint attention throughout the course of this chapter.

²⁷⁶ Mundy, 498.

examples of the child actively initiating joint attention with someone else – he desires that the parent co-attend to some third object along with him, so that “their own and another person’s attention are focused on the same object.”²⁷⁷

The role that joint attention plays in forming our cognitive abilities is, according to many scholars, simply profound and not easily overstated. According to prominent contemporary psychologist Michael Tomasello, joint attention is a major element of *shared intentionality*, what Tomasello, et al, describe as “the ability to participate with others in collaborative activities with shared goals and intentions.”²⁷⁸ Tomasello is notable for insisting that joint attention is, in fact, the “crucial difference between human cognition and that of other species.”²⁷⁹ In a different work, Tomasello posits that joint attention contributes to “the ability to create common conceptual ground,” which he sees is “an absolutely critical dimension of all human communication, including linguistic communication with all of its *he’s*, *she’s*, and *it’s*.”²⁸⁰ This remark may carry some profound implications – but what is meant by the idea that joint attention is foundational to “all human communication”?

Well, before children learn how to speak, during the phase that they are “pre-linguistic,” Tomasello describes situations which count as “protoconversations.” Examples include a child following another’s gaze (passive), and the child pointing towards an object to get another person to attend to that object with them (active). At some point, the child notices (implicitly) that instead of pointing he can represent his intention to co-attend using a

²⁷⁷ Naomi Eilan, *Joint Attention*, i.

²⁷⁸ Michael Tomasello et al., “Understanding and Sharing Intentions: The Origins of Cultural Cognition,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 28, no. 5 (October 2005): 675.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Michael Tomasello and Tom Roeser, *Origins of Human Communication* (Cambridge, United States: MIT Press, 2010), 5. Emphasis original.

semantic symbol or symbols: the child can use words. When this happens, the “parents and children must somehow coordinate their attention so that they are focused on the same aspects of the world when children hear words.”²⁸¹ When a parent urges her two-year old son to “give” her “the stuffed puppy,” for example, she is relying on the child’s ability to focus in some way on the object and the utterances being spoken in association with the object. There exists in these myriad contexts a triadic, person-person-object, relationship.

Moreover; on at least one prevalent psychological account, the child’s participation in this advance is enabled by him or her being able to somehow glean the intentions of the parent/adult, in contrast with a strict behaviorism, or, a pure covariation theory of word learning.²⁸² The covariation theory supposes that a child simply associates the utterance of a word with whatever object is in his immediate view (or in his mind as an object of thought). Dare Baldwin, however, reviews significant clinical literature that argues that this situation is not the case. The data suggests, on the other hand, that children “have some awareness of others’ mental focus and recognize when focus is shared.”²⁸³ For example, studies show that a child will not associate a word with an object if the parent says he is “looking” for it and keeps picking up and putting down different toys but not showing satisfaction. Only until he exclaims “aha!” does the child seem to make the linguistic match. The intention to focus attention on *that* toy as the object being referenced is successfully perceived by the child.

²⁸¹ Dare Baldwin and Mark A. Sabbagh, “Understanding the Role of Communicative Intentions in Word Learning,” in *Joint Attention*, 166.

²⁸² See R. Peter. Hobson, *Autism and the Development of Mind*, Essays in Developmental Psychology (Hove: Erlbaum, 1993).

²⁸³ Dare Baldwin, “Understanding the Link Between Joint Attention and Language,” in *Joint Attention: Its Origins and Role in Development*, ed. Chris Moore and Philip J. Dunham (Hillsdale, N.J; Hove: Erlbaum, 1995), 139. Emphasis added.

Another example is where the parent remarks the toy is in the barn but proceeds to then pick up several different toys in the room. The child seems aware that the adult's intention, despite the word being said in proximity to the toy(s), does not warrant a match.²⁸⁴ As development continues, the child goes from understanding a word spoken by someone else, to uttering that word himself, typically towards some goal or objective. There is thus a motivational aspect to word learning; the child *desires* something and moreover, desires that someone else co-attend to that thing with him.

In other words, the trend in research suggests that early word learning heavily relies on deeply intersubjective psychological mechanisms, ones which enable the child to somehow appreciate certain goal-oriented factors extant in everyday situations: maneuvering oneself in the physical world to obtain food or shelter, avoid danger, and so on. On this account, word learning – the basis of so much higher-order communication and intelligence – happens only in the nexus of our spatiotemporal world that we mortals must learn to negotiate, and that in the context of a rich social fabric (relational, in fact) which relies predominantly on joint attention.

Joint attention in early childhood is also viewed as being critical in the development of other cognitive skills, such as the ability to comprehend and negotiate the objective world, or, spatial reasoning. In what's known as triangulation, a child and another person (typically an adult) engage in joint attention over the external world throughout early development, and these frequent instances (triangulations) are seen as predominantly crucial for the purpose of enabling the child to develop spatial reasoning skills.²⁸⁵ Other examples abound, yet it is

²⁸⁴ See the overview of these clinical studies in Ibid, 141-152.

²⁸⁵ Naomi Eilan, "Joint Attention, Communication, and Mind," in *Joint Attention*, 1-33.

beyond the scope of this section to survey all of the formative aspects of joint attention that occur in infancy and early childhood. These various formative features do denote, however, a significant role for joint attention in the cognitive development of the faculty of understanding, as understanding regards things like language, spatial awareness, and other epistemic goods.

Alternatively, consider another description of joint attention (one which is consistent with the first description), this one provided by Peter Hobson:

Joint attention, then, occurs when an individual (say, P 1) is psychologically engaged with someone else's (P 2's) psychological engagement with the world. The nature of P 1's engagement has to be that she relates to P 2's relation to the world; in other words, she has to encompass the state of P 2 as this is directed to something that P 1 also experiences from her own vantage-point.²⁸⁶

This description almost invokes images of two people engaged in a sort of mental dance where each person's disposition is a constant effect on the other's, a two-way cognitive shuffle that, if successful, results in both orientations becoming more harmonized. In Tomasello's words, "Joint attention is a back-and-forth negotiation in which two partners in an interaction not only have shared goals and interests but each has her own individual goals and interests as well. So partners must keep re-establishing or maintaining their joint attention as they move along.... The process is thus one of individuals constantly attempting to align their goals and attention."²⁸⁷ Elsewhere he elaborates: "The interpersonal negotiation here is thus each partner's sequential shifting from individual to joint attention, as either communicator or recipient."²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Hobson, "What Puts the Jointness into Joint Attention," 188.

²⁸⁷ Michael Tomasello, *Becoming Human: A Theory of Ontogeny* (Harvard University Press, 2019), 65.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 66.

The salient point is that joint attention does not denote a *static* psychological state. There seems to be some kind of psychological *process* of synchronization which occurs over time, continuously during periods where two (or more) people are jointly attending. Hobson explores this principle, where he aims to stress how joint attention should be thought of as psychologically *rich*:

One can only have joint attention if one has the capacity to ‘join’ another person—which means that one needs to be able to share experiences with others, registering intersubjective linkage—and at the same time remain separate.... The joining goes deeper than this, however—it is a linkage that exists in what can only be called *identification*. Identification is not reducible to imitation, any more than a subjective orientation can be reduced to intention or action. It involves appropriating something of *the psychological orientation* as well as the actions of the other person.... Therefore identification involves potential *movement* in psychological orientation.... In one sense it is to the position of the other, but in another sense it is from the other person into oneself—a case of interiorizing what takes place in the interpersonal domain (Vygotsky, 1978). So jointness comes with being moved just enough to sense the psychological orientation of the other in oneself, but as the other’s.²⁸⁹

Notice the language where one, or both, are said to be “*moved*” in relation towards a perspective that the other has on the object. In this way, joint attention has a richly emotional element to it. For example, embedded as part of parent-child exchanges, young children have been shown to reciprocate and/or placate the expressed emotional desires of the parent. Infants one day old can respond to a parent’s smile with a smile of their own, for example.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ Hobson, “What Puts the Jointness into Joint Attention,” 201. Hobson’s reference to Vygotsky is from his “Internalisation of higher psychological functions,” in L. S. Vygotsky and Michael Cole, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, 1978).

²⁹⁰ See Andrew N. Meltzoff and M. Keith Moore, “Imitation of Facial and Manual Gestures by Human Neonates,” *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)* 198, no. 4312 (1977): 75–78.

Hobson emphasis that there is some kind of important role for emotional linkage,²⁹¹ as does Tomasello. In fact, on Tomasello's account, our ability to *emotionally* connect is what provides the impetus for further collaboration, shared intentionality, and joint attention.²⁹²

Joint Attention in Non-Developmental Contexts

This section has so far shown or referred to the ways in which joint attention is seen by experts as crucial in early childhood cognitive development. In a helpful and recent article on the subject, however, specialist Felipe León remarks that joint attention in non-developmental contexts deserves its own focus too.²⁹³ Consequently, what about investigating joint attention in the context of enabling understanding in adolescents and adults, such as the kinds of situations reviewed in the previous section?

Beginning with the second commonsense example, schoolteachers instructing students, Elizabeth Anscombe once said, "The greater part of our knowledge of reality rests upon belief that we repose in things we have been taught or told."²⁹⁴ First, telling, or testimony and its epistemic significance, has enjoyed a surge in focus. This surge is partly due to the appreciation that our knowledgebase is enormously indebted to the testimony of other people. Richard Moran insists that testimony is just "the basic *relationship* between people

²⁹¹ Hobson, "What Puts Jointness into Joint Attention," 201. "Jointness...happens through intersubjective engagement that is emotional in source and emotional in quality." Also recall Hobson in *The Cradle of Thought*, where he says that "The links that can join one person's mind with the mind of someone else – *especially, to begin with, emotional links* – are the very links that draw us into thought." *Cradle*, 2. Emphasis added.

²⁹² For example, "the glue that holds protoconversations together is not just contingency but the exchange of emotions." Tomasello et al., "Understanding and Sharing Intentions," 681.

²⁹³ Felipe León, "Joint Attention without Recursive Mindreading: On the Role of Second-Person Engagement," *Philosophical Psychology* 34, no. 4 (May 19, 2021): 566.

²⁹⁴ G.E.M. Anscombe, Mary Geach, and Luke Gormally, "What Is It to Believe Someone?," in *Faith in a Hard Ground*, vol. 11 (United Kingdom: Andrews UK Ltd, 2008).

when one person tells a second person something and the second person believes him. This is the primary everyday occurrence, and it is the basic way knowledge gets around.”²⁹⁵

Likewise, Will Small gives a helpful analysis of telling in his essay “Teaching and Telling.” He argues that telling, at least certain kinds of telling, requires a certain “uptake” on part of the listener; namely, he or she *believes* the speaker. This reason accounts for why phrases such as “I told you so,” or “you should have believed me” – in the context where the hearer disregards the speaker’s testimony – only make sense in a bipolar, person-hearer sense.²⁹⁶ Telling is not really telling without both persons assuming a certain psychological stance: the teller *intending* to communicate a message, and the hearer *believing* (or at least actively acknowledging) the message. Furthermore, this transaction should not be understood as two or three separate instances, as in, the teller tells – break – then the hearer listens/believes. Instead, perfect cases of testimonial transaction are when the speaking and the listening/believing is a unitary bipolar act. Both I-You and You-I are happening at once, because in these cases, the teller telling X and the hearer listening/believing X both describe the same reality.²⁹⁷ On this account, our great wealth of knowledge owed to telling is irreducibly linked to numerous instances of what the literature calls “mutual attention,” or,

²⁹⁵ Richard Moran, “Getting Told and Being Believed,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 5 (2005): 2. Emphasis original.

²⁹⁶ Will Small, “Teaching and Telling,” *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 3 (2014): 108-123.

²⁹⁷ Ibid. One objection to there being necessarily I-thou characteristics to testimony (and thus the large body of knowledge owed to testimony), is that what happens in a bipolar telling-believing exchange can also be achieved through third-person means (propositional), such as rational argumentation, presenting physical evidence, or first-person inductive reasoning, etc. This position is known as the reductionist theory of testimonial knowledge, but as John Greco points out, this position is highly problematic because it requires that all such knowledge must ultimately “bottom-out in non-testimonial knowledge only.” The problem with this idea is that so much of our evidence-base is at some point down-the-line constituted from testimony in early and later childhood – testimony which does not and cannot rely on anything more fundamental than the epistemic value inherent in exchanges between teacher/parent and student/child. If the reductionist account is true, in other words, then we know a lot less than we say we do, if we even know much at all. John Greco, *The Transmission of Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 31.

dyadic (person-person) joint attention instead of triadic (person-person-object) joint attention.²⁹⁸

Teaching, on the other hand, could be described as a more sophisticated form of telling. Small points out that teaching obviously involves many instances of telling, but teaching differs from telling in some important ways. Teaching typically involves the transmission of general truths, perceived by many subjects, instead of individual truths perceived by individual subjects. For example, the teacher *teaches* that bears are omnivores, but the teller *tells* that a certain bear is currently rummaging in the garbage bin behind the school cafeteria.

Recall that successful teaching is said to involve richly pedagogical, interpersonal relations between teacher and student. According to Small, however, in this relation, the teacher is neither insisting her students believe her on basis of mere authority, nor is she simply presenting various related facts to her class and hoping they draw the correct conclusions. Instead, “the teacher is *actively engaged with* the students, *helping* them come to see it for themselves.”²⁹⁹

This description of the act of teaching, in other words, seems to suggest that teaching relies on phenomenon which might best be categorized as joint attention. Say, for example, a teacher and her student are psychologically engaged with an object of inquiry, in this case the mental “object” of Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative. Her efforts are geared towards the goal of “encompass[ing] the state of the student [sic] as this is directed to something that

²⁹⁸ This distinction should not be overlooked. On this account, mutual (person-person) attention is too a kind of joint attention, and in fact, it should be conceived as the epistemic ground for follow-on triadic engagements. See Vasudevi Reddy, “Before the ‘Third Element’: Understanding Attention to Self,” in *Joint Attention*, 85-109.

²⁹⁹ Small, “Teaching,” 114. Emphasis original.

the teacher [sic] also experiences from *her own vantage-point*.”³⁰⁰ The teacher is trying to “move” the student to more closely align the student’s perspective and the teacher’s perspective. Such phenomenon is inherently intersubjective, given that there must be an uptake by the student on behalf of the teacher’s intention.

Furthermore, Small continues, the effective teacher seeks to adequately represent the *science* (or discipline) as a whole.³⁰¹ Instead of getting her class to just see particular facts from her vantage point, she is trying to shape a certain kind of holistic disciplinary competency. For example, the chemistry teacher does not insist that his class perform many experiments for the sole sake of having them observe a wide range of chemical reactions. The chemistry teacher is primarily concerned with making sure his class both learns how to run an experiment correctly and understands the principles proper to chemical experimentation and scientific investigation.

Similarly, the history teacher does not primarily want her class to produce many correct descriptions of historical periods in their assigned essays; she desires that they understand historical significance and the interrelatedness of historical events – things not reducible to merely knowing a lot of facts. Additionally, she wants them to *learn good historiography*, the principles which shape proper historical investigation. On this account, and consistent with what educationalists have widely recognized, good teaching involves initiating students into a narrative of interrelated suppositions; a system or structure of knowledge “that stand in relations of mutual support and explanation.”³⁰² And this initiation,

³⁰⁰ Paraphrase of Hobson’s quote, *Joint Attention*, 188. Emphasis added.

³⁰¹ Small, “Teaching,” 115.

³⁰² Small, “Teaching,” 116.

more readily seen in the hard sciences but nevertheless extant in the humanities, should eventually manifest as a type of skill, the mastery over a *techne*.

As Small puts it, the learner does not gain much by learning a “heap of judgments pertaining to the subject matter,” but rather he needs to “acquire various abilities and dispositions – *how to do* various things...”³⁰³ This ability or disposition is acquired along parallel lines that the student grasps a systematic knowledge (understanding) of the discipline as-a-whole. Here we see from the educationalist perspective on teaching, how closely tied are both a holistic apprehension of structures and the acquisition of disciplinary skill – concepts thoroughly germane to understanding.

Furthermore, Small’s description coheres nicely with the analysis of joint attention above, where agents are said to be “moved,” and where psychological orientations are said to constantly shift in response to the other’s, an act of mental negotiation that, if successful, results in a synchronization of perspectives. This description should recall the discussion in section one, which reviewed the interpersonal teaching style called “learner-oriented,” or active teaching. Again, this kind of teaching is where the teacher takes on board the ideas of the student, for the purpose of using his or her ideas as a starting point from which to use and bring into conversation with the teacher’s own ideas (that is, the ideas the teacher is trying to convey – the ideas the teacher sees as representative of the discipline, regardless of whether she happens to agree with them). The remarks made by Yash Pal and the attitude prevalent throughout the Indian Curriculum Framework also cohere nicely with these descriptions, such as the emphasis on dynamic engagement, societal learning, and the central role of teacher-student interaction.

³⁰³ Ibid, 118. Emphasis original.

Finally, there is the case of the third commonsense example, that of military training instructors forming a new cohort of service members. The kind of two-way, cognitive shifting of perspectives reviewed regarding teaching is also extant in military training scenarios. As stated above, to form such competency there is a need for the instructor and the student to “jointly” attend to the relevant flight materials and prerogatives, together.

Moreover, recall the discussion on *sense-making*. The good leader, to instill the correct sense of the situation for his troops, must get them to see it from his vantage point, by somehow “connecting” his sense with theirs, and through interaction, gradually improve the quality of their sense. There is in this way, as reviewed, the element of *emotional* engagement inherent to these exchanges – the kind that communicates *meaning* beyond or adjacent to just purely objective understanding. Recall the ways in which joint attention is entangled with emotional engagement and compare that to the description of Ben-Shalom in the context of sense-making, or that of myself, regarding instilling warfighting competency upon less-experienced USAF pilots.

In summary, joint attention is obtained whenever two people stand in relation to one another such that both are co-attending to one another (person-person, dyadic), or with one another in reference to some third object (person-person-object, triadic). A few primary manifestations of joint attention have been reviewed, such as that which is involved in early childhood development, as well as more mature forms of joint attention in contexts where school-teaching or military-instructing is involved. This section aimed to demonstrate a clear link between the salient cognitive elements extant in the commonsense examples outlined in section one, with the psychological descriptions of joint attention.

3.2.2: When Joint Attention is Deficient

This subsection reviews further evidence regarding joint attention, with special focus on what can be learned from certain cases where people have difficulty engaging in joint attention. From this evidence, this subsection aims to prompt further investigation into what may be key to joint attention, philosophically speaking, and help discern whether there exists a unique mode of interpersonal relatedness that is inherent within these instances.

I will proceed first by reviewing a few conclusions which have been drawn by some of those examining, in a certain way, the clinical and psycho-philosophical literature of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Certain studies looking at ASD with a particular focus have been instrumental in shedding light on the nature of interpersonal relations and their theoretical principles. Before doing so, however, I will say a brief word about the nature and approach of such endeavor, in response to recent criticisms that this academic treatment of the literature on ASD (or other disabilities or conditions) is in some way discriminatory or dehumanizing.

Brief Prelude

Joanna Leidenhag is a recent outspoken critic of this research approach towards ASD, and it is worth quoting her summary of this criticism:

In this paper, I argue that autism places an important restraint upon the use of relationality in theological anthropology. This argument proceeds by outlining how the appropriation of dialectic personalism, which initiated ‘the relational turn’ in twentieth century theological anthropology, has struggled to escape the capacity or property-based focus on individual subjects. *As such, this relational account remains discriminatory against those who do not or cannot enact a particular kind of relationality, as some models of autism suggest.* Moreover, attention to interpersonal relationships as a key human capacity within twentieth century theological anthropology closely parallels and may even have informed the development of autism within psychology as, in part, a social impairment. *The devastating collision of these two intellectual trajectories is made apparent in explicit references by contemporary theologians to autism as a condition that prevents some humans from*

*bearing the image of God, developing fully into persons, or receiving God's grace by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.*³⁰⁴

So, for Leidenhag, there are two principal streams of criticism against what she calls the “relational turn” in recent theological anthropology. The first has to do with the philosophical tenability of the position itself – that such a “relational turn” is not warranted by good reason or the evidence, simply speaking. My focus, however, is on her second criticism, that the approach taken by those advocating for the “relational turn” is *ethically* unsound because, either directly or by implication, it treats people with ASD in a discriminatory, less-than-fully-human, or otherwise derogatory manner. (It should be noted that her first criticism is not unrelated to the second, and in fact, the former criticism may evaporate, at least somewhat, if the latter can adequately be addressed).

Leidenhag then proceeds to quote a few theologians as “examples” of “the discriminatory way autism has come to be used in contemporary systematic theology.” One example is lifted from Andrew Pinsent’s work, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas’s Ethics*. She quotes Pinsent in the epigraph to her article: “This loss [of infused virtue] can be characterized metaphorically as the onset of ‘spiritual autism’, insofar as the cognition of God and certain habituations may persist but the person ceases to be moved by God as by a second person.”³⁰⁵ On Leidenhag’s account, Pinsent and similar-minded scholars should cease their discriminatory and harmful approach. Although I will not attempt to argue that *no* philosopher or theologian is worthy of Leidenhag’s ethical reprimand at all, I will nevertheless attempt to show that Pinsent’s approach, at least, may not be guilty of the charge

³⁰⁴ Joanna Leidenhag, “The Challenge of Autism for Relational Approaches to Theological Anthropology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*: IJST 23, no. 1 (2021): 109–34. Emphasis added.

³⁰⁵ Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas’s Ethics: Virtues and Gifts*, Routledge Studies in Ethics and Moral Theory 17 (New York: Routledge, 2012), 100. Parenthetical added.

Leidenhag is making. The reader may judge whether I am successful, but in any case, I aim to approach this topic with the mindset exemplified by Pinsent.

Those who have read Pinsent's work carefully should notice that he makes it clear that he is using the literature of people with ASD as a kind of instrumental tool to make a point, while simultaneously acknowledging the limits of such procedure. As Pinsent puts it, he uses "the *metaphor* of autism" to highlight certain spiritual and intellectual characteristics.³⁰⁶ Pinsent early-on acknowledges that those who suffer from autism do so on a varied spectrum, and thus the extent to which someone is autistic, is the extent to which it is *difficult* (not impossible) for him or her to engage in interpersonal relatedness. He does not say that autistic people cannot perform this mental activity at all, and additionally, he qualifies in a straightforward manner that those who suffer from such condition are not disqualified from participating in the life of grace or enjoying relatedness with God. He says:

It is important to clarify that the *metaphor* of autistic spectrum disorder, the condition which has been so instructive for the study of joint attention, does not imply that autism precludes possession of the gifts and a second-person relationship to God. On the contrary, unlike the Aristotelian virtues, Aquinas is clear that anyone can possess the gifts, which are infused by God (cf. ST 2a2ae, q.47, a.14 ad 3). Nevertheless, what is lacking in the relationship of an autistic person to another human person *provides a metaphor* for the condition that the gifts are intended to remedy in the relationship of any human person to God.³⁰⁷

Autistic people, on Pinsent's account (*pace* Leidenhag) are fully human, bearers of God's image, and wholly eligible to participate in the life of grace.

Aaron Davis, in "Making and Mending Our Selves: A Practical Proposal," agrees with this sense, namely, that this kind of metaphorical use of autism is not depersonalizing

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 74. Emphasis added.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 131. Emphasis added.

per se. Here, Davis seeks to apply some of the conclusions drawn by the “relational turn” in theology towards the idea that certain modes of the I-thou perspective can be “a practical means by which healing love might be communicated.”³⁰⁸ Davis makes particular use of Eleonore Stump’s contributions in *Wandering in Darkness*, where Stump is both a target of Leidenhag’s critique as well as a scholar who engages with the topic of autism in similar style as Pinsent. Davis notes Leidenhag’s criticism of Stump in “The Challenge of Autism,” but he also considers Stump’s own clarification on this point a worthwhile gesture that is effective enough to ethically justify her approach. His defense rests on a key quote by Stump, made in her more recent book *Atonement*:

The impairments of autism help to highlight human cognitive capacities that we might otherwise overlook or be skeptical of; and I raise the issue of autism only for that purpose. But if autism were a main subject for me, then I would be at pains to emphasize that human beings can flourish and be in union with others in a way well worth honoring, no matter what cognitive impairments they work through.³⁰⁹

Here Stump expresses a similar gesture as that of Pinsent, namely, that autistic people are not inherently less-than fully persons and that their condition makes it difficult – not insurmountable – to interpersonally relate to others, including God. Davis does admit that a “detailed account” addressing this concern has yet to be provided, but nevertheless considers Stump’s gesture compelling enough, at least, to adequately (even if not exhaustively) temper Leidenhag’s criticism. In short, I share both Davis’s impulse to welcome scholarship which can help provide a more detailed account, as well as his impulse that engaging in relational theology or philosophy (and its metaphorical use of autism) is not *de facto* ethically unsound.

³⁰⁸ A.B. Davis, “Making and Mending Our Selves: A Practical Proposal,” *TheoLogica* 6, no. 1 (2022): 178.

³⁰⁹ Eleonore Stump, *Atonement*, First edition., Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology (Oxford, 2018), 453.

The final remark I will offer for consideration on this point is that the *metaphor* of physical disability is also employed by the authors of Scripture. For example, the author of 2 Corinthians says that “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). The metaphor of physical blindness, which prohibits or reduces one’s ability to see literal light, is likened to spiritual blindness in which unbelievers cannot perceive or “see” the truth of the gospel. It appears that Biblical instances such as these instances, according to Leidenhag, are likewise examples of “discriminatory” and “destructive” speech, which denies effected people their humanity – a charge which requires no small burden of evidence to demonstrate.

One may object that my counterexample in 2 Corinthians does not do Leidenhag’s criticism justice, because the author of 2 Corinthians is not saying or implying that the capacity for sight is integral, or even important, to personhood or to salvation. The author of Romans, however, declares that “faith comes by hearing” (Romans 10:17), and that “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). In these passages, it is unlikely that the author is denying that salvation can come to the deaf, mute, or to those too young or impaired to form propositional beliefs about Christ. It seems much more likely that the author is employing metaphor by drawing upon the *norms* of human experience, without denying that exceptional cases cannot somehow be accounted for. After all, the author in this passage also says that “‘No one who believes in him [God] will be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; *the same Lord is Lord of all...*” (Rom 10:11-12a, emphasis added).

If the comparison is fair, and insofar that the biblical authors are not engaging in unethical practices by using these kinds of heuristic tools, then perhaps, contra Leidenhag, utilizing these kinds of metaphors should not be rejected out of hand, at least in principle. The alternative for Leidenhag, it would appear, is for her to argue that the biblical authors are themselves guilty of fostering unethical perceptions, an argument which she is free to pursue, but which arguably puts an unfair strain upon the authors and all those throughout history who have used and endorsed these passages.

Nonetheless, I will proceed to explore what can be learned from those with ASD from the standpoint of using the disability or condition as a metaphor, without denying or attempting to deny or downplay the status and worth of autistic or otherwise disabled people.³¹⁰ In what follows, I will review some of the literature that Stump and Pinsent have made use of, as well as bring the conversation more up to date.

Joint Attention and Autism

It is helpful to start off by looking specifically at what Pinsent, and others, are getting at. Pinsent's review of joint attention and autism in *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics* mirrors and builds from previous similar attempts – most notably that of Eleonore Stump in *Wandering in Darkness*. Both Pinsent and Stump, moreover, are heavily

³¹⁰ As for Leidenhag's first criticism, the positive arguments made and considered in this thesis do not necessarily require "dialectic personalism" to be true, and therefore I will allow others to engage with her on that point. I will say, however, that Leidenhag's insistence on the traditional "property-based" personhood – she uses Boethius' definition as a good example – is hardly without its own set of contested issues, and possibly even subject to her own ethical critique. For an interesting discussion on this point, see Jenny Teichman, "The Definition of Person," *Philosophy* 60, no. 232 (April 1985): 175–85.

indebted to a key collection of essays on joint attention, edited by Naomi Eilan.³¹¹ One essay deserves special focus, “What Puts Jointness into Joint Attention?” by R. Peter Hobson.³¹²

The key issue in Hobson’s article, and what Stump and Pinsent are attempting to further explore, is what *precise* kind of person-person connection is extant in instances of joint attention, where joint attention has been shown to play such a significant role in cognitive development. On Hobson’s account, joint attention “develops in three stages”:

1. The infant engages with someone else.
2. The infant engages with someone else’s engagement with the world – and is ‘moved’.
3. The infant achieves a new level of awareness that she is engaging with someone else’s engagement with the world (in part through the process of being engaged with the other’s engagement with herself).³¹³

Although Hobson begins his examination from the point of view of developmental psychology (hence the subject in his description is an infant), his description maps onto general cases of joint attention (e.g., cases where adults are engaged). The important element to appreciate is that, on Hobson’s account, this “engagement” needs to be understood in a qualified way. He clarifies: “joint attention entails more than merely recognizing another person’s attitude – it also means *feeling connected with the person* as the source of that attitude.”³¹⁴ But what does this phrase mean, exactly?

It should be noted that on some accounts, the “kind” of interpersonal engagement extant in instances of joint attention is the kind which is ultimately a mode of the first and/or

³¹¹ Naomi Eilan, *Joint Attention: Communication and Other Minds: Issues in Philosophy and Psychology*, Consciousness and Self-Consciousness (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

³¹² Hobson, “What Puts the Jointness into Joint Attention,” *Joint Attention*, 185-204.

³¹³ Ibid, 188.

³¹⁴ Ibid, 189. Emphasis added.

third-person perspective(s). On the other hand, as León observes, “there is a striking contrast between the widespread agreement that joint attention is critical in a variety of domains [including cognitive], and the lack of consensus on how to account for it.”³¹⁵ This is partly because there has been a profound mismatch over the “massive amount of empirical research...and the relatively scarce theoretical engagement” on the topic of joint attention.³¹⁶ Thus, although experts have largely reached consensus that joint attention is important for certain cognitive developments early-on, one primary contested issue is over the precise theoretical account of such instances.

This issue turns, as León outlines, on “reductive” vs “non-reductive” accounts of joint attention. The reductive accounts assign different modes of the first and/or third-person perspective(s) as the fundamental explanans of what constitutes the “kind” of interpersonal engagement involved in joint attention, such as simulation-theory or theory-theory, whereas non-reductive accounts see the “openness” or “mutually manifest” nature of the co-engagement as something somehow primitive, and irreducible. Yet, León stresses, these non-reductive accounts – although intuitive in many ways – are critically in need of further theoretical elaboration. It may be the case, however, that they call for philosophical resources that go beyond those provided in first- and third-person explanations alone.

Peter Hobson is particularly concerned with this issue and seeks to shed light on the nature of what “*kind* of interpersonal engagement”³¹⁷ is involved in joint attention, and he proceeds by reviewing a few experiments he and his team of researchers conducted involving

³¹⁵ León, “Joint Attention without Recursive Mindreading,” 551.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Hobson, “Joint Attention,” 189. Emphasis added.

children with ASD. Hobson's essay "What puts Jointness into Joint Attention" deserves some review, because Hobson and his team carried out several experiments specifically designed to help shed light on the theoretical underpinnings of joint attention, in the backdrop of the reductive vs non-reductive debate.

Aware of the difficulties of this debate, he states that he believes that "recent evidence from children with autism"³¹⁸ can help begin to discern the answer. As he admits, however, the theoretical underpinning of joint attention "does not lend itself to conventional scientific measurement,"³¹⁹ because the issue fundamentally depends on the correct *philosophical interpretation* of the empirical data. Nevertheless, Hobson describes a few helpful experiments, the results of which may be theoretically suggestive. I will first review a couple of these experiments, and then cite how Hobson and others have commented on their results. Then, I will bring more recent literature into the discussion to help further explore this issue.

First, Hobson conducted an experiment that involved non-autistic children as well as autistic children watching a series of "properly configured moving dots of light as human people"³²⁰ (projected onto a screen) which were then manipulated to imitate various actions that had emotional character to them. For example, one "point-light person" was seen walking along and then it suddenly expressed surprise, by abruptly halting and pulling back a bit, while throwing its arms out and finally giving "a sigh."³²¹ Similar type presentations were shown to emulate a sad, scared, and angry person, with the goal of comparing the difference

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 190.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid, 192.

between how normal children and autistic children would “spontaneously see and comment” on the presentations. The research team was particularly interested in how the children commented on the *emotions* expressed by the point-light-person. As the researchers suspected, the non-autistic children almost unanimously commented on the emotional state of the point-light person, at least once per display. Most of the autistic children, on the other hand, “*never* referred to emotional states.”³²²

Stimulated by this finding, the experimenters continued to setup point-light displays that presented point-light people expressing actions that reflected more basic feelings (as opposed to complex emotions) such as “itchiness, boredom, tiredness, cold, and hurt.” The autistic children and the non-autistic children were asked two separate questions: what the person is feeling, and what the person is doing. There was not a significant difference in the two groups in the way they answered the “actions” question, but the autistic children “were markedly less successful” on the “feelings” question. One autistic child, when asked about what the “itching person” was feeling, responded with “scratching...lots of fleas.”³²³ In both sets of experiments researchers observed a significant general trend: the autistic children were predominantly concerned with the objective features of the presentation, instead of the subjective state of the (point-light) person.

This characteristic prompted Hobson and his team of researchers to devise further experiments, “to get just a bit closer to the *kind* of interpersonal lack of connection”³²⁴ present in children with ASD. He then organized a team of raters to watch the videos of these

³²² Ibid. Emphasis original.

³²³ Ibid, 193.

³²⁴ Ibid, 194. Emphasis added.

experiments, with their attention specifically on the greeting portion of the session before the experiment went underway. Each rater would then comment on how engaged the child was with the experimenter during the greeting, with the options being hardly engaged, somewhat engaged, or strongly engaged. The assessment was based primarily on the child's level of eye contact and depth of conversation with the experimenter. The raters judged most of the non-autistic children to be strongly engaged, whereas almost none of the autistic children were judged similarly. The raters said that most of the children with autism, instead, were "hardly engaged" with their experimenter.³²⁵

Finally, these observations, combined with Hobson's reflections on autistic infants finding it difficult to engage in one-to-one mutual attention, motivated Hobson to investigate the question of "how do children with autism engage with others' engagement with the world?" To explore this question, Hobson and his team conducted a study where children are asked to first watch, then imitate, various actions of an experimenter doing things with several items. For example, one experimenter strummed a pipe-rack with a stick, choosing to strum it gently and relatively quietly to some children and aggressive and loud to other children. Both the autistic children and the normal children were able to successfully perform the actions themselves. Moreover, most of the non-autistic children imitated the experimenter's action by likewise mirroring their strumming more-or-less to the gentleness or aggressiveness of that of the experimenter.

The autistic children, on the other hand, properly recognized the goal of the action and successfully strummed the pipe-rack, but almost none of them approximated the experimenter's *style*. Instead, they would simply strum the pipe-rack in the simplest way

³²⁵ Ibid.

possible, without concern over imitating the experimenter's mode of strumming. Another notable factor concerning style was that the experimenter would often prop up the pipe-rack on his shoulder to strum it, which was mirrored by most of the non-autistic children, but by almost none of the autistic children. Similar disparities were exhibited throughout the other imitation vignettes.³²⁶

What did Hobson glean from these results, theoretically speaking? Regarding the point-light experiment, he concluded that autistic children, and perhaps autistic people in general, "have real difficulty in reading the subjective states of the person depicted," in contrast to "a difficulty that did *not* extend to their judgments of actions."³²⁷ In other words, these autistic children were not readily predisposed to identifying or connecting *with* the point-light person as (hypothetical) persons.

Also, even though these children recognized the displays as representations of *persons* (and not representations of mere things), their tendency was to focus on the objective and observable actions, described in mechanistic terms, instead of to focus on the subjective emotions and feelings exhibited by the point-light person. Hobson remarks that these results confirm his suspicion that the root issue in people with autism is "a complex and far-reaching limitation in...their relatedness to others."³²⁸

Likewise, concerning the imitation exercise, what Hobson concludes from the results is that the non-autistic children chose to imitate the "person of the experimenter," whereas the autistic children imitated merely the "action." They did not, in his words, move "to the

³²⁶ Ibid, 198-200.

³²⁷ Ibid, 193. Emphasis original.

³²⁸ Ibid.

position of the other,” but instead it was as if they were “watching from the outside.”³²⁹ He concludes from this that the autistic children failed to “identify” with the experimenter in a personal way, to take their role or to adopt their self-orientation. In other words, “what they learned seemed to be available from their position as a kind of detached observer of actions and goals. They were not ‘moved’.”³³⁰ On this account, a connectedness with others – *as others* – which occurs in normal circumstances, has an important affective or emotional quality to it.

Upon reflection of all these experiments, Hobson concludes that the *kind* of intersubjective engagement involved in instances of joint attention is the kind where “one has the capacity to ‘join’ another person...to be able to share experiences with others...” where the “movement...is to the position of the other” while *at the same time* “from the other person to oneself.”³³¹ These remarks highlight that, at least according to Hobson, the kind of intersubjective engagement involved in joint attention is the kind where two people are somehow psychologically linked, but with each person retaining his or her individuality so as to not result in some mysterious or spooky third agent. This link, moreover, is nevertheless something which has the quality of genuine connection in what Hobson calls the “interpersonal domain,”³³² a somewhat vague term, but perhaps inviting further examination.

Having reviewed a few of Hobson’s studies and his own remarks on the topic, it is helpful to see what scholarship has brought forward in the last two decades since “What Puts Jointness into Joint Attention.” One issue worth looking more closely at is this topic of

³²⁹ Ibid, 198.

³³⁰ Ibid, 200.

³³¹ Ibid, 201.

³³² Ibid.

imitation. As Hobson admits in his article, this issue over the core constituents of imitation and the literature on children with autism “is remarkable for its lack of consensus.”³³³

According to a recent study (2022) by the US National Institute for Health, however, imitation serves both a “learning function” (so that children can learn new skills) as well as a “social function” (so that children can learn about people and communication).³³⁴ Children with ASD, according to the study, have both a difficulty in the “ability” and the “propensity” to imitate, which results in cognitive shortfalls during development.³³⁵

The question remains, however, over which of these two difficulties is primary in the autistic child. One way to think about this question is to first conceive of which function is imitation primarily aimed at delivering – the learning function or the social function?

According to Elizabeth Spelke in her recent book *What Babies Know* (2022), the answer to the question “why do infants reproduce the actions of their social partners?”³³⁶ is that the motivation is primarily *social*. As she explains, the primacy of the learning function (promoted by influential experts in the field such as A.N. Meltzoff) does not adequately explain certain characteristics of normal infant imitation. For example, children seem to imitate only when “the person whom one is imitating is present and watching,”³³⁷ suggesting that children have more in mind than learning the new skill, but instead, they also (and

³³³ Ibid, 198.

³³⁴ Alice Bravo and Ilene Schwartz, “Teaching Imitation to Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder Using Discrete Trial Training and Contingent Imitation,” *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities* 34, no. 4 (2022): 655.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Elizabeth S. Spelke, “Core Social Cognition,” in *What Babies Know: Core Knowledge and Composition Volume 1*, ed. Elizabeth S. Spelke (Oxford University Press, 2022).

³³⁷ Ibid, 314.

perhaps predominantly) are interested in psychologically and emotionally connecting with the other person in the room.

Moreover, infants imitate behaviors that “have no instrumental purpose or effect” like “mouth opening” and “vocal sounds divorced from meaning.”³³⁸ What Spelke is trying to get at is the fact that children in these situations are much more concerned with *connecting* with the person in the room and building relationship with them, instead of mere instrumental skill-learning. Although the learning of skills does certainly happen in these contexts, Spelke emphasizes that this learning might better be conceived as a byproduct of interpersonal relatedness. On this account, the cognitive shortcomings of those with ASD are rooted in, what could be called, a “willed loneliness.”

One Autobiographical Account

Perhaps the most powerful way to demonstrate what is meant by “willed loneliness” is to examine a first-hand account of an autistic person. In what is plausibly a severely overlooked resource within the psychological corpus is the reports and descriptions of ASD from those who suffer it themselves – especially in cases where the person has an accurate recounting of his or her childhood and has developed into adulthood (usually via extensive treatment) as a “high functioning” autistic person.³³⁹ Australian-born author and artist Donna

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ The term “high functioning” when describing an autistic person is an informal yet useful term, which denotes someone who can behave and communicate effectively with others, as well as integrate into wider society. Some markers which are regularly used to classify a person with autism as “high functioning” is if they can maintain a steady job, achieve a high-school education level (or higher), live on their own or at least without caretakers, etc. Psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen puts it this way, “By convention, if an individual with autism has an IQ in the normal range (or above), they are said to have ‘high-functioning autism’ (HFA).” Simon Baron-Cohen, “Is Asperger Syndrome/High-Functioning Autism Necessarily a Disability?,” *Development and Psychopathology* 12, no. 3 (2000): 490.

Williams is such a person, and her book *Nobody Nowhere* recounts her experiences as an autistic child with some vividness and clarity.

Williams was born in 1963 and was diagnosed by the medical community at that time as, “psychotic.”³⁴⁰ Eventually the diagnosis was corrected to accurately reflect her condition as a case of ASD, which was in fact very severe. Williams battled the severity of her condition throughout her maturity into adulthood, with significant success. She published *Nobody Nowhere* in 1991, and went on to become a recognized singer, songwriter, screenwriter, and sculptor. What is perhaps especially remarkable is that she was publicly active throughout most of her adult life, and quite open about her experience as a person with autism.³⁴¹ Williams died from cancer in 2017³⁴² at the age of 53, and at a significantly high level of cognitive functioning, relatively speaking.

In *Nobody Nowhere*, Williams often highlights the fact that she grew up wanting to avoid connection with people and interaction with peers. Remembering her early experiences with her own brother, her only sibling at the time, Williams remarks that she “hardly acknowledge or accepted him.”³⁴³ Although she was good at entertaining herself as a child, Williams recounts how “mine [childhood imagination] was a rich world, but like many rich people I was very alone.”³⁴⁴ This loneliness, however, was not so much rooted in other

³⁴⁰ Donna Williams, *Nobody Nowhere: The Remarkable Autobiography of an Autistic Girl* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009), 1.

³⁴¹ Some of this activity is captured in her series of open-source online videos (video logs, or “vlogs”) extrapolating on what she wrote in *Nobody*, as well as discussing other facets of the condition of autism from her first-person perspective. “Donna Williams: Interactive,” <https://www.donnawilliams.net/indexe195.html?id=interactive>.

³⁴² Her journey through this time was also captured in these vlogs, as late as a month before her death.

³⁴³ *Ibid*, 9.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 24.

people not wanting to interact with Donna as it was in Donna not wanting to interact with others. The epigraph to the book captures this well; in it she writes: “This is a story of two battles, a battle to keep out ‘the world’ and a battle to join it. It tells of the battles within ‘my own world’ and the battle-lines, tactics used, and casualties of my private war against others...If you sense distance, you’re not mistaken; it’s real. Welcome to *my world*.”³⁴⁵ Her world was so lonely, she remembers, but in large part because of choice.³⁴⁶

It would be too far to say that Williams “recovered” or was “cured” from autism entirely, because she did suffer from the condition her entire life. Yet, on her own metaphor, it may be fair to compare her triumph to that of someone who escaped a world of isolation for a world of relationship, and then provided a first-hand account of what it was like inside this isolated world. Thought of in this way, her book could be regarded as especially useful, and her witness conceived as a powerful companion to the scholarly literature thus reviewed, written by career academics. On Williams’ two-world analogy, these scholars could be likened to a *stranger* looking in and studying the nature of her world *from the outside* – a worthwhile procedure for some purposes, but one that could never entirely substitute for the first-hand accounts of the experience itself.³⁴⁷

An alternative medium which captures Williams’ thought here are the pictures of her as a young child presented throughout the book; complemented by Williams’ highlighting the fact that she was extremely avoidant of direct eye contact. These pictures clearly elucidate in

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 9. Emphasis original.

³⁴⁶ By “choice,” I mean to denote a course of action that is motivated by desires which are non-trivially a product of the autistic condition. This nuance recognizes that one who suffers from autism is not necessarily culpable for such choosing, let alone desiring.

³⁴⁷ In this way, *Nobody Nowhere* is an even more potent account than Park’s account in *The Siege*, at least in the sense of immediacy to the autistic condition.

Donna a sense of recoil and disdain for having to look into the camera or exchange a smile with the photographer. As she grew older, in fact, Williams recounts how she developed the skill of “looking straight through people, even if you had to look into their eyes to convince them you were listening.”³⁴⁸

The book is peppered with gesture after gesture of Williams’ insistence to avoid connection with others due to what could be labelled a kind of willed or preferred isolation.³⁴⁹ Although as she grew older this disposition was slowly partially overcome – through the relentless efforts of others who gradually coaxed Donna to “join” the world, as she says – there is one anecdote in particular which encapsulates the mind and attitude of this willed loneliness. Williams recounts how as a young woman coming into the world, at eighteen years old, she had little job prospects due to her condition, her disposition with other people, and her level of education. Confiding in her friend, Mary, Williams writes:

I had begun to fear the obviousness of my own instability, which became ever more noticeable and unforgivable with my increasing age. At times I felt I was in my twenties, at times I was sixteen at the most, and at other times I was still only three years old. I had been talking about this and had explained that I still was not ready to leave home, thought it had seemed I’d never have one. I had naively stated in a defeated tone that the problem these days was that no-one wanted to adopt eighteen-year-olds. I looked up at Mary, who seemed to have tears in her eyes. I was touched that she was able to feel emotion for my words in a way I had never been able to. I responded to this with the respect I would have hoped for my own display of emotion. *I said nothing and pretended not to notice.*³⁵⁰

Her commentary is perplexing as much as it is illuminating. Here, Williams showcases that her emotionally distancing herself from a distressed Mary was, ironically, because Williams

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 45.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 191. “As much as many of the things I did were dangerous and as much as people could sense my isolation, *this isolation was not from being left to my own devices. It stemmed from the isolation of my inner world...*” Emphasis added.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 102. Emphasis added.

cared about Mary and wanted to treat Mary the way that Williams would have wanted to be treated if the roles were reversed. Her story highlights this highly relevant aspect of ASD, that the cognitive shortfalls which occur because of a lack of interpersonal relatedness is rooted in a *desire* and a *willingness* to not emotionally, affectively, or interpersonally engage with the other person. From Williams' anecdote here, the issue was not that she could not sympathize with Mary, but instead, due to her autistic condition, Williams did not *want* to.

In the book's epilogue, Williams holistically reflects on her account of her growing up with autism. Williams remarks that she "rejected much interactive contact" because her "stilling sanctuary" was much preferable to the "emotion-jolting threat of intimacy and closeness."³⁵¹ This stonewalling of others, emotionally speaking, greatly affected Williams' ability to understand language. She remarks, "For language to have any meaning one must be able to relate to it. For me, when the directness of relating is too great, the walls go up."³⁵² This reason is why she says "on a cognitive level, the meaning carried by intonation and gesture could be completely shut down, leaving me with no emotional cues. The meaning behind the significance of social rules could be completely lost or the comprehension of the meaning of words could drop away leaving me lost to both concept and significance."³⁵³ The "stress" of emotionally loaded communication, "blocked the brain's ability" to understand what was being spoken. In her words, "the comprehension of words depended on the amount of stress caused from fear and stress of relating directly."³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Ibid, 180.

³⁵² Ibid, 181.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 182.

These reflections are of no little significance because they serve as a direct, first-person account which supports much of what academic experts of autism, like Peter Hobson, have been arguing for years. Namely, that the cognitive shortfalls had by those with autism are rooted in something rather fundamental: “a complex and far-reaching limitation in...their relatedness to others.”³⁵⁵

Finally, it is worth briefly reviewing Williams’ reflection on what helped bring her out of such willed isolation, enabling her to eventually function at a relatively high level, relate to others, and integrate into wider society. From Williams’ perspective, the best methods for “the way out of autistic withdrawal” are indirect. One example she gives concerns active listening. When direct attention was being sought from Williams, she would recoil from the invitation and insist on isolation. By contrast, however, if someone was “to speak to themselves about me out loud or about someone like me,” this indirect approach “would have inspired me to show I could relate to what was being said.”³⁵⁶ She posits a situation where an adult (say, a parent), while staring out of a window, begins to speak to themselves about Donna. Although seemingly cold and indifferent, Williams insists that, on the contrary, it demonstrates “awareness and sensitivity to the child’s problem of coping with directness.”³⁵⁷

This kind of indirect approach can be emulated and applied to different domains of connection, such as “speaking through objects or use of visual symbols,” as well as the area of physical touch.³⁵⁸ Throughout the different approaches, however, there remains a slow,

³⁵⁵ Hobson, “Joint Attention,” 193.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, 190.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid 191-194.

gradual, and patient coaxing of the person into more and more relatedness with others. In this way, these methods can be thought of as a kind of beachhead, or a place where one can stage an offensive and engage with Williams’ “private war” of willed self-isolation. Alternatively, in her own words, to “inspire the courage to explore the world and get out of my world under glass step by step.”³⁵⁹

In summary, the psycho-philosophical literature on those suffering from ASD, coupled with Donna Williams’ first-hand account of the condition, helps reinforce the idea that there exists a unique *kind* of interpersonal connectedness involved when two people co-attend to one another (dyadic joint attention), or with one another in reference to some third object (triadic joint attention). In recent years, in efforts to better understand this connectedness, certain philosophers have been focusing their research towards investigating the philosophical principles of joint attention, considering what kind of interpersonal relatedness might provide the best *theoretical* account of what Hobson and other researchers have been experimentally striving to showcase. Some of this research, at least, suggests that joint attention may be best described as *constitutive of second-person relatedness*. This possibility is explored at some length in what follows.

3.3: The Second-Person Perspective

So far in the thesis, especially in this chapter, any reference to a second-person perspective or form of relatedness has been predominantly evocative in nature, meaning, although there has been an increasing emphasis on the importance of a certain kind of relationship (or, more correctly, *relatedness*), there has been little explicit probing into what,

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 191.

precisely, is meant or included by this term. The reason for this omission is because my initial focus has been to discover the patterns that emerge from certain commonsense cases and their corresponding psychological principles, and only subsequently, to investigate philosophically wherever this evidence may lead. Consequently, in this present section, I explicitly probe the theoretical principles of the second-person perspective, to see whether these principles provide the most fitting philosophical account of the *kind* of intersubjective connectedness involved in instances of joint attention – a psychological phenomenon which has been shown to contribute to the faculty of understanding in many significant ways.

In what follows, I provide a much more thorough and rigorous elucidation of the notion of the second-person perspective than was provided in chapter 1. Herein, I go to some length illustrating the basic idea, qualifying what I mean by it, and bolstering its plausibility as a metaphysical (and not merely psychological) reality. In the second subsection, and drawing from the materials presented, I explore the ways in which joint attention may, in fact, be considered as constitutive of second-person relatedness – a correspondence which, if valid, would have significant implications for the thesis question.

3.3.1: What is the Second-Person Perspective?

As chapter 1 reviewed, a useful contemporary introduction into the second-person perspective and second-person studies is Naomi Eilan's compilation of related essays, *The Second Person: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. In her introductory chapter, she offers a dynamic picture of what the phenomenon is all about:

Suppose you and I are having a conversation, about anything – a book, a philosophical problem, the state of the world, someone we are both looking at. In virtue of having such a conversation we are each in position to use the second person pronoun to address each other. Conversations are not the only kind of exchange that makes use of the second person pronoun possible and appropriate simply in virtue of engaging in the exchange. Any form of verbal communication does this, but so too do

jointly attending to an object, sharing a smile, exchanging gifts and so forth. I will call instances of the relation in which two people stand to each other, in virtue of which use of the second person is possible and appropriate, ‘second person relations.’³⁶⁰

In other words, second-person situations are those situations in which “I” relate to “You” in various distinct ways, and the term is meant to inspire a sense which goes beyond merely the sense invoked by “I” or “you,” but instead, whatever might be entailed by “I-you.”

Furthermore, Eilan’s everyday examples here do have some intuitive and commonsense characteristics as far as describing or illustrating what she takes to be instances of the second-person perspective, however, this quick gloss will not suffice for a philosophically rigorous elucidation of the concept.

On the other hand, one may readily notice that in her description above, Eilan alludes to instances of dyadic joint attention (such as sharing a smile), and instances of triadic joint attention (such as conversing about a third object or another person), as well as instances plausibly involving a mix of both (such as exchanging gifts). Again, however, there currently exists a *lacuna* regarding adequate philosophical treatment of joint attention; recall León’s remarks: “there is a striking contrast between the widespread agreement that joint attention is critical in a variety of domains [including cognitive], and the lack of consensus on how to account for it.” He attributes this lack due to the “relatively scarce theoretical engagement” on the topic.³⁶¹

But theoretical engagement of joint attention using the philosophical notion of the second-person perspective is not so simple. Instead, philosopher Dan Zahavi stresses that discussions about what the second-person perspective *is* and *is not*, are very much ongoing,

³⁶⁰ Naomi Eilan, “The You Turn,” *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 3 (2014): 266.

³⁶¹ León, “Joint Attention without Recursive Mindreading,” 551.

and these discussions are a witness to the fact that there exists a need for further clarification on the concept. He summarizes, “whereas many contributors insist that a proper consideration of the second-person perspective will have an impact on our understanding of social cognition, joint action, communication, self-consciousness, morality, and so on, there remains considerable disagreement about what exactly a second-person perspective amounts to.”³⁶²

In other words, he asks, “What is the difference between adopting a second-person and a third-person perspective on another? How does one relate to another as a you and how does that differ from relating to another as a he, she or they?”³⁶³ Hence, this section aims to coordinate several insights to further the discussion on the precise nature and scope of the second-person perspective, in order to offer, potentially, a suitable account of joint attention, philosophically speaking.

To attempt this achievement, I will first lay out the account of what qualifies as a “second-person experience” according to philosopher Eleonore Stump, followed by a thickening of this account, so to say, in the light of additional research and considerations.

As a quick clarification of terms, however, I should point out that what Stump calls second-person *experience* is what Eilan calls second-person *relations* (or at least the latter includes the former), and other authors often speak of the second-person *perspective* when

³⁶² Dan Zahavi, “Observation, Interaction, Communication: The Role of the Second Person,” *Supplementary Volume - Aristotelian Society* 97, no. 1 (2023): 82.

³⁶³ Ibid.

referring to what Stump and Eilan are talking about.³⁶⁴ In this project I have predominantly used the language second-person *relatedness* to allude to the various instances which Stump, Eilan, and others are referring, although as will be made clear, I shall continue to define and distinguish the differences (if any) between the various terms employed.³⁶⁵

Three Criteria and their Qualifications

Eleonore Stump, in *Wandering in Darkness*, explores and coordinates several facets of the purported second-person perspective, where her purposes are to provide an adequate defense of God's justice despite the existence of evil and suffering in the world. A close look at some of her material will help describe the nature of the second-person perspective as well as invite further investigation and application. As a quick preface to Stump's account, however, I will say something about what is meant by the word "person." Stump, like many others such as Aquinas, accepts Boethius' formulation of what a person is: an individual

³⁶⁴ There is also the language of the second-person *standpoint*, coined by Stephen L. Darwall in *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006). What Darwall means when he refers to the second-person standpoint is "the perspective that you and I take up when we make and acknowledge claims on one another's conduct and will" (p. 3). He conceives the idea as a way to ground ethics, and his usage only maps onto other accounts of the second-person phenomenon to a limited degree. In his words, although his terminology "derives...from the grammatical second person," it is a different account than "[Donald] Davidson;" to which Darwall is referring (p. 3) to Davidson, "The Second Person," in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). This project does not draw from Darwall's interpretation of the second person via his second-person *standpoint*.

³⁶⁵ Second-person "experience," "relations," or "perspective" are not necessarily better or worse terms than "relatedness," but for sake of simplicity and consistency I will use "relatedness" whenever feasible. I do also at times employ the term "perspective" and "experience," although I mean to refer to the same thing. Finally, the literature sometimes uses the term second-person *relationship*, which on most accounts at least includes second-person relatedness, and is sometimes employed as a synonym for it. "Relationship," however, suggests something which lasts over time between two people, and it often connotes something of a certain emotional quality. Neither are necessarily the case when referring to second-person experiences, and therefore the terms "relatedness" or "perspective" preserve a bit more precision. I am grateful to Andrew Pinsent for making this point, drawing from his conversations with Peter Hobson. There are times, however, where the connotations associated with "relationship" are useful, and in these instances, as will be seen, I shall use the term second-person relationship.

substance of a rational nature.³⁶⁶ This medieval definition (adopted by many of the scholastics) is certainly not without its objectors, however, in this thesis I do not try to settle the question of whether Boethius' definition is an adequate, necessary, or sufficient account of personhood. Rather, for the purposes of this thesis, I take "person" to be a properly basic concept, and on the account assumed in this project, all humans are persons, as well as purported angels, demons, and God.³⁶⁷

Stump supposes that for someone, say Meghan, to have a second-person experience of someone else, say Harry, there are three conditions that must be met:

(1) Meghan is aware of Harry as a person (call the relation Meghan has to Harry in this condition 'personal interaction'),

(2) Meghan's personal interaction with Harry is of a direct and immediate sort,

and

(3) Harry is conscious.³⁶⁸

For Stump, these three criteria are both necessary and sufficient to render a situation a valid instance of "minimal" second-person experience. She then proceeds to provide a large (yet

³⁶⁶ Stump, *Wandering*, 387, 614-15.

³⁶⁷ For further reading on the issues surrounding what constitutes personhood, see Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between "someone" and "Something,"* Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., in *Who Count as Persons? Human Identity and the Ethics of Killing*, Moral Traditions and Moral Arguments (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2001).

³⁶⁸ Stump, *Wandering*, 75-76. In Stump's examples and discussion, she uses the names of two people in her own life: Paula and Jerome (and sometimes a third person, Julia). I have chosen to substitute these names with more common names found in the Anglosphere.

useful) set of qualifiers for each of these criteria.³⁶⁹ For the first condition, Meghan must be “aware” of Harry, which means Meghan must be conscious, although Meghan does not have to perceive Harry in a direct and immediate way, in the sense of being with Harry.³⁷⁰ A phone call with Harry would count as awareness without perception,³⁷¹ yet it must be that Meghan’s awareness of Harry is “as a person.” In other words, if Meghan suffers from agnosia (a condition which often includes the inability to recognize persons), and she is consciously aware of Harry but is aware of him only as, say, a sort of mannequin, then she is not having a second-*person* experience of Harry.

For the second condition, “direct and unmediated” means that Meghan’s contact with Harry is not facilitated through a third person or persons, although mechanical or machine-like intermediaries still can count as direct and unmediated. This reason is because a mechanical device such as eyeglasses, or a machine such as a two-way video-conferencing system, are not themselves “the thing cognized” – Harry is still “the thing cognized,” albeit it is through the glasses or the computer screen (or both).³⁷²

³⁶⁹ The prolonged discussion on page 76, and the endnotes which accompany it (located in pp. 513-517) provide extensive qualification of these criteria. My aim is to summarize what I take to be the most important of these qualifications and proceed with my follow-on “thickening” of Stump’s minimal-case account.

³⁷⁰ As Stump develops her account, she uses “perception” to mean the kind which involves seeing, or at least physically being with and directly sensing someone.

³⁷¹ As Stump remarks, it is difficult to define what precisely counts as “awareness” when direct perception is absent. It must be more than an imagining of Harry, even though this imagining in other circumstances could be thought of as some kind of “awareness.” Instead, Harry himself, and not just a private imagining or a figment of Harry, must factor into the experience. Furthermore, the matter of a telephone call brings up the issue of mediation, addressed below.

³⁷² There are complexities which can quickly blur the otherwise clear-cut cases. Stump takes e mail and telephone communication to be examples which can count as second-person experience, but not if someone else other than Harry is talking to/e mailing Meghan pretending to be Harry. It is also unclear in the case where Harry is intentionally trying to deceive Meghan in the things he says about himself.

On the other hand, if Meghan's interaction with Harry is mediated through, say, their daughter Lili, who repeats a message that Harry has for Meghan (or who takes down a message from Meghan intended for Harry), the person Harry is not the thing cognized by Meghan; instead, the person Lili is the thing cognized. Therefore, this situation would not count as Meghan having a second-person experience of *Harry*.

Finally, the third condition on Stump's account requires that Harry be conscious. If Harry is asleep or in a coma, for example, he is not in a position to offer any "personal interaction" to Meghan, and Meghan's experience of Harry is instead flattened to Meghan having an experience of Harry's unconscious (or semi-conscious) and relatively unresponsive body, instead of Harry.³⁷³ Stump's account of this minimal-case of second-person experience, however, does not require that Harry be conscious (or aware) *of Meghan*. In other words, if Meghan is watching a conscious Harry behind a one-way mirror, and conditions (1) and (2) are met, then on Stump's account, Meghan is still having a second-person experience of Harry. On this interpretation, the "personal interaction" (inherent to condition 1) between Meghan and Harry can be one-sided, such that in the example where Harry is hidden behind a screen, Harry is still able to present to Meghan cognizable input of a certain quality. Meghan, however, is not providing any input to Harry, and in this way the understanding of the term or condition "personal interaction" is somewhat thin.

³⁷³ A significant subtlety, though, about humans' interaction with the "unanimated body" (or body parts) of loved ones is that we do not typically treat them as *mere stuff*, without distinction from common, everyday raw "matter." As Charles Foster put it, we do not use the ears of dead relatives as ashtrays, for example. See Charles Foster, "Dignity and the Ownership and Use of Body Parts," *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics* 23, no. 4 (October 2014): 417–30. Many religious systems, furthermore, place a significant emphasis on the veneration or honoring of *relics*: bodily remnants of men and women who are remembered as saints. In other words, although bodies (and body parts) are not persons, our interactions with them are in some ways colored with personal characteristics.

Consequently, at least for the purposes of this thesis, I would like to “thicken,” so to speak, Stump’s account of a second-person experience, as helpful as it has been, by amending this third criterion. When I or other authors, such as Hobson, refer to second-person experience, perspective, or relatedness, what is usually involved is the additional factor that *both people are aware of each other*.³⁷⁴ In the everyday examples presented in section one – children and caregivers, students and teachers, and military members and training instructors – as well as the instances of joint attention described and examined in sections two and three (gaze following, pointing, mutual attention, etc.), there seems to be mutual, or shared, awareness.³⁷⁵ Thus, in a slightly altered version of Stump’s account of second-person experience, condition three would be:

(3)’ Harry is aware of Meghan.³⁷⁶

Dan Zahavi captures the essence of this impulse to understand second-person relatedness in this way when he says “It is not possible to adopt a second-person perspective on one’s own. I cannot relate to another second-personally (rather than third-personally) by simply changing my intentional stance vis-à-vis the other. *The person I am relating to must herself be a participatory agent*.”³⁷⁷ Furthermore, Eilan’s appeal to ground or at least correlate “second-person relations” with situations where “use of the second person [pronoun] is

³⁷⁴ Recall that Hobson phrases this phenomenon as [sic] “shared awareness of shared focus.” Hobson, “What Puts the Jointness into Joint Attention.”

³⁷⁵ Eilan’s colorful examples above of “second-person relations” likewise includes two-way shared awareness.

³⁷⁶ Because he is aware, he is also conscious. So (3)’ does not replace (3), but includes and adds to it.

³⁷⁷ Dan Zahavi, “Observation, Interaction, Communication: The Role of the Second Person,” *Supplementary Volume - Aristotelian Society* 97, no. 1 (2023): 94. Emphasis added. Parenthesis original.

possible and appropriate,” relates nicely to this idea of mutual awareness. As Victor Verdejo summarizes,

In the philosophical literature on personal indexicals the second-person perspective reveals itself as a distinctive awareness relation. When you refer to a subject S with ‘you’, and do so in a paradigmatic and felicitous case, you stand in a special form of awareness *toward one another*. Not only are you aware of S, and not only is S aware of you. In addition, you are both aware of being mutually aware of one another.³⁷⁸

In other words, the existence, and the use of second-person pronouns in language not only provides some immediate *prima facie* evidence that there is such a thing as a second-person perspective or form of second-person relatedness, but it also implies that this relatedness is something which necessarily involves two agents mutually aware of each other.

One will notice, however, in the final line of Verdejo’s quote above, that there is an additional aspect to the account of the second-person perspective that is not explicitly stated in conditions (1) – (3)’. This aspect is that both people are *aware of each other’s awareness*.

Several situations can be supposed in which these first three conditions are met but which are nevertheless without the mutual awareness of each other’s awareness. For example, imagine that Meghan and Harry are in different rooms, separated by a one-way mirror. Meghan is in the room with the reflective, non-transparent side of the mirror, so Harry can look into Meghan’s room and be aware of her. Meghan does not know that the mirror on her side of the wall is in fact transparent on the other side, and therefore she does not know that Harry is watching her. Additionally, let us suppose, Meghan is watching and aware of Harry through a video-teleconference screen mounted above the mirror, out of

³⁷⁸ Víctor Martín Verdejo Aparicio, “The Second Person Perspective and the ‘You’-Rule,” *Teorema* 41, no. 2 (2022): 188. Emphasis added.

Harry's field of view, making it so that Harry does not know that Meghan is aware of him.³⁷⁹ In this situation, Meghan and Harry are both aware of each other, but there is not a mutual awareness of their awareness. The situation would not be qualitatively different if, suppose, only one of the two knew about the full setup in both rooms. While watching Harry, Meghan may, for example, know that Harry is aware of her through the one-way mirror, but if Harry does not know that Meghan is aware of him (he still does not know about the camera and TV setup), there is not a *mutual* awareness of each other's awareness.

Another example, perhaps more true-to-life, is imagining Meghan and Harry both lifting weights in a public gym, where the walls are covered with (normal) mirrors. We can suppose that Meghan and Harry are exercising in the same room and looking at each other through the reflection of the mirrors. But in this case, Meghan and Harry are wearing dark-tinted sunglasses which hide their eyes and obscure the direction in which they are looking. In this instance, Meghan and Harry are not aware that each other is attending to the other person, and this description would obtain were only one of them wearing sunglasses.³⁸⁰

In cases such as these instances, conditions (1) – (3)' are met, strictly speaking, but there seems to be something critically missing from the situation for it to count as the kind of experience usually offered as examples of second-person relatedness. This intuition may be illustrated by changing the thought-experiments above, where now, Meghan and Harry are made to be aware of each other's awareness. So, in the split room example, suppose Harry

³⁷⁹ The (hidden) camera in Harry's room is mounted above the mirror, making it so that Meghan does not see that there is a one-way mirror in his room and that he is watching her.

³⁸⁰ Meghan, say, is not wearing glasses and she watches Harry, who in turn is watching her. But Harry is still wearing sunglasses (and does not make it obvious that he is aware of Meghan, say, by orienting his head in Meghan's general direction). So, Meghan does not know that he is watching her, and she thinks that he is not. There is no mutual awareness *of* their mutual awareness.

sees Meghan pull out her cell phone and she proceeds to dial Harry's number (again, Meghan is not yet aware that Harry is watching, or aware of, her). As soon as the call goes through, Meghan sees Harry pick up his cell phone and answer Meghan's call. This reciprocal action would immediately make both observers aware that each other is aware of one another, a characteristic that they did not enjoy beforehand. Their subsequent interactions ensue in the light of this realization, a realization which clearly marks the experience as different in kind than it was previously. Alternatively, in the gym scenario, should Meghan and Harry remove their sunglasses and continue to stare at the other person, each is likely going to look quickly elsewhere, to avoid an awkward moment. Again, the experience becomes different in kind than it was before mutual awareness is achieved.

The overall point, however, is that this additional factor of mutual awareness of each other's awareness seems to fundamentally change the quality of interpersonal phenomena. Therefore, as regards my account of a second-person experience, instead of adding a fourth condition, we may (for simplicity's sake) understand the terms "aware" and "interaction" explicit in conditions (1) – (3)' as being of the kind that is mutually mutual. (Additionally, going forward, when I say "mutual awareness" I mean the awareness of each other's awareness).

The Unique Nature of 'Relatedness'

Furthermore, it is worth examining in more depth the precise nature of this two-person quality that Zahavi, Verdejo, and others describe. On this understanding of second-person relatedness, these instances contain a certain "bipolarity," or irreducibly two-person quality, which is non-accidentally constitutive of the phenomenon. Michael Thompson provides a helpful way of illustrating this idea:

I may be said to view a pair of distinct agents as joined and opposed in a formally distinctive type of practical nexus. They are for me like the opposing poles of an electrical apparatus: in filling one of these forms with concrete content, I represent an arc of normative current as passing between the agent-poles, and as taking a certain path.³⁸¹

On this illustration, second-person experiences or perspectives are necessarily, adopting Aristotle's words, "toward another."³⁸² More explicitly, in instances of second-person relatedness, "what is required from the second-person is both distinct from, *and interdependent with*, what is required from the first."³⁸³ In other words, on Thompson's illustration of a bipolar electrical apparatus, the relatedness between the two people – which is signified by the arc of electrical current – is not something trivially added to the two-poles which oppose one another. The electrical current is part of what is constitutive of the apparatus itself and cannot be extracted from it.

As Eilan summarizes another author, Sebastian Rödl, instances of second-person relatedness are not "a combination of two acts," they are instead "essentially acts for two."³⁸⁴ On this account, the "self-consciousness involved in such transaction [second-person instances]" cannot be explained by "equipping each subject with a kind of interpersonal self-consciousness *that has the content it has independently of the transaction*."³⁸⁵ On this understanding of second-person relatedness, the "personal interaction" or "transaction" between the two people is part of what constitutes the cognitive content in each agent. Zahavi

³⁸¹ Michael Thompson, "What Is It to Wrong Someone?," in *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, edited by R. Jay Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 335.

³⁸² *Pros heteron* or *pros allon*. Ibid, 337.

³⁸³ Eilan, "The You Turn," 268. Emphasis added.

³⁸⁴ Ibid, 270. She is summarizing some thoughts from Sebastian Rödl, "Intentional Transaction," *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 3 (2014): 304–16.

³⁸⁵ Ibid, 271. Emphasis added.

puts it this way: “Consequently, rather than seeing you-awareness as an individual cognitive achievement, it might be better to see it instead as a joint accomplishment, as ‘a social action in which two co-agents involved’.”³⁸⁶ But what do these statements mean, precisely?

Eilan tries to unpack the meaning and relevance behind these somewhat sweeping statements in her essay, “Other I’s, Communication, and the Second Person.” In it, she supposes a scenario in which you are at a university meeting organized by the university administrators, and the topic of conversation pivots to some such pedantic or cliché reference to the university’s so-called “entrepreneurial gene.” You look up and make eye contact with a colleague sitting opposite you. One of four things (at least) can happen:

- (a) A brief almost deadpan meeting of eyes suffices to establish you both feel and think exactly the same about the proceedings.
- (b) Your eyes meet. You expect an exchange of shared embarrassment/boredom, for example. Instead you encounter eyes shining with enthusiastic endorsement. This kind of exchange probably needs more time than the first, as each one of you registers the difference, before you return to your doodles and he resumes his rapt attention to the speaker.
- (c) Your eyes meet, but he looks at you questioningly, he doesn’t, as we say, know what you are ‘on about’. Or maybe he’s just pretending not to. Slight embarrassment or frustration ensue and you resume your doodling.
- (d) Your eyes meet. But it is clear to you that his thoughts are elsewhere –he sees you, perhaps even has your eyes in focus, but fails to notice, and hence to respond to, the invitation to exchange views. (Which is different from someone deliberately ‘looking though’ you).³⁸⁷

Before examining more closely these potential responses, it is worth pondering why it is in the first place that we are prompted to “lock eyes” with another whenever instances happen

³⁸⁶ Zahavi, “Observation, Interaction, Communication: The Role of the Second Person.” His quote is from Monika Dullstein, “Understanding Others in Social Interactions,” *Philosophical Topics* 42, no. 1 (2014): 314.

³⁸⁷ Naomi Eilan, “Other I’s, Communication, and the Second Person,” *Inquiry*, July 12, 2020, 8.

like this one described. Here is a similar example that might also get the point across. Imagine you are at the supermarket checkout finishing your weekly grocery shopping, placing items from your cart onto the motorized conveyer belt. You get distracted and start responding to a text from your mother for a minute or two, while the person behind you proceeds to load the space on the belt, behind the divider, with her items. You are only conscious of her actions in the periphery of your awareness, until you put down your phone and look at the collection of items she placed on the conveyer and see that what is on the belt is nothing but two dozen jars of mayonnaise and a mini inflatable pool... an image which strikes you as especially peculiar.

In response to such curiosities, why is our immediate and instinctual impulse to earnestly seek the eyes of the person – in this case, this culprit of mayonnaise mania? There is something we are trying to find out, almost like an itch that just needs to be scratched, and it *seems* that the only way to do so is to look into the eyes of the other person (even if she does not look back). We are left unsatisfied until we do. In one way or another this action, this quest to encounter the person through the eyes, and face, to find out something about them, begins to satisfy our curiosity and desire for understanding in a way that does not seem to be able to be substituted by anything else.

Regardless, in Eilan's example, your attention perks up at the speaker's cliché remark about the "entrepreneurial gene" and you seek to solicit your colleague's attitude on the subject, as well as express your own feelings about it, through mutual gaze. On Eilan's account, there is something extant in responses (a) – (c) that is not there in response (d). Namely, in the first three examples, there is an "a mutual registration that channels of

communication are open, thereby establishing a kind of *communicative connectedness*.”³⁸⁸

The colleague is relating to you as a person, issuing, through non-verbal cues, an exchange of attitudes and emotions.

This exchange and especially coordination of emotions (as in the first example, (a)) are what Vasudevi Reddy take as distinctive of relating to someone second-personally as opposed to third-personally. In her estimation, “The extent to which one is open to and present to the other and to which the other is open to and present to you is what marks out a second-person relation.”³⁸⁹ According to Reddy, Eilan, Zahavi, and others, the stance one takes when objectifying someone, or treating them as mere means to an end, or thinking about them in purely analytical terms, is not a second-person relation, because such attitudes take the other person as a “he/she” (or “it”) rather than as a “you.”³⁹⁰

For example, in the fourth case, case (d), the colleague is not relating to you as a person, *per se*, but neither is he “looking through you.” The colleague is still looking at you, but more so as a mere object of perception instead of as a person with which to interact and relate. Perhaps case (d) is like when you go to the optometrist to get an eye exam. When the doctor tells you to look straight ahead, and he proceeds to stand in front of you face-to-face to examine your pupils, your “eyes lock,” but this situation clearly has a different quality to it than were the optometrist instead a close friend who was comforting you after the disappointing news that you didn’t get the job you earnestly applied for. Normally, when you

³⁸⁸ Ibid. Emphasis added.

³⁸⁹ Vasudevi Reddy, “Why Engagement?: A Second-Person Take on Social Cognition,” in *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition*, Oxford Library of Psychology (Oxford University Press, 2018), 438.

³⁹⁰ Buber’s *I and Thou* is memorable for the way he reflects on the treating of people as an “it,” what he calls the “I-It” mode of relation.

are at the optometrist being examined, you are both looking at each other, but there is not much openness or connectedness of mind and emotion.

Now instead, in the optometrist scenario, imagine that your cell phone briefly blares a highly offensive song lyric as a custom notification that signals you just got a text message from your older brother (perhaps your brother might have even programmed this setting without your knowledge, as a prank). You quickly silence your phone and look at the optometrist, especially sheepishly, but at the same time earnestly. Your glance at the optometrist is qualitatively different than how it was before. In this quick instance of the initial glance, you are intently seeking to communicate something about how you feel about the outburst (say, embarrassed, instead of emboldened) *and* to solicit likewise from him a response, to understand what he thinks about the episode. Is he angry, or offended, and will the rest of the exam be terribly awkward? Perhaps he is slightly amused, or even very amused. After all, you are swiftly about to explain what happened, and should he be amused, your explanation is more likely to succeed in making the rest of the exam less awkward.

In other words, in that initial glance, you are hoping that he will respond, with even the slightest gesture, without antipathy. Yet, suppose in this case, regardless of his inner thoughts and feelings on the matter, he goes on staring at you in just the same way as he did before. He leaves you guessing how he might feel about the episode due to his refusal to respond in-kind and you are likely keen to get on with the exam as soon as possible and quickly move past the moment.³⁹¹

³⁹¹ His lack of response might even be worse than were he to respond negatively. If you see a negative response, then you can start strategizing how to explain yourself and conduct yourself in a manner that will recalibrate his attitude towards you. But no response? You are left guessing, without anything to go off. This absence of response is explored more below.

To make matters worse, suppose the optometrist was initially acting jovial and interacting with rich instances of communication, such as slight banter and good rapport, but at the onset of the ringtone, he switches to the deadpan expression described above, and persists with this expression despite your gestures of light-hearted, albeit slightly embarrassed, laughter, facial expressions, and tone of voice. One can imagine the extreme stress this change in attitude would cause (at least for most people), and the stress would probably be higher than if the optometrist reacted *negatively*, but nevertheless reacted *somehow*.

Interestingly, a similar situation of this kind has been studied at length with small children, in what are known as still-face experiments.³⁹² In still-face experiments, the mother begins by interacting with her infant face-to-face through normal modes of interaction: reciprocal smiling, laughter, “baby-talk,” and the sort. This phase is called the baseline phase. Then, when the experimenter signals, the mother ceases all interaction and gives a deadpan, emotionless, stare at the child. This phase is called the still-face phase. At the onset of this stage, the child quickly becomes distressed and immediately begins attempts at re-establishing connectedness; he waves his arms and cries, and eventually, if the mother continues with the still-face, the child seeks disengagement through the aversion of gaze and other methods, all while stress levels remain high. Finally, the mother re-establishes

³⁹² Judi Mesman, Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, and Marian J. Bakermans-Kranenburg, “The Many Faces of the Still-Face Paradigm: A Review and Meta-Analysis,” *Developmental Review* 29, no. 2 (2009): 120–62.

interaction in what is called the reunion phase, where the child (usually³⁹³) responds in-kind, coupled with a decrease in stress levels.

What's remarkable about these experiments is that even when the mother gives negative affective interaction during the reunion phase, such as frowns and angry or anxious facial expressions, the child's stress levels nevertheless decrease from what they were in the still-face phase. These results suggest that the child is perturbed in the still-face phase not mostly because she perceives her mother to be in a bad mood, but *mostly because of the lack of communication in and of itself*.

Particularly, in these experimental cases, there is a failure to respond in-kind to one's initiation for communication and connection. Crucially, then, what is missing in Eilan's fourth case (d) is *mutual address*, or the thinking of you as a "you" from other person, even though you are thinking of him as a "you," instead of thinking of him as a "he" or an "it."³⁹⁴

Zahavi remarks that the mere potential for mutuality is not enough – it must be realized. Yet, this realization cannot be accomplished on one's own: "whether I encounter someone from a second- or third-person perspective isn't simply up to me and my intentional stance. I cannot unilaterally transform a he or a she into a you. Rather, you-awareness is a joint accomplishment, and requires the participation of both parties."³⁹⁵ In other words, this realization of mutuality cannot be done unilaterally, it is *essentially* a joint accomplishment.

³⁹³ The study also reviews cases where the still-face phase is especially prolonged, or, when the mother keeps going in and out of still-face to reunion, without prolonged interaction. In these situations, the child exhibits less and less responsiveness in the reunion phases, as if the child does not trust the mother's initiations of reunion. In order to overcome this hesitancy once the experiments are over, the mother has to provide exceedingly consistent responsiveness.

³⁹⁴ On this account, this "you" address need not be verbal, as is clear from Eilan's examples.

³⁹⁵ Zahavi, "Observation, Interaction, Communication," 92.

What remains interesting about the first three cases ((a) – (c)), which on Eilan’s account qualify as instances of “second-person awareness,” is that in these instances, the cognitive content of this “you-thinking” has “a kind of world-dependence here, but the world one is depending on *is the world of the other thinking about me in the same way as I am of her.*”³⁹⁶ For this reason, this communicative connectedness should be viewed as something fundamental, or primitive. What this notion entails is that instances of second-person relatedness are not analyzable in terms of anything more fundamental. Rather, this relatedness is like entering into an “I-thou” perspective which is a mode of existence in and of itself, a distinct reality that cannot be exchanged for or reduced to any other kind.

Concerns about Metaphysics

This assertion that the second-person perspective is metaphysically fundamental (in the sense that it is irreducible) may strike some readers as a bit odd and somewhat unwarranted. After all, some thinkers – especially those steeped in the analytic tradition – will demand an ontological account of such purported second-person reality.³⁹⁷ Meaning, these inquirers demand to know on what kind of metaphysical schema am I, or others, hanging this reality onto, so to say (and likewise, on what account is this schema the correct metaphysical system?). Although this thesis does not endeavor to settle these interesting

³⁹⁶ Eilan, “Other I’s, Communication, and the Second Person,” 13. Emphasis added.

³⁹⁷ In my interaction with scholars and students in the analytic tradition, this demand inevitably sits center-stage of any discussion about my thesis project, and it is often difficult to “get off the ground,” so to speak, to apply the second-person perspective in any interesting way, whether it relates to the faculty of understanding, or otherwise. Stump’s discussion and usage of analytic philosopher Bas Van Fraassen in *Wandering* may be a refreshing recalibration of what constitutes good philosophy. See *Wandering*, 24, 27, 37-38, and 60. Perhaps one quote from Fraassen will suffice to illustrate his basic insistence: “[analytic] metaphysicians interpret what we initially understand into something hardly anyone understands, and then insist that we cannot do without that. To any incredulous listener they’ll say: Construct a better alternative! But that just signals their invincible presumption that [analytic] metaphysics is the sine qua non of understanding.” Bas C. Van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance*, Terry Lecture Series (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 3.

questions within the field of analytical metaphysics, I will offer, however, a second-order approach to the question. This approach may satisfy the question enough, at least, so that one can continue exploring the second-person concept as worthwhile.³⁹⁸

My proposal is that in whatever way there is a distinct third-person reality, and likewise a (purported) first-person reality (assuming that consciousness is not reducible to physical states), there is also an irreducible or distinct second-person reality. In other words, I start with the widespread assumption that one can adopt a third-person perspective on a reality that is third-personal – such as a botanist who classifies various species of orchids for the purposes of creating an orchid field-manual. Accordingly, then, the second-person perspective is a perspective that one can take in virtue of a reality which is second-personal.

On this account, the botanist can take this perspective when he engages with, say, his colleague in certain ways (such as jointly attending to a certain, recently discovered orchid). The proponent of the second-person perspective, then, need not commit himself, necessarily, to a particular metaphysical system vs another (although this compromise, as it were, is not to deny that some systems are probably closer to the truth than others). If this approach is sound, then this second-order premise about the nature of a second-person concept or second-person reality can therefore “map” onto different first-order accounts of ontology, at least potentially. Most relevant is that this cautious agnosticism concerning which metaphysical system is correct may “rescue” the second-person proponent from endless technical debates that turn in circles.

³⁹⁸ For a worthwhile introduction into the field of analytic metaphysics, see Daniel Nolan, “Method in Analytic Metaphysics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Methodology*, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2016) and Peter Simons, “Metaphysics in Analytic Philosophy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford Handbooks in Philosophy (Oxford University Press, 2013).

It should also be noted, in passing, that a strand of philosophy made popular in the 20th century by thinkers like Martin Buber, called dialogical personalism, takes the second-person reality to be the *most* fundamental reality, where first- and third-person accounts of encountering the world actually, in some way, derive from the metaphysically foundational “I-thou.”³⁹⁹ On this less common view, the burden of proof for the explanatory superiority of the third-person perspective is on the modern analytic metaphysician, instead of vice versa. The validity of dialogical personalism notwithstanding, there is one more related issue that needs addressing.

A related and equally pressing question concerning an analytic account of the second-person perspective is brought up by asking the question, in virtue of precisely *what* does this perspective denote a distinct reality? In other words, an interlocutor may demand a strictly and exhaustively propositional explication of what the second-person perspective is and what it is not. This issue is related to the previous, and emerges out of it, but it is nevertheless distinct. This issue is not about totalizing metaphysical accounts of reality, *per se*, but instead the question emerges out of the desire to know whatever is *essential* to the second-person perspective and to frame this essence in third-person descriptions. This demand, however, is likely wrongheaded. If proponents of the second-person perspective and its supposed uniqueness are correct, it means that the reality which it denotes cannot be described or defined – at least exhaustively – in purely propositional terms, that is, in statements which are inherently *third-personal*. In this way, proponents of an irreducible second-person reality

³⁹⁹ For an overview of personalism, see Thomas O. Buford and Harold H. Oliver, *Personalism Revisited: Its Proponents and Critics*, Value Inquiry Book Series; 124 (Leiden; BRILL, 2002), especially the essay by Edgar Sheffield Brightman. For dialogical personalism, see Paul Ricœur and Kathleen Blamey, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1992).

mirror the intuition by those who likewise propose an irreducible first-person reality; namely, the belief that consciousness cannot be fully explicated in scientific (third-person) terms.⁴⁰⁰

So, were a proponent to insist that such an account of the second-person perspective could be given, even hypothetically, it would negate the core assertion about the second-person perspective in the first place. Nevertheless, it is not that descriptions and attempts at some kind of definition(s) cannot be offered, it is simply that there will always be something left over which is inexplicable in propositional terms. This idea of there being something “left over” is helpfully showcased by Stump, in a couple of thought-experiments she lays out, which show that this idea concerning non-fully explicable phenomenon is not so novel, and a quick review of her method will be helpful.

Distinctiveness of the Second-Personal

In much of the first part of her book, Stump examines the somewhat murky, yet persistent, epistemic concept that there exists knowledge which is not and cannot be reduced (at least entirely) to “knowledge-that.” Knowledge-that is more-or-less another term for propositional knowledge: knowledge *about* things, people, ideas, etc. Instead, there seem to be other sorts of knowledge, such as the comparatively less-studied *knowledge by acquaintance* (less-studied relative to the modern epistemic focus on knowledge-that). Knowledge by acquaintance, on the other hand, is knowledge gained through an immediate apprehension of entities. It accounts for things like qualia: internal mental states which are the result of unmediated, phenomenological experience. To use the common example of “seeing red,” there is a difference between the knowledge gained by seeing red – specifically,

⁴⁰⁰ I.e., the view, already popular, but crystalized in [analytic] discussions via Chalmers’ “hard problem of consciousness.” Chalmers, “Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness.”

knowledge of the color itself – vs the knowledge-that gained by studying data *about* the color red (its placement on the electromagnetic spectrum, historic connotations, biological effects it has on the human eye, etc.). Stump reminds us that no matter how thorough a description is offered in terms of knowledge-that to, say, Mary who has been colorblind since birth, there is always something left over which Mary could only learn via knowledge by acquaintance – in this case, seeing red.⁴⁰¹

These considerations prompt Stump to elaborate on another kind of knowledge by acquaintance, one that is not first-personal, but instead *second-personal*. She devises a thought experiment, or rather amends the existing thought experiment about Mary, to illustrate her point. In Stump's version, suppose instead of Mary never seeing the color red, Mary grows up having never met her mother. In the absence of meeting her mother, however, Mary is provided with written resources that list everything there is to [propositionally] know *about* her mother – her demographical and biometric information, her likes, her dislikes, her history growing up, all her activities, habits, and behaviors, etc.

But no matter how exhaustive any such account or accounts about her mother that Mary is provided with – delivering to Mary a heap of knowledge-that – there remains important knowledge (or better yet, *knowing*) which is not gained until Mary finally *meets* her mother. Beforehand, Mary knew most, possibly even *all* there is to know *about* her mother, now Mary finally *knows her mother*. Stump shows that it is quite plausible that this kind of knowledge simply cannot be reduced to either third-person propositions (knowledge-

⁴⁰¹ Stump, *Wandering*, 50-51. Stump is making use of the thought-experiment originally published by Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 127 (1982): 127–36.

that), or even first-person mental states about what it is like to meet and know another person. She elaborates:

Although Mary knew that her mother loved her before she met her, when she is united with her mother, Mary will learn what it is like to be loved. And this will be new for her, even if in her isolated state she had as complete a scientific description as possible of what a human being feels like when she senses that she is loved by someone else....Mary will also come to know what it is like to be touched by someone else, to be surprised by someone else, to ascertain someone else's mood, to detect affect in the melody of someone else's voice, to match thought for thought in conversation, and so on. These will be things she learns, even if before she had access to excellent books on human psychology and communication. The way in which I have formulated what Mary learns— what it is like to be touched by someone else, and so on— may suggest to someone that Mary learns things just about herself, and that she learns them in virtue of having new first-person experiences. It seems, then, that whatever Mary learns can be explained adequately in terms of a first-person account. But this is clearly wrong-headed. Even if Mary does learn new things about herself, what will come as the major revelation to Mary is *her mother*....What is new for Mary is a second-person experience.⁴⁰²

In other words, there exists a unique epistemic standpoint made possible only through the dyadic, bipolar, second-person perspective.⁴⁰³ When finally meeting her mother, let us imagine, Mary is able to hear the dynamic story of how she got that scar on her left arm; Mary sits and listens to her mother tell her all about what it was like to rescue the household cat from the burning storeroom (the way she got the scar), and just what it meant to the family afterwards for old Sunshine to escape the flames and be reunited to his worried owners. Before, Mary might have “known” about her mother’s scar and how she got it – known, that is, in a narrow sense: she “had (all) the facts” *about* this story. Whereas now,

⁴⁰² Ibid, 52-53.

⁴⁰³ For two more recent scholars who have also concluded that knowledge of persons is not reducible to third-person knowledge—that or first-person intuition, see Bonnie M. Talbert, “Knowing Other People: A Second-Person Framework,” *Ratio (Oxford)* 28, no. 2 (2015): 190–206 and David Lauer, “What Is It to Know Someone?,” *Philosophical Topics* 42, no. 1 (2014): 321–44.

after meeting and conversing, Mary knows or understands this story in a qualitatively different way.

Finally, and as my vignette just described begins to suggest, Stump innovates a bit further by describing what she takes to be second-person *accounts*. Just as there are third-person accounts (propositions or matter-of-fact descriptions), and first-person accounts (reports about one's internal mental states), there are also what she takes to be second-person accounts: reports about the interactions of two or more people, most often mediated through the literary device of *narrative* (or stories). The power implicit in stories has long been recognized by theologians, at least, so much to the point that Stump is prompted to give some analytical account as to *why*. In Stump's estimation, narrative can give someone an approximation of the second-person experience(s) by way of telling a story, enabling the listener to imagine themselves standing in those second-person relations, and thereby gain *something analogous* to second-person knowledge.⁴⁰⁴ Her description is helpful:

A story takes a real or imagined set of second-person experiences of one sort or another and makes it available to a wider audience to share. It does so by making it possible, to one degree or another, for a person to experience some of what she would have experienced if she had been an onlooker in the second-person experience represented in the story. That is, a story gives a person some of what she would have had if she had had unmediated personal interaction with the characters in the story while they were conscious and interacting with each other, without actually making her part of the story itself. The re-presenting of a second-person experience in a story thus constitutes a second-person account. It is a report of a set of second-person

⁴⁰⁴ The concept behind this kind of knowledge, mediated through narrative or storytelling, acts as the catalyst for her broader thesis in *Wandering*. Namely, that it is possible that God has given us just such kind of stories in the biblical texts (those in the book of Job, for example) to facilitate something analogous to an immediate, personal, experiential, and intuitive grasp of God's love and care for His creatures – a grasp which simply cannot be acquired through accounts of mere knowledge-that. Thus, Stump argues, the philosophical problem of human suffering can perhaps be partially mitigated if one considers the kinds of goods, epistemic and otherwise, such knowledge is uniquely equipped to deliver.

experiences that does not lose (at least does not lose entirely) the distinctively second-person character of the experiences.⁴⁰⁵

So, on this scheme, were Mary given not only exhaustive descriptions *about* her mother (propositional knowledge-that), but Mary was also given her mother's diary, it is easy to see that Mary gains some kind of knowledge that the propositions did not deliver. True, reading her mother's diary and reading stories involving her mother may not be able to replace the knowledge gained were Mary to actually meet her mother, face-to-face (and perhaps hear these stories face-to-face), yet it does seem to give Mary *something closer to it* than what she had before.

This phrase, "something closer to it," deserves a bit of unpacking. The word "something" here signifies the thing that closes some of the gap between knowledge-that (Mary knows *about* her mother) and the knowledge of persons (Mary *knows* her mother). The "it" is the thing that the second-person account is approximating, the thing that is on the other side of the gap: Mary knowing her mother. Furthermore, as discussed, neither personal knowing nor its approximation can be fully explicated in discrete terms.

This idea is illustrated by comparing the knowledge secured by reading a biography of someone to the knowledge secured by reading a collection of short stories written by someone who intimately knew the person. In Stump's words, "There is a great deal to be learned about Johnson from DeMaria's *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, but Boswell's stories [*Life of Johnson*] give you the man as the biography cannot."⁴⁰⁶ What exactly the difference is between the two kinds of epistemic uptake is something which fundamentally must be

⁴⁰⁵ Stump, *Wandering*, 78.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, 518.

intuitively grasped, as it cannot be discursively laid out. In other words, the “seeing” or recognizing this difference is itself a kind of knowledge by acquaintance.⁴⁰⁷

On this account, instances of second-person relatedness run parallel to, but are inherently distinct from, instances of first-person and third-person relatedness. This reason is because a first-person perspective on an object (mental or physical) is something that only the person having it could have. For example, Harry’s perspective on what it is like *for him* to run the London marathon can only be had by Harry. A third-person perspective is something that anybody, in principle, can have on an object. So, Meghan, Lili and Harry can all read about and observe the physiological precursors to, and effects of, someone running the London marathon. A third-person perspective is therefore a scientifically detached perspective – a view from the outside, as it were – hence the oft-associated word “objective.”⁴⁰⁸ The first-person perspective, on the other hand, is an inherently “subjective” viewpoint, a privileged and exclusive view “from the inside” that only the subject (the person) can have.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ I mean that it shares the quality of being not fully explicable in propositional terms. Furthermore, Stump gives a remarkable summary on page 498-499 which reviews how, at least according to one expert (Thomas Baldwin) Bertrand Russell’s fourfold taxonomy of knowledge has all knowledge ultimately relying on the “knowledge by acquaintance of things”. Stump notes that this description of Russell’s account of knowledge is therefore intriguingly similar to Thomas Aquinas’. I presume she is referring to what is now referred to as Aquinas’ “peripatetic axiom,” his supposition, following Aristotle (Aquinas refers to *Posterior Analytics*), that “Nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses.” Thomas Aquinas and Robert W. Mulligan, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, Library of Living Catholic Thought (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952), q. 2 a. 3 arg 19.

⁴⁰⁸ Or “object-ive,” treating things as merely objects.

⁴⁰⁹ Stump does see a distinction between a first-person (and second- and third-person) *experience* and *perspective* (“point of view”). *Wandering*, 513. In my view, and at least for the purposes of this thesis, this distinction is too minor, and possibly unhelpful (especially when trying to parse the differences between the parallel second- and third-person distinctions). I therefore use “perspective” and “experience” interchangeably with “relatedness.”

Yet, as has already been somewhat examined, more and more scholars from a wide variety of fields have been exploring the suspicion that there exists a perspective which is neither or at least not fully either first-personal or third-personal; that when engaging with another person on a third object, or when mutually attending to another person in social interactions, one can stand in a relation with that person which is fundamentally unique.⁴¹⁰

Consider Zahavi's example of the third-person perspective you can take on a friend who "has just removed a bottle of painkillers from the medicine cabinet," thereby enabling you to *infer* that he is in pain, as compared to watching the face of your friend as he issues an aggressive "wince and moan," giving you a different kind of recognition that he is in pain.⁴¹¹ As one team of researchers put it, situations such as the latter are "so different from our perception of the inanimate world," because "we witness the actions and emotions of others, but we also carry out similar actions and we experience similar emotions." They go on to grapple towards the idea that "There is something shared between our first and third-person experience of these phenomena.... A crucial element of social cognition is the brain's capacity to directly link the first and third-person experiences..."⁴¹² Or, in the words of another scholar,

What are the ways in which one agent can enter the thoughts of another and ground her action? Philosophical discussion is structured by an unstable opposition between views which give conceptual priority to the first-person standpoint of individual agents [subjective], separately considered, and those which give priority, instead, to the standpoint of the universe [objective], which is to say no point of view at all...I

⁴¹⁰ For a very inter-disciplinary example, see Leonhard Schilbach et al., "Toward a Second-Person Neuroscience," *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 36, no. 4 (2013): 393–414, and the follow-up article, Leonhard Schilbach, "Towards a Second-Person Neuropsychiatry," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 371, no. 1686 (2016): 20150081.

⁴¹¹ Zahavi, "Observation, Interaction, Communication," 84.

⁴¹² Vittorio Gallese, Christian Keysers, and Giacomo Rizzolatti, "A Unifying View of the Basis of Social Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 8, no. 9 (2004): 396.

want to frame the interest of the second-person...in terms of its potential to guide us between the poles of this opposition.⁴¹³

Studies into the phenomenon of the second person, therefore, are attempts to understand more fully the principles of this intersubjective or interpersonal domain extant in social situations, such as joint attention, and this present account is one attempt at adequately explicating and describing second-person relatedness.⁴¹⁴

Final Caveats

Before closing this section and proceeding further, it is worth qualifying the foregoing discussion and exploration of the second-person perspective with some review and a few final caveats.

In this section, I have defined valid instances of the second-person perspective or experience to be those instances which involve two or more people interacting in a direct and immediate way, and who are conscious and aware of each other; this description summarizes premises (1) – (3)’ listed and discussed above. I have further thickened this account with the insistence of the additional criteria of mutual awareness and communicative connectedness. Mutual awareness, again, is the quality that two people are mutually aware *of their awareness*. And communicative connectedness is quality that this interpersonal interaction is “open” or “manifest,” where the persons conceive of each other as persons, both as each other’s “you,” and are in a position to share emotions or thoughts with one another through this connection. All these criteria together are what I take to be the kind of second-person

⁴¹³ Douglas Lavin, “Other Wills: The Second-Person in Ethics,” *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 3 (2014): 281.

⁴¹⁴ “Social” simply denotes that more than one persons are involved as a qualifier for “interaction.” It is not meant to imply a lively gathering of co-workers or friends, such as in the phrase “we went to an afterwork social.”

relatedness *relevant for the purposes of this project* – but it need not necessarily be understood as the solely valid account.

On the contrary, this present account could be understood as that which counts as “rich” cases of second-person relatedness, instead of this account being understood as the *sine qua non* for second-person relatedness. What I mean by that distinction is this. In Zahavi’s scenario of him watching his friend wince and moan, for example, and thereby simply “seeing” or apprehending (as opposed to logically inferring) the knowledge that his friend is in pain, Zahavi also imagines a case where the friend is asleep and in pain and thus not aware (let alone mutually aware) of Zahavi. This situation is one which does not qualify as a second-person experience, on Stump’s account, because the friend is not conscious. Yet, it should be obvious that Zahavi nevertheless gleans something about his friend that is *not* mere third-person “observation plus inference,” such as in the case of Zahavi idly observing his friend take pain medicine out of the cabinet.

Moreover, if the friend was conscious, but hidden behind a one-way mirror, the scenario *would* qualify, on Stump’s account, as a second-person experience (because the friend is conscious), but on the present account I have developed it would not qualify (because the friend is not aware of Zahavi). Yet, it is difficult to see what crucially makes all the difference between the friend asleep and in pain and the friend hidden from Zahavi’s awareness and in pain. Intuition here tends to direct me towards the suspicion that one or both cases are somehow related to the second-person perspective, as they do not seem to be something *wholly* different. The same concern applies to the various gray or blurry cases reviewed in my initial discussion of Stump’s account of second-person experience.

Without taking each unclear instance one by one and attempting to adequately categorize all of them (an impossible task), I believe it is more helpful to take instances like

these instances as being either *analogous* to the second-person perspective (in a similar way that second-person accounts are analogous to second-person relatedness⁴¹⁵), or alternatively, different in the *degree* to which they are second-person experiences. What this consideration means is that it is probably fair to consider Stump's account of a second-person experience as a sufficient, albeit thinner, account than the one currently presented.

So, in Zahavi's hypothetical, the case where Zahavi is watching his friend while hidden behind a screen may in fact be an example of Zahavi relating to his friend second-personally, but only in a more rudimentary way (lesser degree). And in the case where the friend is unconscious and asleep, if this is *not* a second-person experience it is probably at least somehow *analogous* to one.

The salient point, though, is that these blurry cases should likely be understood as somehow entangled with the phenomenon of the second person, and in a way that is not merely trivial. Reddy, aware of these complexities about strict definition and categorization, remarks that it is probably best to see second-person "engagement as a continuum rather than as an either/or category."⁴¹⁶ This reason is because the terms used to define and describe the phenomenon are "loaded with complexities of level, of types of relation, of intensity, of activity, and of modality," such that there is a "quagmire of overlapping terms and complex phenomena."⁴¹⁷ She firmly defends *that there is* a distinction between second- and other

⁴¹⁵ In another work, Stump remarks that second-person accounts (narratives) may be treated as either a specific kind of second-person experience, or instead they can be regarded as analogous to one. She admits, however, that the question of which is more accurate is highly complex and that trying to settle it may be best relegated for further discussions, where in any case, usage of the concept of the philosophical second person remains justified. I take it that second-person accounts (such as narratives) are analogous to second-person experiences and not actual second-person experiences. Eleonore Stump, "Theology and the Knowledge of Persons," *Roczniki Filozoficzne / Annales de Philosophie / Annals of Philosophy* 69, no. 3 (2021): 23.

⁴¹⁶ Reddy, "Why Engagement?: A Second-Person Take on Social Cognition," 435.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid, 436.

types of “engagement,” however, when she insists that this distinction “matters on the ground. However messy the definitional distinctions, being addressed and being heard [second-person engagement] makes a difference to one’s experience of being at any moment, and most crucially, it makes a difference to development.”⁴¹⁸ I think she is right.

To sum up these caveats, in other words, one may think of these factors as existing on a continuum or a spectrum; richer cases of second-person relatedness involve mutual awareness and communicative connectedness, weaker cases do not involve them at all or *as much*. Meaning, factors such as communicative connectedness are themselves on a continuum, one which is nested inside the overall second-person experience continuum (a combination of continua, therefore, regarding things like personal interaction, awareness, etc.). When there is deeper interpersonal and emotional connectedness and exchange, as well as relatedness that lasts over time (such as in what is normally entailed by “relationship”), the second-person experience is thereby enriched or thickened according to the intensity of these factors. Although this understanding of the second-person perspective will not always make the question of whether it applies in any given scenario clear-cut, it nevertheless seems to be the right way to treat the phenomenon.⁴¹⁹ I do, however, stress that for my purposes in this

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 439. Her follow-on remarks are also worthwhile: “In adults, being directly addressed by another person leads to different neural processing and to enhanced sensory awareness. Hearing one’s name being called leads to activation of the same brain areas as does seeing someone look at one, independent of arousal...Direct gaze, smiles, and attracting the other’s attention show distinct and localized neural activation processes.”

⁴¹⁹ An image which might capture this nuance is someone who tries to capture, in words, the elegance of a butterfly. There may be certain advantageous, regarding terminological exactitude, when the specimen under investigation is a dead, static, butterfly that can be pinned on a wall. Arguably, however, this is not a butterfly, but only a body of one. A living butterfly, on the other hand, will be more difficult to describe with the same amount of precision, but these descriptions might nevertheless reflect something that is closer to the real thing.

thesis, I take second-person relatedness as consisting in conditions (1) – (3)', along with at least some level of mutual awareness and communicative connectiveness.

In closing, this present account of the second-person perspective is an attempt to give it a philosophically or theoretically rigorous explication. This requirement stems from mine and others' claim that what is occurrent in social interactions involving joint attention just is two people relating to one another in a unique, second-personal fashion. Although previous sections of this chapter may have adequately demonstrated that at least some kind of sociality or inter-personality is involved in the instances involving joint attention, especially those instances which regard the faculty of understanding, it remains to be shown that the *kind* of social phenomenon involved just is this account of second-person relatedness (or close to it).

Consequently, in the next subsection, I will explore more explicitly whether there is, in fact, a significant relation between the psychological principle of joint attention – especially as joint attention regards the faculty of understanding – and the philosophical principle second-person relatedness (as it has been described and qualified thus far). Beginning with cases involving infants and small children, I will move to the cases involving grown or adult persons engaged in joint attention that I reviewed. This analysis of the adult cases will be especially fertile. As Reddy recently observed, “the difference between second and third-person engagements is crucial for the development of infant social cognition (*and possibly for social cognition through the lifespan*),” although, she confesses, “this is another paper.”⁴²⁰ Likewise, León sees good reason to give focused philosophical analysis on particularly “non-developmental” (i.e. adult) cases of joint attention.⁴²¹ In effect, the

⁴²⁰ Reddy, “Why Engagement?: A Second-Person Take on Social Cognition,” 433. Emphasis added.

⁴²¹ León, “Joint Attention without Recursive Mindreading,” 566.

following subsection seeks to determine whether the actual instances of joint attention reviewed so far do, in fact, correlate best to second-person relatedness.

3.3.2: Joint Attention and Second-Person Relatedness

So much for the lengthy examination, illustration, and qualification of this purported irreducible and unique way in which two people related to one another, that is, second-person relatedness (or instead, what I take to be the best account of it for this project). What does it have to do with the evidence presented so far in this chapter? Well, there may be good reasons to insist that second-person relatedness is inherently and indispensably associated with the phenomenon of joint attention, a psychological principle which has been shown to play a significant role in the faculty of understanding.

Linguistic Evidence

First, as Andrew Pinsent observes, “The plausibility of a link between joint attention and the second person is revealed...by the natural use of the corresponding grammatical forms in conversation.”⁴²² By this remark Pinsent means that in cases where two people are jointly attending to a third object or to one another, the appropriate form of address is the second-person pronoun, “you.” For example, if two people, Meghan and Harry, are sharing awareness of their sharing of focus on, say, a ball, the way for Meghan to address Harry is by saying, “you are throwing the ball.” The use of a third-person pronoun is not appropriate, such as “he [or, Harry] is throwing the ball,” because the person being addressed is in the presence of the addresser. In typical cases, one would only use the third-person pronoun when talking about Harry to someone else.

⁴²² Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics*, 48.

Additionally, the second-person pronoun is prominent in a wide variety of cultures and languages, a reality which has long been recognized by sociologists and anthropologists.⁴²³ Specialists in this field acknowledge that in many different languages, use of a second-person pronoun is typically considered appropriate (vs use of a third-person pronoun) when speaking to the other person who is present.⁴²⁴ This fact means that the argument linking the second person and joint attention via examining usage of the second-person pronoun is not limited by evidence taken from English speaking societies only. Instead, the argument is supported in this way to the extent that this linguistic phenomenon is transcultural and/or pan-linguistic.

Second, as reviewed, joint attention in early child cognitive development often manifests in gaze-following (passive joint attention) and pointing (active joint attention). As one research team put it, “in the development of spoken language in hearing children, pointing seems to allow access to verbal naming and predict lexical development.”⁴²⁵ Meaning, pointing is a pre-linguistic or proto-declarative way of asking the adult something along the lines of “would *you* look at this?” or “do *you* see that?” In other words, the child is actively trying to get the adult to focus *with him* on whatever object the child is interested in. Likewise, in instances of gazing, where the child is curious about where the adult is looking and he shows interest, the child seems to be primitively wondering to himself “what are *you*

⁴²³ See especially Roger Brown and Albert Gilman, “The Pronouns Of Power and Solidarity,” in *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, Originally published 1968 (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 1968), 252–75.

⁴²⁴ Emiko S. Kashima and Yoshihisa Kashima, “Culture and Language: The Case of Cultural Dimensions and Personal Pronoun Use,” *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 29, no. 3 (1998): 461–86. I say “a” second-person pronoun because many languages other than English have different forms of the second-person pronoun, where usage depends on the social, especially hierarchal, context.

⁴²⁵ Marie Leroy, Emmanuelle Mathiot, and Aliyah Morgenstern, “Pointing Gestures, Vocalizations and Gaze: Two Case Studies,” in *Studies in Language and Cognition* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 262.

looking at?” On this account, there is implicit “you-language” or “you-thinking” extant both in requests for joint attention (pointing) and in responses to requests (gaze following). This evidence suggests that in such instances the child is attempting to relate to the adult in a specifically second-personal sense.

Third, it is worth recalling that children with autism very rarely, when left un-coaxed, point. If pointing – a form of joint attention – is a proto-declarative way of indicating the second-person pronoun, within the context of a specific second-person perspective, then a deficiency with pointing would likely correlate to a deficiency with second-person pronoun usage.

Incidentally, a group of researchers recently recorded how “children with ASD are uniquely impacted by JA [joint attention] in terms of their production of pronouns...”⁴²⁶ The autistic children who were able to have better responses to requests for joint attention were able to “produce more [second-person] pronouns,” and this correlation was shown to be essentially directly proportionate.⁴²⁷ The study, then, offers a clinically derived correlation between the second-person pronoun and joint attention. It is further relevant that this difficulty with the second-person pronoun, moreover, is not typically present in children with other cognitive deficiencies, where those deficiencies *do not inhibit the ability to engage in joint attention*, such as Down’s Syndrome.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ Emma Kelty-Stephen, Deborah A. Fein, and Letitia R. Naigles, “Children with ASD Use Joint Attention and Linguistic Skill in Pronoun Development,” *Language Acquisition* 27, no. 4 (2020): 428.

⁴²⁷ Ibid, 426. Figure 3b shows virtually an exact correlation in autistic children with correct “2nd person pronoun” production and their level of joint attention capabilities (p. 424).

⁴²⁸ Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas’s Ethics*, 48. Also see Helen Tager-Flusberg, “Dissociations in Form and Function in the Acquisition of Language by Autistic Children” in *Constraints on Language Acquisition*, ed. by Helen Tager-Flusberg (Hillsdale, N.J; Erlbaum, 1994).

In the case of autistic children, Pinsent too calls attention to the fact that they tend to have difficulty in using the second-person pronoun consistently and correctly. As reviewed, children with autism have a particular difficulty engaging in joint attention and fail to benefit, cognitively speaking, from this engagement. Pinsent characterizes one aspect of this pronoun-usage deficiency in the light of the way that these children often incorrectly swap the “I” (or the “me”) for the “you” in speech. For example, in response to the question: “how are you feeling?” autistic children tend to answer by saying something close to “you are feeling fine” (instead of “I am feeling fine”). Pinsent remarks,

This pronoun reversal would not be a mistake if the linguistic rules for denoting second persons were the same as the rules for objects and third persons. In the exchange above, the autistic child merely repeats the linguistic marker ‘you’ that the other person has just used, a strategy which would be correct for denoting an object or a third person. What makes the strategy incorrect, however, is that the linguistic rules for ‘I’ and ‘you’ pertain specifically to the second-person relationship, one of the rules of which being that the markers should be reversed depending on who is speaking to whom.⁴²⁹

In linguistic situations that are, so to say, “monopolar,” such as in the example above (denoting objects or third persons), or in the case of strictly first-person prose (someone writing about his or her own experience), there is no need for pronoun reversal. But when someone is addressing someone else, and is being addressed by someone else, the case is different. In other words, these children with autism “have difficulties relating to others in a specifically *second-personal sense*.”⁴³⁰

So far and based on the evidence surrounding the linguistic nature of the second-person pronoun, it seems to be immediately plausible that there exists an inherent link

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

between joint attention and second-person relatedness insofar that joint attention might be, specifically, constitutive of second-person relatedness.

Evidence drawn from Donna Williams' Account

Another line of evidence in support of this position emerges upon reflection of some of Donna Williams' life story. Williams' personal account of her reflection as a fully-grown autistic woman corroborates Hobson's characterization of this autistic difficulty regarding joint attention as an inability or an unwillingness "to be moved" by the other person. Recall that Williams remembers her early childhood difficulty in learning English as stemming from a desire to avoid relating to others, something which she perceived to be emotionally "jolting," and very stressful. As a result, Williams says that she could not, therefore, understand intonation and gesture and other social cues in the same way a normal child could, rendering, among other things, "the comprehension of words" to fade away.

Specifically, what seems to be missing is the kind of relatedness that Zahavi says is unique about the second-person perspective, in that this relatedness includes a "communicative connectedness" between the persons, a quality that requires both people to be emotionally open towards relating to one another. Williams, in other words, had difficulty engaging in joint attention insofar as she had difficulty engaging with others in a specifically second-personal sense, and this difficulty had impacts on her cognitive faculty of understanding (both its development and use).

This linkage between second-person relatedness and joint attention, in Williams' case, is best showcased by one of her recommendations elucidated near the end of the book, concerning those caring for autistic people. Recall that Williams said that she viewed the "indirect approach" as the best way to coax autistic people into more and more relatedness with others. Recall her example of an indirect approach: someone, say her mother, stares

outside through a window and speaks “to themselves about me out loud or about someone like me.”⁴³¹ In this way, the invitation to relate to the speaker is less direct, and much more “up to” the autistic person.

Remarkably, in this recommendation for how to help the cognitive development of an autistic child, Williams’ indirect method can be described as the initiator attempting to offer the child an opportunity for an approximate instance of second-person relatedness.⁴³² Williams’ passively listening to her mother talk about her while her mother is staring outside of a window requires that Williams is aware of her mother, at least, and in the scenario, the mother is also aware of Williams.⁴³³ This approach, however, does not require that this awareness is mutually mutual, and in fact, its success may even depend on the initial absence of shared awareness.

The scenario Williams describes is such that she might not know that her mother is aware of her, and the suggestion seems to be that it is best that she does know or is not certain. But her mother is aware of her, and she is only being clever.⁴³⁴ Williams’ insinuates that the cleverness behind this approach is due to Williams not being put in a position where mutual awareness is thrust upon her – like it would be in a direct address – which would only cause her to recoil. Instead, in this case, it is fully in Williams’ control whether to interject

⁴³¹ Williams, *Nobody Nowhere*, 190.

⁴³² Other accounts might qualify this as a second-person experience different in degree, but not kind.

⁴³³ In theory, her mother could perform this manner of speaking without knowing that her daughter is listening, and the situation would not be radically different. It seems likely, however, that Williams is assuming that the method, and the content, of her mother’s monologue is *because* she is aware of Williams. I say the “content” as well because when the mother knows her daughter is listening, she is likely going to talk about her in specific ways that she knows might entice Williams to engage.

⁴³⁴ Even where Williams knows her mother is aware of her, the mother’s manner of speaking indicates that this is nevertheless a weaker case of mutual awareness, at least insofar as the personal interaction at this stage is less direct.

and start having an actual conversation (a form of joint attention), thereby adding the quality of mutual awareness, and entering a full-fledged episode of second-person relatedness with her mother.

In other words, Williams's account of how to help autistic people respond positively to requests for joint attention, and therefore how to help their cognitive development, seems to corroborate the position that joint attention is specifically constitutive of second-person relatedness. And insofar that cognitive development contributes to or is part of the development of the faculty of understanding, this account of joint attention as constitutive of second-person relatedness means that second-person relatedness contributes to the development of the faculty of understanding. This conclusion is only preliminary, however, as further investigation is still warranted, as well as an engagement with the objections.

Nevertheless, so far, I have briefly examined the evidence taken from (1) the second-person pronoun, (2), childhood development, and (3) the special case of autism, in support of the argument that joint attention is constitutive of second-person relatedness. What about the other examples, namely, (4) grown students learning from teachers in the classroom, and (5) military members being instructed by senior cadre?

Non-Developmental Evidence

Recall that as a primer to the phenomenon of teaching, I briefly reviewed the phenomenon of telling. This reason is because so much of our knowledgebase is constituted from things we know in virtue of being told, and also because teaching involves many instances of telling (albeit teaching is not necessarily reducible to simply many instances of telling). Therefore, the knowledge-securing phenomenon of telling is a key constituent of the understanding-securing phenomenon of teaching. The phenomenon of telling, again, requires uptake on part of the listener. Telling is telling only when both the teller speaks and the

listener receives, and this transaction should not be understood as a piecemeal or discretely stepwise transaction. Telling is not telling when the teller speaks apart from the listener receiving what he said. Instead, as I described it earlier, telling is a unitary and bi-polar act where the cognitive activity involved is not, to use Eilan's description earlier, "a combination of two acts," but instead they are "essentially acts for two." On this account, telling – which is a dyadic form of joint attention and a phenomenon that is at least a precursor to understanding – appears to be constitutive of the kind of relatedness described in this section as second-person relatedness.

What about teaching? Recall that Will Small describes successful teaching as the kind where "the teacher is actively engaged with the students, helping them come to see it for themselves," which fits nicely with Hobson's description of joint attention as a phenomenon where one person enables someone else to see something *from their own vantage point*, in the metaphor of someone being "moved." The student being "moved," in this case by the teacher, can clearly be seen as requiring an openness in support of communicative connectedness, especially in the light of how pedagogists have described successful teaching as that which is "learner-oriented," or, where the concern is primarily with *the student*, and not just the student's theoretical views. Meaning, learner-oriented teaching is where the teacher is interested in creating a social environment where the student can voice his opinion and reasoning regarding the topic at hand, whereby the teacher fosters in the student a feeling of being genuinely heard and respected.

According to proponents of learning-oriented teaching, it is only with this quality that such teaching can be achieved, because the follow-on steps are for the teacher to engage with the student by taking on board, as it were, the student's view, and then seeking, through instruction and bi-lateral dialogue, to better align his views with the view the teacher believes

are representative of the discipline. This joint attention can be cashed out in terms of the teacher and the student constantly exchanging thoughts and ideas, where there is a series of “uptakes” from both sides, an irreducibly bi-polar “practical nexus,” which results in the student’s viewpoint coming more into align with the teacher’s viewpoint.⁴³⁵

What seems to be *important*, and not just accidental, to this kind of understanding-affording phenomenon – classroom learner-oriented teaching – is what has been described as second-person relatedness: two people interacting and who are mutually aware of one another with openness and connectedness. It does *not* seem to be the case that this kind of teaching is a phenomenon which can be reduced to any combination of first- or third-person realities. By that statement I mean to say that the learner-oriented method that pedagogists believe is so successful does not seem to be something that can occur where the student is left alone by himself (first person), or where the teacher simply repeats a collection of facts in the student’s presence (third person). Instead, there is the necessity for an open and positive engagement with the student’s own views, that is, an engagement or a relatedness with the student *as a person*. Saying it differently, learner-oriented teaching – which, when successful, secures understanding on the part of the learner – seems to rely heavily on rich cases of second-person relatedness via rich cases of joint attention.⁴³⁶

And what about military training instructors instilling competency into their troops? A lot of what has been said with regards to classroom teaching applies to cases of military

⁴³⁵ Where, again, the teacher’s view is not just her personal opinion, but on good instances of teaching, the teacher is acting on behalf of discipline, in a way. On good instances of teaching, in other words, the teacher is trying to get the student to align with her view insofar as her view is co-extensive with the view “of the discipline,” so to say.

⁴³⁶ Whether the uptake of understanding which occurs in successful cases of learner-oriented teaching can be replaced by non-second-personal means will be discussed in chapter four.

training, as well. For instance, in both the examples of rifleman learning sharpshooting from competent instructors, or the example of how student pilots learn to recover an airborne emergency, the survey of the materials suggests that the uptake of understanding importantly relies on the troop- or trainee-instructor interaction, in a manner that could be described by using at least some of the principles of learner-oriented teaching. Insofar as the arguments in favor of learner-oriented teaching and its inherent relation to second-person relatedness (via joint attention) are successful, these military-training contexts should likewise be seen as examples of the formation of understanding by means of second-person relatedness.

One key difference, however, is that in these military contexts the epistemic goods being delivered are both theoretical understanding of a discipline as well as skill-knowledge of how to perform an embodied competency. The difference between theoretical understanding and skill-knowledge can be cashed out in terms of the different epistemic objects being sought. In the theoretical case, where one seeks to acquire an understanding of a discipline or a principle proper to a discipline, such as Boyle's law, which is a principle proper to chemistry, the epistemic object being sought is essentially theoretical and skill independent.⁴³⁷ It is a matter of *what* is Boyle's law. In the case of sharpshooting, on the other hand, the epistemic object is also and primarily one of *how*, in this case, *how* to shoot at and hit a target at various distances.

It is by this point likely readily obvious that the epistemic good of *how*, skill knowledge, also relies on joint attention. Namely, as reviewed, it is widely accepted that learning a language crucially relies on joint attention, and on many accounts, language is a

⁴³⁷ At least in the sense of not *relying* on skill-knowledge, even where skill-knowledge can be said to contribute, in some way, to the uptake of theoretical knowledge.

type of skill.⁴³⁸ Moreover, from my own military experience, one of the staple methods of instruction during academic training or in pre-flight and in post-flight briefings is to use “sticks.” “Sticks” is shorthand for model aircraft which are about the size of a smartphone, mounted at the end of a two-foot wooden rod. These sticks are then used by the instructor to help visualize the proper “sight picture” for the student, that is, what kind of angles and perspectives, line of sight movement across the canopy and location on the canopy, etc., should the student see and experience if he is performing the maneuver properly. In this case, both the student and the instructor are focusing on the sticks as the object of their attention (i.e., this method could be a textbook case of non-developmental triadic joint attention).

For example, when instructing how to perform aerial gunnery, there is a very distinct way that the aircraft in front of you (the defender) should look before you know that you are in the right position to attack with the gun (by pulling him into your sights and firing the rounds). This pre-requisite “sight picture” is a combination of being at the correct distance, with the correct rate of closure, and at the correct angles. Usage of “sticks” in moments like these teaching instances is indispensable, evidenced by this usage considered a time-honored and effective instructor method.⁴³⁹

More importantly, however, is that the constituents of learner-oriented teaching reviewed above are extant in these military contexts as well. In other words, with regards to

⁴³⁸ Nick Chater and Morten H. Christiansen, “Language Acquisition as Skill Learning,” *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 21 (2018): 205–8.

⁴³⁹ Furthermore, it should be mentioned, those *good* at aerial gunnery are able to simply “see” what is in front of them and act appropriately, instead of constantly relying on cockpit instruments to give them the numerical readouts of these figures. These cockpit aids are useful when learning the skill, or as a check when conditions are non-ideal (i.e. at night), but the proficient pilot possesses what could be described as a Gestalt-type of understanding or sense-making concerning the whole environment in which he is embodied. The usage of sticks, much more than an analysis of these numerical readouts, helps deliver this understanding.

properly employing the faculty of understanding as it concerns military skills, there is a deep reliance on joint attention that seems to be entangled with second-person relatedness.

Finally, before closing this subsection and moving onto the next section, there is one other aspect to the formation of understanding within a military context that deserves attention, and this brief focus will serve as a primer for what is examined in the next section.

Recall the review of “sense-making,” a term used in the literature on military psychology to denote the kind of holistic situational understanding required to make good decisions in a battlefield environment. According to experts such as Ben-Shalom, et al, sense-making relies not only on cognitive processes but also on “emotions” or affective processes. This reason is because what is needed for sense-making is not merely detached situational understanding, but an appreciation of *meaning* – in other words, why it is that what the soldier is doing is morally valuable and ethically important. From these researchers, recall that the connection of “one’s sense of the situation” with the “followers’ sense of it” requires “trust and togetherness...[which] result from the interaction of subordinates with their leaders.”⁴⁴⁰

On this account, a commander (or instructor), through interaction, can synchronize his troops’ sense with his own (superior) sense, and this ability is enhanced where the commander is known to have previous combat experience. In other words, as I earlier summarized the phenomenon, in the unique context of military combat and the mortal dangers which accompany it, sense-making occurs through the two-way meeting of whole persons. What this characterization means is that the kind of second-person relatedness extant in rich instances of sense-making goes beyond mere cold relatedness, but includes

⁴⁴⁰ Klar, Benbenisty, and Ben-Shalom, “Characteristics of Sense-Making in Combat,” 228.

elements of what are typically implied by the term “relationship,” such as trust, togetherness, relatedness over time, the commander’s caring for the wellbeing of his troops (instead of solely concerned with accomplishing the mission), honesty, a certain degree of openness, etc. On this account, there are circumstances in which the deliverance of understanding requires a kind of second-person *relationship*.

I will briefly offer evidence concerning a non-relational vs relational understanding taken from USAF airborne ground-support tactics. In standard tactics manuals, which I confirm from my own experience, whenever fighter aircraft are deployed for combat, there must always be at least two fighters engaged together to carry out airborne strikes competently and safely. This emphasis on interpersonal reinforcement is so strong, if one jet is away receiving fuel (midair) while the other is on-station over the combat area, and should a situation arise where enemy fire is reported on friendly forces, the aircraft being refueled (fuel permitting) should break off and immediately return to his wingman, so that the two can give one another what is called “mutual support.”

Mutual support occurs when each pilot continually checks the flight path and other parameters relevant to each phase of a flight or mission. An example is a wingman making sure his flight leader does not insidiously fly below the minimum training altitude set for that day/mission-type. At least according to Air Force doctrine, mutual support ensures that crucial mistakes are made less often, mistakes which have potential to be catastrophic in a combat scenario. One of the ways in which this mutual support encourages a better understanding (or sense-making) of the situation and, in this example, of a pilot’s targeting instructions, is through a principle that each pilot speak up if he sees the other pilot doing something or about to do something “dumb, dangerous, or different.”

For example, on *several* historical occasions that all fighter pilots are made aware, an act of friendly fire was avoided because the wingman interjected on the radio and voiced his suspicion that the other aircraft's targeting device was cued on the wrong target (and in many of these cases, the wingman could not be sure, and merely had a suspicion). An airborne correction of this magnitude can hurt one's ego, and if the misguided pilot treats his relationship with his wingman poorly, the wingman is less likely to say anything out of fear of reprisal in the case that his suspicion is incorrect. Any such suspicion from either pilot, however, absolutely needs to be voiced and adjudicated before any weapons are released. So, it is crucial that one feels a sense of openness and trust with the other pilot, in a manner that can be described as a rich case of communicative connectedness that is of a relational kind. In other words, on this doctrine, the Air Force sees the understanding of one pilot as relying, in some way, on the understanding of the other pilot, connected by a nexus that could be described as a second-person *relationship*.

This interdependency and bi-polar characterization of what mutual support delivers fits nicely with the philosophical concept of second-person relatedness. Furthermore, the irreducible or at least irreplaceable nature of this mutual support is further supported by the notion that pilots strive to be physically present in the airspace. With modern technological devices, all kinds of sensor data can be instantly transferred from one aircraft to another via radio-waves, although Air Force tactical guidance nevertheless views personal presence in high regard. This reason helps explain why, even though all kinds of an aircraft's sensor data can and often is transmitted to various ground and airborne platforms, there is still an official doctrinal insistence that the other pilot (person) make every effort to physically be present with his wingman. The second person in these instances is viewed as irreplaceable, at least when considering what is *ideally* the case.

In summary, in this subsection I have sought to explore the ways in which joint attention might best be viewed as constitutive of second-person relatedness, having drawn from a wide variety of evidence such as the rules of language, early childhood development, autism spectrum disorder, the classroom setting, and military training contexts. Indeed, it appears that joint attention is, in fact, constitutive of second-person relatedness in a significant and indispensable fashion. Given the ways in which joint attention has been shown to contribute to understanding, I can preliminarily conclude that second-person relatedness (via joint attention) *is* a factor in the faculty of understanding.

This conclusion is preliminary because I have yet to respond to the objections presented in chapter 2. Before offering my responses, however, I will explore one final aspect of second-person relatedness (via joint attention) and understanding. Recall that I culminated this subsection by inviting the reader to consider that there might be a kind of understanding that is only achievable through certain, rich forms of second-person relatedness (those forms which might be better described as *relationships*). It is with this last consideration that we turn our attention to the topic of *theological* understanding.

3.4: Second-Person Relatedness and Theological Understanding

Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’—

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed

on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.⁴⁴¹

In the preceding sections, this chapter has aimed to demonstrate that the faculty of understanding is enabled throughout life in diverse contexts via the psychological phenomenon of joint attention, and that joint attention should specifically be considered as constitutive of the philosophical principle second-person relatedness. In this section, I pivot from examining the relevant insights had within science and philosophy, and instead I draw from insights particular to Christian theology. Therefore, this section is designed to round-out the chapter's overall purpose of providing a more robust account of the thesis topic than the one presented throughout chapter 2, using insights drawn from areas within philosophy, within science, and within theology.

Consequently, the chapter's previous sections were about the faculty of understanding as regards natural truths, that is, truths which can be understood using the light of natural reason alone. On the other hand – and as is highlighted in the Scriptural passage above – St. Thomas Aquinas insists that, “Now Scripture, inspired of God, is no part of philosophical science, which has been built up by human reason. Therefore it is useful that besides philosophical science there should be other knowledge – i.e., inspired of God.”⁴⁴² In other words, according to Aquinas (and longstanding Christian tradition), there are truths which are not understood using the light of natural reason alone.

⁴⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 2:6-13.

⁴⁴² *ST* 1a, q.1, a.1, s.c. All English quotations from the *Summa* are taken from: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ed. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Burns Oates & Washbourne, n.d.). Latin quotations from the *Summa* are from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Editio altera Romana (Forzani et Sodalis, 1894). I use both editions which have been digitized for electronic use through Logos Bible Study software (version 29.1), a product by Faithlife Corporation. I depart from the English translation only where it says, “Holy Ghost” instead of “Holy Spirit.”

In the light of this distinction, it is now worthwhile to pivot towards examining a different kind of truth, namely, theological truth. This truth is the kind that has purportedly been specially revealed by the Christian God of the Old and New Testaments, where this special revelation consists of (1) the inspired and canonized Christian Scriptures, (2) the incarnation of Christ Jesus (which includes his life, death, resurrection, and ascension), and (3) Holy Apostolic Tradition. Although the various expressions of Christianity understand each of these three types of revelation in somewhat different ways (especially Holy Tradition),⁴⁴³ what remains a shared Christian belief is the belief reflected in the Scriptural passage above: all special revelation is, ultimately and in some way, an outcome of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Now, this notion of, as it were, “being inspired by another person (the Holy Spirit),” invites one to ask: what is the true epistemic object of this revelation? Is theology merely a chapter of philosophy, where the methods of investigation do not differ in principle from the methods of philosophical investigation? Eleonore Stump remarks that this understanding of theology has become more and more popular.⁴⁴⁴ She also argues, however, that this understanding of theology is not correct. Whereas philosophy, or philosophical science as Aquinas puts it – which is built by “human reason” – has as its object an abstract universal: *wisdom*, theology is not about an abstract universal or set of abstract universals. The object of theology is ultimately a person, namely, God. Therefore, drawing from Stump, the proper

⁴⁴³ Following Aquinas, and consistent with an Orthodox Christian or a Roman Catholic account, this section understands Holy Apostolic Tradition as being those teachings which were handed down by the apostles, and then codified/ratified as such in official councils. This understanding means that although new, public revelation might have ceased with the death of the original apostles, there are God-given doctrines to be believed which are not wholly circumscribed by the Scriptures alone.

⁴⁴⁴ Stump, “Theology and the Knowledge of Persons,” 10.

method of investigation to understanding theological truth needs to be fundamentally shaped by the object of such knowledge: the person of God.⁴⁴⁵

On this account, everything expounded in the preceding sections concerning the difference between (propositional) knowledge *about* a person, and *knowing* a person, would apply in the case of theological knowledge. For example, as Stump lays out, there is an essential difference between the claim (1) Aquinas *knew that* God exists, and the claim (1') Aquinas *knew* God. Similarly, there is an essential difference between the statement (2) Aquinas *knew that* Christ is really present in the Eucharist, and (2') Aquinas *knew* the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.⁴⁴⁶ In both cases, the latter claim cannot be reduced to the former claim, because knowing someone is qualitatively different than knowledge *about* someone, as has been demonstrated and illustrated in this chapter so far.⁴⁴⁷

It follows, then, that to fully understand theological truth, someone needs something other than mere knowledge *about* God; he or she needs to *know* God. Stimulated by the work of Michael Polanyi, I will call this type of knowledge “personal knowing,” a type of knowledge that is different in-kind from propositional or descriptive knowledge.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ On the standard Christian account of God, God is *three* distinct persons united by *one* essence, or nature, and who indwell one another eternally and necessarily (i.e., the Trinity). Therefore, along with the other monotheistic faiths, Christianity affirms the Old Testament truth that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4), but Christianity also affirms that God is mysteriously three-in-one. In this light, I mean to refer to the triune Godhead by the phrase “the person of God,” unless I explicitly qualify that I am referring to one of the distinct persons (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit).

⁴⁴⁶ Stump, “Theology and the Knowledge of Persons,” 15.

⁴⁴⁷ This truth can be further shown by pointing out, as Stump does, that claim (1) [or (2)] can obtain by itself, without (1') [or (2')] also obtaining. The reverse is likewise true, namely, that (1') or (2') can obtain by themselves, without, necessarily, a corresponding knowledge *about* also obtaining.

⁴⁴⁸ This coinage is similar to Polanyi's, in his most well-known title, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958). Polanyi's account of “personal knowledge” has some overlap with the account of “personal knowing” presented in this chapter, but his account also encompasses a much wider set of phenomena than that of knowing persons. So, when I use the phrase “personal knowing,” I do not mean to refer to everything that Polanyi has to say in his treatment.

Immediately, however, one should recognize a notable discrepancy between the object of personal knowing in the cases reviewed previously, namely other human beings, and the object of personal knowing in the case of theological understanding: the divine person of God. Human beings can be known directly and related to immediately as other beings who share the same nature and who exist in time and space, constituted by bodies like our own, etc. God, however, is not a created being and He is not a human person, He is a divine person, and we cannot speak to God face-to-face or relate directly to God the same way.⁴⁴⁹

Hence, the following question now arises: how do we come to know God, and therefore, understand theological truth? The author of 1 Corinthians, in the passage above, seems to have some idea, namely, that the “Spirit of God” is the agent of such revelation. But do the Scriptures contain any other breadcrumbs, so to speak, which can aid in answering this question? Perhaps the following passage, the opening to the book of 1 John, contains a few clues:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us — we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.⁴⁵⁰

This passage contains a couple of peculiar and thought-provoking ideas and references. In fact, the reader might find it worthwhile to read the passage once more.

⁴⁴⁹ Even a purported relatedness to Christ is not *exactly* the same as a relatedness to other humans, for at least two reasons. First, according to Christianity, Christ incarnate is now resurrected and in heaven, and not physically present on the earth (at least not un-mysteriously present – e.g., the mystery of the Eucharist). Second, unlike other humans, Christ is not a human person *per se*, but a divine person who took on a second nature: the contingent and created human nature, a nature which he shares with us. Via the hypostatic union, this human nature is united to his uncreated divine nature in the one (divine) person of Christ.

⁴⁵⁰ 1 John 1:1-3.

Upon further reflection, one should take note of the descriptions which the author views as instrumental in enabling the “word of life” to be “revealed” to them: the author remarks, “what we have *looked at.... touched...seen and heard....*,” phenomena which the author also connects with the community’s resulting “fellowship” with God and one other.⁴⁵¹

These descriptions reflect anything other than a cold, detached, and lifeless “download of information;” rather, the author describes personal, physical interaction and two-way encounter. In other words, these descriptions correspond much closer to the kinds of activities associated with personal knowing (as opposed to knowledge *about*), and they also appear to gesture strongly towards the interpersonal domain.

In the light of these considerations, it is now worth exploring a more theoretically sophisticated account of how the phenomenon of second-person relatedness might enable the faculty of understanding as specifically regards theological truth. I aim to explore this idea by investigating the influential account of Christian theology according to Thomas Aquinas, reflected in his *Summa Theologica*.

3.4.1: Theological Understanding According to Aquinas

First, it must be highlighted that Aquinas provides his theological treatise with certain, overarching, attitudes widely reflected in Christian thought. Namely, whereas pre-Christian pagan philosophy concerning the divine typically conceived of God (or the gods) as impersonal, rather fickle beings who are entirely or almost entirely beyond human reach or

⁴⁵¹ So, Christ becomes the very answer to the problem of the otherwise unsurmountable humanity-divinity gap. In this way, Christ is analogous to a bridge that connects two seemingly unconnectable landmasses. Alternatively, perhaps the Chunnel Tunnel is an even better metaphor. People living prior to the modern age likely found it unconceivable that England and France should one day be connected by an undersea “bridge.”

understanding, Christian theology introduced a radically different approach.⁴⁵² Instead, consider this famous prayer by St. Augustine of Hippo, an earnest plea now memorialized by most of Western Christianity:

Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved Thee! And behold, Thou wert within and I was without. I was looking for Thee out there, and I threw myself, deformed as I was, upon those well-formed things which Thou hast made. Thou wert with me, yet I was not with Thee. These things held me far from Thee, things which would not have existed had they not been in Thee. Thou didst call and cry out and burst in upon my deafness; Thou didst shine forth and glow and drive away my blindness; Thou didst send forth Thy fragrance, and I drew in my breath, and now I pant for Thee; I have tasted, and now I hunger and thirst; Thou didst touch me, and I was inflamed with desire for Thy peace.⁴⁵³

One should notice the quite personal, relational, and dynamic attitude reflected in Augustine's prayer, an attitude that – when compared to the impersonal descriptions of God by the Greek philosophers of the past – seems almost scandalous. One should also notice Augustine's quick and frequent use of the *second-personal* form of address, addressing and crying out to God as a “you,” instead of merely talking *about* God (or, the gods) as an abstract concept.

Fittingly, this specifically (Judeo) Christian line of thought resolves to the following theological principle expressed by St. Thomas Aquinas: according to Aquinas, ultimate personal success is had when a person, eventually, becomes what Aquinas calls a “friend of God.”⁴⁵⁴ In fact, Aquinas sets out his entire theological schema in the *Summa* with the express purpose of elucidating the theological principles which accompany this successful

⁴⁵² Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics*, 108.

⁴⁵³ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, ed. Vernon J. Deferrari Roy Joseph, Bourke, vol. 21, *The Fathers of the Church* (The Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 297.

⁴⁵⁴ *ST* 2a2ae, q.23, a.1. In the *sed contra*, Aquinas defines the theological virtue of *caritas* as “the friendship of man for God.”

end-state of human flourishing. In other words, for Aquinas (and as reflected in Augustine's prayer), the object of the Christian life is to personally know God, an understanding that results in divine friendship. So, it is now pertinent to ask the following question: according to Christian theology (at least, as reflected in Aquinas), what are the intellectual principles which establish this personal knowing, or divine friendship with God?

Consequently, in what follows, I will proceed to explore Aquinas' theological account as follows. First, I provide an overview of the *Summa* and describe one recent account of Aquinas' ethical framework. From this examination will emerge, second, a focus on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially, the intellectual gifts.

Overview of Aquinas' Ethical Framework

As some readers will be familiar, the *Summa* is split up into three parts. The First Part, as Aquinas explains, concerns God in Himself and as the Source of creatures, hence it discusses God as one and as the blessed Trinity, then the "procession" of creatures from God – notably the human creature – and the governance of creatures.⁴⁵⁵ The final part, the third, concerns the Savior of all (Christ the Lord), and the benefits bestowed by Christ on humanity, namely: the sacraments and the resurrection. In between these two parts is the second part. The second part is broken up into two subparts, the first part of the second part (1a2ae), and the second part of the second part (2a2ae).⁴⁵⁶ As Aquinas says and then lists, the general concern of the entire second part are the following items: man's last end, those things which man's happiness consists, what happiness is, what is required for it, and how to attain it. Aquinas' goal in the second part of the *Summa* is to help the reader understand what

⁴⁵⁵ Stated in the prologue to *ST* 1ae, q.2.

⁴⁵⁶ When using the phrase "the second part," I mean to refer to both the 1a2ae and 2a2ae taken as a whole.

principles encourage man's earthly journey towards his true and proper end: eternal fellowship – friendship – with God in heaven.

These principles which Aquinas analyses in the second part include the *actus* of the will and the passions (the “affective” powers), the *habitus* of the virtues, the *habitus* of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the *actus* of the beatitudes, and the *actus* of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. These five principles, or *habitus* and *actus* – affective powers, virtues, gifts, beatitudes, and fruits – can be thought of as Aquinas' ethical framework. Aquinas gives tremendously much more attention to these topics (especially the virtues) compared to any other topic in the *Summa*. This detailed attention is due to Aquinas conceiving these principles, or specifically their proper cultivation and manifestation, as constituting such a crucial element of human flourishing as it relates to the life of grace.⁴⁵⁷ In other words, the Doctor's *overall* approach to each of these elements in the *Summa* is one that is meant to complement a uniquely *Christian* (i.e. life of grace) ethical framework. For Aquinas, these principles complement the believer's journey towards God, a journey which is a lifelong walk-of-grace where God's presence and His divinely instituted principles inhere or should inhere every aspect of man's constitution and behavior.

One pertinent account of Aquinas' ethical framework has been put forward by Andrew Pinsent (2012), an account which draws from Servais Pinckaers' earlier and influential work on this topic.⁴⁵⁸ According to this approach, none of the elements in Aquinas' ethical framework should be treated purely in isolation, because Aquinas' system is rather a highly

⁴⁵⁷ The life of nature vs the life of grace distinction is longstanding Catholic tradition, whereby the “life of nature” denotes man's state into which he is born, one that is severed due to original sin from a personal, salvific, and transformative relationship with God – the “life of grace.” This life of grace, on the other hand, formally begins at baptism and results in eternal fellowship with God in heaven/the New Creation.

⁴⁵⁸ Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).

integrated network of virtues, gifts, beatitudes, and fruits (VGBF).⁴⁵⁹ Before focusing my examination on the intellectual gifts, it will be helpful if I provide an overall description of Aquinas' ethical network, by drawing from both Pinsent's book and more recent scholarship.

In the first part of the second part (1a2ae), Aquinas examines the generic categories of the VGBF network, and in the second part of the second part (2a2ae), Aquinas examines the specific perfective attributes of the items in this network – perfective in the sense that these items under consideration are those which, for Aquinas, have been transfigured by sanctifying grace. Beginning with the virtues, Aquinas has three main groupings of virtue: intellectual virtue (five in number), moral or cardinal virtue (four in number), and theological virtue (three in number).

Concerning virtue in general, the four moral virtues are justice, prudence, courage, and temperance, and the five intellectual virtues are wisdom, knowledge, understanding, art, and prudence. The moral virtues perfect the soul's appetite, but the appetite is governed by the soul's reason, which is perfected by the intellectual virtues. Therefore, for Aquinas, as regards the principles in the generic sense, the intellectual virtues are more "excellent" than the moral virtues, inasmuch that the intellectual virtues enable the moral virtues to follow reason. Wisdom, knowledge, and understanding are of the "speculative" intellect, which considers "necessary things which cannot be otherwise than they are," and art and prudence

⁴⁵⁹ Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics*. One will notice that the passions are missing from this taxonomy. This reason is because there are still many unsettled issues regarding the passions amongst contemporary Thomists. Some believe that Aquinas' treatment of them is shaped after the principles of the life of nature, and therefore, they should not be included in the VGBF life-of-grace framework. For what seems to be an example of this view, see Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae: 1a2ae 22-48*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For a good starting point to consider the alternative, namely, that Aquinas' treatment of the passions in the entire second part, overall, may in fact be shaped after the principles of the life of grace (and therefore perhaps should be included in the ethical framework), see Andrew Pinsent, "Robert Miner, Thomas Aquinas on the Passions," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, February 2, 2010.

are of the “practical” intellect, which concerns contingent matters and regards exterior works (e.g., what ought to be done, prudence, and what ought to be made, art).⁴⁶⁰ One will also notice that prudence is doubly listed as a cardinal/moral virtue and as an intellectual virtue. Aquinas clarifies that the “matter” of prudence also includes those which are appetitive, however, prudence is still “essentially” an intellectual virtue.⁴⁶¹ Therefore, Aquinas reckons prudence as belonging to both groupings of virtue.

For Aquinas though, there is a stark distinction between virtues that are virtues according to the principles of the life of nature, and virtues which are virtues according to the principles of the life of grace. According to Aquinas, a natural species of the moral and intellectual virtues can be acquired apart from grace, usually through habit (as in, habituation). This understanding of the virtues as being acquired through habit is in the classical manner described by prominent figures such as Aristotle.⁴⁶² In other words, for Aquinas, the virtues had been previously described and explored, with some level of success, by the pagan philosophers of the past – thinkers who were approaching the topic of the virtues (and of ethics, more broadly) from a standpoint absent special revelation and sanctifying grace. Therefore, these philosophers conceived of the virtues as *habitus* which operate according to the principles which they were aware (e.g., those according to nature), and at various points, Aquinas agrees with these philosophers on the characteristics of the virtues (again, when treated generically).

⁴⁶⁰ *ST* 1a2ae, q.57.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *ST* 1a2ae, q.63, a.1 and a.2.

Yet, according to Christian thought, and expressed more explicitly by Aquinas, there exists a second kind of virtue, distinct in species, and which only exists in a person through divine assistance, or grace, via *infusion*.⁴⁶³ It is this second kind of virtue that Aquinas is referring to when he provides a definition of virtue drawn from St. Augustine.

Indeed, adopting St. Augustine's definition, Aquinas defines virtue as "a good quality of the mind by which one lives righteously, of which no one can make bad use, and which God works in us without us," and that "This definition comprises perfectly the whole formula of virtue."⁴⁶⁴ This definition of virtue is therefore only proper to the virtues which have been divinely infused, and not fully applicable to the virtues which can be naturally acquired through habit, in an Aristotelian manner. This distinction is crucial and explains why Aquinas stresses that only the infused virtues deserve to be called virtues without qualification: "Acquired virtue, to which these words [i.e., "which God works in us without us"] do not apply, is not of the same species as infused virtue."⁴⁶⁵ So for Aquinas, virtue, in the fullest sense of the term, is only that which has been divinely infused – rendering acquired virtue an approximation or a less-than-complete version of infused virtue.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶³ Whatever the correct metaphor to better understand what is meant by "infusion," Pinsent is confident that it should not be conceived as "pixie dust or unexplorable skyhooks" provided from on-high. Andrew Pinsent, "Infused Virtues, Gifts, and Fruits," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, 2022, 291. Insights into the nature of infusion will emerge as this section develops.

⁴⁶⁴ *ST* 1a2ae, q.55, a.4 and q.63, a.4.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ On Pinsent's account, acquired virtue is, at best, a facsimile to real virtue (which are infused). Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics*, 108. According to other Thomists, such as Richard Conrad, acquired virtue still qualifies as genuine virtue, albeit a different species than infused virtue. On Conrad's understanding, acquired virtue is imperfect virtue, but real virtue nonetheless. Richard Conrad, "Human Practice and God's Making-Good in Aquinas' Virtue Ethics," in *Varieties of Virtue Ethics* (United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 163–79.

In effect, the 1a2ae treats virtue in the generic sense, with an examination of the moral and intellectual virtues. Again, for Aquinas, natural man – as he exists apart from a state of grace – *can* acquire a natural species of the moral and intellectual virtues, according to the principles of the life of nature. These virtues, again, are only virtues in some kind of qualified way, because perfect virtue, which is divinely infused and not acquired through habit or any other natural means, only exists according to the principles of the life of grace.⁴⁶⁷

Accordingly, the 2a2ae pivots to the perfective aspects of virtue according to the principles of the life of grace, and therefore in this part Aquinas is examining the virtues that are *infused*. These infused virtues are faith, hope, and love (the three theological virtues), and justice, prudence, courage, and temperance (the four infused species of the cardinal virtues). Justice is the chief moral virtue, and love is the chief theological virtue. The cardinal virtues are united by prudence, and all the infused virtues are united by love.⁴⁶⁸

So then, the 2a2ae analyses seven virtues, all of which are infused: the three theological virtues, and the four cardinal virtues. The following question emerges: what about the intellectual virtues, where in the *Summa* are their infused counterparts? Aquinas does not explicitly designate infused virtues that are counterparts to the intellectual virtues (aside from the infused virtue of prudence, which is both a moral and intellectual virtue). Setting to one side the various possible reasons for this omission, suffice it to say that – as other

⁴⁶⁷ The theological virtues are only infused because, Aquinas explains, the moral and intellectual virtues concern things which man can “comprehend” under power of his own reason, whereas the theological virtues concern divine matters which are beyond man’s comprehension under the power of his own reason only. *ST* 1a2ae, q.62, a. 2.

⁴⁶⁸ The infused virtues are united by the theological virtue of love in the sense that *caritas* is the “form of the [infused] virtues.” See *ST* 2a2ae, q.23, a.8.

commentators have noticed – the likely explanation is that the intellectual virtues have their infused counterparts by means of a different category of *habitus*.⁴⁶⁹

Aquinas does, in fact, have another category of *habitus* which are not virtues but are nevertheless divinely infused. These are called the gifts of the Holy Spirit, a list of gifts which Aquinas takes from Isaiah 11:2-3 (therein, they are called “spirits”). How does the matter of the gifts adjudicate the issue regarding the intellectual virtues?

Well, Aquinas states that “Therefore whatever powers in man can be the principles of human actions, can also be the subjects of gifts...”⁴⁷⁰ The gifts, then, pertain to the same matters as the virtues. In other words, the infused gifts can act as principles of human actions in a way that overlaps with the function of the virtues.⁴⁷¹ For Aquinas, then, because “these gifts extend to all those things to which the virtues, both intellectual and moral, extend,”⁴⁷² the matters pertaining to the intellectual virtues of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, are the same which pertain to the infused gifts of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.

To summarize, for Aquinas, the intellectual principles according to the life of grace primarily exist in the forms of the intellectual gifts: the gifts of wisdom, knowledge,

⁴⁶⁹ Eleonore Stump, “Wisdom: Will, Belief, and Moral Goodness,” in *Aquinas’s Moral Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 48. Pinsent endorses this interpretation in “The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2012), 484.

⁴⁷⁰ *ST* 1a2ae, q.68, a.4, s.c.

⁴⁷¹ Aquinas gives this answer on his way to responding why there are only four intellectual gifts instead of five, since art is also listed as an intellectual virtue in the 1a2ae. Aquinas concedes that art is not necessary for the life of grace, because in this divinely shaped system, art is on the part of the Holy Spirit (instead of on the part of man), and art does not extend to what is to be done (i.e., morality), but what is to be made (i.e., aesthetics)

⁴⁷² *ST* 1a2ae, q.68, a.4, resp.

understanding, and counsel.⁴⁷³ Much more will be said about these gifts, for now, however, I will summarize the remaining elements of Aquinas' VGBF network, a summary which should provide helpful context for what follows.

Aquinas says that the cardinal virtues are united by prudence, and they along with the intellectual virtues are established by the gifts.⁴⁷⁴ The gifts, in turn, are established by the theological virtues, and the theological virtues are united and established by the chief virtue among them, infused *caritas*.⁴⁷⁵ In other words, divine love (*caritas*) which comes from God, shapes the entire system – both the *habitus* which serve as the principles, and the *actus* which are the outcomes of these principles. So, these principles or *habitus* give rise to the system's *telos*, the acts of the life of grace: the beatitudes and the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Since a virtue “denotes a determinate perfection of a power,”⁴⁷⁶ and a perfection of a power necessarily includes the perfection of all its associated acts, what Aquinas' system has is the *habitus* of the life of grace giving rise to the acts of the life of grace – these acts are the

⁴⁷³ This taxonomy leaves art as the only virtue under discussion in Aquinas' second part which does not have a divine counterpart included in the life of grace. This consideration means that, for Aquinas, art is not *necessary* for salvation. This qualification about art, however, does not necessarily preclude the idea that God can inspire an artist to work in such a manner that he would not be able to without God's gracious insistence. Whether Aquinas, or those whom he cites as authorities, discuss this idea is for other researchers to explore.

⁴⁷⁴ *ST* 1a2ae, q.68, a.5. As others have noted, Aquinas matures in his understanding of the gifts from the 1a2ae to the 2a2ae. It is odd that Aquinas would state that the gifts (which are infused) establish *both* the (infused) cardinal virtues and the intellectual virtues, when he does not have infused counterpart virtues to the otherwise natural intellectual virtues (other than prudence). Perhaps Aquinas means that the gifts establish the intellectual virtues insofar that the intellectual gifts themselves are the “stand-ins,” so to speak, of the intellectual virtues as regards the life of grace. On the other hand, perhaps Aquinas had a plan to develop an account of infused intellectual virtues (as well as, or instead of, intellectual gifts), but later abandoned this project, in favor of the account we see in the 2a2ae instead.

⁴⁷⁵ *ST* 2a2ae, q.19, a.9 ad 4. “For the gifts of the Holy Spirit are the origin of the intellectual and moral virtues, as stated above [*ST* 1a2ae, q.68, a.4], while the theological virtues are the origin of the gifts, as stated above.” [*ST* 1a2ae, q.69, a.4, ad 3].

⁴⁷⁶ *ST* 1a2ae, q.55, a.1.

appending beatitudes and fruits of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷⁷ The beatitudes are spiritual benefits, initially realized in this life, of those walking in the life of grace.⁴⁷⁸ Aquinas describes the beatitudes as pertaining either to merit or to reward; merit predisposes one towards happiness and reward delivers happiness. Aquinas lists eight beatitudes, which correspond to Christ's explication of them in Matthew 5, and the final beatitude, persecution, is a kind of summary beatitude that confirms all the rest, and which corresponds to each of the other beatitudes.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are the end-goal or the final *telos* to Aquinas' ethical system. Aquinas says that these fruits are "delightful" to the soul; a kind of *actus* in which, according to Pinsent, there exists "a harmony between two persons, an alignment in which one chooses the same things as one's friend and with one's friend."⁴⁷⁹ These fruits then are eminently interpersonal, as Pinsent further argues, since in several places the fruits denote "the experience of God abiding in a person," as in the case with peace, or "a union of affections and a union of persons" as in the case with the fruit of divine love.⁴⁸⁰ Pinsent offers the metaphor of "resonance," a phenomenon where, "when coupled systems are almost exactly in harmony with one another" they experience a "disproportionate decrease in effort and increase in intensity..."⁴⁸¹ In the case of physical systems, this phenomenon can be observed when pushing a child in a swing until one achieves the natural frequency of the

⁴⁷⁷ Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics*, 85. "Aquinas usually describes the beatitudes and fruits as *actus* of the virtues and gifts. In various places, he also refers to them as *operationes*, *opera*, and *actiones*."

⁴⁷⁸ *ST* 1a2ae, q.69, a.2. "Thus, those things which are proposed in the beatitudes in the role of merit are preparations or dispositions for beatitude, which may be either perfect [future life] or inchoate [present life]."

⁴⁷⁹ Pinsent, "The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit." 481. The fruits are described by Aquinas to be "delightful" and of a "sweet" nature to one's soul, analogous to literal fruit.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸¹ Pinsent, *The Second-Person*, 96. Angela Knobel sees Pinsent's metaphor of resonance as regards the fruits "promising." Angela Knobel, "The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts by Andrew Pinsent (Review)," *The Thomist* 77, no. 4 (2013): 644.

swing, resulting in the highest proportion of energy going into the swing in relation to the effort into each push. With personal systems, i.e. humans, this metaphor of resonance can be observed when two or more people are performing a musical piece at an orchestra, or alternatively, performing a dance. In both cases, the persons involved are “attuned” to one another, so to speak, and their efforts “fly along” with one another and with the music.

Nevertheless, the beatitudes, according to Aquinas, constitute “perfect works,” and they are “perfect and excellent,” unlike the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are “ultimate and delightful” but regardless, “more is required” for the beatitudes. Aquinas lists twelve fruits, according to Galatians 5:22-23 (the Vulgate lists twelve fruits, as opposed to most modern editions, which usually only list nine). He also places the first three fruits: love, joy, and peace, as the chief or the first among the fruits, and he assigns the fruit of love the first place among these firsts.⁴⁸²

Summarizing Aquinas’ entire scheme, the principles of the life of grace are ordered as follows: *caritas* unites and establishes the theological virtues, and these virtues constitute the principle for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and in turn, these gifts constitute the principle for the cardinal virtues.⁴⁸³ Finally, the result of these principles are the acts of the life of grace: the beatitudes and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. The beatitudes and fruits, then, are the congruous products of the infused virtues and gifts, where the whole network is unified by the chief principle of divine love – the infused theological virtue of *caritas*. One should notice that the system is initialized by divine love, and then divine love runs through the rest of the *habitus*, which gives rise to the *actus*, the ultimate product of which is the fruits, the chief being the

⁴⁸² *ST* 1a2ae, q.70, a.3 resp.

⁴⁸³ Again, these virtues (cardinal and theological) and gifts are infused.

fruit of love. So, for Aquinas, the love of God, which is given to the believer by grace, produces in that same believer the fruit of love. Love in, love out, and love throughout.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Let us quickly re-orient by recalling that for Aquinas, the purpose of the Christian life is to become a “friend of God,” and thus, his theological system of certain principles and outcomes is ultimately shaped by this interpersonal *telos*, to know God. Having given a bird’s eye view, as it were, of Aquinas’ ethical scheme, it is now worth probing more deeply into how he accounts for theological understanding (knowing God), especially in the light of the prominent role that the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit have in Aquinas’ VGBF network.⁴⁸⁴ In what sense, though, are these gifts “prominent”?

Aquinas, unlike most of his predecessors, placed an extremely high value or high importance on the gifts. As reviewed, Aquinas establishes a hierarchy of principles amongst the gifts, virtues, beatitudes, and fruits. The theological virtues establish the gifts, and in turn, the gifts establish the cardinal virtues. This order means that in a system that has almost sixty *habitus*, only the theological virtues are given higher importance than the gifts.⁴⁸⁵ Additionally, the gifts can be seen as what “connects” the theological virtues to the cardinal virtues, given their intermediate hierarchical order.

Furthermore, Aquinas also associates or assigns each of the theological and cardinal virtues to at least one of the gifts, a characteristic which can be thought of as making the gifts

⁴⁸⁴ Treated as a theological topic, the gifts had been commented on by other theologians before Aquinas, but in Aquinas’ day there was much debate over their precise nature and function. See Odon Lottin, “The Thomistic Theory of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost in the Last Quarter of the Thirteenth Century,” *Dominican Studies* 3, no. 2 (1949): 104–44. This reason helps explain why Aquinas’ treatment of the gifts in the *Summa* was considered as a kind of breaking new ground in the theological landscape.

⁴⁸⁵ This high reckoning of *habitus* is because Aquinas assigns about seven sub-virtues under each of the cardinal and theological virtues.

“spill over” into the rest of the *habitus*. A similar primacy of the gifts is seen as they regard the *actus*. Aquinas lays out a scheme of correspondence of the gifts to the various beatitudes,⁴⁸⁶ and again, the beatitudes establish the fruits. This facet makes the gifts the conduit, so to say, between the *habitus* and the *actus* of the life of grace. This conduit terminates in the fruits, which are the *telos* of the entire system. In other words, although the theological virtues, especially infused *caritas*, is most *foundational* to Aquinas’ system, the gifts may be conceived as the most *central*.

In addition, as reviewed, for Aquinas, the intellectual part of the soul is “more excellent” than the appetitive part – in the sense that the intellect governs the appetite.⁴⁸⁷ Yet, in the life of grace, the principles according to the intellect are had primarily by means of the intellectual gifts, and this characteristic entails that the intellectual gifts are, at least in one sense, the most crucial principles for Aquinas’ system – second only to the theological virtues. For several reasons, then, the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit are a subject worth more seriously analyzing.

Recall that for Aquinas, the gifts are exclusive to the life of grace, and therefore only exist as divinely infused *habitus*, with no counterpart natural species. These seven gifts are listed as four gifts according to reason (wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and counsel) and three gifts according to appetite (fear, courage, and piety). The gifts according to reason are more excellent than the ones according to appetite (again, because the reason governs the appetite), and the gift of wisdom is the chief gift (just as the virtue of wisdom is the chief

⁴⁸⁶ *ST* 2a2ae, q.121, a.2.

⁴⁸⁷ Although Aquinas states that “the intellect is nobler than the will,” in the sense alluded to here, he also holds that “the love of God is better than the knowledge of God.” *ST* 1ae, q.82, a.3, resp. Loving God, then, is better than knowing about God.

intellectual virtue). Both the virtue and the gift of wisdom regard “right judgment about divine things,” both the virtue and the gift of knowledge regard “right judgment about created things,” and both the virtue of prudence and its corollary gift, counsel, regard right judgment about “individual actions.”⁴⁸⁸

But if the virtues and the gifts regard the same things, and they are both *habitus*, how does Aquinas distinguish the gifts from the virtues? This distinction lies in the *way in which* these virtues and gifts regard their objects. Aquinas differentiates the gifts from the virtues in that the virtues perfect the person according as it is natural for him to be moved by his own reason, whereas with regards to the gifts, “a human being needs yet higher perfections, whereby to be disposed to be moved by God. These perfections are called gifts, not only because they are infused by God, but also because by them man is disposed to be made readily movable by divine inspiration.”⁴⁸⁹ This supposed distinction will require further elaboration, especially considering how closely wed are the virtues and the gifts.

Indeed, for Aquinas, all the infused virtues and gifts are within a person at once, or none of them are there at all.⁴⁹⁰ Meaning, the gifts cannot and do not inhere the believer in a state of grace without the infused virtues also present, and likewise, these virtues cannot and do not inhere the believer in a state of grace without also the gifts present. The idea behind Aquinas’ thought seems to be that the virtues, by themselves, are principles which enable the believer to live a righteous life, as this life trends towards its ultimate end: friendship with

⁴⁸⁸ As stated above, the intellectual virtues and gifts pertain to the same matter.

⁴⁸⁹ *ST* 1a2ae, q.68, a.1.

⁴⁹⁰ *ST* 1a2ae, q.68, a.5. Also, “Aquinas affirms that the gifts are either all present in a person, being infused along with love, or else all absent if love is absent. Given that precisely the same condition applies to the infused virtues, gifts can never be present without infused virtues and vice versa.” Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas’s Ethics*, 34.

God. But the believer also needs outside “help,” as it were, to continue in this path of sanctification. This help comes by means of the gifts: infused dispositions which make the believer “readily movable” to act righteously, that is, to act in the way that is consistent with being one’s friend, the friend of God. This successful co-operation with grace more strongly secures the virtues in the soul of the believer, which then make it easier or more natural for the believer to continue to co-operate with God via the gifts. And this interplay between the virtues and the gifts, then, continues to strengthen the believer’s life of grace, resulting in increased sanctification on his way towards the final goal of fellowship with God in heaven. The virtues and the gifts, in other words, are inseparable from one another.

Not a few visual metaphors have been proffered regarding this close relationship between the gifts and the virtues.⁴⁹¹ Perhaps one intriguing visualization, offered by Bernhard Blankenhorn, is that of a double spiral, or a helix.⁴⁹² On this illustration, the virtues and the gifts each constitute one strand of the double helix, with the intent to show how closely tied are the two sets of infused *habitus*. This visualization, in modern terms, might invoke some characteristics of the double helix found in a strand of electrical cord, where the two negative and positive (red and blue) wires are bound closely together to ensure signal transmission.⁴⁹³

Similarly, the virtues and gifts constitute closely wed and mutually indispensable *habitus*, in the sense that they – together – enable the believer to continue to walk in the life

⁴⁹¹ Most famously the ship illustration given by John of St. Thomas, a metaphor which Pinsent spends some time critiquing in his book. On this metaphor, the virtues are like a person who is powering a boat by rowing, and the gifts are like a wind that propels a boat with sails.

⁴⁹² Bernhard Blankenhorn, “Aquinas on the Spirit’s Gift of Understanding and Dionysius’s ‘Mystical Theology’,” *Nova et Vetera* (English Edition), vol. 14, no. 4 (2016), 1119.

⁴⁹³ Per the principles of electromagnetism, this configuration protects against internal and external “noise,” which would otherwise disrupt the signal.

of grace.⁴⁹⁴ In other words, for Aquinas, where the virtues are, so are the gifts (along with *caritas*), and where the gifts are, (along with *caritas*) so are the virtues. In this way, there is ultimately no meaningful way to treat either the infused virtues or the gifts as entirely extracted and separated from one another.

Nevertheless, to reiterate, what Aquinas claims is unique about the gifts as compared to the virtues is not that they are infused, because the virtues are also infused, but that “by means of a gift, a person is disposed to become ‘amenable’ or ‘readily movable’ (*disponitur, ut efficiatur prompte mobilis*) by divine inspiration.”⁴⁹⁵ The infused virtues, on the other hand, constitute *habitus*, or dispositions of the soul, which “perfect a person according as it is natural for that person to be moved by her own reason.”⁴⁹⁶

The idea, though, of being made “readily movable” by another person – in contrast with one being moved “by her own reason,” requires finer reflection. The gifts of the Holy Spirit operate in the context of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer, where the Holy Spirit, according to the author of the Gospel of John, is called the *paraclete*.⁴⁹⁷ Translators have typically rendered this word, in English, as helper, advocate, intercessor, comforter, or friend.⁴⁹⁸ But, the word, when translated in the most literal way, means “the

⁴⁹⁴ The subject of temptation helps to further demonstrate this emphasis. As the believer continues to walk in the life of grace, he constantly faces opportunities to commit sin, and these actions will either undermine or prohibit him from reaching his goal. But so long as he does not completely abandon God, through an act of mortal sin, the virtues and the gifts co-operate together to help protect or shield him from temptation (not so much from temptation’s existence, but rather from its power and influence).

⁴⁹⁵ *ST* 1a2ae, q.68, a.1, resp.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁷ Παράκλητος. This term is the Greek word used to refer to the Holy Spirit in John 14:26.

⁴⁹⁸ See these and an even wider variety in Johannes Behm, “Παράκλητος,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. W. (Geoffrey William) Bromiley et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1964), 800-814.

one called alongside,” or “the one who comes alongside.”⁴⁹⁹ Richard Conrad expresses a similar idea, in that the *paraclete* is a kind of “friend for the campaign,” where in this context, the friend is not someone you are looking at, but someone you are looking *with*.⁵⁰⁰

In other words, and in the light of the insights considered in this thesis, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit facilitates what can be metaphorically described as *joint attention* between the believer and God. In effect, the gifts consist in a uniquely *second-personal* disposition (*habitus*). Furthermore, this joint attention enables the believer to benefit all that there is to be benefitted from having such second-person relatedness with God, in a manner analogous to the benefits gained within human-human instances of joint attention.

A biblical example which illustrates this difference between a first-person disposition and a second-personal disposition is highlighted by Pinsent, upon reflection on God’s command to Abraham that he sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham does not, according to his own reason, desire to sacrifice Isaac. But, on *faith* that God will keep His word (by somehow reviving or otherwise preserving Isaac through the event), Abraham places his trust in something other than his own reason. Pinsent remarks:

Abraham therefore has to trust God, an action of second-person relatedness, despite the utter impossibility of attaining the desires of his heart according to any conclusion based on first-personal reasoning alone. This situation is therefore radically different in kind, and not in degree, from any scenario in which one sets out one’s own path for the attainment of one’s desires...⁵⁰¹

In other words, if a virtue is a first-person foundation for correct moral or intellectual action, then – in the light of the language of *being moved* by another person, namely the Holy Spirit

⁴⁹⁹ For example, Edwyn Clement Hoskyns and Francis Noel Davey, *The Fourth Gospel*, (London: Faber, 1940), 549-554.

⁵⁰⁰ His paraphrase, given upon my conversation with him in February 2024.

⁵⁰¹ Pinsent, *Aquinas’ Ethics*, 89.

– it might be best to conceive of a gift as a *second-personal* foundation for correct moral or intellectual action.⁵⁰²

On this account, the correct metaphor for *infusion* is not “pixie dust or unexplorable skyhooks,” but instead, the phenomenon of joint attention, such as the joint attention which is had between a mother and her child when the mother points her child to an object that they then proceed to attend together. On this understanding, the *being moved* as regards the effects of the gifts, as well as the effects of human-human joint attention, can be thought of as consisting in the individual – the one who is being moved by the other – participating in the same *stance* towards the object of mutual attention. This synchronization of stance, or perhaps “sense” – to invoke the ideas brought forward in 3.1 concerning military sense-making – might be the most appropriate way to conceive how the one who is being moved is affected by the Holy Spirit’s infusion of the gifts. Consequently, a closer look at the intellectual gifts is warranted.

For example, regarding the intellectual gift of knowledge, Aquinas describes it thus:

Because man forms a sure judgment about a truth by the discursive process of his reason: and so human knowledge is acquired by means of demonstrative reasoning. On the other hand, in God, there is a sure judgment of truth, without any discursive process, by simple intuition, ...; wherefore God’s knowledge is not discursive, or argumentative, but absolute and simple, to which that knowledge is likened which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, since it is a participated likeness thereof.⁵⁰³

What Aquinas seems to be describing here is a phenomenon more akin to joint attention, especially in pre-linguistic infants, who have not yet developed the means to reason discursively. Instead, in both cases, one simply intuits the truth of a situation, through

⁵⁰² Ibid, 62-63.

⁵⁰³ ST 2a2ae, q.9, a.1, ad 1.

somehow participating in the other's "stance." Additionally, one should notice Aquinas' phrase that the gift of knowledge consists in *participating*, somehow, in the knowledge of God. The various instances of joint attention reviewed so far seem to help communicate what is meant by someone "participating" in the knowledge of someone else.

As for the gift of understanding, Aquinas defines understanding as follows:

Accordingly on the part of the things proposed to faith for belief, two things are requisite on our part: first that they be penetrated or grasped by the intellect, and this belongs to the gift of understanding.⁵⁰⁴

As Pinsent points out, this definition of understanding regards new things as simply apprehended, "rather than being judged," and it involves an "intimate knowledge," or "inward reading" beyond what appears merely to the senses, and into the very "essence" of a thing itself.⁵⁰⁵ This definition of understanding, however, is applicable to both the virtue and the gift. Aquinas distinguishes the gift of understanding from the virtue as follows:

The intellectual light of grace is called the gift of understanding, in so far as man's understanding is easily moved by the Holy Spirit, the consideration of which movement depends on a true apprehension of the end.⁵⁰⁶

The distinct nature of this gift is somewhat difficult to grasp, especially when the gift is treated in isolation. Aquinas gives some clue as to what the distinguishing markers might be, when, in another article relating to the gift, he gives reference to a passage in Luke's gospel.

In this passage, Christ is described as "opening" the Scriptures to Cleopas and the other traveler on the road to Emmaus, in order that these disciples be enabled to understand. This interaction between Christ and these two disciples seems markedly interpersonal and

⁵⁰⁴ *ST* 2a2ae, q.8, a.6, resp.

⁵⁰⁵ Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics*, 57.

⁵⁰⁶ *ST*, 2a2ae, q.8, a.5, resp.

given the overall second-personal nature of the gifts, it might be best to conceive the gift of understanding using the metaphor of *pointing*. As Pinsent remarks, the gift of understanding is metaphorically like what Christ did for his disciples: having something *pointed out* to us (where pointing is an instance of active joint attention).⁵⁰⁷

Lastly, the superlative intellectual gift is the gift of wisdom. Regarding this gift, Aquinas states:

Accordingly it belongs to the wisdom that is an intellectual virtue to pronounce right judgment about divine things after reason has made its inquiry, but it belongs to wisdom as a gift of the Holy Spirit to judge aright about them on account of connaturality with them. . . . Now this sympathy or connaturality for Divine things is the result of love, which unites us to God, according to 1 Cor. 6:17, “The one who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit.” Consequently wisdom which is a gift has its cause in the will, which cause is love, but it has its essence in the intellect, whose act is to judge aright, as stated above.⁵⁰⁸

So, for Aquinas, the gift of wisdom, like the gift of knowledge does not rely on discursive reasoning, but on something pre- or supra-discursive. Aquinas stresses the necessity of being “joined” to the Lord, via the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and in this way, there is explicit symmetry with the requirement of personal presence in instances of joint attention.

Additionally, like the gift of knowledge, one should notice that the gift of wisdom also involves something like “participation” (e.g., “sympathy or connaturality for Divine things”).

For Aquinas, then, the believer is joined to God through *caritas*, where *caritas* involves the notion of *communion* between the believer and God, via the indwelling the Holy Spirit – the *paraclete*, or the one who comes alongside whom we attend *with*. This indwelling

⁵⁰⁷ Pinsent, *Aquinas’s Ethics*, 58. Also, recall that in the psychological literature, this is called “active” joint attention because someone is initiating a request for joint attention via pointing. Similarly, in some places Aquinas classifies the gifts as “active” grace.

⁵⁰⁸ *ST* 2a2ae, q.45, a.2.

carries with it both the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the personal presence of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰⁹ On the triadic joint attention metaphor elucidated above, God (in the person of the Holy Spirit) co-attends with the believer to an object of shared attention, and this phenomenon is what facilitates the believer's "participation" and in his "being moved" – with regards to both intellectual and moral matters.

In effect, these second-person experiences had between the believer and God result in both: correct knowledge or understanding concerning divine things, *and in attaining the ultimate object of theological understanding: knowing God, as one's friend*.⁵¹⁰ Furthermore, these two items are inseparable from one another for Aquinas, meaning, one cannot have complete or perfect theological understanding as regards divine things without *knowing God*, a knowing which is achieved through and inseparable from *caritas*.⁵¹¹

As a result of this analysis of the intellectual gifts, then, it seems that Christian theology according to Aquinas has an indispensable place for second-person relatedness (via joint attention) as regards theological understanding.

Application: The Gift of Wisdom in the Case of Christ

If the above preliminary conclusion is correct, it will be beneficial to see whether it holds up in a sort of "test case." Contemporary Thomist Richard Conrad highlights that Aquinas' somewhat brief treatment of the doctrine of Christ in the third part of the *Summa* is an avenue for further exploration regarding many topics, especially the subject of the precise

⁵⁰⁹ *ST* 2a2ae, q.24, a.2, resp.

⁵¹⁰ *ST* 1a2ae, q.1, a.8, resp. "For man and other rational creatures attain to their last end by knowing and loving God." And, "men can participate in the Sovereign Good in this life, by knowing and loving God, albeit imperfectly." *ST* 1a2ae, q.5, a.3, obj 2. Although part of an objection, Aquinas grants this point. The virtues and the gifts are the principles through which we achieve this imperfect knowledge.

⁵¹¹ Via infusion. But more will be said on Aquinas' account of *caritas* in 4.4.

nature and relationship between the incarnate Christ and the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹²

In the third part of the *Summa*, Aquinas addresses the “grace of Christ as an individual man” in question 7. In this question, which spans thirteen articles, Aquinas affirms that in Christ there is habitual grace, including *all* the virtues and gifts – most especially, the gift of wisdom.⁵¹³ Aquinas notes several times, however (and in accord with the biblical account), that Christ, being God, is the sender of these gifts in the first place.⁵¹⁴ Additionally, Christ is Himself the “wisdom of God.”⁵¹⁵ Somehow, then, Christ is the sender of the gift of wisdom, the recipient of the gift of wisdom, and the very “wisdom of God” itself. Aquinas parses these distinctions by saying that, in his divinity, Christ is the sender of graces, in his humanity, he is the recipient of them, and in virtue of being the “Eternal Son of God,” Christ is the wisdom of God itself.⁵¹⁶ But as Conrad points out, there is much untilled ground as regards further developing Aquinas’ thought on this topic.

As it relates to this thesis, the pertinent question is this. Does joint attention remain an appropriate metaphor, or analogy, for *infusion* in the case of Christ?⁵¹⁷ This question deserves

⁵¹² Richard P. Conrad, “Wisdom and Sonship,” in *Faith, Hope and Love. Thomas Aquinas on Living by the Theological Virtues*, 2015, 303–305.

⁵¹³ *ST* 3ae, q.7, a.2, resp. Aquinas also states that Christ had the natural or acquired species of the virtue of knowledge and wisdom. *ST* 3ae, q.9, a.4, resp. By implication, then, Christ had all the natural as well as all the infused virtues (and infused gifts).

⁵¹⁴ For example, *ST* 2a2ae q.14, a.2, ad 3. “Grace and truth were the work of Christ through the gifts of the Holy Spirit which He gave to men.”

⁵¹⁵ *ST* 3ae, q.44, a.4, s.c.

⁵¹⁶ Conrad, “Wisdom and Sonship,” 304.

⁵¹⁷ Although Pinsent, for example, throughout his treatments uses the word “metaphor,” the term “analogy” might be more appropriate when referring to the similarity between human-human joint attention and the joint attention had between a person and God. The similarity is not merely poetic or non-literal, as

some considerable attention, given that Christ is the paradigmatic, transfigured “God-man,” who is both the source and *telos* of our redemption. Indeed, as the Nicene-Constantinople creed confesses, Christ is both “true God from true God” and yet somehow, he “became man.” Consequently, whatever kind of sanctifying grace Christ enjoyed on earth should not be wholly different than the kind that Aquinas describes regarding the rest of humanity, who walk in the life of grace.

Perhaps the best way to explore this topic is to run a test case. The most poignant example in the gospels where Christ, in his humanity, appears to have been “moved” in such a way as to obtain “sympathy” or “connaturality for Divine things” so that he would “judge aright” (e.g., this is the effect of the gift of wisdom, the superlative intellectual gift) is during the nearing of his passion, while in the garden of Gethsemane. In this vignette (Matthew 26:36-46), Christ is shown deliberating between two courses of action: either follow the Father’s divine will and proceed with the suffering of the cross, or follow his human will and avoid the cross, ensuring physical survival.

It must be noted that, according to the dogma established at the 6th ecumenical council (Constantinople III), Christ had two wills: one human, and one divine.⁵¹⁸ This doctrine was affirmed primarily to rebut the Monothelites, who insisted that Christ had only one will.

“metaphor” might otherwise denote. “Analogy,” on the other hand, indicates a literal similarity and an extension of the same idea to cover both instances. Nevertheless, regardless of the term used, it is recognized that there can be a real, literal, joint attending between persons and God, while also recognizing that any such analogous extension that concerns divine activity will always be limited in one way or another.

⁵¹⁸ This issue, and how it was resolved, is analyzed in J.P. Farrell, *Free Choice in St. Maximus the Confessor* (St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 1989). There is much technicality working in the background of this assertion. The council draws primarily from St. Maximus the Confessor, who taught that will is a property of nature. Ibid, 157. But natures do not “will,” only people will; natures, in other words, are not agents. Consequently, the characteristics of Christ’s two wills are proper to the divine nature and the human nature, but the action of Christ in his willing is, since the incarnation, always “theandric,” meaning, it involves both wills in joint unison.

Furthermore, on the reasoning of the council, neither of Christ's wills overpowered, subsumed, or determined the other (otherwise, such a relationship between the two wills results in a version of Monothelitism, the very heresy that the council was convened to address). Rather, both Christ's human will and Christ's divine will, per the council, were (and are) *free*.⁵¹⁹

From the divine point of view, this doctrine simply means that God's decision to send Christ as a propitiation for the sins of the world (a decision made in eternity past) was not obligatory or necessary; it was an entirely free decision, consistent with God's abundant graciousness (analogous to how God's decision to create the world was also free). Likewise, in Gethsemane, Christ, in his humanity, had to *freely* consent to the will or the desire of the Father. In this case, at least according to the reasoning of the council as taken from St. Maximus the Confessor, Christ truly could have willed to survive, a decision that was consistent with his assumed human nature.⁵²⁰ This nature, however, is the very thing which Christ came to assume and thereby raise up and redeem, in virtue of his impeccable life, passion, and death. Such is the scope of the very atonement itself, ensuring that all of humanity will be raised up at the last day, with those who co-operated with God's grace (the

⁵¹⁹ If God created man with a free will (consistent with the notion that we are created in His image and likeness), then Christ too must have assumed a human nature that has a free will. If his human will is not free, it means that he assumed a nature different than man's nature. Thus, a denial of either Christ having two wills or that both these wills are free, amounts to a denial of the incarnation.

⁵²⁰ On St. Maximus' thinking, Christ's deliberation should be conceived as being between a lesser good and a greater good, instead of being conceived as a choice between good vs evil. Physical survival was a genuine good according to Christ's human nature, but a lesser good compared to what the Father desired. Maximus thoroughly repudiates the notion that lesser goods somehow constitute partial evil, as in his mind, this is the dialectical error of the heretical "Origenists." Ibid, chapter 6. Thus, really, Christ's decision was truly *free*. Otherwise, if choosing survival was "sin," and therefore impossible given Christ's impeccability, it puts serious strain on the clear intention of Matt 26:53, where Christ says he *could* call down the angels and be rescued.

elect) enabled to enjoy union and mutual presence with God in heaven.⁵²¹ That this entire divine project hinged on a *free* decision on the part of Christ, in his humanity, is stunning. In fact, this notion is so stunning that debates continue over the precise relationship between the will of God (given God's providence) and will of man (given man's culpability).

On the metaphor of joint attention as plausibly the most appropriate way to understand the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the resulting description in this case would be Christ, while in Gethsemane, co-attending *with* the indwelling Holy Spirit *towards* the "divine thing" (the prospect of the passion), together. Indispensably, however, his co-attending or joint attention must have consisted in Christ being non-deterministically "moved" to make the judgment aligned with the divine will.

It is at this point that I think the metaphor of parent-child joint attention proves to be most fruitful. In my own life, I reflect on the characteristics of the *art of parenting*, especially in scenarios when I am trying to get my son, for example, to obey my wishes. In this example, it is early January and my son, Elijah, is playing with a toy that he had been given for Christmas. In this case, the toy is a magnetic sketch pad that can be used to draw all sorts of fun patterns and designs. The pad is so fun, in fact, that my daughter, Evelyn, wants to also draw on the pad with Elijah – much to Elijah's chagrin. Elijah does not want to share the sketch pad, and Evelyn does not want to play with another toy. What is a parent to do? One approach is to overpower my son's will and effectively force him to share. But this approach circumvents Elijah's consent, and so the action is not free. As a result, my son is not really

⁵²¹ Although both the elect and the damned will have resurrected bodies, the quality of each person's experience in the eschaton is shaped by the formation of his or her desires, a formation which is the result of how the person chose to respond to God's grace in this life.

benefiting, morally speaking, as much as I would like, because what I really want is for him to make choices that help form within him a heart that *wants* to share.

So, I take a different approach. I tell him that “yes, this is in fact *your* toy. You do not *have* to share it with your sister. It is good that you are playing with your toy, because that is why I gave it to you. But it would be *better* if you decided to share with Evelyn, because as we have talked about before, ‘it is better to give than to receive’.” Pondering my suggestion rather haphazardly, Elijah continues to play with the sketch pad – much, now, to Evelyn’s chagrin. For me to get what I want (proper moral formation in my son), I cannot use brute-force commands or even, as was just proven unsuccessful, helpful suggestions “from the outside looking in,” as it were. No, I need to do something else entirely. So, I begin to sketch on the sketch pad *with* Elijah. I spend a few minutes jointly attending to some sketches; first, I draw a snowman without a head and then invite him to finish the sketch. Then, I play a game of tic-tac-toe and let him win, and finally, I might even ask him to describe what he thinks I look like as I attempt to sketch something that matches his descriptions. After a few minutes, I tell him I must go help mom downstairs and I leave the room.

Elijah, after our extended instance of joint attention and co-operation with the sketch pad, finally appreciates the potential benefits that *sharing* might deliver. He then proceeds to invite his sister over to him, freely, so that they can both continue to do the sorts of things that he and I were doing moments before. These benefits should not be conceived in a behaviorist or reductionist sort of way either (as in, Elijah enjoyed merely having his dopamine receptors fire). Instead, one of the benefits that Elijah enjoyed was the presence of, or *communion* with, his dad (something he then sought with his sister).

In the above scenario, Elijah, having freewill, could genuinely have chosen to remain stubborn in his unwillingness to share, even despite my joint attention activities. Meaning, I

did not alter the nature of his will, and because it was free, both choices remained opened to him. His change of course after my activity of joint attention is something which Elijah truly deserves some credit for; he was not forced, or even “manipulated.”⁵²² Nevertheless, Elijah also required his father’s help to show him the right path, the “higher good,” so to say, of being (a little bit) self-sacrificial. In effect, Elijah’s decision was neither purely on his own lights, nor was it a result of master-craft puppeteering on my part. It was something else – not “in between,” nor partially some of each – but something else entirely.⁵²³

This metaphor, taken from a true-to-life example of second-person joint attention, is perhaps a helpful way to think of the co-operation between Christ in his humanity and God the Holy Spirit. Perhaps that, in Gethsemane, the indwelt Holy Spirit co-attended with Christ to the “divine thing” of the *telos* of the ensuing passion: a *telos* which includes (if not consists in) eternal glory and intimate fellowship between Christ and His creation. Christ’s attending with the Spirit would be theandric, but nevertheless, in his humanity, Christ was a recipient of the gift of wisdom, and this gift (along with all the other gifts) enabled him to judge in accordance with the divine standpoint. This process, moreover, occurred through a

⁵²² I insist that the actions do not count as manipulation on the basis that they were not motivated by self-pleasure; instead, they were motivated by *love* – I both wanted the good for Elijah, and union with Elijah. More will be said on these ideas in 4.4.

⁵²³ Before the eclipse of the philosophical school known as nominalism, it was generally understood that God’s will and humanity’s will do not, in a manner of speaking, occupy the same metaphysical space. Meaning, they are not in competition, as if our co-operation with God was a zero-sum game, where some percentage of the co-operation had to be assigned to man’s will, and some percentage of the co-operation assigned to God’s will. See Matthew J. Thomas, “Justification,” in *St. Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brenden N. Wolfe (University of St. Andrews, October 5, 2023), <https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Justification>. On this understanding, it is a profound misnomer to conceive the meaning behind the word “cause” or “move” in the phrase “God’s Spirit causes/moves us to act” as the kind of cause-and-effect found inherent in physical systems, such as when a domino in a row of dominos is tipped over. Instead, the sense of co-operation which is illustrated in the above parent-child joint attention scenario might, in fact, be quite an appropriate analogy for how two wills can occupy different “metaphysical space,” and therefore, be described as both “effective” *and* (indeterminately) free (I say “indeterminately” to disqualify most compatibilist accounts of freedom).

method that can be metaphorically understood as a synchronization or harmonization of perspectives, such as has been described in instances of human-human joint attention.

If my analysis is successful, then the metaphor of second-person joint attention as a metaphor for the *infusion* of the gifts does appear like it could apply in the superlative case of Christ, thereby reinforcing the conclusions made from this subsection's exploration.

More importantly, however, is the fact that this section started with two Scriptural allusions: first, that the "Spirit of God" is the revelatory agent of theological truth (per 1 Corinthians 2:6-13), and second, that the incarnate Christ is also the revelatory agent of theological truth (per 1 John 1:1-3). An account of the gifts drawn from the metaphor of second-person joint attention would have Christ, in his humanity, serving as the *prototypical man*, in that Christ receives and co-operates with the gifts in order to sanctify, and eventually glorify, human nature. On this basis, then, Christ in heaven now *sends* the Holy Spirit to believers on earth, so that they, too, can second-personally co-operate with the Spirit's gifts and be likewise sanctified. This co-operation results in theological knowledge of the kind that is rooted in *love* and consists in, among other things, *knowing God*, as His friend. The intellectual gifts of the Spirit (as well as the other gifts), in other words, seem to make the most sense on the second-person account. Saying it more directly – and momentarily setting to one side the original objections – second-person relatedness does appear to be a factor in the faculty of understanding as regards theological truth.

CHAPTER 4: RESPONSES TO OBJECTIONS

It is now time to respond directly to each of the four objections presented in chapter 2, in the light of the alternative account I developed, at some length, in chapter 3. In each section of this chapter, I will restate the summary characterization of the corresponding objection and briefly describe its core tenets, before proceeding with a reply. These replies will draw on the insights presented in chapter 3, as well as bring forward additional considerations which interact with these insights, and which bear directly on the objection.

4.1: First, it is Plausible that the Second-Person Perspective Does Exist

As a review, the first objection states that the second-person perspective is not fundamentally real. This objection does not mean that those who hold it do not refer to “I” and “you” relations, but instead they hold that these references are mere terms of convenience. These objectors – represented by figures such as Dennett, Heck, Peacocke, Stueber, and others – argue that the second-person perspective is, in principle, reducible to something else more fundamental.

Namely, some objectors claim that the second-person perspective and its grammatical forms are, at least in principle, reducible to an entirely third-person description of the world. Alternatively, others claim that the second-person perspective is simply the imaginative projection of a first-person perspective or experience. If either set of objectors are correct, the second-person perspective does not really exist, strictly speaking. On this basis, then, this perspective cannot yield specific insights into the nature of shared understanding present in the diverse range of joint attention activities surveyed throughout chapter 3.

My presentation of this objection sought to encapsulate its various aspects by summarizing the governing account of the objection, an account called “Theory of Mind,”

which is constituted by two subtheories: simulation-theory and theory-theory. Overall, Theory of Mind begins with the presupposition that there is an epistemic “gap” (as Vasudevi Reddy puts it) between our minds and the minds of others, and that this gap needs to be successfully traversed for us to justifiably say that we have any knowledge of other minds whatsoever (including knowledge of other minds’ existence and mental states).

In earlier years, proponents of Theory of Mind have generally taken it as axiomatic that the second-person perspective is not fundamentally real, but in response to the recent uptick in focus on the second-person perspective, the proponents of the different versions of Theory of Mind have sought to justify this denial explicitly as well. These efforts have led to more sophisticated attempts to reduce the second-person perspective to either the first-person perspective (in the case of simulation-theory), or the third-person perspective (in the case of theory-theory).

A brief, but accurate, way to describe the broad approaches exhibited by both subtheories is to say this. Simulation-theory attempts to bridge this epistemic “gap” through the awareness of our own mind, our *self-awareness*, and theory-theory attempts to bridge this gap through our awareness of facts which are *self-less*, that is, facts that are constituted by empirical sense data of objective realities; objects which are or at least are treated as subject-less.⁵²⁴ So, simulation-theory sees the knowledge or experience of *oneself* as both epistemically prior to and the medium through which knowledge of *yourself* (e.g., other minds) is obtained, whereas theory-theory puts in this role the knowledge or experience of things that are without selves; things that are *self-less*.

⁵²⁴ Whether they are treated as subject-less in the sense that the items of focus are actual objects (concrete or abstract), or instead, the items of focus are psychological items but are nevertheless what the literature calls *subpersonal*.

Recall that both simulation-theory and theory-theory, according to Shawn Gallagher, share three central principles, which are worth restating:

- (1) The unobservability principle: social cognition is a problem due to the lack of access that we have to the other person's mental states. Since we cannot directly perceive the other's thoughts, feelings, or intentions, we need some extra-perceptual cognitive process (mindreading or mentalizing) that will allow us to infer or simulate what those mental states are.
- (2) The observational stance: our normal everyday stance toward others is an observational one. We observe their behaviors, and based on what we observe we mindread their mental states. We do this in order to explain their behaviors, or predict what they will do next.
- (3) The supposition of universality: our primary and pervasive way of understanding others is by way of one of these processes, either theoretical inference or simulation.⁵²⁵

In the light of the account presented in chapter 3, coupled with some additional literature which directly bears on the topic, and which helps crystalize these insights in service of a substantive reply, what can be said in response to each of the three premises of Theory of Mind?

First, there appear to be good reasons to doubt the surety of the unobservability principle. The evidence from developmental psychology, which has been mounting for several decades since the inception of Theory of Mind and which was showcased in chapter 3, seems to undermine any sweeping claim that we do not have direct epistemic relatedness with others. As reviewed, for example, children as young as a day old can appropriately respond to a smile with a smile of their own, and within just a few months infants have shown an ability to appropriately respond to others' intentions, moods, feelings, and the like.

⁵²⁵ Gallagher, *Action and Interaction*, 71.

On Theory of Mind, specifically theory-theory, it is difficult to see how children can be said to be forming third-person propositions, in order to “know the other mind,” as these theorists say, when infants have not yet developed the ability for metarepresentational thought. Metarepresentational thought, again, is the kind where in an instance of someone watching someone else smile, for example, they internally reason to themselves something like the following: “that person is smiling. People who smile are typically happy, at least in normal circumstances. These are normal circumstances, so the person likely feels happy.”

As reviewed in 2.1, the primary empirical support for theory-theory resides in the way these theorists interpret the results of false-belief tests. Until recently, these tests consistently showed that not until children reached the age of about four-years-old could they pass the test (by somehow correctly predicting that the person was going to look for the toy in the wrong box, for example), and theory-theorists used this data as evidence for the notion that only when children are old enough to form metarepresentational content can they begin to theorize about and have “knowledge of other minds.” In other words, on theory-theory, the evidence gathered from false-belief tests justifies the assumptions behind Theory of Mind and renders theory-theory as likely the most correct version of it.

Gallagher, Reddy, and others have noted, however, that recent evidence has begun to seriously challenge this interpretation: studies have shown that children as young as thirteen-months old can pass the test by exhibiting awareness that the subject in these tests are not looking for the toy in the correct box.⁵²⁶ These studies, and other related difficulties,⁵²⁷ are significant enough to have put a considerable strain on theory-theorists, and while some

⁵²⁶ Gallagher, *Action and Interaction*, 75.

⁵²⁷ Ibid, 76-97. Gallagher outlines what he sees are the “eight problems” for theory of mind.

theory-theorists have posited that the faculty for forming representations must occur earlier in development, this position is generally viewed as unsupported by the evidence, and therefore an instance of special pleading.

Yet, if the child is not carrying out mental activity in service of generating a theory, and yet children can respond to other persons in the context of all kinds of joint attention activities, then what are proponents of theory-theory left to do? As Gallagher remarks, theory-theorists are increasingly aware of the difficulty that developmental psychology presents them with (both in terms of the field's current findings and apparent trajectory), and the more common route among theory-theorists is to appeal to a hybrid Theory of Mind. Hybrid theory combines elements of both simulation-theory and theory-theory, and these theorists suppose that some kind of simulation is extant in early development, which then acts as a means by which the ability to form meta-representations ensues. On their hypothesis, simulation-theory is less complex and more easily amenable to "unconscious" processes or processes that are automatic and "offline," so to speak, when compared to theorizing. Thus, on a hybrid-theory account, theorizing can "get off the ground" by means of simulation.

Likewise, in response to other difficulties that challenge simulation-theory, some committed simulation-theorists have posited their own hybrid theory to explain what gets simulation "off the ground." Either maneuver, however, does not appear to rescue theory-theory, simulation-theory, or hybrids thereof. As Gallagher observes,

But how does theoretical inference itself get off the ground in any particular case? Perhaps it can go the other hybrid route. The only reason I know what rule of folk psychology to apply is because I begin by simulating the other person's situation... But then, again, how do I start the simulation? It seems to me that these hybrid approaches simply push the problem back a step; one ends up in a circle of starting problems which turns from abstract rules to unsure suppositions and then returns to abstract rules. What seems to be lacking is an account of how we get the right kind of

particularistic or contextual knowledge that would be the ground for getting things off the ground.⁵²⁸

In other words, in a hybrid theory, each subtheory attempts to “piggyback,” so to say, off the other subtheory to get things going, but both cannot rely on the other in this way simultaneously, so each subtheory is left with the same problems it set out to solve by appealing to a hybrid model in the first place.

This difficulty and the other related difficulties with Theory of Mind has persisted, resulting in a sort of gridlock where neither account has been able to make significant theoretical strides. Consequently, this situation has motivated other researchers into an entirely new way of looking at the problem and its presuppositions.

Reddy’s insights on this issue are eminently pertinent, as they further encourage this motivation by reminding us of something very commonly observed, yet severely overlooked in these debates. These debates, in essence, turn on the question of whether there is a “gap” in the first place. But, as Reddy remarks:

The standard way of thinking about private and shared experiences is to think of privacy as the starting point from which communication about private mental states can occur, though never quite adequately. Developmentally speaking, however, this is not true. First, developmentally speaking, to be private is more difficult than to be public. In many ways, we know this to be true. We see an infant cry or smile or turn to look or frown, and there is no question that the distress and joy and interest are publicly available. While we could doubt them in an adult, we could not do so in an infant.... Second, joint action and shared experience are developmentally prior to the communication of private experiences. Telling others about one’s thoughts and feelings and perceptions and intentions happens only after a long history of engagement with each other’s thoughts and feelings and perceptions and intentions.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁸ Ibid, 78.

⁵²⁹ Vasudevi Reddy, *How Infants Know Minds* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008),

In other words, on Reddy's reckoning of the developmental evidence, and which was observed in chapter 3, we initially negotiate the world through sharing our understanding with others and others sharing their understanding with us. Likewise, our own self-revelation to others through speech seems to be founded on a rich, prior history of connecting with others through pre-linguistic communication. These pre-linguistic engagements, recall, are what Tomasello calls "proto-conversations," and Tomasello undoubtedly agrees with Reddy on this *ordo* of the mental: in normally developing children, a mind that is public is chronologically and developmentally *prior* to a mind that is concealable, and in fact, the former acts as the basis for the latter.⁵³⁰

As Reddy aptly states – a suggestion which is worth re-emphasizing – in the case of young children, "*to be private is more difficult than to be public.*" Indeed, how ubiquitous it is for parents and caregivers to correctly respond to the moods, thoughts, feelings, and desires of young children, a success which is rarely hindered by the child's attempt to communicate or present a different disposition. When a three-year-old, say Lili, lashes out against her mother, Meghan, and Lili is made to apologize by her father Harry, it is almost always openly manifest whether Lili is genuinely sorry. Where Lili, being only three, attempts to merely appear genuine to her parents, but is inwardly unrepentant, her true feelings are rarely, if ever, successfully opaque.

Indeed, this situation occurs not only where adult caregivers are involved, but also in the context of the child's peers. According to the psychological literature on school-age bullying, childhood bullies find so much success in nefariously exploiting other children's

⁵³⁰ "Human beings are the world's experts at mind reading." Tomasello et al., "Understanding and Sharing Intentions," 675.

emotions chiefly *because* other children find it so difficult to conceal their embarrassment, anger, and so forth. In one study, researchers remarked that “youth lacking emotional and behavioral regulation and anger management (components of self-management) were more likely to be bullied due to their higher frequencies of emotional outbursts and hyperactivity compared to other youth, which provoked other peers and inevitably invited more peer harassment incidents.”⁵³¹ In other words, both common experience and clinical scholarship show that, on the whole, epistemic connectedness to others seems to be the norm, and that an impeded connectedness is instead a result of *learned competency*.

Although adults have formed the ability to do this quite readily, namely, to *appear* genuine (or to appear any number of other states), this purported gap which precludes connectedness with and understanding of others might be less warranted than Theory of Mind proponents assert. In other words, it might be better to understand this “gap” as something which is artificially created, instead of something which is universally extant. Reddy, for example, admits that this gap exists in at least *some cases* (such as when someone is trying to be deceptive), but the entire justification for the necessity of Theory of Mind from the outset is the assumption that this gap is always there from the beginning, and must always somehow be traversed for this “problem” of other minds to be solved. If, on the other hand, the default situation is that we can readily connect to or relate with other people, rendering minds that are openly manifest, “public,” or “shared,” then a profound conclusion results:

These developmental factors—that doubt about mental states is more appropriate later in development and that communication about mental states occurs after a prior history of sharing mental states—suggest that we could in fact turn the tables on the

⁵³¹ Chunyan Yang, Mei-Ki Chan, and Ting-Lan Ma, “School-Wide Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Bullying Victimization: Moderating Role of School Climate in Elementary, Middle, and High Schools,” *Journal of School Psychology* 82 (2020): 50. The study treats these skills related to emotional self-management as learned skills.

standard story and reverse the direction of effects. The story makes better developmental sense if we argue that it is shared experience of mentality that allows privacy. The “public”—sharing—is a developmental step necessary for allowing the “private”—concealment—and not the other way around.⁵³²

In other words, according to this understanding, the root assumptions behind Theory of Mind may need to be re-examined, and if they are found to be unwarranted, then Theory of Mind would not have justification to reduce the second-person perspective.

Another researcher, Monika Dullstein, provides useful analysis in this regard, in that she shows how the second-person approach exhibited by Reddy and Gallagher (an approach which has much in common with many other contemporary second-person proponents such as Eilan, Zahavi, Stump, León, Pinsent, and others) does not so much seek to solve the “problem” of other minds insofar as this problem has originally been conceived by Theory of Mind theorists. Instead, it may be more accurate to say that the second-person approach motivates researchers to question whether the Theory of Mind debate has been set up correctly in the first place.⁵³³

Indeed, two main root assumptions motivate Theory of Mind, which in turn, motivate the three principles above (the unobservability principle, observational stance, and principle of universality). The first is the epistemic gap assumption which has been discussed, and the second assumption is that the only epistemically valuable uptake regarding other minds is *knowledge*, where such knowledge is typically understood as the kind which Stump described as knowledge-that (e.g., predominantly propositional. Such as is the case, in

⁵³² Reddy, *How Infants Know Minds*, 16.

⁵³³ She states, “Second person accounts thus conceived [by Reddy and Gallagher] do not directly address the questions that gave rise to the theory of mind debate. They invite us, however, to critically reflect upon the way the debate has been set up.” Monika Dullstein, “The Second Person in the Theory of Mind Debate,” *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2012): 231.

Zahavi's example, when I "know" my friend is in pain because he is taking pain medicine out of the cabinet). What the second-person approach is focused on, Dullstein points out, is not so much the deliverance of knowledge-that, but the deliverance of personal *understanding*.⁵³⁴ Meaning, it is focused on understanding (or knowing) persons. Dullstein, however, does not elaborate much on what knowing persons amounts to, precisely.

This *lacuna* is where the examination laid out in chapter 3 nicely dovetails with, or springs off, Dullstein's analysis. Namely, the review of the characteristics and epistemic importance of personal knowing. Likewise, in a focused article targeted at Theory of Mind, Eilan describes it this way. The Theory of Mind debate is concerned with securing knowledge *about* persons (namely, knowledge of their mental states), whilst the second-person approach is more fundamentally concerned with *knowing* (or understanding) *persons*.⁵³⁵ Therefore, insofar as *knowing persons* (or, understanding persons) is epistemically valuable, to that extent, at least, success of the second-person approach is likewise valuable. Furthermore, insofar that (1) *understanding persons* is more superior to (2) knowledge *about* persons, a position this thesis has explored, namely, that understanding in this sense is superior to knowledge because it is more epistemically fundamental and it is more morally significant, then phenomena which secure (1) should likewise be seen as superior to those that only secure (2).

⁵³⁴ "I will illustrate this claim by focusing on Reddy's and Gallagher's accounts and argue that these authors use the notions of knowing and of understanding other minds differently than traditionally assumed." Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Naomi Eilan, "Knowing and Understanding Other Minds: On the Role of Communication," *University of Warwick Department of Philosophy*, 2018, <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/philosophy/people/eilan/kuom.pdf>.

With these considerations in view, one can now question the second central premise of Theory of Mind, the observational stance.⁵³⁶ The proponents of the second-person approach have arguably shown different (but interrelated) ways in which the relatedness between two people engaged in joint attention often requires *more* than passive observation, but instead, active participation. Reddy characterizes this activity primarily as emotional engagement, and she says that the work of Tomasello and others have shown that “understanding what another person knows about an object depends initially on *actual joint engagement* with that adult and the object, and only subsequently relies on simple observation of the adult’s engagement with the object.”⁵³⁷ These insights on social cognition and developmental psychology are profound enough, for Reddy, that the infant should not be cast “in the role of an epistemic observer or analyst,” and the term “engagement” should not be seen as merely “cues to the perception of the object world.”⁵³⁸ Instead, our understanding one another is rooted in reciprocal interaction prevalent in instances of joint attention.

She argues this case by pointing out the way children learn about the intentions of adults is not through sitting back, passively, as an outsider and “theorizing” to themselves about what the adult might mean, or thinking to himself “if I were him...” Instead, in episodes of adult-child “directives,” for example (where the adult is attempting to get the child to do something, or not to do something):

What is very clear in these directive episodes is the infant’s interest in joining with the adult’s intentions and interests; the adult’s directive is interesting to the infant *because* it comes from the adult to the infant. And the infant’s (initial) willingness to

⁵³⁶ Repeated from citation above: (2) The observational stance: our normal everyday stance toward others is an observational one. We observe their behaviors, and based on what we observe we mindread their mental states. We do this in order to explain their behaviors, or predict what they will do next.

⁵³⁷ Reddy, “Why Engagement?: A Second-Person Take on Social Cognition,” 447. Emphasis added.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

engage—however tentatively—with their directives encourages adults in constantly upping the ante and putting forward more and more complex invitations.⁵³⁹

So, on this account, and in the light of the insights brought forward in chapter 3, it is probably incorrect to describe these phenomena in terms of phrases such as, “acquiring knowledge about other minds,” but instead, to think of these instances as instances where the person’s epistemic uptake is secured through his or her (second-person) relatedness with others, a relatedness that involves mutual participation.

Reddy’s insights on the importance and nature of infant “clowning” help to elaborate on this point:

Often an accidental discovery that a certain facial expression, sound, or movement of the body leads to adult laughter or general positive attention can lead to the infant repeating that expression, sound, or movement (sometimes for weeks) to re-elicite the response...The occurrence of clowning is fundamentally mutual—it depends on the presence of an “other” who finds an action or expression funny, and it depends on the infant’s pleasure in the other’s amusement, the infant’s awareness that the amusement is linked to the action or expression, and the infant’s ability to re-elicite it by repeating the action or expression.⁵⁴⁰

These characteristics highlight the importance of affective, not merely cognitive, engagement, and they highlight how the cognitive benefits from these engagements often require a great deal more than observation; they require active relatedness and interaction.

Furthermore, León’s analysis on what he sees as the non-reductive nature of joint attention also helps shed further light on this attribute. According to León,

Reciprocity is important in early ontogeny because it provides the ground for exchanges of emotions between ‘I’ and ‘you’, which in turn presupposes that reciprocating partners are in a position to address and being addressed by another. I suggest that later, when infant and adult engage in triadic joint attention, for example, via the exchange of ‘sharing looks’, a basic situation is reciprocally ascertained

⁵³⁹ Ibid, 446. Emphasis added.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid, 444.

between them: you and I are on the same ground with respect to a particular target of attention, you and I partake in a commonly available world.⁵⁴¹

He describes these situations as two people relating to one another as “co-partners,” and draws on another scholar, Bruner to capture this idea: “the responses of *each* member can be shown to be dependent on a prior response of the *other*.”⁵⁴² This “practical and interactive” dimension to joint attention, for León, requires that the “openness” of joint attention be reconsidered less as a merely cognitive phenomenon (i.e., the observational principle), and much more as a whole-person engagement that involves activity, reciprocity, and participation – either towards one another (in dyadic joint attention, what León calls primary intersubjectivity) or towards a target of mutual focus (in triadic joint attention, what León calls secondary intersubjectivity).

On this scheme, “attending together” and “doing things together” are not insulated from one another. Understanding other people, in other words, relies on more than observation, and the “shared understanding of what ‘we’ (‘you’ and ‘I’) are doing together” should be viewed as “*constitutive*” of many important joint attention activities.⁵⁴³

With these considerations in view, it is not difficult to see why autistic children suffer, cognitively speaking, from the failure to engage second-personally. Recall from chapter 3, that autistic children are typically better at obtaining knowledge *about* people than

⁵⁴¹ León, “Joint Attention without Recursive Mindreading,” 567.

⁵⁴² Emphasis original. León is quoting from Jerome S. (Jerome Seymour) Bruner and Rita Watson, *Child’s Talk: Learning to Use Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 132.

⁵⁴³ Other second-person proponents gesture similarly. Guy Longworth stresses the importance of “coordination” (Guy Longworth, “You and Me,” *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 3 (2014): 289–303), Sebastian Rödl stresses the importance of “transaction,” (Rödl, “Intentional Transaction”) and Jane Heal (although a simulation-theorist ultimately but who nevertheless shows some sympathies for second-person thinking in this article) stresses “cooperative activity” (Jane Heal, “Second Person Thought,” *Philosophical Explorations* 17, no. 3 (2014): 317–31).

they are at interacting and emotionally engaging with people; in other words, they have difficulty in knowing people. Yet, because of this difficulty, their knowledge *about* persons is not unaffected – recall that often, autistic children’s knowledge *about* is focused primarily on objective features, many of which are relatively trivial given the context. This fact suggests that the uptake of knowing persons enabled through interpersonal engagement (e.g., second-person relatedness) is not insulated from knowledge about persons. Rather, knowledge *about* also depends in some way on knowing persons.

The considerations up to this point concerning the (1) unobservability principle and the (2) observational stance principle should suffice to adequately call into question the third principle of Theory of Mind, the universality principle.⁵⁴⁴ It does not seem to be the case that our primary and pervasive way of understanding others is by way of *either* (third-person) theoretical inference *or* (first-person) simulation.

Nevertheless, despite the evidence against the root assumptions and central principles of Theory of Mind, there remains a widespread difficulty in embracing all that second-person accounts have to offer. For example, Tomasello – who admits he is not a philosopher and whose goal is not primarily to give the best theoretical account of joint attention – still offers some theoretical gestures from time to time. As Reddy points out, at times Tomasello sounds like his account is consistent with the second-person account, but nonetheless, he has also shown that he’s committed to the “recursive mindreading” view of joint attention (this account is the one that logically emerges out of Theory of Mind, and which is argued explicitly by Peacocke; it is the view that the joint awareness in joint attention is infinitely

⁵⁴⁴ Repeated from citation above: (3) The supposition of universality: our primary and pervasive way of understanding others is by way of one of these processes, either theoretical inference or simulation.

iterative – e.g., “I know that you know that I know that you know...[infinite sequence]...that you are aware of me/some third object”).

Tomasello states that although “no one is certain how best to characterize this potentially infinite loop of me monitoring the other, who is monitoring my monitoring of her, and so forth... it seems to be part of infants’ experience—in some nascent form—from before the first birthday.”⁵⁴⁵ This position is fundamentally at odds with the second-person approach wherein joint attention is a “primitive” phenomenon (cf. John Campbell), unanalyzable in terms of anything more basic. In other words, the empirical and theoretical evidence notwithstanding, many experts in the field still find it difficult to abandon Theory of Mind as the governing account on this topic. Conversely, with time, and with further development of second-person relatedness treated as a philosophical principle, this attitude may begin to change.

In summary, this reply has sought to critique the core tenets of the view which entails that the second-person perspective is not fundamentally real, out of which emerges the positions exhibited by the various authors showcased in 2.1. Although this reply has not aimed to give a meticulous rebuttal to everyone who advocates for Theory of Mind, and with it, a reduction of the second-person perspective, this reply should nevertheless offer a few insights from a variety of perspectives that reinforce the position – enriched by the insights in chapter 3 – that the second-person perspective *is* real, and not reducible to something else more fundamental.

⁵⁴⁵ Michael Tomasello, “Human Culture in Evolutionary Perspective,” in *Advances in Culture and Psychology*, vol. 1 (United States: Oxford University Press, 2010), 35.

Particularly, in direct response to the three central principles of Theory of Mind: first, we seem to understand other people via means that are not limited to observation solely (and probably not primarily). Second, this understanding does not seem to rely on *either* (third-person) inference *or* (first-person) simulation. And most importantly, third, epistemic connectedness to others does not seem to be fundamentally impeded by minds which are predominantly concealed.

Therefore, in the light of this project's analysis, Theory of Mind's reductive accounts of the second-person perspective seem to be unwarranted, and, in agreement with León, if reductive accounts of the second-person approach fail, then logically, at least some kind of non-reductive account must be true.⁵⁴⁶ I conclude, then, that the diverse attempts to dismiss the second-person perspective by means of "Theory of Mind" are inadequate in the sense that they fail to carry out reductions of this perspective to the first- and/or third-person perspective(s). Given the huge range of everyday experiences testifying to the existence of this perspective, as surveyed in 3.1, and the failure of the Theory of Mind to replace it, it seems far more sensible to work on the basis that, yes, the second-person perspective exists.

4.2: Second, Understanding Likely Does Require Second-Person Relatedness

What about the second objection? To review, according to the second objection, second-person relatedness may be real, but it is not necessary for understanding, because fundamentally, understanding is an achievement that is acquired on one's own. This view emerges in consideration of the ways in which people seem to receive incredible amounts of

⁵⁴⁶ León advocates for the "argument by elimination, which can be summarized as follows: if joint attention is to be accounted for either reductively or non-reductively, and if there are convincing and general arguments against reductionism, such arguments will also speak in favor of non-reductionism." León, "Joint Attention without Recursive Mindreading," 551.

insight and perform acts of understanding by themselves, without any apparent relatedness with others. Evidence for this objection is readily obtained from many varieties of lone geniuses, or persons who happened to be alone at the moment of their insights. Examples include Archimedes, Descartes, Grothendieck, Newton, Ramanujan, Thoreau, and many others. Moreover, there is a considerable body of literature on the cognitive benefits of isolation, such as the works of David Krell and Charles Scott. In other words, the objection states that even if the second-person perspective exists, this perspective is not, in fact, necessary to all kinds of actual insights.

In the light of the evidence brought forward in this project, what might be said in response to this second objection? Upfront, it may be necessary to concede at least one aspect of the objection. It may be the case that the intellectual achievements presented in the objection support the view that acts of understanding, *when considered as independent acts*, are at least sometimes performed in a solo context (Archimedes, Newton, etc.). Furthermore, as it regards understanding entire intellectual domains, like any of the seven liberal arts, or flying an F-16, *most* people, at least, require a great deal of person-to-person tutoring, and one should recall how chapter 3 has shown the various ways in which second-person relatedness is involved in classroom teaching or military instructing environments, via the phenomenon of joint attention. But one may grant, however, that there does at least appear to exist a small body of exceptions to this rule, comprised of people like Ramanujan.

One consideration which might shed light on the nature of the exceptional cases is that once someone has grasped or apprehended the appropriate first principles, a function of the *intellectus*, or *nous*, he or she can, via procedures that can be done “solo,” correctly deduct a variety of logically valid “truths.” (This description most neatly, but not wholly

exclusively, applies to subjects like mathematics or chess). But what about initially apprehending these first principles themselves?

Well, it is said that self-taught chess prodigy Bobby Fischer, for example, simply picked up a book on chess and learned how to master the game himself.⁵⁴⁷ Likewise, mathematical geniuses like Ramanujan have had plenty of textbooks at their disposal, which outline the mathematical axioms appropriate for whatever kind of mathematics is being performed. In these instances, the exceptional person is applying his or her cognitive faculties to apprehend written material. This reality, though, leads to a deeper question: how were the cognitive faculties that enabled this understanding formed in the first place?

This question is meant to invoke the fact that each of the people presented as examples of the objection were nevertheless reared as a child in some kind of home with parents or caretakers, where this upbringing undoubtedly involved numerous examples of dyadic and triadic joint attention. In other words, none of these figures were born into a state of isolation and remained in a state of isolation throughout their cognitive achievements later in life. Instead – and there is no apparent reason to suppose otherwise – each of them grew up embedded within a nexus of social relationships; phenomena necessary for the proper development of their cognitive faculties, such as understanding.

Vitality, furthermore, if joint attention is constitutive of second-person relatedness – a thesis this project has so far concluded – then the instances of solitary understanding presented in 2.2 in no way invalidates the importance of this mode of learning. This reason is because the upbringing and cognitive formation of these individuals relied on numerous

⁵⁴⁷ Frank Brady, *Endgame* (London: Constable, 2011), 10.

instances of second-person relatedness via joint attention, as surveyed throughout chapter 3.2. The following point, however, needs to be stressed.

The view that sociality – at least in some form – is important to the formation of cognitive capacities (not excluding the faculty of understanding), is a view shared by various contemporary experts. On the other hand, there persists debate on *what it is about sociality* that makes sociality so important, epistemically, and developmentally speaking. Is, in fact, some kind of second-person relatedness – particularly the kind which has been presented in this project or is at least consistent with this presentation – the determining factor, or at least an important factor? Alternatively, is it something else, something that is not necessarily and uniquely “second-personal”?

In addition to this project’s analysis regarding joint attention as constitutive of second-person relatedness – and therefore, a factor in the faculty of understanding in both developmental contexts (one’s cognitive formation), and in non-developmental contexts, such as classroom teaching or military instruction – in what follows, I aim to shed further light on this response by importing a few insights from the literature on childhood neglect.

The psychological literature on early childhood neglect suggests at least a couple of worthwhile considerations pertinent to this topic. For instance, experts on this topic are virtually unanimous in insisting that the more or longer a child is neglected, especially early on, the more difficult it will be for that child’s development, especially as it regards his or her later academic and intellectual competency.⁵⁴⁸ One seminal analysis recently examined the various studies of the correlation between childhood neglect and later academic performance,

⁵⁴⁸ See Monica L. McCoy and Stefanie M. Keen, *Child Abuse and Neglect*, Third edition (London: Routledge, 2022).

and the analysis confirmed a persistent negative correlation between child neglect and academic ability.⁵⁴⁹

Other negative outcomes abound, too. For example, children who are neglected during what is termed the “critical period” of development (some number of years before the onset of puberty) typically have much lower linguistic competency, lower IQ, deficient performance in the classroom, and a lack of social understanding. In fact, child neglect is both unique enough and has been shown to be such a consistent predictor of later intellectual deficiency, that many researchers who specialize in the topic argue that it should be treated as its own standalone psychological category and not be classified as a subcategory of *child abuse* (as is mostly the case in the current and historical psychological corpus).⁵⁵⁰

Especially relevant here is that there exist exceptional cases of childhood neglect, ones which are so extreme that they are classified in the exclusive category of “feral children.” These are cases where the neglect is so profound that the child takes on “wild” or animal-like characteristics. The cases involving “feral” children are classified into two groups: children who are abandoned in the literal wild at an early age and left to fend for themselves for several years, and children who are not abandoned *per se*, but who are raised for a good portion of their early years in a state of extreme isolation, typically by abusive (and sometimes insane) parents/caretakers.

What will be worth considering for the purposes of this reply is whether there exist any possible examples of “feral children” who nevertheless develop normal cognitive

⁵⁴⁹ This “negative correlation” means that lower academic performance was associated with higher amounts of neglect during childhood. Elisa Romano et al., “Childhood Maltreatment and Educational Outcomes,” *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 16, no. 4 (2015): 418–37.

⁵⁵⁰ See Margaret G. Smith and Rowena Fong, *The Children of Neglect: When No One Cares* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), chapter 11.

functions and faculties, while lacking sociality. If there do exist such cases, in other words, then perhaps the reply from the argument of early development loses force.

As one might expect from what the literature has already suggested, however, all documented cases of “feral children” invariably record that the child, upon discovery, possesses cognitive abilities only little beyond those of a wild animal. These children do not know how to speak, read, write, they do not typically pick up on social cues, and have a difficulty with turn-taking, appropriate eye-contact, and emotional understanding.⁵⁵¹ This reality may not be surprising, but by itself, it does not necessarily endorse the thesis that *second-person relatedness*, specifically, is what these children needed to otherwise cognitively benefit, developmentally speaking.

Instead, an objector may still question whether second-person relatedness is, in fact, the “active ingredient,” as it were, of the sociality which would have otherwise afforded the child normal cognitive development. This doubt would persist, especially, should the objector find the preceding arguments linking joint attention with second-person relatedness wanting. Therefore, in consideration of this potential resistance, I turn my attention towards summarizing the attempts at rehabilitating feral children, attempts which generally have had comparable results – with one remarkable exception, an exception that I think helps shed light on this debate.

Although there are not many well-documented cases of feral children, there are at least a few. One of the most well-known cases is the case of Victor of Aveyron, or “the wild boy of Aveyron.” Victor’s case is seen as somewhat paradigmatic of the phenomenon of feral

⁵⁵¹ See Michael (Michael Stuart) Newton, *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

children, in terms of his mental state upon discovery, the methods used to attempt to rehabilitate him, and the eventual results of these attempts. Therefore, a summary of his case will serve to give the overall sense of *most* other cases of feral children, as shall be seen.⁵⁵²

Victor of Aveyron was a feral child discovered in France in the year 1800, at the age of around nine years old. Apparently, he had lived most of his life up to that point in the Tarn – an area of France wild and unoccupied, at least during Victor’s lifetime. Suffice it to say, when Victor was discovered, he had behaviors and skills like that of a wild animal. Unsurprisingly, he could not speak, or read, or write; he had almost no ability to notice social cues and he had little ability to engage in interpersonal reciprocity – including modes of reciprocity such as empathy.

After his discovery, he was promptly transported to the Parisian National School for the Deaf, but his initial caretakers found no success in rehabilitating Victor at all. Soon, a young medical consultant, schooled in both the medical and philosophical wisdom of his day, took great interest in the boy: a Frenchman named Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard. Itard was given a grant by the French government in efforts to educate and civilize poor Victor. Itard then spent the next several years working closely and almost exclusively with Victor, towards the goal of fully educating and rehabilitating the boy. Itard, in fact, is credited with giving him the name Victor in the first place.

Itard’s methodology is thoroughly documented by his own hand and published under the name “The Wild Boy of Aveyron.” A perusal through his notes reveals an overall scientifically objective approach to Victor. For example, Itard more often refers to Victor as

⁵⁵² Bibliographic notes about Victor taken from Jean Marc Gaspard Itard, George Humphrey, and Muriel Miller, *The Wild Boy of Aveyron*, Century Psychology Series (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Educational Division, Meredith Corporation, 1932).

the “boy,” the “savage,” the “orphan,” or his “pupil,” instead of by his name. Itard’s curriculum, as it were, relied heavily on repetition, positive (and negative) reinforcement, and brute persistence. His methods could be described as somewhat mechanical, although Itard did recognize some kind of value in emotional development. It is worth showing how Itard approached trying to develop Victor’s “emotional capacities”:

To these various stimulants I had to add emotional stimulants which were no less exciting. Those to which he was susceptible at this time were confined to two, joy and anger....Once when we wanted to make him take a bath which was as yet only lukewarm and our reiterated entreaties had made him violently angry, seeing that his governess was not convinced of the coolness of the water by the frequent tests that he made with the tips of his own fingers, he turned towards her quickly, seized her hand and plunged it into the bath.⁵⁵³

Itard goes on to defend his methods by pointing out that he also did things to incite happiness and joy, such as in the following:

A ray of sun reflected upon a mirror in his room and turning about on the ceiling, a glass of water let fall drop by drop from a certain height upon his finger tips while he was in the bath, and a wooden porringer containing a little milk placed at the end of his bath, which the oscillations of the water drifted, little by little, amid cries of delight, into his grasp, such simple means were nearly all that was necessary to divert and delight this child of nature almost to the point of ecstasy.⁵⁵⁴

Both instances evoke images more akin to a scientist running experiments on his lab rat, than anything resembling the love and nurture most children experience, in normal circumstances, inside of conventional households. These examples from Itard’s notes show little reciprocity or emotional richness on Itard’s part. In fact, one researcher laments the fact that Victor did

⁵⁵³ Ibid, 17.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, 18.

not have the opportunity to interact or play with other children, due to the fact that Itard did not see it as a priority.⁵⁵⁵

Furthermore, Victor's efforts to play with or show affection towards Itard were usually met with little response. On one occasion, Itard recounts the nature of Victor's playful attitude, and the follow-on commentary shows Itard's general attitude towards this kind of activity:

...there are times when he welcomes me and they are the times which I have never used for his instruction. For example, when I go to the house in the evening just after he has gone to bed, his first movement is to sit up for me to embrace him, then to draw me to him by seizing my arm and making me sit upon his bed, after which he usually takes my hand, carries it to his eyes, his forehead, the back of his head, and holds it with his upon these parts for a very long time. At other times he gets up with bursts of laughter and comes beside me to caress my knees in his own way which consists of feeling them, rubbing them firmly in all directions for some minutes, and then sometimes in laying his lips to them two or three times. People may say what they like, but I will confess that I lend myself without ceremony to all this childish play. I shall perhaps be understood if my readers will remember the paramount influence exerted upon a child's mind by the *inexhaustible delights* and the *maternal triflings* that nature has put into the heart of a mother and which make the first smiles flower and bring to birth life's earliest joys.⁵⁵⁶

From this passage, there seems to be a kind of connectedness or relatedness that Victor was earnestly seeking in his instructor. Yet, Itard appeared to view such things as only trivially important as it regarded his goal of cognitively rehabilitating Victor. It is worth asking what motivated Itard's approach, overall.

George Humphrey points out, in the forward to his translation of Itard's book, that Itard was heavily influenced by empiricist philosophers John Locke and Étienne Bonnot de

⁵⁵⁵ Wayne Cayea, "Feral Child: The Legacy of the Wild Boy of Aveyron in the Domains of Language Acquisition and Deaf Education," 2006, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:141534594>, 18.

⁵⁵⁶ Itard, *The Wild Boy*, 25. Emphasis added.

Condillac.⁵⁵⁷ On Itard's interpretation of these thinkers, everybody is born as a "blank slate" (*tabula rasa*) and acquires attributes solely from the sensory stimuli originating in external environments. So, Itard reasoned that all the boy required were the correct stimulants to his senses, and eventually, Victor would learn how to understand, especially, how to speak. On this account, the only real puzzle is figuring out *which* sensory stimulants are required.

Sadly, after several years of Itard's regimen, Victor never learned how to read, write, or speak. The closest he came was what one analyst calls "action language," a concept similar to Tomasello's notion of proto-conversation (pointing, etc.),⁵⁵⁸ but he never spoke a word. Itard then eventually became frustrated with Victor's lack of success. After five years, he chose to cease his efforts and instead Itard spent his talents on other patients who he thought might show more promise. Victor was effectively abandoned by Itard, and the French government no longer sought Victor's rehabilitation. He spent the rest of his life being cared after by Itard's state-salaried housekeeper, Madame Guerin. After Itard's departure, Victor passed into obscurity and eventually died at the age of about forty (1828), in more-or-less the same cognitive state that Itard left him. Victor – or "the savage" as he was simply called after Itard left – died in a state of fear, unable to adequately express himself or reveal anything of much value concerning his past.

Now, the general opinion among those who have examined Victor's case is that Victor was not deaf, which might otherwise help explain his persistent lack of progress. But some debate continues whether he was in fact born autistic or retarded. In other words, in Victor's case, it is not altogether clear whether he was abandoned in the woods because he

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid, xv.

⁵⁵⁸ Cayea, "Feral Child," 27.

was congenitally an “imbecile,” or if his condition was directly caused by abandonment and isolation.⁵⁵⁹ Whatever the case, the trajectory that Victor experienced, is, unfortunately, generally the trend among cases of feral children, making it unlikely that congenital defects are the common root issue.

Linguist Yvan Lebrun gives summary review of some of these prominent cases, such as the young Indian girl “Nanga,” the Russian twins Yura and Lioscha, the “wolf girl” Kamala, and the quite famous “Genie” Wiley.⁵⁶⁰ Although some outcomes have been worse than others (Genie’s early isolation and subsequent misfortune mirrors much of Victor’s, sadly, whereas Nanga was able to reach some competency, yet did not achieve a full rehabilitation), the common theme among feral children is that they have significant cognitive difficulty throughout the rest of their lives. It is worthwhile, however, to look at two final examples.

These final examples are what could be called the case of the two “Annas.” Alice Marie Harris (called by the pseudonym “Anna” in the account written by child psychologist Kingsley Davis) was born in Pennsylvania in 1932 as an illegitimate child and kept in a state of extreme isolation by her deranged grandfather, for almost six years.⁵⁶¹ When eventually discovered, Anna was shuffled around different foster homes and medical facilities ill-equipped to handle her dire condition, and after two years of attempted rehabilitation, Anna died of jaundice, having reached nothing “much more than a two-and-a-half-year mental

⁵⁵⁹ Cayea, “Feral Child,” 15.

⁵⁶⁰ Yvan Lebrun, “Victor of Aveyron: A Reappraisal in Light of More Recent Cases of Feral Speech,” *Language Sciences (Oxford)* 2, no. 1 (1980): 32–43.

⁵⁶¹ “There she remained, kept on the second floor in an attic-like room...” Kingsley Davis, “Final Note on a Case of Extreme Isolation,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 52, no. 1 (1947): 433.

level.”⁵⁶² In this way, Anna’s story mimics much of the worst-case stories of feral children thus reviewed, as there was little reason to expect a significantly different outcome.

Curiously though, during the same time as Anna, there was another case of a feral child which had remarkably similar characteristics. This second child was Annabelle Barton (a different “Anna,” as it were), and it is a case that has almost passed into complete obscurity. She was born in Ohio only a month after Anna Harris, also as an illegitimate daughter, and she was *also* raised in a state of extreme isolation for about six years. Annabelle, referred to by the pseudonym “Isabelle” in the accounts, was locked “in a dark room shut off from the rest of the mother’s family” until she was discovered by medical staff at the age of six and a half.⁵⁶³ Upon discovery, Annabelle could not speak a word, and had all the tell-tale deficiencies of children who were put into similar circumstances like hers, such as those of Anna Harris. So, from the evidence presented up to this point, one should expect Annabelle, this “second Anna,” so to say, to have likewise found little success in rehabilitation efforts, if any.

But remarkably, this outcome is not what happened. By the time Annabelle turned eight years old, that is, a year and a half after her discovery (and the same age as when the other Anna died in a highly deficient cognitive state), Annabelle had gained the developmental competencies equivalent to other children her age.⁵⁶⁴ And her progress only continued. She grew up through grade school, got married, had children, and had a more-or-less normal adult life.⁵⁶⁵ In other words, and in striking contrast with the other examples,

⁵⁶² Ibid, 434.

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 436.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Lebrun, “Victor of Aveyron,” 38.

Annabelle achieved virtually a full recovery. This disparity between Annabelle's eventual success with that of so many other feral children is surprising enough to ask, what, precisely, was different about Annabelle's situation?

One of Annabelle's key therapists was Dr. Marie K. Mason, who recounts her rehabilitation techniques in an article published in the *Journal of Speech Disorders*. In her first encounter with Annabelle, or the pseudonym "Isabelle" as she is called, Mason recounts the following, which is worth quoting in full:

Sensing that any direct approach which I might make would not only be of no immediate avail but might disastrously affect any future confidence, I pretended absorption in a doll brought to me by Jane, another child in the same ward. Covertly watching Isabelle, I chose a chair close to her bed and drew Jane and the doll to my lap. I glanced up casually to find Isabelle watching me. I gave her a friendly smile but made no attempt to engage her attention. Soon her attitude of repulsion gave way to one of curiosity. She made a gesture with the palm of her hand first raised to me and then to the child in my lap. This I interpreted as her desire to discover the relationship between Jane and myself. I felt that she wanted to know whether the child belonged to me. Fearing to lose by denial what seemed to be Isabelle's first indication of interest or response to anyone, I smilingly nodded my head and, with an affectionate gesture, drew Jane more closely to me. Thereupon Isabelle immediately shook her head negatively and again made her gesture of repulsion, which seemed to me an indication that she disliked my attention to Jane. Following this lead, I allowed Jane to slip off my lap. As I did so, the following method of approach occurred to me: I held my wrist watch to Jane's ear, "Do you hear it tick?" I asked. Jane listened and said, "Yes !" In pantomime, holding my watch to my own ear and with a questioning look on my face intended as an invitation to Isabelle to listen to my watch, I held it to her ear. Isabelle studied me for a moment, reached out her forefinger guardedly, and touched the watch. Then, of her own accord, she touched the ring I was wearing on the same hand, lifted the finger, and placed the ring to her ear. Holding the ring to my own ear and again to hers, I shook my head to indicate that the ring made no sound. Then pointing to the watch and holding it again to my ear, I nodded my head affirmatively, placed the watch to her ear, and indicated that the watch made a sound but that the ring did not. Then I smiled confidentially at her, gave her a reassuring pat on the hand, and, fearing to mar this first friendly contact, I left her, waving my hand as I left the room.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁶ Marie K. Mason, "Learning to Speak After Six and One-Half Years of Silence," *Journal of Speech Disorders* 7, no. 4 (1942): 296.

This approach should be noticed for its marked difference than that of, say, Itard. Mason's approach reveals a much higher degree of emotional sensitivity and feels more organic and less forced. One should especially notice the similarity of Mason's approach to Donna Williams' recommendations reviewed in 3.3, namely, the *indirect* style of seeking relatedness for a child that, for several possible reasons, is resistant to direct or abrupt requests for relatedness.

Moreover, throughout her report, Mason stresses her repeated use of pantomime, imitation, getting Annabelle to play with children her age, and other significantly interpersonal activities – all of which plausibly included *rich instances* of joint attention. Mason's approach also reveals a sense of genuine care and concern. This sense is corroborated by a later newspaper article reporting on Annabelle's success, where it was reported by hospital superintendent Eva Johnson that "she likes to be hugged and frequently tussles with the other five children in her ward, or with the nurses."⁵⁶⁷ This evidence shows that Annabelle seemed to enjoy real relationships, ones which were able to deliver meaningful connectedness.

Finally, what is also *crucially* different about Annabelle's situation is that during her first six and a half years of life, where she never learned how to speak nor was prompted to learn how to speak, Annabelle had the benefit of something that none of the other feral children had. Namely, Annabelle was locked in the upstairs bedroom and kept in isolation *along with her mother*. Her mother, though, was completely deaf, dumb, half-blind, and extremely "simple-minded."⁵⁶⁸ (She had suffered an accident as an infant, resulting in her

⁵⁶⁷ "Six-Year-Old Mt. Vernon Girl, Isolated for Years in Room, Given New Life," *The Coshocton Tribune* Vol. 30, No. 91, November 23, 1938.

⁵⁶⁸ Davis, "Final Note," 435-436.

condition. After she gave birth to Annabelle, her father locked the pair away together and seldom let the mother out of the room, usually only to do chores).

But, although her mother was completely mute, and exceptionally “simple minded,” completely unable to offer Annabelle any kind of proper “education,” not even, in fact, the opportunity for speech interaction, Annabelle was nevertheless, as Lebrun remarks, “mothered, cuddled and loved.”⁵⁶⁹ As rudimentary as it must have appeared, Annabelle had at least some kind of relationship with her mother. In other words, during Annabelle’s years in this “critical period,” she would have had a severely impoverished social life in many ways, but she was nevertheless equipped with the resources to form one decisive ability: *the ability to relate to others*.

The key lesson that I am drawing from the accounts describing Annabelle’s case is that Annabelle seemed to develop normal cognitive functions quickly upon treatment largely because she was able to engage in instances of what this project has been describing as rich instances of second-person relatedness.⁵⁷⁰ In particular, unlike other feral children, Annabelle’s experiences with both her mother, initially, and eventually with Dr. Mason and the rest of the hospital community (the other children as well as the professional staff) seemed to afford Annabelle, among other goods, the benefits gained from a certain kind of interpersonal engagement, a kind which vitally involves elements such as emotional

⁵⁶⁹ Lebrun, “Victor of Aveyron,” 39. Lebrun comments that this factor somehow seems to be the distinguishing factor in Annabelle’s case as compared to the rest, but he does not elaborate as to the reason why. Likewise, Ian Robertson also concludes that “her [Annabelle’s] greater success [than Anna’s] seems to have been related to the fact that her mother was present during her isolation.” Ian Robertson, *Society: A Brief Introduction* (New York, New York: Worth Publishers, Inc., 1989), 72.

⁵⁷⁰ This factor may not have been the only relevant factor, but I argue that it was at least one of the relevant factors. Lebrun makes the case that nourishment played a key role, but he does credit the mother’s care as a major factor (as does Robertson). Davis emphasizes the consistency of treatment Annabelle received by competent practitioners.

reciprocity and active participation (cf. chapter 3). In other words, Annabelle benefitted, specifically, from second-person relatedness – or better yet, second-person *relationship*.

It is now appropriate to summarize this response. First, as reviewed in chapter 3, second-person relatedness appears to be a direct factor in understanding in a diverse range of adult-learning, including classroom teaching or military instructing, via joint attention. Furthermore, the fact that isolated or proximate instances of understanding are acquired on one's own does not, by itself, detract from the importance of this mode of learning. Second, even in instances of lone genius, such persons have typically been involved in the vast range of joint attention activities that characterize the lives of most human beings. Indeed, there are no known instances of human beings who have been brought up in abnormally isolated ways, such as feral children, developing those typical cognitive functions, such as language, and a great deal of other abilities related to understanding. And finally, third, what appears to be so cognitively important about sociality – as illustrated by the especially exceptional and pertinent case of Annabelle Barton – is that forming the faculty of understanding plausibly relies on a kind of sociality that involves, *specifically*, second-person relatedness.

Therefore, and in similar manner as the first objection, the weight of everyday experience testifying to the importance of second-person relatedness combined with the paucity of contrary evidence tends to invalidate the second objection as well. In other words, second-person relatedness does appear to play a crucial role in the acquisition and communication of understanding. This conclusion is reinforced by the way in which an absence of second-person relatedness, especially in childhood, is correlated with an absence of understanding.

4.3: Third, Advanced AI Probably Cannot Replace the Epistemic Role of Second-Person Relatedness

What about the third objection? To review, an objector might grant that second-person relatedness does exist and that it normally contributes to understanding. But according to the third objection, this contribution is not unique, when considering the trajectory of advancement in artificial intelligence. On this account, the achievements of AI have shown that understanding can be acquired through machines or by machines, apart from second-person relatedness. If this view is correct, then second-person relatedness should be seen as playing a dispensable role, at most, regarding the faculty of understanding.

Again, proponents of this view argue that understanding – as it regards truths of all kinds – can be secured by outsourcing human cognitive labor entirely to AI. On this view, AI can, in principle, produce the epistemic benefits that understanding delivers: either via machines that become conscious and can genuinely “understand,” or instead, via non-sentient machines which can nevertheless produce “the correct answer” to any question. On this latter account, the value of understanding is reducible to the ability to produce correct answers, which means that all the results consistent with understanding can somehow be “calculated.” In either case, though, acquiring understanding would not depend on relatedness with other people, because fundamentally, understanding can be technologically manufactured. Hence, in what follows, I first provide some alternative views on the nature of AI from two notable AI experts, one of whom gestures towards the epistemic benefits of interpersonal phenomena. Building from this analysis, I then offer a critique of the futurist perspective exemplified by Bostrom.

Two critiques from certain prominent AI experts are worth briefly reviewing, one from Aaron Sloman and the other from Selmer Bringsjord. Sloman is one of the more involved and influential thinkers in the field of the philosophy of AI, where his academic

activity in this area goes back to the early days of the field. Bringsjord is another longstanding contributor to the philosophy of AI, with a robust multi-disciplinary background and author of several acclaimed books, such as “What Robots Can and Can’t Be.”⁵⁷¹ Both scholars recently presented at the PT-AI conference (Philosophy and Theory of Artificial Intelligence), in efforts to further vindicate the core of Searle’s complaint, namely, that AI still lacks *understanding*.⁵⁷² These two thinkers’ critiques will help crystalize the insights examined in chapter three, in service of a pertinent reply to Bostrom and the futurist perspective that he exemplifies.

Aaron Sloman argues in “Huge, but Unnoticed, Gaps Between Current AI and Natural Intelligence,” that AI cannot grasp first principles, and that this shortfall constitutes a critical deficit regarding genuine intelligence.⁵⁷³ In the paper, Sloman complains over the lack of research-focus dedicated to AI as it intersects [cognitive] science and philosophy [of mind]. Instead, AI is becoming increasingly specialized, and its value seen as solely practical; he attributes this shift in focus to the historic inability to advance towards artificial general intelligence, AGI.

This failure, for Sloman, is not necessarily due to hypothetical constraints, but due to misperceptions of the human mind and how it has acquired the abilities it has. His main line of argument orbits around the idea that certain truths are not discursively *reasoned to*, but

⁵⁷¹ Selmer Bringsjord, *What Robots Can and Can’t Be* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Dordrecht, 1992).

⁵⁷² For various positions on the validity of Searle’s Chinese Room Experiment, see John Preston and Mark Bishop, *Views into the Chinese Room: New Essays on Searle and Artificial Intelligence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

⁵⁷³ Aaron Sloman, “Huge, but Unnoticed, Gaps Between Current AI and Natural Intelligence,” in *PT-AI*, vol. 44, *Studies in Applied Philosophy, Epistemology and Rational Ethics* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 92–105.

instead intuitively *discovered* or *apprehended* and thenceforth *reasoned from*. Long before David Hilbert instituted modern mathematics as the project of formalizing axiomatic systems, Sloman argues, ancient mathematicians like Euclid or Zeno were able to non-discursively “grasp” certain fundamental mathematical truths, without the use of “axiomatic, logical, forms of representation and reasoning based on Cartesian coordinates, such as Hilbert’s axiomatization of Euclid.”⁵⁷⁴ In this way, Sloman (perhaps unsuspectingly) makes use of the pre-modern epistemic distinction between the intellectual virtue *intellectus* (or *nous*), and *ratio* – in the sense of a reasoning process.

As Aquinas sees it, for example, the mathematician is exercising his *ratio* when he deduces geometric truths based on mathematical axioms, but it is by *intellectus* that the mathematician grasps those axioms in the first place. This axiomatic “grasp,” or mental apprehension, is something that cannot – by definition – be a function of *ratio*. *Ratio* argues to the body of truths that constitute the *scientia* (*episteme*) of geometry. Analogously, understanding, in the “rich” sense employed in this thesis, is valuable because it transcends the ability to produce or “calculate” correct answers by *ratio*, for any such calculation depends on truths which *cannot* be “calculated.” Instead, by “understanding” in its fullest sense, these truths are grasped, apprehended, or mentally “seen.”

Sloman then couples this argument from mathematical understanding with his examination of pre-verbal toddlers’ ability to *spatially* reason without being able to *formally* reason. Sloman claims that in both cases, there is a brute apprehension of *impossibility* and *necessity*. Euclid simply “saw” that the angle of a triangle stretched along one axes must necessarily result in it becoming smaller, like how toddlers are simply “aware” of the

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid, 93.

impossibility of the magicians' trick that links and unlinks pairs of solid metal rings.⁵⁷⁵

Where current AI technology is at in reference to these abilities, Sloman summarizes:

Despite the popular assumption that computers are particularly good at doing mathematics, because they can calculate so fast, run mathematical simulations, and even discover new theorems and new proofs of old theorems using AI theorem-proving packages, they still cannot replicate the ancient geometric and topological discoveries, or related discoveries of aspects of geometry and topology made unwittingly by human toddlers.⁵⁷⁶

In other words, AI lacks basic abilities usually associated with the faculty of understanding, and therefore, for Sloman, any prediction about future AI capabilities should remain careful and cautious.

Now, Sloman does hint at a few ways forward into the field, all of which rely on deeper, and more complex algorithmic programming. Regardless, he insists that none of these methods will find any significant success unless some sort of machine “mathematical consciousness” can be achieved. Nonetheless, what should be noticed is that Sloman’s complaint concerning the capabilities AI currently lacks are things which understanding seems to afford. In Sloman’s critique, there seems to be some kind of cognitive pre-requisite for the axiomatic reasoning made possible by formal systems.⁵⁷⁷ This ability, or cognitive pre-requisite, to apprehend the “bigger picture” all at once, is arguably proper to the faculty of understanding. But more importantly, as this project has reviewed, the kinds of understanding Sloman describes such as apprehending first principles, grasping the “big picture,” and spatial reasoning skills, seem to critically rely on second-person relatedness

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, 97.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁷ For a mathematical expression of this shortfall, see Roger Penrose, *The Emperor’s New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds, and the Laws of Physics*, Revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

phenomena inherent in instances of joint attention. Regardless, if Sloman's analysis is correct, *understanding* may in fact not be reducible to "calculating the correct answer," making difficult any claim which says understanding (or all its products) can be technologically manufactured.

The second article, titled "Do Machine-Learning Machines Learn?," is by Selmer Bringsjord. Along with Sloman, Bringsjord is another "heavyweight" in the field, as it were, and in this paper Bringsjord argues that contemporary "machine learning" is not true learning at all. Bringsjord, et al, present a three-pronged conditional argument (C1-C3) which they argue must be met by an agent (be it human or machine) for "real learning" to take place.⁵⁷⁸ Bringsjord restricts the case to learning only formal mathematical functions, and his argument pivots around the premise in C1 that such entity "understands" the formal definition of function f .

On "understanding," Bringsjord asks "What is understanding?" and admits it is a murky philosophical concept. As a placeholder, he accepts a functionalist benchmark for what constitutes understanding, that the agent "can correctly answer test questions regarding the formal definition of f , where the answers in each case are accompanied by correct proofs, discovered, expressed, and provided by [the agent]."⁵⁷⁹ This somewhat minimal, functionalist, account of understanding likewise involves (but is not limited to) a penetrating apprehension of causes and explanatory reasons, similar to Sloman's account. Additionally,

⁵⁷⁸ Selmer Bringsjord et al., "Do Machine-Learning Machines Learn?," in *PT-AI*, vol. 44, Studies in Applied Philosophy, Epistemology and Rational Ethics (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 136–57. The C1-C3 conditional argument, p. 137, is a bit technical and it would likely be unhelpful to directly quote it.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid, 138. The problem worsens, he points out, when considering non-formal domains (like art).

Bringsjord's insistence on being able to answer "test questions" is also parallel to understanding as *skill*.

According to Bringsjord, an agent which possesses and exercises these abilities constitutes "real learning," and he proceeds to point out the basically self-evident truth that "there isn't a scintilla of overlap" between machine learning and real learning.⁵⁸⁰ Bringsjord sees this truth as self-evident on the basis that "real learning," by his definition, requires the *generalizable* reasoning and communication competencies needed to enable "correct proofs, discovered, expressed, and provided by" the real learner. To date, no AI has these abilities.⁵⁸¹

Bringsjord ends his paper by presenting four main theories within contemporary psychology on how real learning is achieved, with the opinion that none of them adequately accounts for the real learning (the acquisition of understanding) he argues for. Of these four, Bringsjord shows the most deference to "instructional learning," where instead of a student and a teacher engaged together on a topic for the purpose of communicating knowledge and other epistemic goods, a machine would be "taught" by a tutor. His suggestion hints at the possibility of there being something epistemically unique about the second-personal, although he does not give further analysis into this idea. There are, however, other engineers who seem to take more seriously the suggestion that second-person relatedness, or at least something similar, might play a role in the acquisition of machine understanding. This

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid, 147.

⁵⁸¹ The quote from 2.3 is worth repeating: "Yann LeCun, Meta's Chief AI Scientist, argues that large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, or Meta's Llama won't ever reach human levels of intelligence.... AGI doesn't exist yet and remains a hot topic among AI researchers and executives." Irwin, "Meta AI Chief." Also, see Andrew Pinsent, Sean Biggins, and Robert Seed, *Artificial Intelligence* (London: The Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, 2024), 45-47.

approach is called AI and pedagogy, and it will be pertinent to this reply to examine whether pedagogical approaches can offer anything unique to the AI landscape.

Much of the literature covering AI and pedagogy, or computers and teaching, concerns how AI can help facilitate *human* learning. But what about inverting this relationship: can human teaching help an AI to *learn*, and can this learning approach *real learning* any better than contemporary methods have been able to achieve? If so, how does this kind of teaching-learning take place? AI-specialist Kristin Thórisson, et al, take up this idea in “The Pedagogical Pentagon: A Conceptual Framework for Artificial Pedagogy.”⁵⁸² In The Pedagogical Pentagon, Thórisson correctly identifies teaching as the process by which learners come to “understand something, or increase the learner’s skill on some metric.”⁵⁸³ Recall the previously discussed emphasis in teaching as involving much more than the communication of mere knowledge, and instead both understanding and skill. AI has seen some success through the methods assumed in “artificial pedagogy,” “making a general theory of teaching more desirable than ever.”⁵⁸⁴

In her article, however, the mechanisms of teaching are viewed with almost no emphasis on the role that the intersubjective, second-person relatedness intrinsically has. For example, the pedagogical “pentagon” is almost entirely organized around getting the AI to do *tasks*, with subsequent domain-specific *tests* to measure the success of *specialized* learning.

⁵⁸² Jordi Bieger, Kristinn R. Thórisson, and Bas R. Steunebrink, “The Pedagogical Pentagon: A Conceptual Framework for Artificial Pedagogy,” in *Artificial General Intelligence*, ed. Tom Everitt, Ben Goertzel, and Alexey Potapov (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 212–22. Thórisson also co-authored an article on AI “understanding” and “common sense,” which reveals that she might have a keen grasp of the epistemic issues surrounding AGI. Thórisson and Kremelberg, “Understanding and Common Sense: Two Sides of the Same Coin?”

⁵⁸³ Bieger, Thórisson, and Steunebrink, “The Pedagogical Pentagon: A Conceptual Framework for Artificial Pedagogy,” 214.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid, 213.

Perhaps a more general theory of teaching, one which emphasizes the role of second-person relatedness and joint attention, could shape a later rendition of the pedagogical pentagon – although it is unlikely that significantly different outcomes would result, for reasons that will become clear.

In a related publication titled “Raising AI: Tutoring Matters,” Thórisson, et al, do give credence to the value of phenomena which I have described as instances of second-person relatedness, in that the tutoring techniques they cover include cooperation, explanation, demonstration, and teleoperation.⁵⁸⁵ These techniques have been applied and been found successful in increasing AI performance, but only as it regards domain-specific outcomes. Regarding the advancement towards AGI, however, Thórisson admits her hope that with enough complexity, enough completed tasks, and enough diversity, special intelligence can begin to transform into general intelligence.

In other words, these engineers interested in AI and pedagogy as well as those AI specialists being criticized by Sloman and Bringsjord all seem to fail to recognize much of a *categorical* distinction regarding intelligence. The stubborn non-advancement towards general intelligence despite AI’s steady, and at times impressive, progress in specific domains strongly suggests that there exists a fundamental distinction between these two epistemic achievements. Indeed, there does appear to be a categorical difference in whatever kind of intelligence is exhibited (or mirrored) by domain-specific, narrow-intelligence, and *general* intelligence.

⁵⁸⁵ Jordi Bieger, Kristinn R. Thórisson, and Deon Garrett, “Raising AI: Tutoring Matters,” in *Artificial General Intelligence*, ed. Ben Goertzel, Laurent Orseau, and Javier Snider (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014), 1–10.

One notable empirical confirmation of this evaluation can be found in the AI called “Cyc.” This machine is an ongoing project that was started by Doug Lenat, CEO of “Cycorp” (until his death in 2023), a company dedicated to creating and providing “machine reasoning AI.”⁵⁸⁶ Cyc is in some ways the most advanced AI on the planet, as it has been endowed by its programmers to date with over *twenty-five million* axioms: an extensive list of rules which is meant to sufficiently represent the entities in the world and the relations which obtain between them. This project has spanned almost forty years, having used over “1,000 person-years” on its development.⁵⁸⁷ In its first decade alone, the project consumed over one-hundred million US dollars of research & development funds.⁵⁸⁸

The idea behind the creators of Cyc is to give the machine common sense, or practical reason. Common sense is a facet deeply entwined with understanding, as AI researchers widely intuit, but are still not sure of the distinctive differences.⁵⁸⁹ Regardless, if enough facts about the world and relationships between those facts can be programmed, these programmers contend, then practical reason/understanding should be expected to emerge.

Cyc, it should be emphasized, is unique in kind from an AI like ChatGPT, which was not designed in efforts to create a “machine mind.” Instead, according to experts, ChatGPT is essentially an advanced search engine; an AI platform equipped with coding to scour the internet and patch together answers to most kinds of questions, as well as able to perform

⁵⁸⁶ “About Us - Cyc,” April 15, 2021, <https://cyc.com/about-us/>, <https://cyc.com/about-us/>.

⁵⁸⁷ Examples and discussion of Cyc taken from Rob Toews, “What Artificial Intelligence Still Can’t Do,” *Forbes*, June 1, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robtoews/2021/06/01/what-artificial-intelligence-still-cant-do/>.

⁵⁸⁸ “About Cycorp.”

⁵⁸⁹ Cf. Thórisson’s article on Common Sense and Understanding.

other organizational and “bookkeeping” tasks.⁵⁹⁰ This example taken from Cyc, on the other hand, is more pertinent to this topic because Cyc was designed with the goal of creating a machine “mind,” from which emerges an intelligence of its own.

To date, however, neither Cyc nor any AI in the world of this kind can correctly answer a remarkably simple question to the following situation:

A man went to a restaurant. He bought a steak. He left a big tip.⁵⁹¹

The question posed to Cyc is, “what did the man eat at the restaurant?” Since the narrative does not explicitly say the man ate the steak, the machine is left to its own devices, and does not answer, or give the correct answer. Cyc does not *understand* the tremendously basic fact that people who pay for steaks at restaurants typically do so for the express *purpose* of eating them.⁵⁹² Neither can Cyc (or any other machine) deduce cause from effect. In another example, the following situation is provided:

When the sun rises, the rooster crows.

The fact (or axiom) that roosters crow when the sun rises can be programmed. But AI still cannot reason whether the rooster crowing causes the sun to rise, or if the sun rising causes

⁵⁹⁰ “ChatGPT Is Not ‘True AI.’ A Computer Scientist Explains Why,” *Big Think* (blog), May 17, 2023, <https://bigthink.com/the-future/artificial-general-intelligence-true-ai/>.

⁵⁹¹ Toews, “What Artificial Intelligence Still Can’t Do.” The assumption is that the answer must be reasoned to by the AI, instead of deterministically programmed beforehand.

⁵⁹² Corroborating Toews, see Ernest Davis and Gary Marcus, “Commonsense Reasoning and Commonsense Knowledge in Artificial Intelligence,” *Commun. ACM* 58, no. 9 (August 2015): 92–103.

the rooster to crow. In fact, the *concept* “caused” is utterly foreign to machines.⁵⁹³ This blind-spot is so severe that practical reason has been dubbed “the dark matter” of AI cognition.⁵⁹⁴ It is not that these engineers simply cannot figure out the right combination of hardware and software configurations, it is that it is not altogether clear where even to start (at least as far as hardware and software configurations are concerned).

Cyc’s persistent underperformance helps corroborate the insistence that there is indeed a categorical difference between specialized intelligence and general intelligence. By way of analogy, consider the case of a mystified aircraft engineer who repeatedly installs different turbofan engines of increasing power, but persistently fails to construct an aircraft which can fly out of the atmosphere and into space. The engineer’s initial reasoning is sound: more powerful turbofans enable an aircraft to fly quicker, giving it more kinetic energy towards the upper atmosphere. But at this stage, what the engineer fails to realize is that this performance-increase can only be made up to a point, because the thinness of the air at higher altitudes (miles before the boundary between the atmosphere and space) simply does not accommodate air-breathing turbofan engines. An entirely new *kind* of thrust is needed.

Alternatively, in his critique, Hubert Dreyfus compares the relative advances made in the field of narrow-AI with respect to achieving general intelligence to an unsuspecting farmer who attempts to get to the moon by climbing taller and taller trees.⁵⁹⁵ The farmer,

⁵⁹³ Toews, “Artificial Intelligence.”

⁵⁹⁴ Quote from Oren Etzioni, founding CEO of the Allen Institute for AI. Source is Will Knight, “The US Military Wants to Teach AI Some Basic Common Sense,” MIT Technology Review, October 11, 2018, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2018/10/11/103957/the-us-military-wants-to-teach-ai-some-basic-common-sense/>.

⁵⁹⁵ “Perhaps we are pushing out on a continuum like that of velocity, where further acceleration costs more and more energy as we approach the speed of light, or perhaps we are instead facing a discontinuity, which requires not greater effort but entirely different techniques, as in the case of the tree-climbing man who tries to reach the moon.” Dreyfus, *What Computers Still Can’t Do: A Critique of Artificial Reason*, 12.

upon reaching higher and higher treetops, is in fact – very strictly speaking – closing his distance to the moon. But what remains obvious is that the farmer’s method will never yield him any meaningful nearness to the moon. In both cases, in other words, neither the engineer nor the farmer will be able to *meaningfully* get closer to his goal without fundamentally revolutionizing his approach.

The lesson behind these analogies is to illustrate the empirically substantiated position that it is *not the case* that so long as narrow-AI continues its trajectory of progression, no matter how incremental, it will reach general intelligence, or even, necessarily, approximate closer to it. Instead, creating an AGI only seems possible were it able to obtain a *kind* of intelligence which allows for understanding, and it is not at all clear that this kind of intelligence, namely, understanding, is achievable by any amalgamation of countless memory chips, processors, and storage drives.

On this account, special intelligence and general intelligence could be visually represented by graphing these two competencies onto a cartesian coordinate plane (a two-dimensional graph constituted by an X and a Y axis). Advances in special intelligence would be represented by a higher value along the X axis, and advances in general intelligence by a higher value along the Y axis. No matter how advanced special intelligence becomes, on this illustration, it would not constitute any increase in general intelligence.

For example, a simple grade-school calculator may be able to multiply values far quicker than any school-age child, and in this way, the calculator could be said to have a high-yield specialized “intelligence,” or, a high value *solely* along solely the X axis. Although a calculator is not typically classified as an AI, the analogy still holds in the case of AlphaGo (ref. 2.3). AlphaGo is good at calculating advantageous moves in a Go-match, and in this way, it mirrors the sort of outcomes that Go players achieve through their

understanding. But neither the calculator nor AlphaGo – unlike the child or the human Go player – have *general* reasoning capabilities of any kind. They would have no intelligence value that maps onto the Y axis.

Likewise, the reverse is also true. A level of general intelligence does not necessarily correlate to a proportionate level of special intelligence. A game-playing fanatic may be able to play several different board games, while remaining a novice at all of them. He is easily defeated by an AI trained on any one game, yet none of these AI have the general reasoning capabilities that the human has, which enables him (among other things) to learn how to play the various games in the first place. So, the fanatic may have a much higher value along the general intelligence axis than he does along the specialized intelligence axis, where his specialized value would not near that of any particular game playing AI.

This reason accounts for why a “strong-AI” and a “general-AI” (or AGI) are not identical terms. A strong-AI is an AI that has *human-level* intelligence, or in other words, an AI with a degree of both special and general intelligence commensurate with that of a fully grown and normally functioning human being. An AGI is an AI with *human-kind* of intelligence – in other words, an AI that exhibits at least some level of general intelligence. But an AI with only a small degree of general intelligence would not qualify as a strong-AI, even though it would still qualify as general intelligence, and therefore, to date, a *sui generis* AI (hence, any strong-AI would also be an AGI, but an AGI is not necessarily a strong-AI). Perhaps this case would be parallel to infant- or child-like intelligence, as compared to full-fledged adult intelligence; both are constituted by general and special intelligence, but the child only has a minimal degree of both. Regardless, there is not currently any kind of AI

general intelligence – all advances, in other words, have been along the “X axis,” as it were.⁵⁹⁶

Despite these and other arguments in favor of it, this *categorical* difference in intelligence has been somewhat undermined in the public consciousness, given the recent successes that AI has had. The discussions, worries, and optimisms surrounding ChatGPT, for example, were alluded to in 2.3. Decades before ChatGPT, however, renown philosopher and public critic of AI, Douglas Hofstadter, did not believe that a narrow-AI could defeat human chess players.⁵⁹⁷ In the wake of Deep Blue having refuted his assessment, some have assumed that Hofstadter’s more fundamental critiques (which are very much in the spirit of Dreyfus and the Heideggerian school of thought) are equally misplaced as well. More recently, AI has become superior to the best human poker players at no-limit Texas hold ‘em.⁵⁹⁸ This achievement is especially novel because poker is known for having so much inherent uncertainty and good players must exhibit the ability to somehow glean the intentions of their opponents (i.e., calling their bluff). It is also noteworthy because since the

⁵⁹⁶ It should be noted that, as stated before, while the word “artificial” in the term “artificial intelligence” is a literal descriptor – the thing in question is indeed “man-made” – the term “intelligence” is not so straightforwardly correct. It may, in fact, be better to recognize “intelligence” as that which requires the kinds of epistemic success described throughout this thesis, namely, the ability to *understand*. Put in more common terms within the AI literature, perhaps the only kind of intelligence that exists and that should rightly be called intelligence is that which is general. Hence, on this reading, the term “intelligence” may be appropriate only when speaking of AGI (a strong-AI, and a superintelligence, SI, are both instances of AGI. The reverse is not necessarily the case, i.e., an AGI is not necessarily “strong” nor “super”). Finally, this implication would mean that the word “intelligence” when referring to non-general AI should at least be understood as not real; in fact, perhaps this kind of AI should be entirely renamed to something more accurate.

⁵⁹⁷ Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 678.

⁵⁹⁸ Douglas Heaven, “No Limit: AI Poker Bot Is First to Beat Professionals at Multiplayer Game,” *Nature (London)* 571, no. 7765 (2019): 307–8.

publication of Bostrom's *Superintelligence*, poker was the only game in a list of other games that still retained human supremacy.⁵⁹⁹

It turns out, however, that both master-poker and master-chess AI's find success through *specialized* algorithmic programming, which remains ultimately reducible to mathematical coding, absent any conscious ability to read intentions or engage in abstract reasoning. As Douglas Heaven highlights, the means of success for all these game-playing AI's boil down to an advanced probabilistic and statistical analysis of each player's hand or position(s).⁶⁰⁰ Similar methods also account for the success of AlphaGo or Deep Blue.

In other words, despite the complexity and domain-limited success, AI does not seem to be any closer towards achieving understanding than it was at the 1956 MIT conference. At least, this view is the position of experts like Gary Marcus, at *Scientific American*. His recent piece titled, "Artificial General Intelligence Is Not as Imminent as You Might Think" (June 6, 2022), reveals that the newest and most promising AI's on the market "are still stymied by the same old problems."⁶⁰¹ More recently, Marcus has also been sure to incorporate ChatGPT as likewise subject to this criticism⁶⁰² (a view which agrees with the assessment of Yann LeCun – Meta's Chief AI Scientist – as referenced earlier). Marcus complains that these "same challenges" include getting AI to "cope with unusual circumstances," because what a

⁵⁹⁹ Bostrom, *Superintelligence*, 16. The game *Go* was also listed as a game which, at the time of publication, had retained human superiority over AI. Google's AlphaGo subsequently overturned this status. See above, 2.3.

⁶⁰⁰ Heaven, "No Limit: AI Poker Bot Is First to Beat Professionals at Multiplayer Game."

⁶⁰¹ Gary Marcus, "Artificial General Intelligence Is Not as Imminent as You Might Think," *Scientific American*, October 1, 2022, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/artificial-general-intelligence-is-not-as-imminent-as-you-might-think1/>.

⁶⁰² "Transcript: Ezra Klein Interviews Gary Marcus," *The New York Times*, January 6, 2023, sec. Podcasts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/06/podcasts/transcript-ezra-klein-interviews-gary-marcus.html>. He is rather blunt that no AI, especially ChatGPT, can produce understanding.

machine learns is “superficial, not conceptual,” and therefore cannot be used “in the context of other processes.”⁶⁰³ In short, the limitations exemplified by Cyc and its contemporaries should hopefully have a sobering effect against the hyped-up predictions, promises, or warnings made concerning near-future AI’s supposed likelihood of morphing into general intelligence (let alone superintelligence).

Indeed, this evaluation coheres with the criticisms coming from Thomas Powers and Jean-Gabriel Ganascia, in the 2020 edition of *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of AI*. They state, “despite its popularity, the main idea of the Singularity is quite dubious,” and that “this overestimation of future technological/ethical problems leads some ethicists to become (amateur) futurists, and these futurists often spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about technological applications that will never come to pass.”⁶⁰⁴ On their account, worries about AI replacing human-level intellectual abilities are rather misplaced.⁶⁰⁵

Consequently, in the light of this reply and the insights showcased in chapter 3, the AI-futurist account exemplified by Bostrom can be issued three main critiques. First, as Hubert Dreyfus and others have long been pointing out, Bostrom’s view altogether ignores the role that embodiment plays in intelligence. Again, on Bostrom’s account, intelligence can be reduced – one way or another – to the physical brain mechanisms which occur as isolated, disembodied instantiations. As both cognitive scientists and phenomenologists have

⁶⁰³ Marcus, “Artificial General Intelligence Is Not as Imminent as You Might Think.”

⁶⁰⁴ Thomas M. Powers and Jean-Gabriel Ganascia, “The Ethics of the Ethics of AI,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of AI*, Oxford Handbooks Series (Oxford University Press, 2020), 28.

⁶⁰⁵ This critique, however, does not mean that AI cannot pose an existential risk should humans give them too much power, such as in the hypothetical case of AI being given too much control over a nation’s nuclear launch protocols. Even without AI achieving or delivering understanding, the abuse of AI can still be catastrophic, and this reality means that concerns over AI’s abilities and regulatory checks and balances are not unwarranted.

laboriously demonstrated, however, so much of *basic* intelligence seems to rely on embodied spatial reasoning, a point that many AI-skeptics, like Sloman, have previously stressed. The ability for spatial reasoning, however, appears to require (among other things) a spatiotemporal body that can stand in spatial relationships. Currently, moreover, even the most advanced robots do not have the level of spatial reasoning skills that pre-verbal toddlers enjoy, let alone geometricians (cf. Sloman).

Second, Bostrom correctly grasps that for there ever to be a human-level AI, let alone a superintelligence, there is a fundamental need that a machine be able to *understand* (or at least, be able to produce the outcomes that are a function of understanding). He insists, however, that the way understanding is acquired can be solely through bolstering a machine's hardware and software endowment. His mindset seems to be thoroughly flavored by the idea that all of intelligence lies on the same spectrum, and that categorical differences either do not exist, or can be overcome by the methods which enable the advancement in a lower category of intelligence. Upon the deeper analysis just given, however, Bostrom's one-dimensional conception of intelligence does not appear satisfactory.

Third, and most relevant to this thesis project, is that the AI-futurist account of intelligence typified by Bostrom does not adequately recognize the role that *other people* have in the generation and transmission of understanding. Instead, on this account, both machine general intelligence and superintelligence can be achieved through recursive self-improvement, via closed-loop, internal feedback loops. These means do not emulate the typical ways humans come to understand, and although it may be possible that machine intelligence does not utilize the same mechanisms as human intelligence, even Bostrom recognizes that the advances in machine intelligence have been achieved through successful

attempts at approximating certain aspects of human intelligence, a reality which renders it unlikely some kind of unforeseen machine intelligence would emerge.

In other words, Bostrom's assessment concerning general intelligence is highly dubious given what we know about understanding relying so much on certain social, namely second-personal, phenomena. And as surveyed throughout chapter 3, the formation and communication of understanding seems to fundamentally rely on joint attention activities that are constitutive of second-person relatedness. In effect, then, it is plausible that AI's shortfall as regards general intelligence is at least in part due to AI not being able to engage in joint attention activities, in the manner of persons.

The foregoing considerations and critiques help to demonstrate that it is perhaps best to describe the futurist perspective (a perspective which has notable influence in the popular consciousness and in portions of academia) as regards creating an AGI, as analogous to an artist who attempts to draw a sphere on a flat sheet of paper. No matter how much detail is applied to the paper, what results is only a two-dimensional representation of a sphere, and never an actual sphere. Likewise, if this analogy is valid, achieving AGI is completely orthogonal to achieving any advanced level of specific intelligence, no matter how advanced. A historical survey paired with contemporary reports of specialized-AI's success vs AGI's persistent elusiveness has seriously called into question whether there exists any direct-proportion relation at all between specialized and general intelligence.

This apparent orthogonality, as the current reply has aimed to demonstrate, is partly due to the existence of unique epistemic goods which fall outside the usual connotations associated with "knowledge," namely understanding, and understanding's allies and/or principles: intuition, insight, and phenomenological apprehension. And, in at least some

ways, these epistemic goods seem to be acquired only in the context of second-person relatedness, via joint attention.

Furthermore, given that understanding and its characteristics rely on forms of cognition which, as Iain McGilchrist says, “underwrites the knowledge that the other [forms] comes to have”⁶⁰⁶ – the centrality of general intelligence and its constituents should not be conceived as “optional extras,” to be somehow tacked on to special intelligence. On the contrary, the primacy of general intelligence and its constituents very much seems to be *epistemically prior* to the specific, some say “left-brain” or calculatable types of knowledge which specialized-AI has been found successful.

In summary, this reply has sought to show that in view of the current and near-future AI landscape, understanding does not appear to be something which will be technologically manufactured, and at least two main reasons account for this assessment. First, the value of understanding does not appear to be reducible to the ability to produce correct answers, in the light of the evidence that any such producing or calculating relies on forms of cognition that are pre-analytic, or, epistemically prior to calculation.⁶⁰⁷ Second, these foundational forms of cognition are, instead, proper to the faculty of understanding, where the formation and communication of understanding crucially relies on activities which involve second-person relatedness – a mode of relation which AI, at least currently, is not able to participate in nor benefit from. Hence, in the light of this analysis, the role of second-person relatedness as it

⁶⁰⁶ McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary*, 176.

⁶⁰⁷ One is also invited to consider that there are outcomes of understanding, such as the beauty displayed in artwork, that are not best described as “producing the correct answer,” since the definition of beauty, on most accounts, is neither wholly objective nor discursively achieved.

regards understanding may in fact be unique, at least in the sense that it is probably not going to be replaced by advanced AI.

4.4: Fourth, Communications from Other Persons, without Second-Person Relatedness, Probably Cannot Deliver Full Understanding

Finally, the fourth objection states that communications from other persons, without second-person relatedness, can sufficiently deliver understanding. This objection admits that there are communicative aspects of humans' coming to understand, but it questions the necessity that these aspects be uniquely *second-personal*. On this account, regardless of whether second-person relatedness exists and can be a factor in the faculty of understanding (even, perhaps, irreplaceable by advanced AI), understanding – regarding truths of all kinds – may be acquired through communication that is absent second-person relatedness.

This objection was presented in a specifically theological context, by examining the biblical account of Balaam. Balaam was a pagan prophet who was given insight and at least some kind of understanding, via inspiration from God. Recall, however, that the full biblical witness betrays that Balaam was not actually holy, but instead he is recorded as being a kind of devil. Balaam, in this context, did not enjoy a covenant relationship with God like the Israelites of the Old Testament, or like Christians in the New Testament. Consequently, and in the light of the detailed presentation in 3.4 of theological understanding according to Thomas Aquinas, we can now say with more precision that Balaam specifically lacked the *gift* of understanding (along with the rest of the infused gifts and virtues).⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁸ It should be noted that the standard Christian account (including Aquinas') is that the gifts of the Holy Spirit (and infused virtues) were not poured out upon the people of God until Pentecost – after Christ's

Nevertheless, it seems that Balaam was at least able to enjoy some of the *outcomes* of the intellectual gifts. Recall that the gift of understanding, according to Aquinas, “consists precisely in its considering eternal or necessary matters.”⁶⁰⁹ Balaam had divine illumination, and at least a kind of understanding, even regarding what appear to be “eternal matters,” but Balaam was without any of the gifts. This reality poses a dilemma to those who insist that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are second-personal *habitus* only enjoyed by believers walking in the life of grace. In other words, based on Balaam and other such cases, an objector could argue that people can enjoy the benefits that the intellectual gifts deliver, absent any covenantal second-person relatedness which accompanies the infusion of the gifts themselves. So, in the light of the examination presented in chapter 3, especially 3.4, how might one respond?

One pertinent approach is to see if Aquinas’ own thought can adequately accommodate cases like Balaam’s, especially when considering Aquinas’ persistent preoccupation with systematic consistency. Incidentally, Aquinas does mention Balaam a couple of times in the *Summa*, saying that Balaam was a “prophet of the demons,” but nevertheless spoke through “divine inspiration.”⁶¹⁰ Indeed, Aquinas elsewhere expounds on the concept of the existence of divine illumination *without* the presence of the intellectual

resurrection and ascension. Within the Christian tradition, however, there is a persistent commitment that the Holy Spirit was nevertheless active in the lives of the Old Testament saints, particularly (but not exclusively) the righteous within the commonwealth of Israel. For a comprehensive list of sources which discuss the role and activity of the Holy Spirit, including whatever preambles to the gifts were extant, see (especially the bibliography) Michael Ufok Udoekpo, “‘May the Lord Put His Spirit (rūḥô) Upon Them’ (Num 11:25–29b): Reading Moses’ Prayer for the Nigerian Contemporary Situation,” *American Journal of Biblical Theology*, 19, no. 28 (2018): 1-25. The overall point of emphasis for the purposes of my thesis, however, is that – consistent with the Christian tradition – were Balaam to have been in covenant relationship with God (were he to have loved God) then Balaam would have enjoyed the kinds of epistemic success associated with the empowerment of God the Holy Spirit, in whatever shape this took prior to Christ and Pentecost.

⁶⁰⁹ *ST* 2a2ae, q.8, a.3, ad 2.

⁶¹⁰ *ST* 2a2ae, q.172, a.6, ad 1.

gift(s). In a question concerning the possibility of possessing the gift without “sanctifying grace,” Aquinas states:

Wherefore unless the human intellect be moved by the Holy Spirit so far as to have a right estimate of the end, it has not yet obtained the gift of understanding, however much the Holy Spirit may have enlightened it in regard to other truths that are preambles to the faith... The understanding that is requisite for prophecy, is a kind of enlightenment of the mind with regard to the things revealed to the prophet: but it is not an enlightenment of the mind with regard to a right estimate about the last end, which belongs to the gift of understanding.⁶¹¹

Hence, as was explored in 3.4, there are *unique* and *distinctive* characteristics which distinguish the intellectual *gift* of understanding from other kinds of understanding, such as the (acquired) intellectual virtue of understanding, or the epistemic achievements included within the “gifts” listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 (which are cognitive in nature). Aquinas outlines these gifts, what are called the charismatic gifts (as opposed to the gifts of the Holy Spirit taken from Isaiah 11), in 1a2ae q. 111, where he states that God may enable someone “beyond the capability of nature” with a grace that is distinct from the kind of grace that sanctifies or justifies, meaning, that which is inseparable from *caritas*.⁶¹² These charismatic graces include the gift of prophecy. Thus, Balaam likely was “graced,” as it were, in some way, but he was nevertheless without the sanctifying *habitus* unique to the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Applying this distinction to Balaam’s case, one can say that Balaam had a divine enlightenment different in species from the enlightenment had as part of the life of grace, a life which includes the infusion of *caritas* and all of *caritas*’ associated *habitus*. In other

⁶¹¹ *ST* 2a2ae, q.8, a.5, resp., and ad 2.

⁶¹² *ST* 1a2ae, q.111, aa.1, 4 and 5. Also see *ST* 2a2ae, q.171-178. In *ST*, Aquinas calls such gifts *gratiae gratis datae*, but explains this term really applies to *all* graces, and is used by default for graces that do not justify the recipient, but enable him/her to help others journey towards God.

words, Balaam's grasp or understanding of various theological truths regarded perhaps both "preambles to the faith" (at least some of which can be grasped by natural reason), and those truths revealed through the (non-sanctifying) gift of prophecy. On the other hand, Balaam could not grasp those truths which are only understood in virtue of being moved by the Holy Spirit, a movement that results in faith *into* God, and an instinct, feel, or sense of how His revelations all "hang together," as it were. These truths, in Aquinas' words above, are those truths which "regard... the last end."

In what sense did Balaam not grasp "the truth as regards the end"? Well, up-front, it needs to be clarified what Aquinas means by "the end." Elsewhere, Aquinas states the gift of understanding consists in considering "eternal or necessary matters," but he also clarifies with specificity what he means by this phrase, "eternal or necessary matters." These matters, for Aquinas, are those which pertain to "the rule of the eternal law, and to the end of Divine happiness."⁶¹³ In other words, the gift of understanding pertains to grasping truths which concern obtaining eternal fellowship (or, friendship) with God in heaven.⁶¹⁴ With this clarification in view, we can now more accurately examine the example of Balaam.

First, as outlined in 2.4, Balaam's additional petitioning for God's permission when Balak's men kept seeking Balaam's hire, and Balaam's stark rebuke while riding on the donkey by the angel of the Lord, are initial evidence that Balaam was not properly grasping "the truth as regards the end." This reason is because Balaam, at the very least, did not grasp

⁶¹³ *ST* 2a2ae, q.8, a.3.

⁶¹⁴ For Aquinas, "the end" (the goal, *telos*) of humanity is divine happiness; following or obeying "the rule of the eternal law," such as the ten commandments or the prohibitions established in Scripture and the canons of the Church, are the instituted means that one normally requires to achieve this end, and they may also be measures of success or visible markers that one is indeed heading towards this end. Nevertheless, for Aquinas, obeying these injunctions – in and of itself – is not considered the goal of human existence.

the fact that God did not approve of Balaam's course of action (ref., "your way is perverse before me," Numbers 22:32), even though God eventually *permitted* him to go.⁶¹⁵ In his treatment, John Henry Newman goes even further, insisting that Balaam knew that God did not want him to go, but he asked anyways, seeing what he could get away with, as it were: "his asking twice was tempting God."⁶¹⁶ In either case, however, Balaam can be said to have failed to consider properly the "eternal law," meaning, God's law – a rule that is meant to encourage mutual friendship, instead of servile obedience.

Second, recall that Balaam's relationship with Balak, king of Moab, eventually culminated in Balaam being counted an enemy of Israel and getting killed. His demise was a result of divine judgment, in response to Balaam's conspiring with Balak to corrupt the Israelite men through sexual and religious immorality. Whatever Balaam's true motivations when he was previously ignoring the wishes of Balak in favor of accurately pronouncing God's revelations, Balaam ultimately did not want to honor the God of Israel, nor did he seem to appreciate that God would have his justice one way or another. Balaam, in other words, clearly did not understand truths as regards the end of divine happiness. If he did, then he would not have sought to undermine the relationship between Israel and God – the only one who can secure this divine happiness (and who, in fact, is the object of such happiness). Hence, in the words of Aquinas, Balaam had "the understanding that is requisite for prophecy, [which] is a kind of enlightenment of the mind with regard to the things revealed

⁶¹⁵ Scripture has plenty of examples of things which God permits but does not ultimately approve of. Divorce, prior to the inauguration of the New Covenant, is one example (Matt 19:8). The existence of sin generally, where sin is the result of a misuse of free will, is another example. God permits sin to exist, because He permits humans' misuse of their free will, but He does not approve of this misuse.

⁶¹⁶ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 4, 31.

to the prophet: but it is not an enlightenment of the mind with regard to a right estimate about the last end, which belongs to the gift of understanding.”⁶¹⁷

Similar distinctives could be shown as regards the intellectual gifts of wisdom and knowledge. Recall from 3.4 that wisdom and knowledge involve some kind of “participation” (as in the case of knowledge) or “connaturality” (as in the case of wisdom) with God’s knowledge and wisdom. It is evident that Balaam enjoyed neither of these things, but rather, if anything, Balaam had a connaturality or sympathy for *demonic* things – as Aquinas suggests.⁶¹⁸

This proximate or preambulatory kind of understanding that Balaam enjoyed seems extant in other biblical figures as well, namely, the demons whom Christ encountered while on earth. For example, in Luke 8, Christ encounters a demonically possessed man when Christ arrives at the country of Gadarenes, a region east of the Sea of Galilee.⁶¹⁹ Therein, Christ exorcises from the man these demons who reveal themselves to be corporately named “Legion,” due to their enormous number. Now, these demons are to know or understand some preambulatory theological truths, such as those truths which the author of the Letter of James identifies (James 2:19).⁶²⁰ Additionally, they might also understand some truths pertaining to the knowledge of demons which Aquinas refers (namely, a partial knowledge of future events).⁶²¹

⁶¹⁷ *ST* 2a2ae, q.8, a.5, ad 2.

⁶¹⁸ *ST* 2a2ae, q.165, a.6, ad 1.

⁶¹⁹ Matt 8:28-34.

⁶²⁰ “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.”

⁶²¹ *ST* 2a2ae, q.172, a.6.

Indeed, in Luke 8 these demons known as “Legion” exemplify the ability to correctly recognize Christ for who he is – because they address him by the title “Son of the Most High God” – and they also believe that he holds the power to one day effect their final condemnation (Luke 8:28, Matthew 8:29). Nevertheless, they seem mystified at the notion of Christ confronting them. “Legion” basically says to Christ, (paraphrasing): “what business do you want with us right now, before judgment day?” So, the host of demons enjoyed some kind of understanding, but they clearly did not understand what Christ was up to, namely, that Christ in his ministry was fulfilling the mission as prescribed by the Father and as recorded in the prophets (when interpreted, or *understood*, correctly). This understanding would have rendered Legion’s questioning superfluous, and he would not have been so confounded when he encountered Christ.

The chief example in this line of thought is Satan himself, who, as one researcher quipped, “sought to kill God, and got exactly what he wanted.”⁶²² Satan, in other words, is motivated by his hatred of God, and wants nothing more than to kill God. Well, in one manner of speaking, Satan achieved exactly this objective⁶²³ – yet little did he *understand*, the death of God would be the ultimate victory of God over Satan.⁶²⁴ In fact, Scripture testifies to the fact that the powers and principalities (headed by Satan), were kept from knowing God’s true purpose in predestining the crucifixion, a “mystery” now revealed

⁶²² Paraphrase from Andrew Pinent.

⁶²³ The death of Christ, God the Son, on the cross. Death, though, is not the cessation of existence, but instead the separation of body from soul/spirit.

⁶²⁴ On the various Christian accounts of the atonement, there is the idea that Christ had to somehow “take on” or “face” death itself – and when he was bodily resurrected, he thus effected the rescuing of human nature from death and corruption. Satan, in his hatred towards God – and thus, everything which God has created – seeks to effect the destruction of creation, especially God’s image bearers (humanity), which would profoundly undermine God’s revealed will. But, as Scripture testifies in various places, in virtue of the atonement, it was *Satan’s* power and dominion which was defeated, and not the other way around.

through the Church.⁶²⁵ In more poignant terminology: the demons, like Balaam – and by implication, anyone else who is not united to God via *caritas* – do not understand certain truths, because they do not know God, because they do not love God.

And it is precisely this lack of love that is exhibited by Balaam's non-relational interactions with God. Balaam, for example, understands some things, clearly, but fails to grasp other truths – such as God's ability to render judgment upon him despite Balaam strictly adhering to God's injunction in Numbers 22-24. On this account, Balaam's faculty of understanding was divinely enlightened on specific matters, but he lacked the understanding associated with the life of grace, illuminating all aspects of a person's life. For this reason, in the biblical account, Balaam's understanding did not lead him to make decisions conducive to the wisdom associated with ultimate personal success. The same diagnosis applies to the devils, who have the power within themselves, and as occasionally revealed by God, to understand theological truth of a certain kind, but the devils are nevertheless ultimately confounded on other, more essential matters.

So, if Balaam, or the demons, enjoy some kind of divine illumination, but these instances are not evidence of possession of the intellectual gifts, what can be concluded concerning second-person relatedness and the faculty of understanding as it regards theological truth? On the account of second-person relatedness explicated in chapter 3, an account which includes “communicative connectedness” as a corollary constituent, Balaam's interactions with God (or God's messenger, the angel of the Lord) are probably better described as mere communication, interaction, or dialogue. Balaam clearly did not enjoy the

⁶²⁵ Eph 3:8-11. Also see Rom 16:25, 1 Cor 2:7, and maybe also Matt 11:25.

kind of relatedness only enjoyed by those who are in a covenant relationship with God, where this kind fundamentally consists in *caritas*, or love.

What do I mean by theological second-person relatedness consisting in love? Well, recall that for Aquinas, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are established by the theological virtues, the chief of which is *caritas*. But *caritas* is not some magical ingredient, as it were, that can simply be added in and mixed with whatever kind of relatedness is already extant, such as surface-level interaction and communication. *Caritas* is more accurately described as loving God and loving with God whomever God loves. The understanding that is had when one loves God, when one has *caritas*, is wholly unique in kind – a sort of difference perhaps better illustrated by invoking the concept of total metamorphosis, rather than adding an “active ingredient” into a mixture. It is a *transfigured* understanding which results from divine love, and not anything less.

So, the infusion of *caritas* – loving God and loving with God, as His friend – is what establishes the other infused virtues and gifts. Without love for God, in other words, someone cannot be “moved” by the Holy Spirit to regard or share connaturality with certain theological truths. Therefore, insofar as 3.4 was successful in showing that the gifts are distinctively *second-personal* dispositions in virtue of their metaphorical similarity with *joint attention*, Balaam’s ultimate lack of understanding was due to a lack of perfective, or covenantal, second-person relatedness with God.

Eleonore Stump’s insights on the nature of *love* are especially pertinent to elaborate on this point. Stump, synthesizing Aquinas’s conception of love, concludes that love requires

two principal desires: the desire for the good of the beloved, and the desire to be united with the beloved.⁶²⁶ On Stump's notion of "union," Jordan Wessling provides a useful summary:

There are two necessary conditions included within love's desire for union. These are (i) the desire for personal presence and (ii) the desire for mutual closeness.... Stump argues that personal presence involves both second-person experience and shared attention.... The second feature of union is mutual closeness. Someone desires to be close with another only if he wants this other person intentionally to share the thoughts and feelings that this other person cares about with him. Two persons are mutually close only if they both intentionally reveal their important thoughts and feelings to one another, and both parties care about what is revealed to them (if not the content of revelation itself, then the fact that the content of revelation matters to the revealer).⁶²⁷

In other words, for someone to desire union with someone else, he or she must desire what was included in chapter 3's account of second-person experience, namely, mutual awareness and communicative connectedness. And for (ii) to obtain, he or she must express some kind of vulnerability, in the sense of sharing thoughts and feelings that "are important to them," to someone the lover "cares about." In this sense, the idea of second-person *relationship* might be the most appropriate term. It should also be noted that Aquinas's two principles of love are mutually dependent, meaning, if one lacks the desire for the good of the beloved then he also lacks the desire to be in union with the beloved.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁶ Stump, *Wandering*, 91-92. The footnotes expound: "ST I-II q.26 a.4, where Aquinas says that to love is to will good to someone. Cf. also ST I-II q.28 a.4, where Aquinas explains the zeal or intensity of love in terms of the strength of a lover's desire for the good of the beloved." Also, "Cf., e.g., ST I-II q.26 a.2 ad 2, and q.28 a.1 s.c., where Aquinas quotes approvingly Dionysius's line that love is the unitive force. Cf. also ST I-II q.66 a.6, where Aquinas explains the superiority of charity to the other virtues by saying that every lover is drawn by desire to union with the beloved..."

⁶²⁷ Jordan Wessling, "Loving Yourself as Your Neighbor: A Critique and Some Friendly Suggestions for Eleonore Stump's Neo-Thomistic Account of Love," *Sophia* 58, no. 3 (2019): 496.

⁶²⁸ Stump, *Wandering*, 96. "On the other hand, if the desire for the good of the beloved is to be a desire of love, the good desired for the beloved has to include union with the lover, as also a good. A lover's desire for the good of the beloved which failed to take note of the beloved's union with the lover as a good would not be a desire of love either."

Therefore, on this account, Balaam did not desire union with God because he neither desired the good for God nor did he desire personal presence with God. This fact is evident by Balaam seeking to usurp the covenant relationship between God and God's chosen people, Israel, whom God wished to be faithful. In fact, as stated in 2.4, Balaam is remembered as particularly diabolical. This reason is because he was, on the one hand, wise enough to understand that covenant-breaking disobedience would render Israel vulnerable to divine punishment – thus enabling Israel's enemies – and he was simultaneously malicious enough to devise such a damaging course of action (the sending of the Moabite women into the Israelite camp). What is crucial to grasp is that Balaam shows that he has the requisite understanding necessary to appreciate the importance of covenantal fidelity, and in this way, he is best likened to the wise serpent in the garden of Eden. Both characters used their intellectual acumen to try to destroy the relationship between God and His beloved; but, as has been reviewed, both also failed to understand more essential matters.⁶²⁹

Balaam, in other words, did not ultimately understand, because Balaam did not love God. But if Balaam did not love God because he did not desire to have union with God, then Balaam was not able to participate in the *shared attention* unique only to those who enjoy this kind of union.⁶³⁰ Finally, this lack of what could be called a perfective form of shared attention is what accounts for Balaam's correspondingly imperfect form of theological understanding. For, were Balaam to have desired union with God (the kind of union explicated above), then he might have been "moved" by the Holy Spirit to properly grasp

⁶²⁹ Where, on the standard Christian interpretation, the actions of the serpent in the garden are co-extensive with the actions of Satan, even though the Genesis account does not explicitly identify the serpent with Satan.

⁶³⁰ See also Stump, *Atonement*, vii. "The fruition of second-person relatedness is love." Also see *Atonement* chapter 4, where Stump argues that "mutual closeness is necessary for union," and therefore love, where mutual closeness is "a second-personal presence...the kind of presence crucial for union." Ibid, 126.

those “truths which regard the end [of divine happiness],” and this *understanding* would have radically altered (1) Balaam’s behavior, (2) his memory in Scripture, and ultimately, (3) his very own eternal destiny.

In conclusion, this response has argued that communications from a second person without second-person relatedness enable, at best, correspondingly imperfect and incomplete forms of understanding which are wholly unique *in kind*. On the other hand, a deeper analysis of Balaam’s epistemic deficiencies, at least, revealed that second-person relatedness with God – namely, *loving* God – enables another kind of understanding, a kind which delivers personal knowing and understanding of certain, more essential truths. Therefore, and by implication, I conclude that communications from other persons, without second-person relatedness, probably *cannot* deliver full understanding.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored whether second-person relatedness is a factor in the faculty of understanding, using some insights taken from key areas of science, of philosophy, and of Christian theology. In this concluding chapter, first, I recap the main contents and arguments of each preceding chapter, and I re-state the ways in which this thesis has sought to contribute to existing scholarship. Second, I propose a plausible answer to the thesis question overall, and discuss, especially, the implications that this outcome has on the wider world.

Chapter Summary and Thesis Contributions

In chapter 1, I introduced the main topics pertinent to this project: second-person relatedness, and the faculty of understanding. The first topic, second-person relatedness, received a lengthy exploration in 3.3, so in chapter 1 I only provided a minimal introduction, merely gesturing towards the notion that second-person relatedness allegedly encompasses certain phenomena associated with “I and you” situations.

As for the term understanding, I drew from researchers like Greco, McGilchrist, Zagzebski, and others, and identified “understanding” somewhat broadly. To re-state, this thesis project has used the term “understanding” to refer generally to the wide body of epistemic objects which are non-propositional in nature, especially structures or wholes, skill competency, and personal knowing. In other words, the thesis has been interested in examining second-person relatedness as regards the kinds of epistemic successes that are not reducible to having the correct set of “justified true beliefs.” Additionally, by use of the term “faculty” in the phrase “the faculty of understanding,” I clarified that I mean to refer to the formation of the faculty itself (in cognitive development), as well as the proper use of the faculty in the various epistemic achievements throughout human life.

Most pertinent, however, is that the bigger gap in scholarship resides in how the relationship between these two phenomena is understood (second-person relatedness and understanding), thus, this area is where the thesis has striven to contribute the most.

I then outlined how I would go about giving a plausible answer to the thesis question and explained that the thesis structure is inspired by the medieval-scholastic method of dialectics. This method, aimed at simulating a real-life conversation between two interlocutors (e.g., second-person relatedness), proceeded in five steps (which correspond to the thesis' five chapters). First, the topic or question at hand was raised (the introduction, or chapter 1). Next, the main objections against the thesis were laid out (primary objections, chapter 2), then an alternative account in the light of other pertinent considerations was offered (the main case, chapter 3). Lastly, before wrapping up the discussion and giving a plausible answer to the thesis question (conclusion, this fifth chapter), the original objections presented at the outset were revisited, with the intent to reveal whether and in what way(s) these objections are or are not valid (responses to objections, chapter 4).

So then, in chapter 2, this thesis examined four principal objections that in diverse ways undermine the idea that second-person relatedness is a factor in the faculty of understanding. Instead, according to the objectors of various kinds, there are adequate alternative accounts of epistemic success that do not require a specifically second-person perspective.

The first objection, outlined in 2.1, states that there is no such thing, really, as the second-person perspective, and that everything which might normally be ascribed to or described as a second-person perspective is in reality completely reducible to different forms of the first- and/or third-person perspective(s). Recall that the various forms of this account are nested under the overarching theory called Theory of Mind.

The second objection, outlined in 2.2, builds from the first and argues that regardless of whether the second-person perspective is fundamentally real, it does not contribute to the epistemic achievement of understanding in many cases, as evidenced by the myriad instances in which understanding appears to be achieved in solitude, absent any relatedness with others. These examples were taken from mathematical and literary “lone geniuses,” as well as hermits or solitaries who spent much time alone, seemingly accompanied by profound epistemic successes.

The third objection, outlined in 2.3, states that whatever role that second-person relatedness might play as regards the faculty of understanding, this role or contribution is not special, because understanding (or at least, the products of understanding) can be acquired via advanced artificially intelligent machines which do not stand in second-person relationships. This objection emerges from the thought behind some influential transhumanists and AI-theorists, namely, that AI will soon reach and then replace human-level intelligence, on the basis that all forms of intelligence, one way or another, can be adequately replicated using complex computer-based algorithmic programming.

Finally, the fourth objection, outlined in 2.4, uses the biblical story of Balaam to make an especially (but not exclusively) theologically shaped argument, namely, that communications from other persons, without a rich second-person relatedness, can deliver full understanding. Recall that Balaam was able to appropriately apprehend various divine insights, inspired of God, but simultaneously, Balaam was a rebel who did not have union with God through love – or in other words, he lacked the kind of second-person relatedness that some have insisted necessarily exists within the context of covenantal love.

For these objections to be either substantiated or refuted, an alternative account of second-person relatedness must be offered, an account which draws from the pertinent

resources so that further light can be shed on this question. In chapter 3, I aimed to provide just such an account.

The way I proceeded to outline this alternative account was to, first, in 3.1, offer a commonsensical or reasonably intelligible – yet predominantly *non-technical* – body of evidence which at least suggests an alternative answer to the thesis question. This evidence was taken from the everyday experiences of parents and caregivers raising young children, schoolteachers educating young adults, and military instructors training new soldiers or pilots. These cases strongly hinted at the importance of the interpersonal, and they served to kickstart a more thoughtful examination of the notion that, perhaps, there is in fact something epistemically unique about certain “I-you” situations.

Thus, second, in 3.2 I then pivoted towards providing a more technically rigorous account of these everyday phenomena, beginning with a psychological description of joint attention, where this mode of relation seems to best match, psychologically speaking, certain key elements of the various everyday phenomena discussed in 3.1.

Namely, throughout 3.2 I showed how joint attention is seen as indispensable for the cognitive formation of the faculty of understanding, as evidenced by joint attention in *normal* developmental contexts, as well as joint attention (or rather, its relative absence) in *abnormal* developmental contexts – cases involving children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Recall Peter Hobson’s characterization of his findings in the clinical studies involving children with ASD: these children failed to benefit in many ways, cognitively speaking, from instances of joint attention.

Additionally – in consideration that the existing psychological literature on joint attention is predominantly focused on joint attention in developmental contexts – I expanded somewhat on this body of existing literature by discussing joint attention in specifically non-

developmental contexts (e.g., adolescent, and adult contexts, such as school-age children and military pilots).

At the end of 3.2 and before proceeding to a philosophically rigorous account, I concluded that what seems apparent from the psychological corpus is that joint attention is indeed crucial to the faculty of understanding – both as regards the formation or the development of the faculty itself, and as regards various epistemic achievements of understanding throughout human life.

Afterwards, having offered a technically rigorous psychological account of joint attention and understanding, I pivoted in 3.3 towards a specifically philosophical examination of joint attention. In the light of the fact that some research suggests that joint attention is best described as constitutive of the phenomenon now called second-person relatedness, I sought to explore in-depth whether this might be the case. I started by explicating what is meant – and what is not meant – by the term “second-person relatedness,” or “the second-person perspective.” According to this explication, and drawing from researchers such as Eleonore Stump, I defined valid instances of the second-person perspective to be those instances which involve two or more people interacting in a direct and immediate way, and who are conscious and aware of each other. I then “thickened” this account, so to say, with the additional criteria of mutual awareness and communicative connectedness. Mutual awareness, again, is the quality that two people are mutually aware of *their awareness*. And communicative connectedness is quality that this interpersonal interaction is “open” or “manifest,” where the persons conceive of each other as persons, both as each other’s “you,” and hence, both persons are able to share emotions or thoughts with one another through this connection.

Then, drawing from the preceding evidence, I showed the diverse ways in which the psychological notion of joint attention does seem to be best accounted for, philosophically, by the phenomenon of second-person relatedness. First, I reviewed the evidence taken from spoken language, namely, the existence of distinct second-person grammatical forms, with rules of grammar that are different from the rules for objects. I then proceeded to analyze the phenomenon of learner-oriented teaching and military sense-making to demonstrate that these forms of joint attention are constitutive of an irreducibly dyadic, bi-polar, and specifically second-personal phenomenon. I drew from both academic literature on these topics, and in the case of military training and sense-making, I drew from my own experiences as a USAF fighter pilot/instructor as well.

In summary, if the alternative account presented in 3.1-3.3 is successful – and momentarily setting to one side the original objections – it means that second-person relatedness, via joint attention, is a factor in the faculty of understanding.

Before I proceeded to directly respond to each of the four objections in the light of the alternative account just developed, however, I then examined the ways in which second-person relatedness might contribute to the faculty of understanding as specifically regards revealed, or theological, truth. This examination, in 3.4, argued that theological truth is ultimately a matter of knowing someone, namely God, and I expounded on one influential account of what “knowing God” entails, drawing from St. Thomas Aquinas’ account of the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit (and from Andrew Pinsent’s reading of Aquinas). I reviewed how the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit seem to be second-personal *habitus*, whereby the believer and God, via the indwelling of the person of the Holy Spirit (the *paraclete*), co-attend to the same matters together, in a way that is plausibly best understood using the metaphor of joint attention. I then showed, building from Pinsent, and inspired by

Richard Conrad's suggestion, how the metaphor of joint attention as regards the gifts may also be appropriate in the paradigmatic case of Christ.

Furthermore, the intellectual or epistemic benefits gained by the believer via these second-personal gifts do not seem to be acquirable by those outside of a covenant relationship with God, making the gifts inseparable from a life which is infused with *caritas*, or divine love. So, I ended 3.4 by concluding that understanding theological truth – at least according to Aquinas' account – crucially involves second-person relatedness between the believer and God, via the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the operation of the intellectual gifts. This conclusion means that second-person relatedness is a factor in theological understanding as well (again, momentarily setting the original objections to one side).

Finally, following the medieval-scholastic method, in chapter 4 I turned again towards the original objections presented in chapter 2, and offered a direct response to each objection, in the light of the alternative account presented in chapter 3.

First, in 4.1, I showcased that there are legitimate reasons to doubt various attempts using the Theory of Mind to reduce the second-person perspective. Namely, the key assumptions and principles of Theory of Mind do not seem to hold up to more recent evidence and more in-depth philosophical analysis. Therefore, and in the light of all the preceding evidence in favor of its existence, it is plausibly better to work on the basis that the second-person perspective does exist as something fundamentally distinct from the first- and/or third-person perspectives.

Second, in 4.2, I explained how understanding likely does require second-person relatedness, because epistemic success is hindered – not enabled – by *total* isolation, even where proximate periods of isolation may be consistent with singular achievements of understanding. The evidence taken from the literature on feral children helped to demonstrate

this case and reinforce the findings observed in chapter 3. In other words, this objection seems implausible as well.

Third, in 4.3 I argued that advanced AI probably cannot replace the epistemic role of second-person relatedness, and I argued this case by revealing and examining the persistent failure of AI to achieve any kind of general intelligence. This failure, furthermore, seems to be partially accounted for, at least, by AI's current inability to stand in second-person relationships, and this fact effectively helps vindicate a positive answer to the thesis question, or is at least consistent with such an answer.

Fourth, re-visiting the specifically (but not exclusively) theologically shaped objection centered around the biblical story of Balaam, in 4.4 I examined more deeply the nature of Balaam's understanding and particularly the nature of Balaam's *failure* to understand. Balaam, recall, failed to grasp certain truths essential to his ultimate well-being, truths which he otherwise could have understood were Balaam united to God through the second-person relatedness found within divine covenantal love. In fact, Aquinas' account of the gifts, when understood as a set of second-person *habitus*, seem to explain best the otherwise puzzling case of Balaam. This reality might help corroborate Aquinas' brilliance and the understanding of the gifts in this way. Nonetheless, and drawing from the implications of my analysis, I concluded that communications from other persons, without a rich second-person relatedness, probably cannot deliver all forms of understanding (especially those forms which relate to personal knowing).

In short, the thesis set out to provide a plausible answer to the thesis question by using the medieval-scholastic method of dialectics, thereby simulating a kind of second-person experience for the reader, and hopefully as a result, enable some epistemic success on the topic itself. Before I explicitly state my proposed answer to the overall thesis question,

however, it will be worthwhile to review all the ways, or at least the primary ways, in which this thesis has aimed to offer contributions to existing research.

At the outset of this thesis, recall that I framed my thesis project as an extended exploration of what Naomi Eilan called the *existence question* and the *significance question*. The existence question is the question of whether the second-person perspective fundamentally exists. The significance question is the question of even if it does exist, why does it matter. I have aimed to advance the academic discussion surrounding these two questions, and hence, offer a genuine contribution to the field, where these contributions, in turn, affect the areas of science, of philosophy, and of Christian theology thus examined.

Specifically, this thesis contributes to existing scholarship in four primary ways (where these four ways are not entirely closed off from one another). First, the thesis provided a systematic framework and presentation of the topic, namely, the relationship between second-person relatedness and the faculty of understanding.

Second, it has done this by addressing certain key objections, head on, and it brought into discussion a variety of sources drawn from a broader base than has been seen yet, for example, sources which orbit around non-developmental cases of joint attention (school-age learning, military pilot training).

Third, it extended existing discussion, treatment, and defense of the claim that the second-person perspective is irreducible, or in other words, that the second-person perspective “exists” in the sense that it denotes a genuine distinct reality. It did so both by making a defensive case against reductionistic accounts of the second-person perspective (e.g., Theory of Mind), and by making a positive case through the philosophical or theoretical engagement with the psychological principle of joint attention.

Fourth, this thesis applied the “apparatus,” so to say, of second-person relatedness as regards the faculty of understanding to shed light on certain questions/concerns/areas in a novel way. The most prominent example is this “apparatus” being used in the service of offering an explanation as to why the creation of an artificial general intelligence (AGI) has been persistently elusive. Another example is the thesis’ more thorough explanation of deficient cases of theological understanding, i.e., those cases like Balaam’s, where these cases might best be explained by a lack of second-person relatedness found within contexts of covenantal love and union.

Outcomes and Implications

As a result of my examination, I propose the following conclusion as the answer to the overall thesis question: I conclude that second-person relatedness *is* a factor, and probably an indispensable factor, in the development and use of the faculty of understanding, as regards both natural and revealed truths. This answer does not preclude all kinds of epistemic success even in the absence of second-person relatedness, as is the case for artificial intelligence and much human reasoning. Nevertheless, the answer does have the following significant implications for the wider world.

First, if the legitimacy of the second-person perspective and its fundamental existence is corroborated in this thesis, this finding should validate other researchers who are investigating this topic, as well as invite more research for further exploration. In other words, it might assist those who are or who might wish to operate on the basis that, yes, the second-person perspective is an irreducible mode of human communication.

Second, the analysis offered in this thesis might have some influence on how one views the burgeoning emphasis on self-paced educational models, where academic curricula are designed such that, a student can complete a bulk of his or her coursework entirely by

themselves, without co-operation or joint attention with others. Meaning, this thesis might help substantiate findings which reveal that this method of education is only able to deliver epistemic success to a definitive point, where fuller or more rich kinds of education – such as mastery over an entire field or a deep grasp of a discipline, for example – can seldom be achieved, if at all. Educationalists, particularly those involved in influencing education policy, might be encouraged to insist more on person-person pedagogical models and less on pre-packaged “do it yourself” academic models. Indeed, recall from chapter 1 that I brought up the ongoing debate over the benefits of the pedagogical “tutorial system,” a highly interpersonal method of learning found in upper-tier institutions such as Oxford. If my conclusion is correct, then it means that second-person relatedness in teaching is uniquely equipped to deliver certain educational benefits, and therefore, this method is plausibly worth the time and financial cost associated with fostering the contexts needed to carry it out.

Relatedly, third, the implications of this thesis’ findings as regards the field of AI are quite significant. If the general intelligence that humans enjoy, e.g., understanding, can only be had in virtue of second-person relatedness (at least in part), then AI engineers might be encouraged to either (a), research the feasibility of creating synthetic counterparts, or AI approximations of second-person relatedness. This course of action would be motivated by the desire that their machines achieve or more closely approximate understanding (and/or, more fruitfully generate the products of understanding, without the actual faculty). On the other hand, and especially if no such synthetic approximation is possible on the basis that, plausibly, personhood is not manufacturable, AI researchers should (b), abandon the project of creating a general AI and instead focus more solely on the specialized benefits that narrow-AI has historically been proven to provide.

If, in fact, personhood is not manufacturable and therefore AI cannot stand in second-person relationships to gain true *understanding*, then perhaps the alarm-ringing (and/or utopia-signaling) on the part of some influential transhumanists (Bostrom, Sandberg) is off-base. On this account, AI will never be able to genuinely *understand*, because AI is not personal. This implication, even if sound, however, would not entail that AI cannot nevertheless pose an existential threat to society. After all, even a narrow-AI, if given enough access and control, can assuredly and catastrophically disrupt all kinds of societal institutions, such as banking services, the electrical grid, various military defense structures, etc. The implication merely entails that there will always be something, epistemically speaking, which AI lacks, and which humans enjoy.

If the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit, in virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are the means by which a full theological understanding is secured (something which is inseparable from *knowing God*), and these gifts, which are second-personal, can only be part and parcel of a covenantal relationship between the believer and God (sourced in *caritas*, or divinely infused love), then such things as intellectualism, rigorous academic study, and fine-toothed exegetical analysis of theological texts – valuable though they are – will not by themselves deliver that understanding which can only be had within a context of covenantal union. These methods, then, when wielded by someone who stands outside of covenantal love as part of the life of grace, can only deliver, at most, categorically lesser benefits – sometimes piecemeal, but nevertheless, in some way(s), not fully adequate. (By contrast, a non-academic who loves God intensely will possess a high degree of “personal, empathetic knowledge of God.” In other words, the “simple faithful,” as they are sometimes described, should not be seen as inherently lacking or inadequate).

On this account, man as he exists outside of the life of grace may be able to glean many theological “factoids,” but he will miss the bigger picture overall: an understanding that can only be had by those living in the life of grace, in union with God through love, where this understanding enables the believer to apprehend those truths which are necessary for his ultimate success (eternal redemption), and which are a function of *knowing* God. In this way, allow me to provocatively suggest that this “natural” understanding of revealed truth, as it were – divorced from a second-personal relationship with God (again, sourced in *caritas*) – can in some ways be analogous to the kind of piecemeal, narrowly-focused, and ultimately inadequate epistemic success had by contemporary AI, or by those who suffer from severe autism (where attempts at treatment or rehabilitation are largely unsuccessful). On the latter point, I also note in passing that there can be situations in which epistemic effectiveness is enhanced by modes of thinking which are characteristic of autism, as, for example, the Israeli Defense Force has discovered.⁶³¹ Nevertheless, second-person relatedness with God as regards theological understanding, oriented towards ultimate human flourishing, remains indispensable.

Finally, fifth, from a military perspective, this conclusion and its implications are far reaching. For example, the US Air Force and the entire Department of Defense require fostering understanding in its leaders in order to achieve the ultimate goals of decentralized execution, a method of command where lower-level leaders are given orders from military

⁶³¹ This enhanced effectiveness is showcased by an account of the Israeli Defense Force in the book *The Weapon Wizards*. Therein, one researcher highlights the IDF’s innovative employment of autistic soldiers. These soldiers were found to be especially skilled “in identifying changes to terrain” when examining military intelligence imagery. In other words, a deficiency in the faculty of understanding, which might otherwise detract from the ability to hyperfocus on something, is of great value in this situation to the IDF. Y. Katz and A. Bohbot, *The Weapon Wizards: How Israel Became a High-Tech Military Superpower* (St. Martin’s Publishing Group, 2017), 140.

superiors, where these orders are to be carried out using methods that are not, and cannot be, exhaustively described. Instead, mission execution relies significantly on the commander's best judgment. In practice, gaining this competency so that such judgments are in fact in accordance with the superior commander's intent, is almost exclusively fostered in contexts of joint attention. Examples, reviewed and analyzed in chapter 3, include the shared awareness of shared focus on problems, where both the military student and his instructor have at least some mutual trust and respect, in various situations not unlike traditional apprenticeship.

Indeed, at the present time, I conclude that by far the best way of communicating understanding is in the context of joint attention activities, and there is no reliable or adequate substitute. This finding highlights that over the longer term, the US Armed Forces will continue to benefit strategically by facilitating the mentoring of younger leaders at the hands of more experienced superiors. On this basis, I would encourage the US Air Force to continue, as one example, its newly formed military-mentoring program.⁶³²

Should the military choose to shrink these contexts wherein understanding is communicated through joint attention activities, all kinds of strategic goals will suffer. Commanders will not be formed with the proper "sense-making" faculties, and decentralized execution will be either severely challenged, or altogether impossible. By rendering decentralized execution less achievable, the US military and the American nation will suffer detriment, especially when normal organization is disrupted, or ranks decreased, in situations of crisis. Moreover, the decline will also inhibit the acceleration of change, diminishing

⁶³² "MyVector Continues to Lay Foundation for Success," Joint Base San Antonio, 25 July 2022, <https://www.jbsa.mil/News/News/Article/3103579/myvector-continues-to-lay-foundation-for-success/>.

innovation and increasing vulnerability to new threats. What do I mean by “the acceleration of change”?

This issue relates to a phrase pioneered in 2020 by the then-newly inaugurated Chief of Staff of the US Air Force (CSAF), General Charles Q. Brown. Specifically, the motto “accelerate change or lose” captured his overall approach to contemporary strategic challenges.⁶³³ According to General Brown, “empowered airmen can solve any problem,” and he has highlighted the importance of this empowerment to “make quality decisions,” at “the lowest capable and competent level possible” (i.e., decentralized execution theory).⁶³⁴ Nevertheless, the survey does not outline a method by which the US Air Force can be most successful in achieving this empowerment.

In the light of this thesis’ exploration and findings, I propose two measures to both General Brown – who is now in a position to affect outcomes across all five branches of the US military⁶³⁵ – and to General Allvin (who succeeded General Brown as CSAF when he was promoted). First, in consideration of this project’s analysis of the recent trends and ultimate shortcomings of artificial intelligence, I would encourage them not to assume that AI is able to replace the *understanding* required to carry out orders competently and with minimal risk required. Instead, as I have argued, this understanding can only be gained

⁶³³ Charles Q Brown, “Accelerate Change or Lose” (United States Air Force, August 2020), https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/csaf/CSAF_22/CSAF_22_Strategic_Approach_Accelerate_Change_or_Lose_31_Aug_2020.pdf. General Brown, incidentally, is also the person responsible for my current doctoral sponsorship. I was selected for this program among the applicant pool in summer 2020, a few months after he had been the CSAF.

⁶³⁴ Ibid, 6.

⁶³⁵ In 2023 Gen Brown was promoted to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or CJCS, the highest-ranking military member in the entire US Department of Defense, and the most key military advisor to the President.

within second-personal joint attention activities like the ones reviewed, and AI is not in a position where it can act as substitute.

Second, I would implore them that we do not cease programs and methods of leader development that involve joint attention activities, such as mentoring, one-on-one (or at least small-group) interaction during all levels of training, and mutual collaboration among similar-rank servicemembers. These methods, at times, have been criticized by detractors and labeled cost-ineffective, especially when considering the kinds of resources required to adequately instill understanding in each leader – sustained and frequent joint attention activities, typically one-on-one. Nevertheless, given the superlative tactical and strategic advantages gained by properly empowered servicemembers, following a military tradition going back to the Ancient Greeks,⁶³⁶ I argue that methods of training based on second-person relatedness are indispensable.

⁶³⁶ For example, see Victor Davis Hanson, *Why the West Has Won: Carnage and Culture from Salamis to Vietnam*, (London: Faber, 2002).

In the old days, people knew a little and understood a lot. Then they gained more knowledge which led to less understanding. And now people know a lot but understand nothing at all.

— Archimandrite John (Krestiankin)

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Vita Auctoris

Major Alexander Gregory Fogassy is an active-duty US Air Force officer, who in 2021 was sent to study for a doctorate in philosophy, as part of a unique officer development and career broadening program sponsored by the USAF Chief of Staff. He is from Oceanside, California, USA, and graduated from Calvary Christian High School, Vista, California, in 2008. His primary career in the Air Force is fighter pilot, flying the F-16C. Upon commissioning as an officer in the USAF in summer of 2012, to summer of 2015, Alexander progressed through the myriad USAF flight-training programs to acquire his mission-ready qualification in the F-16. From spring of 2015, Alexander served operationally in the 77th Fighter Squadron (Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina), flying missions as part of various training exercises, presidential support, and overseas combat operations. From 2018 to 2021, Alexander served in the 18th Aggressor Squadron (Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska), supporting the F-16 mission in the challenging arctic environment.

He was awarded a Bachelor of Science Degree in Astronautical Engineering (with a minor in Arabic) from the United States Air Force Academy in 2012. In 2020, Alexander was awarded a Master of Arts in Philosophy and Apologetics, a degree gained in-correspondence from Southern California Seminary, El Cajon, California. From 2021, he began studying Science and Religion at Mansfield College, Oxford, being awarded a Master of Studies (Merit) in summer 2022. From fall 2022, Alexander has been studying for the DPhil at Oriel College, Oxford.

Concerning his time at Oxford, during 2021-2022, Alexander competed on the Oxford University American Football Club (OULAFC) and from 2021-2024, Alexander competed on the Oxford University Athletics Club (OUAC). Beginning from his second year, 2022, Alexander also rowed “eights” for the Oriel College Boat Club. He was a member of Oriel’s postgraduate students committee, was one of the founding officers and treasurer for the newly formed Oriel College Metaphysical Club (OCMC), and was a middle reader as part of the Newton House Theological Centre, an academic community and study space based in central Oxford. He was joined in Oxford by his wife, Sara, and their two young children, Evelyn and Elijah.

Major Fogassy’s subsequent military assignment is in America’s capitol, Washington D.C. While at Oxford, he was handpicked to fulfill an analysis and advisory role at Headquarters Air Force, The Pentagon, as the Department of the Air Force’s “Chief Responsible AI Ethics Officer,” a position located within the Secretary of the Air Force’s Chief Data and AI Office. This position was initially established to fulfill the emerging necessity that there be cross-agency coordination amongst the various lines of effort to ensure that the Air Force’s employment of artificially intelligent systems is shaped by sound ethical considerations. Although few, only officers with a PhD can fill the position, and so Major Fogassy will utilize the insights gained during his doctoral studies and apply them towards the new and evolving challenges that AI-ethics will continually present.

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