

# *Strawson on the Notion of the First Person*

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**Abstract:** The paper is an attempt to understand Strawson's notion of the first person in the context of his general theory of a person. More specifically it will relook into the idea that the concept of a person is 'primitive', and see how Strawson's idea of primitiveness of the concept of a person can be extended to his notion of the first person. One way of cashing out the notion of primitiveness in the context of the first person is in terms of the way the pronoun "I" functions in self ascription, like "I am feeling terrible". As Strawson himself points out, 'use of "I" is guaranteed against two kinds of failure to which the uses of some other definite referring expressions are sometimes exposed: it is guaranteed against lack of reference, and it is guaranteed against mistaken or incorrect reference.' (1994, 215) Does this way of understanding the primitiveness of first person work? If it does what kind of a notion of first person and authoritative self-knowledge may be derived from it? Another related issue that will be dealt with in the paper is how can one construe the relationship between the first person and the world on the one hand and the first person and 'the other' on the other hand within the Strawsonian framework.

**Keywords:** first person, primitive concept, 'the other', ascription asymmetry.

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## **Introduction**

Understanding the notion of how we come to know ourselves, our own mental states and processes, and how this kind of knowledge seems to have a privilege over other forms of knowledge (like the knowledge of the external world, or the knowledge of other minds) have been one of the central concerns of philosophy. Recent debates in Philosophy of Mind, particularly in the analytical tradition have focused on these issues, which has led to a wide range of literature in the area of what may be called "Self-knowledge". Connected with the question how we come

to know our own mental states are questions related to such notions as first-person authority and subjectivity, along with questions concerning how we come to understand the occurrence of "I" in our language. Is there something subjective to which we have a direct access of some sort when we say that we know our mind, and to which the pronoun "I" refers in our language? - This question and many others belonging to the same set of enquiry have been either directly or indirectly addressed in Strawson's theory of the Person. As we know, Strawson's work is an "Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics", an attempt to lay bare 'the actual structure of our thought about the world' (1959, 9). In an attempt to reveal 'the general features of our conceptual structure' (*ibid.*), Strawson takes into consideration the basic particulars that constitute our thought and talk about the world among which the notion of the Person as a basic particular is a notion that has been widely discussed and debated.

Here, at the very outset one may distinguish two questions with which one may be concerned: (1) Who am I? and (2) Who (what) is a Person? These two questions are certainly not identical. The first is a question raised from, what may be called, 'a first-person' point of view, a question about the nature of my own self, a question which may be regarded as closely connected with an enquiry that is enshrined in the pronouncement of the Delphic oracle 'know thy self'. It seems that what Strawson was concerned with in *Individuals* is the second question. It is an enquiry into the concept of a person, an enquiry into how we can identify and individuate the concept of a person, a concept which, it seems, can be understood without bringing in the first-person perspective directly into play. One may even go on to saying that the concept of the person can be understood independently of understanding the first question. It may be further argued, and Strawson certainly seems to argue, that the understanding of us as persons is parasitic upon the understanding of the concept of the person as a primitive concept. Our aim in this paper is to try and understand the relationship between our understanding ourselves and our understanding the notion of the person. An attempt will be made to show that the concept of the person, contrary to Strawson, depends upon taking ourselves as persons, and to that extent parasitic upon the notion of the first person. So, it may not be a basic particular as Strawson takes it to be.

The paper consists of four sections. In the first section we try to understand Strawson's notion of a basic particular, while in the second we

address the question as to why Strawson takes the concept of a person as basic and as a primitive concept in our scheme of thinking. The third section deals with Strawson's notion of the first person following upon his discussion regarding how the pronoun 'I' functions in our language. One of the most important notions attached with the concept of the person is the notion of the P-predicate. In the last and the final section we discuss the dynamic and rather complex relationship between, what are known as 'I' thoughts, and P-predicates, which, in turn, suggests that the concept of the person may be neither primitive nor basic in relation to that of the first person. Hence, a need for a different way of conceiving the relationship between person and the first person is necessary.

## 1 On Basic Particulars

Strawson, in the Introduction to *Individuals* says, about material bodies and persons,

in our conceptual scheme as it is, particulars of these two categories are the basic or fundamental particulars, that the concepts of other types of particular must be seen as secondary in relation to the concepts of these. (ibid., 11)

We are familiar with Strawson's notion of basic particulars as those which can be identified without the identification of other types of particulars. So, if the concept of a person is a basic particular then it can be identified as such without needing to identify any other particular.

Here we know that Strawson talks about two kinds of identification: the speaker's identification and the hearer's identification. There are many expressions in our language which we use to refer to particulars, proper names (Tom, Dick, Harry etc.) are one such group, while pronouns (I, you etc.) are another group. According to Strawson, 'when a speaker uses such an expression to refer to particulars, I shall say that he makes an identifying reference to the particular' (ibid., 16). He further goes on to making a stronger claim that the speaker not only makes an identifying reference to the particular but she also actually identifies the particular. This happens in case the hearer is able to identify the particular the speaker is referring to on the basis of the identifying reference that the speaker makes to the particular. This form of identification, according to Strawson, can be either basic or non-basic. He says, 'It often enough happens that the identification of a particular of one kind is made to depend on the identification of particular of

another kind' (*ibid.*, 1). In the non-basic case the hearer needs to identify the basic particular in order to identify the particular that is being identifyingly referred to. For example, in order to identify the house referred to by the referring expression 'the house that John built' the hearer needs to identify the person John. Now, to cut a long and rather familiar story short, we can go on to asking the question that is more important for our purpose: What constitutes an identification of a basic particular? – This question may be formulated in Strawsonian terms in the following way: '... is there any one distinguishable class or category of particulars which must be basic from the point of view of particular-identification?' (*ibid.*, 38) The answer provided by Strawson is that, it is possible to make all the identifying reference to a set of particulars without the requirement of making identifying reference to particulars of another kind. He goes on to give the example of identification of private experience. According to him, instead of taking these private experiences, such as 'a twinge of toothache or a private impression of red' (*ibid.*, 41), as basic form of identifying particulars, we need to take persons to be basic particulars, which needs to be identified first in order to identify these private sensations. Furthermore, in identifying persons as particulars we need no other identification, and it is due to this that the class of persons can be regarded as belonging to the class of basic particulars. 'Identifying reference to "private particulars" depends on identifying references to particulars of another type altogether namely persons' (*ibid.*).

Strawson considers some examples where it seems that we can make a direct reference to a particular pain without identifying the person who has that pain. When in agony of a toothache we say 'this toothache is terrible' do we not make an identifying reference to a particular sensation without making identifying reference to the person who has the pain? According to Strawson even in these kinds of cases we make an implicit reference to the person whose pain it is. And furthermore, more strongly put, we cannot make identifying reference to the pain without implicitly making reference to the person who has the pain. So, 'the implicit reference to the person is,... essential to the identificatory force of the demonstrative phrases referring to private experiences' (*ibid.*, 42). The demonstrative 'this' explicitly makes identifying reference to the pain, and, at the same time implicitly makes identifying reference to the person who has the pain. One can here say that

the implicit reference to the speaker and the hearer, that is, persons, is involved in any kind of demonstrative identification, not just demonstrative identification of private experience. In answer Strawson says that implicit reference to a person in identifyingly referring to a private experience is not merely a consequence of this general fact of demonstration, 'but also of the fact that he is the person whose private experience we are referring to' (*ibid.*, 43). This fact consists of the person and the private experience that the person has. That is why the private experience, by virtue of being a private experience of someone is necessarily dependent, for its identification, on a particular of another kind, which is the person.

## 2 On Persons

Strawson takes the concept of a person to be a primitive concept. One of the most important reasons for taking the concept of the person to be a primitive concept is to steer clear of the Cartesian dualism. Instead of taking mind and body to be two separate substances with special properties of the two, Strawson takes persons to be a primitive concept, primitive *vis à vis* the concepts of both the mind and the body. His taking the concept of the person to be primitive is also a way of facing up to the challenges of what he terms 'no-ownership theories', as classically stated in Hume, and found in Wittgenstein. So, there are two motivations for introducing the notion of the Person as a primitive concept:

- 1) to provide an alternative to both Cartesianism as well as no-ownership theory,
- 2) to answer skepticism regarding other minds.

Strawson starts with enquiring into the various ways in which we talk about ourselves, 'some of the things which we do ordinarily ascribe to ourselves' (*ibid.*, 89). The list of things (predicates) that we ascribe to ourselves is as follows:

- Actions and Intentions
- Sensations
- Thoughts and feeling
- Perceptions and memories
- Location in space
- Physical Characteristics (which are relatively enduring)

The question that needs to be answered regarding this above list of properties is: How is it that one and the same thing seems to be ascribed with both states of consciousness as well as physical characteristics? Obviously this is the same question that Descartes addresses and tried to answer by saying that contrary to what seems to be the case, human beings are made out of two separate substances of mind and body, and states of consciousness is ascribed to mind while physical properties are ascribed to body.

It is only a linguistic illusion that both kinds of predicate are properly ascribed to one and the same thing, that there is a common owner, or subject, of both types of predicate. (ibid., 94)

According to the no-ownership thesis, it is further the case that states of consciousness are not ascribed to anything at all. So,

it is only a linguistic illusion that one ascribes one's states of consciousness at all, that there is any proper subject of these apparent ascriptions, that states of consciousness belong to, or are states of, anything. (ibid.)

Both Cartesianism and no-ownership theory have their own problems. We will not go into Strawson's discussion as to what these problems could be, but will state the conclusion that Strawson arrives at after having considered these two positions in detail. According to him,

What we have to acknowledge, in order to begin to free ourselves from these difficulties, is the primitiveness of the concept of a person. What I mean by the concept of a person is the concept of a type of entity such that *both* predicates ascribing states of consciousness *and* predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics, a physical situation &c., are equally applicable to a single individual of that single type. (ibid., 104)

There are two points that are being made here:

- a) The concept of person is such that it can take two apparently contradictory kinds of predicates or, two apparently contradictory predicates can be ascribed to this concept;
- b) This concept of a person is a primitive concept.

What does Strawson mean when he says that the concept of the person is primitive? – Before answering this question we must note two things which are relevant here. Hide Ishiguro in her paper “The Primitiveness of the Concept o the Person” (1980, 63 – 64) rightly points out that to say that a concept is primitive is not to say that the concept is simple, and

that primitiveness of a concept is a relative notion. So, the concept of a person may be primitive without being simple and the concept is primitive always with reference to some other concept. It is not primitive as such. What needs to be understood with regard to the Strawsonian notion of the person is that, 'the concept of a person is relative to the concept of a mind and the concept of a body' (*ibid.*).

So, we need to understand the primitiveness of the concept of a person as not being either simple or non-relative. In order to make sense of the primitiveness of any concept, we can start by articulating what a non-primitive concept is, according to Strawson. A non-primitive concept is one that can exist as a secondary concept, a concept which can be explained or analysed only in terms of another concept (1959, 102). If that is how we are to understand a non-primitive concept, then a primitive concept, according to Strawson would be one which is primary – primary in the sense that it can exist, and can be explained and analysed independently of any other concept.

According to Strawson, one way of trying to understand the primitiveness of the concept of the person is by trying to answer the following two questions:

- a) Why are states of consciousness ascribed to anything at all?
- b) Why are they ascribed to the very same thing as certain corporeal characteristics?

As we know that both the Cartesian as well as no-ownership theorists tried to answer this question by either suggesting that it is a mere illusion that states of consciousness are ascribed to the same thing as corporeal characteristic, or by suggesting that it is a mistake on our part to take statements ascribing states of consciousness as ascriptions at all. The third alternative that Strawson brings out, which can be regarded as one of his most important contribution to Philosophy, is that we can steer clear of this debate between dualists of two kinds<sup>1</sup> by admitting of an entity which is primitive in relation to both the states of consciousness and corporeal characteristics. It is an entity without which states of consciousness could not be ascribed at all. That is why Strawson says: 'The

<sup>1</sup> See p. 98. This is a point where Strawson finds a connection between no-ownership theory and Cartesianism. 'The latter is straightforward enough, a dualism of two subjects, or two types of subject. The former could, a little paradoxically, be called a dualism too: a dualism of one subject – the body – and one non-subject.'

concept of a person is not to be analysed as that of an animated body or of an embodied anima' (*ibid.*, 103). It is a concept which exists independently of, and can be explained and analysed independently of, either the concept of 'animated body' or 'embodied anima'. Furthermore, these two latter concepts cannot exist or be analysed independently of the concept of the person. The steps through which Strawson arrives at this conclusion is, by now, well-known. I won't rehearse those arguments here once more. But it is the outcome of these arguments that I would like to consider here.

The outcome is the distinction between M-Predicates and P-Predicates. About M-Predicates and P-Predicates he writes:

The first kind of predicates consists of those which are also properly applied to material bodies to which we would not dream of applying predicates ascribing states of consciousness. I will call this first kind M-Predicates... The second kind consists of *all the other* predicates we apply to persons. These I shall call P-Predicates. (Emphasis mine)

Now the primitiveness of the concept of the person can be further brought out by considering the implications it has on the logical character of the ascriptions involving P-predicates. The special character of the ascription of P-predicates to the person is as follows:

1. They admit of both first-person and third-person ascriptive uses.
2. They are ascribable to one's own self without any observation on the part of the individual of his/her own behavior, while they are ascribable to others only on the basis of the observation of their behavior.
3. To learn to use them consists in learning to use the predicates in both these uses.
4. In order to possess the concept of a P-predicate one must be a self-ascriber as well as other-ascriber of those predicates.
5. Furthermore, one has to recognize every other user of this kind of predicate as a self-ascriber.
6. None of these two aspects of their use is self-sufficient or primary.
7. It is constitutive of the very meaning of this kind of predicates that they be used in two different ways – in the first, as well as in the third-person way.

So, according to Strawson, the question whether the concept of the person is possible is identical with the question how are P-predicates possi-

ble, because the primitiveness of the concept of the person is understood in terms of the unique character of the P-predicates.

In order to answer the question: How are P-predicates possible? Strawson, as we know, takes into consideration a particular kind of P-predicates, a kind of predicates which is ascribed to individuals when they are involved in *doing something*. The examples that he takes are like going for a walk, coiling a rope, writing a letter etc. which not only involve an intentional aspect, but also a very specific kind of bodily movement. They are predicates which are different from something like 'thinking of writing a paper'. The reason why he brings these predicates into a central position in order to understand the working of P-predicates is that though they are self-ascribed without observation and other-ascribed due to observation of particular behaviour, 'in the case of these predicates one feels minimal reluctance to concede that what is ascribed in these two different ways is the same' (*ibid.*, 111). The reason we are happier to concede that the same predicate is ascribed both in the first as well as in the third person case is due to the fact that these kinds of actions are identified by their marked pattern of physical movements. The reason why we know bodily movements of this kind without observation is due to the further fact that we are able to interpret them in terms of their intentions, and to that extent, we take them to be actions rather than mere movements. What these examples show is that the precondition for taking oneself and others as persons is that we as well as others perform actions with a specific intention. We not only act, we act in response to actions performed by others, and we 'act in accordance with a common human nature' (*ibid.*, 112).

What is this common human nature that Strawson is talking about? It cannot be taking each other to be persons, because that is what is being explained here. Strawson is really not clear what he means by this common human nature. There are two things that he says about this idea. One is that the P-predicates of various kinds are not an unrelated set of predicates, they are connected with each other to form a system of predicates and that is what may be termed as having a common human nature. He also rather explicitly says that by common human nature he does not mean 'community nature' (*ibid.*). But his explanation here, if not completely unsatisfactory, remains rather incomplete. In the next couple of sections we will try to articulate what this common human nature could be without deviating too much from the Strawsonian framework.

Before that let us try to understand how Strawson conceives the notion of a first-person.

### 3 On the First Person

One of the main features of a P-predicate, according to Strawson, is that it allows for both first-person and third-person ascriptive uses. It is further suggested that there is continuity between the first and third person ascription such that none of them can be taken to play a primary role in the understanding of the other. Now, does that mean that we are to understand the following two ascriptions in the same way?

- 1' I am walking
- 1'' John/he is walking

Obviously not. There are two major differences that Strawson himself points out. One is to do with the manner in which 'walking' is ascribed in 1' and in 1''. In 1' the P-predicate is ascribed non-observationally, that is I do not need to observe myself, or my bodily movements to know and to assert 1', while in 1'' the P-predicate is ascribed observationally, that is I do need to observe John, or his bodily movements to know and to assert that he is walking. This is an important difference that, though Strawson recognizes, does not take very seriously. Another difference is in the use of the pronoun 'I' in 1' and the use of the proper name 'John' in 1''. In a small article called 'The First Person – Others'<sup>2</sup> he brings out the distinction in the way we use first-personal pronoun as against the way we use proper names.

According to Strawson, the use of 'I' in 'I am walking' or 'I am depressed' is 'guaranteed against two kinds of failure to which the uses of some other definite referring expressions are sometimes exposed...' (1994, 210). The two kinds of guarantee in the reference are well-known: 'I' is guaranteed against mistaken reference, as well as failure of reference. I may be mistaken in calling myself Tom instead of John, but I cannot be mistaken in referring to myself with the pronoun 'I'. Furthermore, a proper name may fail to refer due to the fact that there is no individual to whom the name refers, but it is not possible for 'I' to fail to refer due to the fact there is no individual to which it refers in the utterance of it.

<sup>2</sup> Republished in Quassim Cassam (1994).

Why is there such guaranteed reference? – According to Strawson, the guaranteed reference of 'I' is

... so far for the simplest of reasons. Anyone who is capable of formulating such a thought will have mastered the ordinary practice of personal reference by the use of personal pronouns; and it is the rule of that practice that the first personal pronoun refers, on each occasion of its use, to whomever then uses it. (ibid.)

In order for this kind of guarantee to operate it is not necessary that the user should know who he actually is. Somebody who has lost all his personal memories or someone who is deluded about his identity will still be able correctly refer to himself with the use of the personal pronoun 'I'. So, there is a marked asymmetry between the use of this pronoun and proper names in our language. The asymmetry is due to the peculiar function of pronoun in our language. But is it merely a linguistic phenomenon? Does this asymmetry, between the reference of personal pronoun and proper name not indicate a deeper asymmetry between the first-person and the third-person perspective? – Many philosophers think that they do.

Wittgenstein, and, following the footsteps of Wittgenstein, Anscombe,<sup>3</sup> has argued that a linguistic expression would be referential and hence would be able to pick out or identify an object among many other objects only if it can misrefer or misidentify. But since 'I' is guaranteed against any kind of reference failure (also it is immune to error through misidentification) it can't be a genuine referring expression at all. As Wittgenstein himself says,

The word "I" does not mean the same as "L.W" even if I am L.W., nor does it mean the same as the expression "the person who is now speaking". But that doesn't mean: that "L.W." and "I" mean different things. All it means is that those words are different instruments in our language. (1958, 67)

This is the conclusion that he arrives at after arguing in the following way:

- 1) One cannot be said to be referring to an object with the help of a linguistic expression unless one is able to pick the object out from a whole range of other objects.

<sup>3</sup> See Anscombe in Cassam (1994).

- 2) But one can be said to pick out an object from a whole range of other object only if it is logically possible for him to make a mistake in picking out the object with the help of referring expression.
- 3) But we cannot make a mistake of picking out the relevant object with the help of the referring expression "I".

Therefore, one cannot be said to be referring to anything with the help of the so-called referring expression "I".

As we know Wittgenstein goes on to argue that sentences like, 'I am in pain' are expressions rather than descriptions of a state that a person himself is in. We may not go along with Wittgenstein fully at this stage. But if it is correct, and as it is suggested by Strawson, that 'I' has a special function in language, then the way it refers to a person has to be different from any other expression in the language that refers to a person. Now, the further question that may be asked here is as follows:

Are these two notions of the person radically different from each other? If so, can a single account of personhood adequate to account for these two different kinds of person?

#### **4 On 'I' Thoughts and P-predicates**

In order to try and answer the above questions we need to answer the further question: How do we understand self-ascriptions of P-predicates?

One of the most important features of ascribability of P-predicates is that it is ascribable to things which have consciousness. Now, self-ascriptions of P-predicates do not require identifying myself as a material body. That I have certain feelings and thoughts, that I know which actions are being carried out by me, can be understood without understanding me as a material body. The reason being that, to repeat myself, I do not need to ascribe these predicates to myself on the basis of observing bodily movements. But when it comes to ascribing the same set of predicates to others we have to identify them as material bodies. The interesting point that emerges here is that when it comes to my understanding myself as a material body, it is secondary to my understanding others as material bodies. That is, it is in and through an understanding of others as material bodies that I understand myself to be a material body. While, when it comes to understanding others as intentional conscious agents, it is secondary to my understanding myself as conscious

intentional agents, and thus taking their bodily movements to be actions and not just movements of some material substance. That is, it is in and through an understanding of myself as a conscious agent that I understand others to be so.

If this is what Strawson is trying to say, then the very **mode** of ascription of P-predicates to myself and the **mode** of ascription of P-predicates to others is different. Non-observational ascriptions and observational ascriptions of P-predicates are two different modes of ascription. Now the question that may be asked here is as follows: Can we not say that since these two modes are so different the person we are ascribing the P-predicate in saying "I am writing" and the person we are ascribing the P-predicate "Strawson is writing" cannot be the same person? – Strawson's own answer to the question would be "No". According to him,

The simple truth is that we are ordinarily and rationally content to operate with a concept of ourselves and other people as beings who are both corporeal and conscious; and it is to such creatures that we employ all the personal pronouns, including the first, to refer.<sup>4</sup>

But the truth may not be that simple!

Strawson refers to the fact that seeing myself as a person involves essentially taking each other to be person. In his essay "The First Person – and Other" he clearly states, 'In order to be a person, one must *see* oneself and others as person' (1994, 214, italics mine). But the seeing, as he himself points out, is not the same in case of oneself and in the case of the other. This asymmetry between the first-person and the third-person ascription is a real asymmetry, it is an asymmetry, admitted by Strawson himself. So, one can say that there are two kinds of asymmetries that are involved in the two ascriptions considered above:

- 1' I am walking
- 1" John is walking

One is an asymmetry arising out of the way in which reference to the person concerned is made. Even if we do not agree with Philosophers like Wittgenstein and Anscombe, there is a lesson to be learnt from their view. The relation of reference associated with the pronoun "I" is not an ordinary relation of reference, since "I" is far from being an ordinary

<sup>4</sup> Strawson in Cassam (1994, 212).

referential expression. The second asymmetry, which I just mentioned is the mode in which ‘walking’ is ascribed to me and to John. If these asymmetries are real and, it seems that Strawson would agree to that, then the continuity between “I” and “John” has to be construed in a way which would respect these asymmetries.

Here one may say that Strawson’s strategy of trying to understand the primitiveness of the concept of person in terms of the peculiar features of P-predicates may not be the correct way of going about answering in what sense the concept of the person is primitive. In fact here we may come back to the question of ‘common human nature’ that we had left behind in our second section. The precondition for taking ourselves to be persons is that we act in accordance with a common human nature. Let us try to articulate this idea in the following manner.

Let us start by noting one primary fact: everyone is an “I” only for herself, and “you”, “he”, “Manidipa” for others. This “I” can be used to think about myself (“I must be making a fool of myself”), communicate thoughts about myself to others (“I am feeling terrible”), trying forget about my state of affairs (“I don’t want to even think about what I am going through”, when uttered in a state of desperation), promise to do something (“I must finish writing the paper today”) etc. In all these cases we are using the pronoun “I” to invoke myself, without speaking of myself to others, which would be done in cases like “I am in pain’ uttered to a doctor. In an attempt to avoid skepticism about other minds, Strawson clearly indicates that taking others as persons is prior to taking me as person, and first-person reference is made primarily to refer oneself to others. But what happens, or how are we to make sense of ascriptions like the above, where our invoking is in a way non-objectifying, that is, in cases where I am not making myself an object of the reference of “I”.

Let me spell out my worry a bit more clearly. Strawson’s way of understanding the notion of first-person ascriptions in terms of third-person ascriptions of mental states, or his way of suggesting that they are virtually on a par with each other takes away the subjective dimension in the first person context. If the way I understand myself as a person and the way I understand others as persons are on a par, then what happens when I single myself out for myself, as when I say to myself about a work to be done “It is only I who can do this”, or when I say, “It is only I who should be doing it”. In uttering sentences of this kind I single myself out for myself, or for seeking my own attention. I guess

that is the reason why Philosophers have always admitted that first-person ascriptions of present mental states are asymmetrical with the third person ascriptions of the same mental states, and have tried to grapple with this asymmetry. Strawson himself admits of this asymmetry. This asymmetry, as we have noted, arises at two levels. Therefore, the onus is on Strawson to explain this asymmetry and the notion of authority that goes along with this. In fact, Davidson, in his essay entitled, "First Person Authority", says that Strawson, though is able to describe the asymmetry, he has not been able to explain this asymmetry. Unless this asymmetry is explained Strawson will not be able to meet the challenges of skepticism about other minds. Therefore, it is important for Strawson to explain how it is that 'a predicate that is sometimes applied on the basis of observation, and sometimes not, is unambiguous?' (Davidson 2001, 9).

One may say that one's experience of one's own subjectivity must contain some reference to the other, but the question still remains, do we give up the experience of myself as the subject? – When I write a letter, play a ball, take a walk, acknowledge my shortcomings, I am dealing with myself. When I think of others, think of their virtues and vices, their likes and dislikes, what may be required is the connection of their subjectivity with that of mine. Chakraborty, in his essay entitled 'On Referring to the First Person', says,

Just as in order to remember (and miss) my past as my past, I have to relive the bygone experience with the present one, in order to think of other person as another subject, I have to connect his subjectivity with mine. (2006, 19)

At the very core of the grasp of our first person awareness there are two kinds of capacities: a) the capacity to integrate my present states of consciousness with that of my past, and b) the capacity to integrate my perspective with that of others. These two capacities should be simultaneously present for self-consciousness.<sup>5</sup> It is only when these two capacities are simultaneously present in me that I can take others to be persons like me. This may constitute what Strawson had been hinting at when he talked about the common human nature. This common human nature does not do away with subjectivity altogether. In fact this common hu-

<sup>5</sup> This is a point that Chakraborty derives from 11<sup>th</sup> Century Indian Philosopher Abhi Navagupta.

man nature is rooted in the subjective dimension of the concept of the person. And the subjective dimension brings forth the primacy of self-ascriptions over that of the other. It is this which gives special character to P-predicates. It is the primacy of this subjective that is crucial to the understanding of the concept of the person as an integrated concept. Unless we recognize that we are the subjects of our P-predicates, and further that we are subjects in the sense that to think of the conscious is to think of the "I", we cannot start thinking of ourselves as persons, and further to think others to be persons like us.

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