

Understanding "I": Symmetry and Objectivity

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According to Frege, "Everyone is presented to himself in a special and primitive way, in which he is presented to no-one else." Frege accepts the consequence that the sense of "I" is private and incommunicable (and suggests that "I" means something different in thought and in communication). Gareth Evans follows him in accepting privacy, while arguing that unshareable "I"-thoughts can nonetheless be objective. I reject this argument and argue instead for the necessary shareability of "I"-thoughts in a very strong sense. The principal driver here is what I term the *Symmetry Constraint*: An account of the sense of "I" must allow tokens of "I" to have the same sense as tokens of other personal pronouns such as "you" in appropriate contexts. In certain contexts, not terribly unusual, the very same (token) thought can be expressed by me using "I" and by you using "you". The Symmetry Constraint is motivated in three ways – (a) through considerations of same-saying; (b) logically, in terms of when speakers should be counted as contradicting each other; (c) on epistemological grounds, in order to allow paradigm instances of testimony to count as knowledge.