Talking Some Self into our Senses

On the relationship between inner dialogue and self-consciousness

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Summary

The aim of this essay is to explain how self-talk is a prerequisite for self-consciousness. A defining characteristic of self-consciousness is the reflexive subject-object relation; a person is both the subject and object of perception. An account based on self-talk is able to explain this without the assumption that people have an innate capacity for introspection. This is because in talking to himself, a person is also both the subject and object of their utterance. Self-consciousness is reflexive because it takes the form of a dialogue with the self. The work of G.H. Mead provides the basic ideas and framework for this theory, which are subsequently refined and expanded upon. In order to develop a theory, this essay discusses dialogue and perspective. Because dialogue involves negotiating multiple interacting perspectives, conducting a dialogue with yourself involves taking the perspective of the other towards yourself. This is how the reflexive subject-object relation emerges out of a socially learned process. As a result, self-consciousness should be interpreted as a social dialogical phenomenon. The dialogical thesis is also considered in the light of psychological research on self-talk. Empirical findings provide evidence for the theory, and they also help to specify the manner in which self-consciousness emerges. This theory of self-consciousness shares some important features with narrative accounts of the self, but the dialogic approach doesn't share some of the problems with the narrative account. Furthermore, it could possibly explain a wider range of phenomena which makes it a promising alternative.

Introduction

For many people, talking to themselves is such an everyday part of their experience that it goes almost unnoticed. They go about their day silently asking themselves questions, giving themselves commands, commenting on their activities and presenting themselves with problems without any regard to the way in which this happens; their thought takes the form of speech, either out loud or in their head. Self-talk, or inner speech, is something we are not always conscious of, which could explain why a rather simple question is rarely asked about self-talk: 'To whom, if anyone, are we talking?'

An obvious answer would be that we are talking to ourselves. However, this raises more questions than it answers. What is this self that we are talking to? Furthermore, if you are talking to yourself, that implies that there are two persons present: somebody that talks and somebody that listens. Self-talk, as it is sometimes called, has the curious property that you seem to be addressing yourself. So it would seem that these conversations carry at least the implicit assumption that something like a self is present.

David Hume (1740) famously rejected the idea that we can directly perceive the self. He argued that our self consists solely of sensory impressions. His claim divides philosophers to this day, with some arguing that the self is something we can perceive directly and some arguing that the self is being arrived at through inference (Smith, 2020). It has been pointed out that Hume himself was not satisfied with his characterisation of the self and self-consciousness (Cassam, 1997, p. 7). In the appendix of the *Treatise* he concedes that his theory is unable to explain how the individual perceptions that make up the self are in fact united in consciousness.

The question then, is how self-consciousness can be possible if we assume that the self is not something we can perceive directly. How do we become both the thing that is perceiving and the thing that is perceived? This essay proposes that self-talk is a prerequisite for the development of self-conscious mental processes. In both self-talk and self-consciousness, the subject and the object of the action are one and the same. People talk to themselves in the same way as other people talk to them. Through this process, people also regard themselves in the same manner that others regard them. This is because the ability to conduct dialogue involves an understanding of the other's perspective. By talking to herself, the individual takes the other's perspective towards herself, which forms the basis for the reflexive subject-object relation that defines self-consciousness.

This idea originates in the work of the philosopher and sociologist G.H. Mead (1934), whose 'genealogy of the self' will function as a framework for determining the exact nature of the relationship between self-talk and self-consciousness. His account is compatible with, and in most cases supported by, psychological research on self-talk and self-consciousness. Furthermore, it helps to explain how the self can be indirectly perceived through talking to yourself.

The questions of what the self is and what self-consciousness is are distinct, but intimately related. A theory of the self necessarily puts restrictions on the medium through which we can be conscious of it. Hume's theory provides a clear example. If the self is a bundle of perceptions, we must be conscious of it through our senses, and so the self and the

medium through which it is perceived cannot be separated completely. If, on the other hand, you hold that a self is a human body, there is no need to suppose that self-talk would play any part in self-consciousness. Many accounts of the self isolate a relevant aspect of human experience and philosophers often argue only for the central importance of a particular aspect of self-experience. Self-talk, I would argue, is of central importance to self-consciousness.

The first chapter of this essay covers various proposed kinds of self-awareness in order to determine what best characterises the basic self-conscious relation. The second chapter discusses Mead's account of self-consciousness, which functions as a framework throughout the essay. The third chapter considers Mead's claims in the light of current experimental findings on inner speech and self-consciousness, particularly in children. In the fourth and final chapter, these various lines of research are combined with discussion of dialogue and perspective, in order to explain how self-talk enables us to regard ourselves from the perspective of another, thus enabling the self-conscious relation. This account of self-consciousness is then compared with current narrative theories of the self to show how the two might be fruitfully integrated.

Chapter 1: self and self-consciousness

Nowadays 'the self' is rarely treated as a uniform whole. Instead, the self is usually accompanied by a qualifying adjective, as in 'the embodied self' (Newen, 2018). In this way the various aspects associated with the self can be studied without necessarily claiming primacy for any one aspect. Research programmes have been proposed that isolate various aspects of self-awareness. Neisser (1988) proposed an initial list of five such aspects, which was expanded to eight by Gallagher (2013). These lists are not intended to be comprehensive, but they are a convenient starting point, and in this chapter I discuss five aspects that are especially relevant to my purposes:

1) *Ecological self-awareness*: this includes the minimal embodied aspects of our experience: from birth the integration of our senses along with proprioception causes the experience of our body as a discrete, situated and different entity from other objects in the environment.
2) *Intersubjective self-awareness*: humans are born with the innate capacity to engage socially with others, which involves an awareness of themselves as interacting with another person. In young infants, this is reflected by the ability to follow someone's eyes and respond to their actions.
3) *Private self-awareness*: this involves the realisation that our thoughts, feelings and experiences are in an important sense our own. Others do not necessarily share our information and this realisation plays an important part in our reasoning about the minds of others.
4) *Conceptual self-awareness*: this includes explicit representation and the understanding of yourself as a self. It is the ability to reflect on and act in regard to some model of what you are.
5) *Expanded self-awareness*: this concerns the conception of oneself both in the past and future. This aspect of the self is based mainly on memory. Most adult humans have a complex sense of self that extends into the future and the past, including childhood when they were very different from their adult self.

The first two items on this list are clearly present in children prior to the acquisition of language. This is especially true of ecological self-awareness (1). From an early age, children experience the world from a pre-reflective first-person perspective. Rochat (2011) presents evidence for the claim that newborn children already have a rudimentary body-scheme that allows them to grab things by moving their arms or turn their head towards things in their environment. Furthermore, this interaction with their environment gives children an awareness both of actions being theirs and of the possible actions afforded by their bodies.

The presence of intersubjective self-awareness (2) can also be seen before children start to talk to others or to themselves. Mother and child exchange precisely timed gestures, vocalizations, and facial expressions, which have been characterised as a form of proto-dialogue (Bertau, 2012; Trevarthen, 1980), and even newborns are perfectly capable of distinguishing social interactions from interactions with inanimate objects in their

environment. This prelinguistic capacity for social interaction enables infants to engage in shared attention and experience.

It is important to note that both ecological and intersubjective awareness are instances of self-awareness without self-consciousness (Neisser, 1988). Infants experience the world from the perspective of their bodies and they are capable of intersubjective interaction with others, but they don't reflect on their ecological or intersubjective selves. There is no mental self-representation that is the object of their thought. However, without self-consciousness there can already be awareness that reflects the perspective of the subject. Thinking from the perspective of a self does not entail thinking about the self, which is required for self-consciousness.

Now that we have some sense of the kind of self-awareness that is present before both self-consciousness and language, we should look at the kind of self-consciousness that can be explained by self-talk. The ability to reflect on a concept of oneself is clearly not something that is present in children from very early on. Before we discuss the other items listed, it might be better first to say something about the common use of the term self-consciousness in order to get a sense of the behaviour it can describe. Gilbert Ryle (1949) discusses the ways in which the term 'self-consciousness' is often used. Apart from its use for describing "embarrassment exhibited by persons [...] who are anxious about the opinions held by others about their qualities of character or intellect", the term is used for "paying heed to one's particular qualities of character and intellect" (Ryle, 1949, p. 150). These behaviours are illustrative of the nature of self-consciousness regardless of your position on the claims made by Hume. It is the consensus amongst philosophers that self-consciousness enables us to reflect on our own conduct, character and intellect, and furthermore, that these reflections feature in our rational deliberations, regardless of what is really the object of reflection.

Traditionally, self-consciousness in philosophy has been described as a reflexive subject-object relation. A person is both the thing that perceives and the thing that is perceived (Tugendhat, 1986). Note that this doesn't require the thing that is perceived to be real in a metaphysical sense. Our concept of self might be purely theoretical or refer solely to an abstract object. With regard to the ways the term 'self' is used in ordinary language, they might be incoherent or self-contradictory. The important thing is that we can think and act on the assumption that there is a self, but that doesn't mean that there is a self

Private (3) and conceptual (4) self-awareness are so closely connected that some authors don't even distinguish between the two (e.g., Gallagher 2013). Despite their close connection, they do enable two different kinds of knowledge about one's environment. Private self-awareness involves knowing that others do not necessarily share your thoughts and relates to the philosophical idea that people have privileged access to their own thoughts. Conceptual self-awareness allows us to represent ourselves similarly to the way we represent other people. These representations do not need to be instances of a single unified model, given our tendency to act rather differently depending on the context we find ourselves in. If we compare the two, private self-awareness relates exclusively to our inner mental life, whereas conceptual self-awareness relates to a more general concept of a person.

Between these two kinds of self-awareness (i.e. private and conceptual), the second is closer to self-consciousness. Self-consciousness involves having a concept of yourself that is the object of your thought, enabling reflective thought and action. Examples might be self-deprecating humour, predicting one's reaction to a certain social situation, feigning a

certain emotion or explicitly avoiding certain temptations in your environment. These are the kinds of actions that require an objective stance towards oneself, in other words a reflexive subject-object relation.

Finally, expanded self-awareness (5) concerns the ability to regard yourself as the same in the past and future. According to Neisser (1988), expanded self -awareness transcends the current moment such that memory no longer functions just for remembering how to do something, but also for remembering how *you* did it.

I suggest that expanded self-awareness belongs to the category of what I propose to call 'broad self-awareness'. Developmental evidence suggests that both self-talk and self-conscious behaviour precede the ability to report on biographical events (Neisser, 1988; Hermans, 2011; Rochat, 2011). Self-awareness through time is one of the ways in which our self-awareness 'broadens' in development. The broader our self-awareness becomes, the more it includes the abstract and peripheral facts about ourselves. Typically, we also consider occupation, talents, and particular habits as part of ourselves. It has even been argued that everything that follows the word 'my' (e.g. 'my neighbour') is in some sense part of the self of the person who utters it (James, 1892). These aspects of the self constitute what I call a 'broad' sense of self

But the thing to be explained first is the reflexive subject-object relation in its simplest form. The ability to consider oneself existing in the past or in the future is more complex than the ability to consider oneself existing in the present. Before self-awareness can be expanded into the past and the future, it should be there in the present. Some philosophers argue that a continuous narrative isn't even a necessary part of self-awareness in adults (Strawson, 2004). Therefore, we shouldn't equate 'self-consciousness of the present' with 'self-consciousness across time'.

In any case, it makes sense that the object of self-conscious thought is gradually expanded throughout development. At first this object includes just the subject in the present moment. Future and past states of the subject as well other broader aspects come later in childhood. The focus of this inquiry is to explain the narrow kind on the assumption that is a precondition for the development of broader elements. How exactly the subsequent broadening takes place is a topic for further research.

Of the two aspects of self-awareness that precede language, intersubjective self-awareness (2) is especially important, because dialogue is a social activity and therefore a dialogic account of self-consciousness must assume some level of social awareness prior to self-consciousness. Both pre-linguistic aspects are pre-reflective, there is no ecological (1) or intersubjective self that is the object of their awareness. However, with conceptual self-awareness (4), and even more so than with private self-awareness (3), our awareness is directed at a self. The conceptual self can be the object of our thought through some kind of reflexive relation and it is this relation that inner dialogue should seek to explain. Other aspects of self-awareness, such as those that expand into the past and future (5) and those that include more indirect properties of a person presumably developed later. They are preceded by the reflexive subject-object relation of an organism to itself in the present moment.

Chapter 2: Mead's genealogy of the self

Now that we have some sense of what kind of awareness is involved in self-consciousness and what kinds of awareness precede it ontogenetically, we can discuss its relation to inner dialogue. One of the more prominent early theories that connect inner speech to the self is that of the philosopher and sociologist G.H. Mead (1934). He describes self-consciousness as intimately connected with the private use of language. In talking to ourselves, we acquire the ability to regard ourselves as we might do others. So, rather than through introspection or through monitoring one's own behaviour, self-consciousness is achieved through taking the perspective of others towards oneself. This chapter discusses the first two stages of Mead's genealogy of the self. Also some criticisms of his account are addressed in order to aid its use as a framework for our inquiry into inner dialogue and self-consciousness.

Mead presents his development of the self in four stages, which are best viewed as necessary (but not sufficient) steps in the development of self-consciousness (Scheffler, 1974). In the first two stages, the development of self-consciousness occurs in close connection with the development of language and higher-order cognitive capacities, all of which are the result of social interaction. The two remaining stages concern societal rather than individual development, and will not be discussed here.

The first stage of development posits humans prior to the acquisition of language, engaged in what Mead calls a 'conversation of gestures' (1934, p. 63). In a conversation of gestures, the action of individual A functions as a stimulus for a specific act of individual B, which in turn provokes a reaction of the other. Mead illustrates this stage with the example of a dog-fight, where both animals constantly change their position and attitude in response to the changing behaviours of the other. The gesture, in this example, is an act of one dog that acts as a stimulus for a certain kind of behaviour of the other dog. Another example could be the interactions between mother and child mentioned earlier, in which sounds, expressions and gestures produced by the mother provoke intricately timed reactions by the child, and vice versa. Mead holds that such social acts provide the starting point for the further development of language, mind, and the self. It follows that he presumes the intersubjective aspect of the self must be present before the development of reflexive self-consciousness. Ecological self-awareness, although not a necessary condition for social interaction, usually is co-temporal with intersubjective self-awareness (Neisser, 1988). So we can assume both these prereflective aspects of the self to be present in the conversation of gestures as described by Mead.

A 'gesture' as defined by Mead is that part of the action that functions as a signal for change in the response of the other (Mead, 1934). According to his theory, a rudimentary form of meaning is already present in these interactions. This meaning is to be found in the three-part relation between the initial gesture, the response made in reaction to it, and the social act it initiates. In other words, meaning should not be understood in terms of ideas in the mind, but in terms of definite responses within a social act.

Mead's account of meaning is similar to Daniel Dennett's (2014) account of intentional behaviour in animals. Dennett gives the example of stotting, when a gazelle jumps in a rather awkward, straight legged fashion in order to dissuade lions from attacking

them. Making these laborious jumps in order to convince predators that you are too fit to be caught is perfectly rational, but neither the gazelle nor the lion has reasoned itself into acting the way they do. Dennett calls this kind of reason a 'free-floating rational' and it is analogous to Mead's notion of meaning, which doesn't need to be consciously present to the creatures engaged in the meaningful act.

Although Mead and Dennett apply a similar solution to the philosophical problems of meaning and reasons respectively, this does not mean that they draw the same conclusions. Dennett is concerned with the interpretation of behaviour as reasoned, whereas Mead makes the stronger claim that meaning is actually constituted by the social process. Dennett's account of the self is discussed in the last chapter and is quite different from Mead's. What they share is a belief in 'complexity without comprehension'; there are meaningful and reasoned acts before the emergence of conscious meaning or reason. The development of language during the next stage enables this pre-conscious meaning to extend from the social to the individual domain, turning the gesture into a significant gesture, which is Mead's term for those gestures in which the meaning is in fact understood by the agents involved.

In the second stage of Mead's genealogy, a gesture made by an individual arouses in her the same response as it does in the addressee, enabling the sender to adjust her behaviour in reaction to the predicted response of the addressee. A vocal gesture is useful for creating a significant gesture, because it affects both participants in a social act in the same way. I hear my voice in more or less the same way as the person I'm addressing, thus creating a shared meaning.

Mead's notion of 'shared meaning' has been criticised by Tugendhat (1986, p. 228). He points out that even when one assumes Mead's questionable point that a person making a gesture implicitly has the same response as the hearer, this identical or simultaneous stimulation is not the same as shared meaning. Mead's account of the vocal gesture might possibly explain why two people have the same response, but this still doesn't entail that they *share* that response. 'Sharing' implies an awareness of the simultaneous response being present that Mead is unable to account for.

In order to salvage Mead's account it is necessary to reinterpret his notion of 'shared meaning' as 'aligned meaning'. If the meaning in a social action is aligned, this does not imply that the meaning is identical to both actors (Garrod & Pickering, 2009). What it does mean is that the actors disposed to act under the assumption that their dispositions concerning the situation agree on certain points. Unlike 'shared meaning', 'aligned meaning' is not achieved instantly as the result of a single gesture. Rather, it is the result of a dialogue of gestures in which the situation-dispositions of the participants gradually overlap. If this is not (sufficiently) the case, the actors quickly find out through the unexpected reactions of their interlocutor. Monitoring of the other's behaviour while speaking requires an enormous effort on the part of the speaker, but some research on dialogue indicates that the ability to perceive listeners' reactions has a positive influence on the quality of the narrative produced (Bavelas et al., 2000; Kraut et al., 1982). This suggests that people in fact use the reactions of their audience in order to aid communication. Through this process of trial and error, the participants eventually land on certain gestures that provoke a common response.

The problem with Mead's account and Tugendhat's interpretation is that both assume particular utterances should have a significant meaning independent of the social interaction taken as a whole. The alignment account of meaning states that an utterance acquires significant meaning within an ongoing social process and cannot be understood

without reference to that context. Because the process is ongoing, it allows the participants to adjust their responses in order to align their dispositions concerning the situation. In this way, it doesn't require an utterance to provoke a shared particular response by and of itself. The 'shared' response doesn't suddenly arise, but gradually comes into being.

While it is clear that an alignment-account of meaning and significant gesturing is different from the one intended by Mead, it relies on neither one of Mead's questionable assumptions about vocal gestures. A vocal gesture does not need to provoke an identical shared response by and of itself in order to create aligned meaning. The gesture becomes significant within a social process.

Mead's paradigm of significant gesturing is the cooperative act. Two animals trying to push over a boulder are engaged in a social act focussing on the same object and goal. When their actions need to be coordinated, for instance when pressure from different angles is necessary in order to topple the boulder, a shared response to a particular stimulus is often required. The first animal could instruct his colleague to push in a certain way and be able to adjust his response to the reaction of the other. This setting also fits well with an alignment approach to meaning. As a result of cooperative interaction, the utterance is no longer free-floating as a social act, but present in the consciousness of the individuals engaged in that act. For Mead this transition is the essence of what language does: "meaning can be be described in terms of symbols or language at its most complex stage of development [...], but language simply lifts out of the social process a situation which is logically or implicitly there already" (1934, p. 79).

The second stage of development has given Mead's pre-reflective human being the ability to grasp the meaning present within a social act. As a result of this development, the individual can now use language in order to influence her own behaviour. A vocal gesture that she uses to effect change in others can be used to effect a similar change in herself. By using spoken language on herself, she can provide stimuli to condition herself. Take the example of a child standing on the highest diving board of the pool, but he is afraid to jump. If his friends standing below shout 'Jump!', it disposes him to jump because of the social pressure of his peers. But what if, on another occasion, he is by himself? Mead argues that children learn to condition themselves using the utterances of others. So the second time, the child might say 'jump' to himself in order to get himself over the line. Importantly, this doesn't require having an explicit understanding of what they are doing.

This conditioning is made possible because you treat yourself as another would treat you in that particular circumstance. If an individual controls her behaviour in this way, her act reflects the perspective of the other towards herself. This perspective is not exactly objective, but it is different from the wholly subjective first stage in development. Through the different perspectives of others, the individual can treat himself as an object of his thought. In this way, Mead's account captures the reflexive relation implied in self-consciousness without an appeal to some elusive introspective ability. Rather, the relation is achieved through taking the stance of the other towards oneself. The organism is an object to itself in the same way others are an object to it.

Mead emphasizes that through the eyes of society we are able to take an objective stance towards ourselves. 'An objective stance' here is meant in the sense of treating something as an object of thought, not in the sense of regarding something without any measure of subjectivity. The viewpoint from the perspectives of another is best characterised as intersubjective, rather than purely subjective or objective. Still, with regard to rational

deliberation and action the ability to regard one's behaviour from multiple perspectives means quite a bit of progress, even if it is not objective in the strict sense of the word.

Mead's genealogy provides us with a useful starting point for considering dialogue and self-consciousness, but his theory is far from the finished article. His description of the stages is somewhat vague, which makes it unfit for interpretation as a literal account of socio-cultural evolution in pre-linguistic humans (Scheffler, 1974). We already saw that his notion of shared meaning needs some massaging in order to make sense. A further issue is that Mead is not clear on what exactly it means to take the perspective of another person. This topic will be addressed in chapter 4, but for the moment one should keep in mind that a theory that is incomplete is not necessarily incorrect. Mead's theory provides a useful framework and whether the gaps we encountered are chasms or cracks remains to be seen.

To summarize, Mead argues that the ability to use language on oneself allows us to control our behaviour through self-conditioning and it allows us to take the perspective of the other towards ourselves. So for Mead, the reflexive subject-object relation is constituted by the speaker treating himself as the object of his utterances. In the next chapter, we will consider these claims in light of psychological research on the phenomenon of self-talk.

Chapter 3: Self-talk and Internalisation

Mead makes three key empirical claims about the development and use of self-talk in children and adults:

1) Using language for oneself has various uses related to controlling our behaviour and higher-order thinking.
2) Self-consciousness starts to develop only after the advent of self-talk.
3) If the reflexive subject-object relation takes the form of a dialogue, it would mean that some of our mental processes, self-consciousness included, retain dialogic form even in adulthood.

In the following I discuss these claims in the light of current empirical research on inner speech and self-consciousness. But first, a note on terminology. In the psychological literature, self-talk is used to indicate speech-acts in which a person is addressing himself. 'Inner speech' or 'inner dialogue' is the most common term, but it also includes the types of speech in which someone is not addressing himself (e.g talking to imagined others or memorizing a list by repeating it in your head). Self-talk can either be overt or covert, depending on whether a person's utterances are observable.

The first of Mead's claims is also most easily corroborated by the empirical psychological evidence. Inner speech is a complex phenomenon with multiple functions and a varied phenomenology, which is often compared to a tool, used in different ways depending on the task at hand (Winsler, 2009). Self-talk is used for problem solving (puzzles, construction, math, etc.), motivation, metacognition, memory, rehearsal, task-switching, and impulse-control (Wiley, 2016; Fernyhough, 2008; Emerson & Miyake, 2003; Manfra & Winsler, 2006). In children, the use of self-talk tends to increase when tasks get more difficult and swiftly decreases when the task gets too difficult (Fernyhough & Fradley, 2005; Winsler, 2009). These findings match Mead's ideas about the importance of self-talk for complex thought processes.

In order to say something about the ontogenetic development of self-talk and self-consciousness, the second claim, it is useful to sketch a short chronology of self-talk. By age two, most children have a reasonable grasp of a variety of words and phrases and these are almost immediately used in a self-directed manner (Fernyhough, 2016). Overt self-talk typically peaks around the age of five, after which utterances start to become more abbreviated and less overt (Winsler, 2009). Around age eight, self-talk is by and large an internal phenomenon (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015).

These findings on self-talk align with the development of self-consciousness. Age two, which also marks the onset of self-talk, sees children starting to acquire the capacity for mirroring self-recognition. Some six months before this, children's use of language starts to reflect the difference between themselves and others (Rochat, 2009). This ability to discriminate oneself, in language use, from other objects and persons reflects both ecological and intersubjective self-awareness. However, these expressions of self-awareness are still frequently mistaken, which is reflected in the way their utterances tend to contradict one

another when they are shown camera footage of themselves. Around age three, children start to develop a sense of self across time, although the ability to report episodic memories still develops into the fifth year (Tulving, 2005).

Developmental evidence regarding self-consciousness is often controversial and the explanatory power of most experiments has been questioned in some way or another (Smith, 2020). However, the general timeline is consistent with the development of the basic reflexive subject-object relation shortly after the advent of self-talk. This basic relation is further developed in the period in which self-talk is also developing. All these findings are consistent with Mead's claims.

The third and final claim concerns the idea that some mental processes, self-consciousness included, retain dialogical form and characteristics throughout development and into adulthood. Most researchers on self-talk agree that adult thinking retains dialogic form even when it doesn't have an explicitly dialogic phenomenology. The preferred theoretical framework amongst self-talk researchers derives from the Russian developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1934) who, like Mead, claimed that all higher mental functions are internalised social processes. Unlike Mead, however, Vygotsky makes concrete predictions about the process of internalisation. According to Vygotsky (1934), language undergoes fundamental change during its expansion from the social to the inner domain, such as abbreviation and reduced audibility. These changes are in line with the developmental evidence mentioned earlier.

Vygostky's theory also states that during internalisation the social phenomenon of language is transformed into thinking while losing its phenomenal linguistic and social features in the process. This would mean that our thinking, self-conscious thinking included, is in large part dialogic even though it is no longer experienced as such. There is some evidence for this view. For instance, tests with video-recording have found that 90% to 98% of adults still exhibit observable self-talk during tasks such as paper folding and data-processing (Duncan & Cheyne, 2001, Duncan & Tarulli, 2009). Interestingly, the large majority of participants did not report having used inner speech during these tests, suggesting that even overt self-talk may occur without our conscious awareness. Also, self-directed speech in children and adults increases in the presence of others (McGonigle-Chalmers et al., 2014; Kronk, 1994). This may not be direct evidence for dialogicality, but it does suggest that self-talk is social in nature.

Hurlburt et al. (2013) are critical of claims made by Vygotsky (1934). They devised a Direct Experience Sampling (DES) method, in which trained participants are given pagers that go off at random intervals during the day, after which point they are questioned extensively about their thoughts at the moment before being paged. According to their results, dialogicality, abbreviation and voices of other people rarely feature in inner speech, contrary to predictions made by Vygotsky. These results fail to corroborate questionnaire research on inner speech, in which all of these phenomena were reported by a majority of people (McCarthy-Jones & Fernyhough, 2011). However, the phenomenological evidence of Hurlburt et al. (2013) is not necessarily relevant if the internalisation thesis is correct. It could be the case that inner speech underlies most of our thinking, but is internalised to such an extent as to be hardly noticeable. People tend to have a poor grasp on the nature of their thinking, which makes it likely that inner speaking and particularly dialogic inner speaking occurs without our awareness. It could be a case of speech disguising itself as thought.

A good example of specifically dialogic thinking that often goes unnoticed is given by Ryle (1971), in his essay on self-teaching. Ryle asks what we are doing when we are thinking something through, such as working out a mathematical proof. He imagines the day after Socrates' dialogue with the young slave of Meno, when both participants have miraculously forgotten the mathematical proof that Socrates taught the boy by merely asking questions. Unfazed, the young slave suggests they proceed just as they did the previous day. Rather sheepishly, Socrates starts asking the boy questions and at the end of the day, they haven't found the proof. However, they have ruled out several possible routes towards a proof and they have some idea of the form their proof should eventually take.

The point of this story is that when thinking through a problem, very often we employ the same methods on ourselves that a good teacher might. A good teacher asks her students questions, she gives demonstrations of how to do something, she appeals to the knowledge they already have, she gets them to apply an approved method on a new problem and, if their memory fails, she gives them clues. The difference between being taught and self-teaching is that you don't know the answer, which makes it more difficult to point out to yourself the right direction. The thinking process still shares some important features with dialogues between student and teacher. However, it seems likely that most people would not report that thinking through a mathematical proof involves talking to yourself, let alone private dialogue.

The three claims in this chapter covered the functions of self-talk, its chronology compared to that of self-consciousness and the dialogical nature of some mental processes. Concerning the first claim, it is clear that self-talk is useful across a wide rage of cognitive tasks. The evidence concerning self-talk and self-consciousness is in line with Mead's second claim, although the empirical record on self-consciousness is far from complete. The last claim hangs on the importance of phenomenology. If the internalisation theory of inner speech is correct, both thinking and self-consciousness could still have dialogical form even though it is not always experienced as such. In addressing these claims, we have met the minimal empirical requirements for considering self-talk as the prerequisite for self-consciousness.

Chapter 4: Dialogue and Social Understanding

If inner dialogue is a prerequisite for self-consciousness, the capacity for self-consciousness should develop after the advent of self-talk and throughout the process of internalisation. In this chapter, we consider how exactly inner dialogue allows for self-consciousness and how this account relates to some contemporary philosophical theories on the self. In Mead's terminology, humans have the ability to make themselves the object of their thought by taking the attitude of the other towards themselves. Using a more current terminology, humans acquire self-consciousness by talking to themselves from the perspective of others. The question is then: how does talking to yourself allow for this perspective taking? Because Mead gives no satisfactory explanation, we need a more extensive account of what inner dialogue is.

People engaged in dialogue are in some sense negotiating their perspectives on the world (Bakhtin, 1953). This can be characterised with a threefold relationship: both participants relate to the object of discussion but they also relate to one another (Davidson, 1992). Every utterance is not only oriented towards the object of discussion but also towards an anticipated reaction of the other: we expect a reaction and usually a particular type of reaction. We are rarely fazed by our interlocutor, real or imagined. However, none of this implies that our two perspectives become one and the same. Dialogue can only achieve alignment, not identity, because agreement, just as disagreement, implies that multiple perspectives are present (Hermans, 1996).

The notion of perspective is polysemous, because it can pertain to various types of information. First, one's perspective can be reflective of one's position in time and space. This type of perspective may also differ according to the power of one's senses: the sensory perspective of someone who is nearsighted is quite different from someone with 20/20 vision. Second, there is the conversational perspective, which reflects people's roles as speakers and addressees. Third, one's perspective may be constituted by what one takes to be the case. This doxastic perspective includes the propositions that can be ascribed to someone at a specific moment in time. In a debate, I can take someone else's doxastic perspective in order to defend a view that is not usually mine. Last, there is sociocultural perspective, which reflects one's position in society. This can be the perspective of someone who is poor or rich, but also more specifically the perspective of a volleyball player for instance. All these notions of perspective tell us something about a way someone relates to the world in a specific context, and all of them may be reflected in dialogic exchanges.

This view of dialogue suggests that humans require sophisticated knowledge in order to conduct a conversation with themselves or an imagined other. In internalizing dialogic exchanges, children not only need to learn to use the utterances of others, but they also need to adopt their perspective. According to the psychologist Charles Fernyhough (2008), this ability to adopt multiple perspectives allows for more flexible, creative thinking as well as an improved understanding of the other's mental states. He argues that children acquire social understanding (or theory of mind) through internalizing dialogic exchanges, because dialogue itself is reflective of the perspectives of the participants. This suggests that talking about mental states may not be critical for the development of social understanding. At first,

the social understanding of other perspectives is of the pre-reflective kind. Children learn to adopt perspectives before they have an explicit understanding of other minds. Eventually, together with a complex grasp of mental state discourse, this capacity develops into an explicit social understanding, as children become able to ascribe beliefs, thoughts, and knowledge to others.

Thus it is clear that inner dialogue requires adopting the perspective of the other. In talking to yourself, you talk like a person that is ordering you to do something, asking you something, trying to teach you something, and so on. At the very least, someone who addresses you is treating you as the person who is listening, which reflects a conversational perspective. The same is true if you are talking to yourself. In other words, you are the object of your speech-act, just as another person might be. This is the reflexive subject-object relation in its most narrow form: the self is constituted by the coinciding of speaker and hearer. Thus we have arrived at a narrow conception of self-consciousness.

In chapter 1, I distinguished between broad and narrow conceptions of self-awareness and I suggested that broad conceptions were most likely preceded by narrow ones. However, a full description of perspective contains much more than simply a person's role as the addressee, which is only the conversational aspect of perspective. If inner dialogue and self-consciousness are in fact related in the way I have sketched, this means that greater knowledge about the perspectives of others opens up a broader conception of oneself. In developing his dialogic ability, a child acquires more and more knowledge about the perspectives of others, including their perspective on itself. In this way, its self-awareness becomes broader, as it comes to include particular properties, social position, past and future.

This view of self-consciousness shares some important features with narrative accounts of the self, which state that the self is in some way constituted by a narrative that provides a coherent explanation of our life as a story, or of parts of our lives as stories (Dennett, 1991). Theories differ on whether the narrative self is a real locus of experience or merely a useful fiction spun by the brain, and on the need for that narrative to be explicit in the mind of a person (Schechtman, 2011). However, all argue that language both facilitates and necessitates the creation of self-narratives (Gallagher, 2000). Moreover, most self-theorists emphasize the importance of our social environment in structuring these narratives. Schechtman (2011, p. 415) summarizes the various narrative accounts by saying that they " [....] share a similar insight, namely that the complexity of selves is to be found in the multiple perspectives on our lives that we negotiate in living them, a complexity best understood in narrative terms". She goes on to say that self-theorists have failed to specify what counts as a narrative in this context, and her own account fails to explain how these perspectives are negotiated. She suggests that a person at different times takes the perspective of a character, an author or a critic towards their own self-narrative, but this doesn't explain anything unless we know what a narrative is in this context.

It seems to me that a dialogic theory of self-consciousness provides a better explanation of the things that narrative theories seek to explain. For instance, it would specify how our self-narrative is structured by our social environment, because that narrative is spun with the perspectives of others. A dialogical approach also provides an alternative explanation for Schechtman's claim that narrativity involves the negotiation of multiple perspectives. Finally, some theories emphasize the importance of narrative for an organism's ability to act within its environment (e.g. Dennett, 1991). This aspect of narrative

self-theories can be explained in part by the function of self-talk as a mechanism for controlling one's own behaviour. It is not surprising that a dialogic approach is better able to explain self-related phenomena, given the fact that dialogue is much more prevalent in our lives. Chapter 3 contains an overview of the various functions of self-talk and dialogue. Unless one claims things like making coffee are a narrative, it doesn't have that much use in life (Strawson, 2004). And as an added bonus, it is easier to pinpoint what dialogue is. Thus, the importance of inner dialogue for thinking and self-consciousness could provide an alternative for narrative theories, or at the very least some much-needed specification within particular theories.

The main point of this chapter was to explain how exactly inner dialogue allows for self-consciousness. This is the case because inner dialogue involves taking the perspective of another towards yourself. In the narrowest sense, this is just the perspective of yourself as the listener. This perspective can be gradually broadened. As a child's ability for dialogue and understanding of perspectives develop, its perspective on itself starts to include more and more properties. But this broad conception of the self can only develop out of the initial self-conscious relation between speaker and addressee. This theory of self-consciousness could play an important part in improving upon narrative accounts of the self.

Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to explain how inner dialogue is a prerequisite for self-consciousness. This is because talking to yourself enables the reflexive subject-object relation that constitutes thinking *about* yourself, rather than just from your particular perspective. Through the process of internalisation, a child not only develops self-consciousness, but possibly many other higher mental processes. In this way, inner speech could constitute a large part of our complex thinking. This idea that thinking consists largely of internalised social interactions is what Mead is referring to when he writes that the self is "an eddy in the social current" (Mead, 1934, p. 182).

Many philosophical conceptions of the self can be described by the manner in which you are aware of them. Ask Descartes what a self is and he would answer: 'a thing that thinks'; ask Hume and he would answer: 'a bundle of perceptions'. The purpose of this essay was not to provide a definite phrase that should follow the words 'a self is…..'. Rather, this account of self-consciousness proposes that in some important sense, you are the thing you're addressing. Or, to put it another way, you are the thing other people talk to. This may sound somewhat trivial, but it has important implications. People tend to think of self-consciousness as a private experience, in which the individual turns his mind's eye inwards. If inner dialogue is a prerequisite for self-consciousness, it is social through and through. It would mean that the way others regard us determines in large part how we think about ourselves, which again borders on the trivial.

The account given in this essay leaves some questions unanswered, both on the empirical and the theoretical side. It remains to be seen whether the internalisation thesis is an accurate description of any higher mental processes in humans. For Fernyhough (2008), the process of internalisation correlates with the extent to which differing perspectives are integrated in the mind. The more abbreviated and silent their self-dialogue is, the more naturally a child can adopt different perspectives on the world. Regarding self-consciousness, this would also be predicted by the level of internalisation. Therefore, it could be worthwhile to conduct experimental research on children in order to test if the extent to which their self-talk is internalised predicts their performance on tasks related to self-consciousness.

On the theoretical side, more work needs to be done in order to see how a dialogical account of self-consciousness could better explain gaps within the narrative account of the self. This also relates to questions about the way in which the object of self-consciousness broadens throughout development. Narrative accounts posit a broadening concept of what a self is and the question of how that broadening takes place remains unanswered. Thinking in terms of dialogue instead of narrative might help to sketch a clearer picture of this process. If these questions can be answered, a dialogical approach to self-consciousness could provide a detailed account of how the self is made possible by the other.

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