NOW-THOUGHTS

Introduction

What kind of thoughts are typically expressed by sentences such as, 'the meeting is starting now', and 'now my daughter is six years old'? One might think the answer is obvious. The word 'now' refers to a particular time, and a 'now'-utterance says that something is happening then. Correspondingly, the thought expressed involves thinking of a particular time and predicating something of it. However, I will argue that matters are not so simple.

'Now'-thoughts are often categorised alongside 'I'-thoughts. The word 'I' (including its counterparts in other languages) and the thoughts typically expressed with it have long been a source of fascination for philosophers. 'I' seemingly behaves in peculiar ways, which many writers take to reflect some interesting features of the thoughts it typically expresses. Whilst writers such as Castañeda (1966, 1967, 1969) and Perry (1977, 1979) have pointed out similarities between the behaviour of 'I' and 'now', the latter has received much less attention in the literature.[1] In this paper, I will take some of the most influential ideas and frameworks that have been used to analyse 'I'-thought and draw on phenomenological descriptions of temporal experience to provide an account of 'now'-thought. I will argue that a certain important class of 'now'-thoughts do not involve thinking about a particular time and predicating something of it, but instead merely involve registering the presence of events.

Importantly, my investigation here is exploratory and its results tentative. There is not space here to conclusively defend any of the frameworks that I rely on. I think they are plausible ways of analysing 'now'-thought due to their centrality in discussions of 'I', but it is an open question whether they should ultimately be accepted. Similarly, I cannot trace all the implications of my view in this paper, and so I will not be able to answer (or attempt to answer) all possible objections, although I will do my best to reply to some obvious worries. The analysis I present here should thus be taken as a contribution to mapping out the territory. Conclusively establishing the correct account of 'now'-thought is a task for further work. As is usual in this area, I will assume, but not argue for, the claim that the nature of our linguistic devices reflects, at least to some extent, the nature of the thoughts we typically express with them, although it may well be that this alignment between thought and language is not absolutely strict.

1. Two central features of 'I'- and 'now'-thought

I will begin by setting out the peculiar features of 'I' that 'now' is supposed to share, and which an account of 'now'-thought must accommodate.[2]

There are different ways of capturing the supposedly strange features of 'I'. Here, I will take two to be of central importance. First, some utterances are immune to error through misidentification (IEM): in making them, it is impossible for the utterer to make a certain kind of mistake. There are two types of error that can be called mistakes of misidentification. The first is what Shoemaker (1968, p. 108) calls 'sortal misidentification', which involves applying the wrong sortal concept to the object of one's thought, e.g., when I think:

(1) There is a llama.

But the animal in front of me is actually a camel. The second involves mistakenly taking one person or thing to be another, e.g.,

(2) Margaret Thatcher is the current Prime Minister of Great Britain.

The second sort of misidentification involves a false judgement of numerical identity. It is immunity to the latter sort of error that is at stake in discussions of 'I' - it seems impossible to mistake *I* for another person when making them.

Second, the thoughts typically expressed using 'I' seem to play an essential role in action.[3] This is illustrated by Perry's (1979) example of the messy shopper who follows a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, meaning to inform the person with the burst sugar bag that he is making a mess. At a certain point, he realises that *he* is the one with the torn bag and stops to adjust it. If he were to express the thoughts he has before and after his realisation, he might utter the following:

(3) The person with the torn sugar bag is making a mess.

(4) I am making a mess.

Even though 'the person with the torn sugar bag' and 'I' refer to the same person, they seemingly express different beliefs, which is illustrated by the difference in action that flows from them. When the messy shopper believes (3), he follows a trail of sugar around the supermarket. But when he believes (4), he stops to adjust his sugar bag.

A certain group of 'now'-utterances seem to share these two features. First, some appear to be IEM. Suppose I feel warmth on my skin and say,

(5) Now the sun is shining.

I could be mistaken in thinking the sun is shining, but it does not seem possible for me to be wrong about whether the time is *now*. Second, at least some of the beliefs typically expressed using 'now' seem to be similarly essential for action. Consider this example from Perry:

A professor, who desires to attend the department meeting on time, and believes correctly that it begins at noon, sits motionless in his office at that time. Suddenly, he begins to move. What explains his actions? A change in belief. He believed all along that the department meeting starts at noon; he came to believe, as he would have put it, that it starts *now* (Perry 1979, p. 4).

Just as accounts of 'I'-thought need to accommodate the peculiar features of 'I', so too an account of 'now'-thought must explain the analogous features of 'now'.

[2] Analysing immunity to error through misidentification

In this section, I will present a framework for understanding IEM. Whilst there has been disagreement in the literature over things such as, *why* certain 'I'-utterances are IEM, and whether there is *more than one* type of IEM 'I'-utterance, these debates largely take place within the framework I will present here.[4]

The definitive account of IEM is given by Evans (1982).[5] According to his analysis, there is more than one way for an utterance to be IEM. Consider first what it is for an utterance to be *open* to error through misidentification (OEM). An error of misidentification involves falsely judging that some person or thing is numerically identical with another. It is thus primarily judgements that are OEM. An utterance will be OEM if it expresses an OEM judgement. For a judgement to be open to the kind of mistake in question, it must have a certain structure. A judgement of numerical identity will obviously be OEM in that if I make such a judgement, it is possible that it might be false, and if so, then I misidentify the object of my judgement. But it is not only explicit judgements of numerical identity that are OEM. Sometimes subject-predicate judgements, i.e., those of the form 'a is F', are grounded in further judgements of numerical identity, which may be explicit or implicit. This will be so when the judgement 'a is F' involves two different conceptions of its object – a conception of a, and a conception of the thing that is F. In this case, when I judge 'a is F', I tacitly take these two conceptions to be of one and the same thing. Evans argues that the number of conceptions involved in a judgement will be to do with the grounds upon which it is made. The judgement 'a is F' will involve two conceptions if

the basis upon which I form my conception a, and the basis upon which I come to know that something is F, are different. Suppose, e.g., that I walk past a field and see a llama clad in a blue blanket. I judge,

(6) My sister's llama is wearing a blue blanket.

My judgement in this case involves two conceptions: a conception of my sister's llama perhaps formed when my parents gave her a llama for her birthday, and a conception of a llama wearing a blue blanket, formed on the basis of my current perception. When I judge (6), I tacitly identify my sister's llama as the one wearing a blue blanket. My judgement is therefore OEM – it is possible that my sister's llama is *not* the one I currently see.

If we now consider *immunity* to error through misidentification, we can see that one way for an utterance to be IEM is for it to express an IEM judgement. There is more than one type of judgement that is IEM. First, a subject-predicate judgement, 'a is F', will be IEM when it involves a single conception of its object, i.e., when the conception of a includes the information that it is F. In this case, when I make the judgement, I am simply articulating some of the information that constitutes my conception of a. A subject-predicate judgement will have this structure when I form my conception of a, and come to know that something is F, on the same basis. Suppose that in the example above, when I see the llama in the field I judge,

(7) That llama is wearing a blue blanket.

My conception of the llama and my knowledge that something is wearing a blue blanket are both based on my current conception of it. Thus (7) involves just a single conception of its object. As such, (7) lacks the logical structure to be open to error through misidentification – it neither is, nor depends on, a judgement of numerical identity – and as such it is IEM.

The paradigmatic types of thought that fit this profile are *perceptual-demonstrative* judgements. These are subject-predicate thoughts about an entity that one is currently perceiving, where one both forms one's conception of the object of one's thought, and comes to know it is in the state one predicates of it, on the basis of one's current experience of it.[6] They are typically expressed in English using 'that' or 'this'. The thought expressed by (7) is an example of this sort. Importantly, an *utterance* of 'that' or 'this' can result in a mistake that can be described as misidentification. Exactly how, and whether, such mistakes can occur will depend on how one takes the reference of 'this' and 'that' to be fixed. But consider this case. I am looking directly at a cat sat in front of me. Unbeknownst to me, there is another cat in my

4

environment sat just behind me, which is salient to onlookers – it is large, plainly in view, and an unusual colour. Suppose I intend to refer to the cat sat in front of me and utter,

(8) That cat smells bad.

My audience reasonably take me to be referring to the large cat sat behind me. On some understandings of how the reference of 'that' is fixed, my utterance refers to the large cat sat behind me, despite my intention to refer to the one I can see.[7] In this case, we can say that I misidentify the referent of my utterance of 'that'. However, when it comes to perceptual-demonstrative *thoughts* it seems no such mistake is possible. If I am looking directly at a cat and thinking about it, I cannot be wrong about *which* thing I am thinking about. Although I can be wrong about whether it really smells bad, or is a cat, etc.

Second, since an error of misidentification involves incorrectly taking two individuals to be one and the same, it will be impossible to make such a mistake if one's thought does not involve thinking about any individuals at all. Consider, e.g., the utterance,

(9) It's raining.

This is a subject-predicate sentence, but it's not clear that the *grammatical* structure reflects the *logical* structure of the thought it expresses. To analyse thoughts such as (9), Strawson (1959) introduces a distinction between subject-predicate and feature-placing thought. A subject-predicate thought involves thinking of an entity, that it is in some state or condition, or has some property. It requires a conception of that entity as an *individual* – something that can be distinguished from other entities and counted. In contrast, feature-placing concepts are of non-countable 'stuff', and feature-placing thoughts involve registering the presence of such 'stuff' in the thinker's vicinity. An example of a feature-placing concept is 'mud'. Mud cannot be counted; it does not make sense to talk of one mud and distinguish it from another. (Contrast this with *patches* of mud, which *can* be distinguished from each other and counted.) Thus it is plausible to think that (9) above does not involve thinking of some individual referred to by 'it', that it is in a particular state. Instead, it seems that the thought expressed simply registers the presence of rain in the speaker's vicinity. Thus feature-placing thoughts are IEM because they do not have the logical structure required for an error of misidentification to be possible.

Other types of thought may be IEM for parallel reasons. Suppose, e.g., that I am talking to a friend and absentmindedly run my hand across a tray of apples. A few have gone rotten and as I touch them, I wince and exclaim,

(10) Urgh, slimy!

5

It's plausible that in this case, I am not thinking about a particular individual(s) and predicating something of it/them. It is, of course, true that some particular apples are the slimy ones. But it seems I do not need to have any conception of which apples, or how many apples, when I think (10). If this is right, then my thought merely registers the presence of the property 'slimy'. Concepts of properties are not the same as feature-placing concepts, because properties are always possessed by an individual, and so (10) is not a feature-placing thought. Nevertheless, (10) is IEM in the same way as (9) – there is no possibility of me misidentifying an individual I am thinking about because I am not thinking of an individual.

Finally, an utterance will be IEM if it expresses no thought at all. Suppose my pet parrot says,

(11) Polly's a pretty bird.

There's no possibility of my parrot misidentifying the creature who is the pretty bird because their 'utterance' does not express a thought.[8] (One could say in this case, that the initial appearance of *immunity* to error arises because (11) is neither immune nor open to error – these concepts just do not apply.)

The foregoing account of IEM reveals that in diagnosing the source of an utterance's immunity, we need to determine whether it expresses a thought, and if so, the structure of the thought expressed. A subject-predicate thought is one where the thinker thinks of a particular thing, that it is in some state or condition, or has some property. To have such a thought, the thinker must have a conception of that particular thing *as* an individual. Note that this is not determined by whether the thinker is thinking about something that is *in fact* an individual. Imagine a small creature that is capable of feature-placing, but not subject-predicate thought. It comes out at night to search for food in the kitchen and always looks in the dog bowl on the floor. The dog bowl is in fact an individual that can be in different states, such as full or empty. But to the creature, there are two features of the landscape that it comes across on different occasions: full-bowl and empty-bowl. Evans (1982) argues that thought about individuals necessarily satisfies two constraints. The first he calls 'Russell's Principle'. It states that to think about something, the subject must know which thing she is thinking about, and this involves being able to distinguish it in principle from all other things. In other words, the thinker must possess the capacity to discriminate the object of her thought from all other things, or be in a position to gain such a capacity. A weaker version of this view requires the thinker to be able to discriminate the object of her thought from *some* relevant things.[9] The second of Evans'

conditions on thinking of something *as* an individual he calls the 'Generality Constraint': one must be able to think of it as satisfying different predicates. Conversely, having a conception of a predicate requires being able to ascribe it to more than one individual. His constraint captures ideas also put forward by Strawson (1959) and Wittgenstein (1958), and has been widely employed in the analysis of 'I'-thought. It allows us to spell out why the small creature's thought in the example above is merely feature-placing thought – it has no conception of the bowl as independent from its contents such that it can recognise that it is *one and the same bowl* that is sometimes full and sometimes empty. Correspondingly, it has no separate conceptions of 'is full' and 'is empty' that it applies to different individuals on different occasions.

Finally, perceptual-demonstrative judgements are an important class of thoughts that are IEM. These are subject-predicate thoughts of the form 'a is F', where one's conception of a and one's knowledge that it is F are both based on current perception of a. As we have just seen, subject-predicate thoughts have a particular structure. Thus it is not enough for one's conception to be based on current experience of what is *in fact* an individual. Instead, the thinker's perceptual experience of it must contain information available to her that allows her to form a conception of that thing *as* an individual. It is usual to understand this as meaning that the thinker must *perceive* the object of her thought *as* an individual. To understand what this involves, it is usual to draw on Shoemaker's (1994) account of what he calls 'object perception', which is intended to spell out what it is to be aware of something as an object, i.e., an individual.[10] There are two of Shoemaker's conditions that are usually taken to be crucial: (i) perception must contain *discriminating* information that allows the subject to pick out the individual from other things; (ii) it must also contain information that allows the subject to *reidentify* the individual after a break in one's perception of it.[11] Moreover, it is generally accepted that for one's perceptual experience of something to contain discriminating information, one must perceive more than just that thing; one must perceive it amongst other entities. I take it that the idea here is that picking out an entity from others requires an awareness of that thing's boundaries – where it begins and ends – and in order to experience a thing's boundaries, one must be presented with it as an entity amongst others. This requirement has played a significant role in discussions concerning whether proprioception can provide the thinker with a perceptual-demonstrative conception of herself.[12]

Shoemaker's requirements on *perceiving* something as an individual are related to Evans' constraints on *thinking* of something as an individual in the following way. For Evans, thought about something as an individual requires the ability to discriminate the object of her thought (Russell's Principle), and to think of it as (potentially) satisfying a range of predicates (Generality Constraint). In other words, the thinker must be able to keep track of the thing she is thinking about across a (potential) change in its states or properties. A perception of that thing that includes discriminating information, as per Shoemaker's first requirement, allows the thinker to form a conception of it that satisfies Russell's Principle. Reidentifying something after a break in one's perception of it involves keeping track of it across a change in its states or properties – at the very least, its property of being seen by the thinker at a particular time. Since real things are constantly changing, it will almost certainly involve keeping track of it across more than just this change – it may have moved position, changed colour, acquired a hat, etc. Thus Shoemaker's requirement that perceptual experience contain sufficient information for the thinker to be able to reidentify the thing she perceives will allow for satisfaction of the Generality Constraint.

3. 'Now'-utterances and IEM

In this section, I will apply the principles outlined in section 2 to analyse 'now'-thoughts.

We saw above that some 'now'-utterances are IEM. If I feel warmth on my skin and say,

(5) Now the sun is shining,

it does not seem possible for me to be mistaken about *when* the sun is shining, i.e., it seems impossible for me to misidentify the time I am thinking about (although I could be wrong about whether the heat is *sun*). In section 2, we saw that perceptual-demonstrative judgements are IEM, and some writers, e.g., Evans (1982), Morgan (2015), have therefore argued for a perceptual-demonstrative account of 'I'. Thus one might wonder: are 'now'-thoughts perceptual-demonstrative thoughts based on the thinker's experience of now? Let us consider this possibility.

Perceptual-demonstrative thoughts are based on current experience of their object. To analyse 'now'-thought, we thus need an account of our experience of time. A rich analysis of temporal experience is offered by writers in the phenomenological tradition. They identify a number of components to temporal experience. The first is its *protential-retentional structure*. This idea originated with Husserl (1964), whose classic illustration of it is a melody. A melody is

made up from a series of notes that occur one at a time. But the average listener does not hear it as a random sequence of noises; instead, the sounds hang together in such a way that the whole is heard as having a 'shape'. Husserl argues that for this to be possible, the hearer must experience each momentary sound in the context of the whole, and so my current experience must contain more than just the note played now. It must also contain the notes that have gone before and those that will come next, and preserve the order in which they occur. This means that the hearer must currently experience past notes *as* past, and currently experience future ones *as* future.

The past and future are not present, they are currently *absent*, so to now experience the past and future *as* past and future, I must experience them *as* absent. No doubt it sounds odd to talk about experiencing something *as* absent – if I am experiencing something, then surely it must be present to me. However, the claim that we can be aware of things *as* absent is commonplace in the phenomenological tradition. Consider our experience of space. We perceive the world as both extended in space, and seen from a point of view. For this to be possible, I must experience the things I see as having hidden parts. For example, I see my fridge from the front, and from this angle I cannot see its back. But I experience my fridge as taking up space; I do not experience it as a flat fridge facade. Phenomenologists argue that this points to the fact that perceptual experience has what they call a 'horizonal' structure. *The* horizon is the line where the land and sky appear to meet. Importantly, we do not perceive them as literally ending at this point. Instead, one experiences the horizon as the limit of what one can currently see, and the land as continuing beyond this limit. The land that is in view is experienced *explicitly*, whilst the land beyond the horizon is *implicitly* experienced. Perceptual experience in general has horizons, which implicitly present the perceiver with parts of the world currently hidden from view, i.e., with what is currently *absent* from her gaze. When I look at my fridge, I explicitly see the front, and a horizon of my experience implicitly presents me with the back. The implicit presentation of what is hidden allows the perceiver to experience it *as* hidden or absent from her view. Notice that to be implicitly presented with the hidden parts of things is to have an implicit experience of what they look like from elsewhere. My implicit perception of the fridge back is an experience of what it would like to someone standing behind it. Perceptual horizons therefore 'refer' to experiences someone could have of the things one sees from other spatial locations.

Just as our perceptual experience has horizons that 'refer' to other experiences one could have of from different points in space, so too it has horizons that 'refer' to experiences of those things someone could have at other times. Thus, e.g., when I see a marble roll off the edge of a table, I explicitly experience it near the edge of the table, whilst implicitly experiencing it both as having previously been further towards the middle, and as about to fall off it. These implicit presentations are references to explicit experiences one could have of the marble at other times.

The temporal horizons of experience give me a sense of the unfolding of events in the world. But my perception also involves a second temporal sequence: the unfolding of my experience itself. It will be helpful to consider an example. Suppose I am watching a snowboarding race. The competitors ride down a hillside, avoiding obstacles. I am sitting with the spectators near the bottom of the track. As the race starts, I rummage in my bag. I locate a cigarette, then walk over to another smoker to ask for a light. I get back to my seat just as the competitors fly over the last jump one by one and over the finish line. The snowboard race unfolds as follows: the competitors line up at the top of the slope; navigate the obstacles; descend down the slope to the finish line. My experience unfolds like this – I perceive: the start of the race; the inside of my bag as I look inside it; another person whom I ask for a light; the end of the race. When I explicitly see the competitors lined up at the start, my experience implicitly presents them as being in the middle of the slope a moment later. However, I never explicitly see them at this position, because when they get there, I am not looking at them but rummaging in my bag. Phenomenologists posit a further sort of implicit perceptual content to account for the subject's awareness of the temporal unfolding of her experience. As well as being implicitly aware how the things one perceives *would* appear from different spatial and temporal positions, one is also implicitly aware of what one *has actually* experienced, as well as what one is *about* to *actually* experience. The terms 'retention' and 'protention' are used to refer to this implicit content. Retentions are retained past experiences, whilst protentions are projections of future experiences. They are part of the structure of current perceptual experience: they are a subset of its horizons.

Let us return to the question of whether 'now'-utterances that are IEM express perceptual-demonstrative thoughts about now. Recall that a perceptual-demonstrative thought is one based on current perception of its object – the thinker forms her conception of an entity, and comes to know what she predicates of it, by perceiving it. To form a conception

of something *as* an individual on the basis of currently perceiving it, one's perception of it must (i) contain *discriminating information* about it, which means that one must perceive that entity amongst others; and (ii) contain information allowing one to *reidentify* that individual after a break in one's perception of it. One might think that the experience of now satisfies conditions (i) and (ii). The subject is not merely aware of what is present, but also what is past and future through the retentions and protentions of her experience. In this way, it seems that experience presents the subject with a range of times, providing her with discriminating information about 'now', allowing her to pick out this time from others.

However, further reflection throws doubt on this claim. A second important feature of temporal experience identified by phenomenologists is *the eternal now*. To understand what this is, we need to consider the nature of retentions and protentions in greater detail. They unify one's perceptions across time as a single stream of consciousness. It will be helpful here to think again about the example of the race described above. When I explicitly experience the competitors lined up at the start of the race, I implicitly experience the inside of my bag as I am about to rummage in it (protention). When I do so, I am *explicitly* aware of what was previously presented *implicitly*. A retention of this new experience, implicitly presents my earlier explicit awareness of the competitors waiting to start the race. The experiences are thus linked together as a unified sequence. On this picture, experiences form a chain – a series of interlocking nows. However, there is more complexity to the protentional-retentional structure of temporal experience than this. A retention is literally a retained experience. As such, it will have its own retentions. Each of these is itself a retained experience with its own retentions. Thus every momentary experience contains a nested series of retentions that encapsulate past experience in its entirety.[13] The same applies to protentions. These are projected experiences, each of which will have its own protentions, and so on. In this way, each experience contains a nested series of protentions that capture the whole of future experience. This is not to say that protentions are a sort of premonition of precisely how experience will unfold because they can be indeterminate. I might, e.g., catch sight of a rhino in the distance before it is close enough to see properly. I experience it as a vague something-or-other. The protention of this experience is also ambiguous – it implicitly presents me with something that could be a rhino, an elephant, or a jeep. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, the protention projects a future 'style' of experience, without filling in the exact details.

These reflections on the protential-retentional structure of perception suggest that the metaphor of a chain of experiences is no longer apt. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the temporal unfolding of experience is better described as a single experience of an ever-changing present, where what was implicit as protention gradually becomes explicit, and what was explicit as present gradually becomes implicit as retention. He calls this whole structure 'the living present' (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 503). On this picture, there is not a series of experienced nows or presents, but awareness of a single, ever-changing, eternal now.[14]

It follows that it's not so clear that our temporal experience satisfies (i). Rather than being presented with now as one time amongst others, now is instead a constant *structure* of temporal experience. It is not an individual item that we come across in the perceptual field, but part of the way that the perceptual field is organised. In this way, it is comparable to the *figure* and the *background* of visual experience. The figure is the focus of one's attention, and is presented in greater detail. The background is the rest of the visual field, against which the figure is seen. The background is presented in comparatively lesser detail, with things being experienced more and more indeterminately, the further they are from the figure. The specific 'contents' of the figure and background change as one shifts one's gaze, but the figure and background themselves are part of how the visual field is structured. Similarly, the content of the now changes, but the now is part of the structure of the temporal field. It is doubtful that temporal experience satisfies (i), but it very clearly fails to satisfy (ii). It does not make sense to talk about the possibility of reidentifying a time after a break in one's perception of it. The reason for this, of course, is because a time is not an object that one experiences in one's perceptual field that one can place amongst the other things one perceives. There is such a thing as keeping track of time, but this is nothing like keeping track of a perceived individual, like a player maintaining visual contact with the ball during a game of soccer. I will return to this issue below, but to anticipate, keeping track of time means remaining aware of when it's time to do something. It follows that those 'now'-utterances that are IEM are not perceptual-demonstrative thoughts about time.

So how we should we understand 'now'-thoughts? Recall that a different way for a thought to be IEM is if it does not involve thinking of any individuals at all. Feature-placing thoughts are IEM for exactly this reason – in thinking the thought expressed by,

(9) It's raining,

the subject is merely registering the presence of rain; she is not thinking of an individual referred to by 'it', and so there is no possibility of misidentifying such an individual. I propose that IEM 'now'-utterances have an analogous source of immunity. They do not express thoughts that involve conceiving of a particular time and predicating something of it. Instead, they merely involve registering the presence of events. Consider again the example above where I feel warmth on my skin and think,

(5) Now the sun is shining.

All of our experiences – including this one – have a temporal character: we are constantly aware of events and our experiences of them as unfolding in time. Nevertheless, it seems that what I am primarily experiencing when I have this thought is *the shining of the sun*, not a particular *time*. On this proposal, the thoughts expressed by (5) and (9) are IEM for the same reason – neither of them involve picking out an individual and predicating something of it, and so there is no possibility of misidentification. Notice, however, that they are importantly different because events are, and can be conceived as, individuals – they can be distinguished from one another and counted. They are thus different from feature concepts such as mud or snow.

My analysis is somewhat similar to an account of IEM 'I'-thoughts offered by Recanati (2007, 2012). He argues that thoughts formed on the basis of, e.g., proprioception, are IEM because whilst they are about the thinker (she can only gain information about her own bodily self via proprioception), the thinker is not represented in the content of the thought. Thus, e.g., if I proprioceptively experience my legs as crossed and utter,

(12) My legs are crossed,

the thought expressed by this sentence just registers the presence of crossed legs. It does not involve a conception of the person (myself) whose legs are crossed. Since this is so, there is no possibility of misidentifying the person whose legs are crossed and (12) is IEM.

4. 'Now'-utterances and the connection to action

The other special feature of 'I' and 'now' is that the thoughts typically expressed with these terms seem to be essential to action. Perry who coined the phrase 'the essential indexical' takes the beliefs typically expressed using 'I' to be essential for action because they are what he calls 'locating beliefs' (Perry 1979, p. 5). It is easy to see why this is plausible. He does not put matters quite like this, but it seems what he points to is the following. Action requires

awareness of how one's body is situated relative to the surrounding world. In order to pick up the coffee cup with my right hand and drink from it, I need to grasp that it is situated a graspable distance from my right hand, which is to say that I need to grasp where my right hand is relative to the coffee cup. There's more than one way that someone could be said to grasp the relative locations of two (or more) things. On the one hand, I can be said to know that the restaurant *Eat Your Greens* is next to the NCP car park in Leeds if I look at a map and see that this is so. But this knowledge is not sufficient for me to act on it. In order to do this, I also need a grasp of where *I* am situated relative to these buildings. As I am another physical entity in the world, it is possible for someone to have the same sort of knowledge where I am, as the knowledge I have of the relative locations of *Eat Your Greens* and the NCP car park. Just as this knowledge is not sufficient for me to act on it in the latter case, so too, it would not be sufficient in the former case either. Instead, there must be a more fundamental way that I grasp where I am relative to the surrounding world. My grasp of this is *perspectival*: I am aware of things as located in space around me on the basis of perception. Perceptual experience is egocentric. I experience my bodily self – the point of view from which things are seen – as being at the centre of perceived space. I see the computer in front of me, I feel the chair below my legs, I see the window to my left, the door to my right, and so on. It follows that action requires a perspectival awareness of one's own bodily relation to the world. 'I' beliefs are essential for action insofar as they express knowledge based on this awareness. Exactly how to account for this will depend on how one takes such beliefs to be structured. But if one takes them to be subject-predicate beliefs, then an obvious explanation is that 'I' expresses a self-conception formed on the basis of perspectival bodily experience. This is why the messy shopper's realisation makes a difference to his actions – they flow from his understanding of where *he* is in relation to the person with the torn sugar bag. He follows the trail of sugar on the floor when he believes:

(3) The person with the torn sugar bag is making a mess,

because he also believes something that could be expressed in English by uttering:

(13) I am behind the person with the torn sugar bag.

When he believes

(4) I am making a mess,

he then stops to adjust his bag.

As mentioned above, Perry also classifies the beliefs that are naturally expressed in English using 'now' as 'locating beliefs' (1979, p. 5), which indicates that he takes them to be essential for action for the same reason as those expressed using 'I'. He does not expand on this point, but one might suppose that the same explanation is available. In order to act, I must have a perspectival grasp of how I am situated in the world. My situation in the world is not just spatial but also temporal. Thus I must grasp *when* I am situated in time. The beliefs typically expressed using 'now' express this grasp. On the analysis I have developed so far, the 'now'-thoughts that concern us do not involve a conception of an individual time. Instead, they register the presence of events. It is clear how registering the presence of an event could be relevant to one's actions, since the presence of that event will – depending on what is happening – require one to act. But we need to add more detail to this very rough idea to adequately explain the role played in action by the beliefs typically expressed by 'now'. To do this, I will turn to a further two features of temporal experience as it is understood by writers in the phenomenological tradition.

The first of these is what Fuchs and Duppen (2017) call *affective-conative drive*. This is the sense of being drawn towards the future, which is given by the experience of being drawn into activity. Writers in the phenomenological tradition hold that we perceive the world in terms of the opportunities it offers each of us for action. For example, I might see a wardrobe as for-hiding-in during a game of hide and seek. I see food as edible. I may perceive a ball as kickable, and so on. There are a myriad opportunities for action offered to the perceiver by her environment at any one time, and not all of them will show up for her in her experience of it. Those opportunities for action that are perceived will show up in different ways. There is no strict principle (or set of principles) governing which opportunities to act the subject will perceive. Those that are salient for her, given her projects, her emotional state, and so on, are more likely to be perceived by her. But a particularly imaginative subject might perceive opportunities to act that are not especially salient. Moreover, the perceiver can: perceive that something *could* be done; perceive that something *should* be done; or she can be *enticed* or *solicited* to do it. It is this latter being drawn into action that gives the subject a sense of being pulled towards the future; this is affective-conative drive.

The requirements for action one perceives interact with each other. At any one time, those that are more salient or pressing take precedence, exerting a stronger 'pull' on the subject, whilst others recede, 'drawing' her less strongly. For example, suppose I normally walk

my dog at lunchtime, but today I have a dental appointment at that time. The opportunities related to dog-walking (taking the lead off the hook, picking up the tennis ball, putting on my old muddy boots, etc.) are affected by those relating to dentist-visiting (brushing my teeth, getting in my car, etc.) so that the former lose their potency.

Opportunities for action also interact *over* time, which brings me to the next feature of temporal experience: the *sense of teleological time*.[15] This is the way that one's long-term projects serve to structure experienced time, so that one experiences the past and future as having a 'shape'. Consider my experience of my daily activities. At each moment, what I am currently doing is affected by my sense of future requirements for action. Today is a day of work. I am solicited by future requirements to write throughout the day. Thus when I walk my dog in the morning, I experience this as a task to be quickly completed before work begins. The day's work task of writing this paper that I will turn to in the near future solicits me whilst I am carrying out my current task of walking my dog, affecting my experience of the latter so that I do not experience it as a leisurely activity to linger over. I experience lunch with a friend as a welcome break from work. But the urgency of my work task weighs on me during my break. As the hour passes, I am solicited more and more strongly to return to writing. Similar points apply to the way that I experience my day. My awareness of the day I have just described is tempered by my sense of whereabouts it is in the week, and the future requirements for action dictated by this structure. I am aware of Monday as the beginning of the working week and so as being the start of five days' worth of requirements for waged work. Solicitations to engage in work tasks are therefore experienced as more urgent on Monday. In contrast, on Friday I am aware of the weekend's solicitations to play. Thus Friday has an air of celebration about it. My sense of the forthcoming weekend and its solicitations to engage in leisure activities affects what I am currently doing so that I experience Friday's work tasks as soliciting me less urgently. My experience of the working week thus has a shape. I do not just experience it as a series of days, but as a period of time with a beginning, middle, and end, which are defined by the project of being at work for those five days. Analogous points can be made about the place of that week in the university term, which also has a shape in relation to my projects that take place over it. In general, one's projects structure one's experience of time resulting in the *teleological sense of time.*

The way that future solicitations affect current experience gives the subject a sense of those events to which the solicitations belong as getting 'closer'. The future solicitations

become more forceful as the time to act approaches. Until, when the time to act is *now*, the solicitation is felt as urgently drawing the subject into action. The beliefs typically expressed using 'now' capture the experience of being immediately solicited to act. Suppose, e.g., I am going on a dog walk with several friends and their canine overlords. I exclaim to my brother who is accompanying me,

(14) The dog walk is now!

As I argue above, the thought I express with this utterance does not involve thinking of a particular time and predicating the dog walk event of it. Instead, I register the presence of this event, where doing so involves feeling the urgency of dog-walking solicitations. It is to experience those solicitations as requiring that I immediately act on them. Note that future solicitations may not be experienced as smoothly becoming more forceful as the event to which they belong gets closer. There might be a discontinuity in one's experience of them. Imagine that prior to the dog walk, I am catching up with my brother and we are absorbed in conversation. My intense focus on our talk means that I do not experience the future solicitations to walk my dog as modifying it – I do not experience the conversation as requiring that I draw it to a close, or the dog lead as demanding that I take it off the hook. But then I glance at the clock and see that it is nearly time to go; the dog-walking solicitations suddenly draw me to act urgently. Whether I experience future solicitations as smoothly becoming more forceful, or gaining in strength all of a sudden, the important point in this context is that registering the presence of the event involves experiencing the solicitations as requiring me to act immediately. The belief expressed by (14) captures this experience. On phenomenological accounts of action, the experience of being solicited to act is necessary for action. Whilst thoughts such as beliefs and intentions are not required to act (although they sometimes play a role), insofar as beliefs like that expressed by (14) capture the experience that draws the subject into activity, there is a special connection between such beliefs and action.[16]

5. The reference of 'now'

The account I have developed in this paper concerns a certain class of 'now'-*thoughts* – those that are IEM.

In the literature, discussion of IEM 'I'-thought very often goes hand-in-hand with claims about the reference of first-personal terms: words such as 'I', 'me', 'my', and their equivalents in other languages. It is usually assumed more generally that the linguistic content of sentences

(more properly, the content of utterances) is the propositional content of the thoughts expressed by them. There are a number of reasons why this claim makes sense. For example, if the contents are the same, then this explains why a particular sentence can be used to express a particular thought. It also makes clear how sentences can be used to communicate a thinker's thought to others – they can understand what someone is thinking by grasping the sentence she uses to express her thought. If this assumption of a single content is accepted, then the conclusion to be drawn from my analysis is that certain uses of 'now' are non-referential: they are not used to pick out and refer to a particular time that the speaker is thinking of as an individual. It is thus akin to more familiar 'no-reference' views of 'I', which hold that for at least some 'I'-utterances, 'I' does not function as a referring term. Wittgenstein (1958) and Anscombe (1975) are the most famous proponents of this view.

There are worries with this approach. First, I have not addressed other uses of 'now' in this paper, but I take it that at least some of them *do* express thoughts that involve thinking of particular times. Thus if one concludes that some uses of 'now' - those that are IEM – do not refer, the result will be a non-uniform account of 'now', according to which the term works in (at least) two quite different ways. One might think that this is not a terrible result – after all, 'it' refers on some occasions and does not on others. However, in the case of 'it' there is no reason to think that all uses of the term should be treated uniformly. It is very plausible to think that the word is sometimes used just to construct sentences that are in line with the conventional sentence forms of English – e.g., subject-predicate sentences – but where there is not a real subject being spoken or thought about. In contrast, all uses of 'now' concern a particular time, even if my proposal is correct and for those that are IEM, a particular time is not represented in the content of the thought expressed by the utterance.

Second, there are issues to do with compositionality. A standard difficulty for the Wittgensteinian 'no-reference' view of 'I' is stated by Shoemaker in the following passage:

Nothing seems clearer than that in all first-person statements [...] the word 'I' functions as a singular term or singular referring expression. Statements expressed by the sentence 'I feel pain' have it in common with those expressed by the sentences like 'He feels pain', and 'Jones feels pain' that they contradict the proposition 'Nobody feels pain' and entail the proposition 'Someone feels pain'. In these and other ways 'I feel pain' behaves logically as a value of the propositional function 'X feels pain' (Shoemaker 1968, p. 555).

Shoemaker takes this to be a decisive refutation of the no-reference thesis. He is not alone – e.g., Garrett (1997) and Harcourt (2000) also take this line.   A parallel argument seems to apply to 'now'-utterances. If I utter,

(5) Now the sun is shining,

this seemingly entails:

(15) There is a time at which the sun is shining,

and apparently contradicts:

(16) There is no time at which the sun is not shining.

Furthermore, an utterance like (5) seemingly shares its logical properties with statements expressed by other temporal terms that it is plausible to suppose do refer to particular times, e.g.,

(17) The sun will start shining at 3 o'clock.

(18) The sun will start shining at lunchtime.

We can contrast the logical behaviour of (5) with

(9) It's raining,

which – assuming the feature-placing analysis of this utterance is correct – does not entail that there is somebody or something that is raining.

A response to this objection is to distinguish between what the content of a thought or utterance entails or contradicts, and what can reasonably be inferred from the content of that thought or utterance together with other elements of the context. An alternative way to understand the situation described by Shoemaker is that when someone utters 'I feel pain', a third party can infer from what is said and the fact that it is said by a particular person, that 'someone feels pain' is true, and 'no one feels pain' is false. But the third party can make these inferences, whether the utterance expresses a subject-predicate thought; or a feature-placing thought simply registering the presence of pain; or whether it expresses no thought at all, and is analogous to a groan as Wittgenstein (1958) has argued is the case for some 'I'-utterances. The same points can be made in the case of 'now'. Events happen in time. Thus if someone registers the presence of an event by uttering a sentence such as 'now the sun is shining', a third party can infer that it is true 'there is a time at which the sun is shining' and infer that it is false 'there is no time at which the sun is shining'. But this on its own does not reveal anything about the structure of the thought expressed by 'now the sun is shining' (or even whether it expresses a thought at all).

These last remarks suggest an alternative approach to the no-reference view. 'Now' is an indexical term. Its reference – like that of 'I' and 'here' - varies according to context. A very influential framework for indexical reference is Kaplan's (1977) account, according to which each indexical has a *character*, which when applied to some context, yields the referent. These characters are the agent of the context ('I'), the time of the context ('now'), and the location of the context ('here'). Kaplan originally assumed that the *context of evaluation*, i.e., the context that determines the reference of an indexical, was always the context of utterance. I have argued, alongside others such as Predelli (1998, 2002), and Corazza et. al (2002), that Kaplan's general framework should be retained, but the context that determines reference can vary, and is not always that in which a term is uttered (Romdenh-Romluc, 2002). Above, we saw that a third-party can infer which time is in question from an utterance of

(5) Now the sun is shining,

together with information that is available when the utterance is made (e.g., that the speaker has made the utterance at 4pm; that the speaker is not taking part in a play; etc.). A no-reference view treats the inference that 'now' in (5) concerns a particular time as separate from the linguistic content of (5). But an alternative is to understand this inference as *determining the referent* of 'now' in (5). In Kaplanian terms, the inference made by the third-party – whether or not it is consciously rehearsed – therefore constitutes applying the character of 'now' to the context of evaluation to yield the referent.

Taking this line preserves uniformity in accounting for 'now' - all uses of 'now' refer. However, it requires us to reject the common assumption that the linguistic content of a sentence is the propositional content of the thought expressed by it.[17] A full discussion of this strategy is beyond the scope of this paper. But I note that this proposal still allows us to make sense of why a particular sentence can be used to express a particular thought – both (5) and the thought it expresses concern the same time, even though that time is only explicitly represented by the linguistic content of the utterance and not the content of the thought. Similarly, the fact that both concern the same time also explains how (5) can be used to communicate the thinker's thought to others, despite the difference in structure between the utterance and the thought it expresses.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that a certain class of 'now'-utterances express thoughts that do not involve thinking about a particular time and predicating something of it, but instead merely involve registering the presence of events. I reached this claim through taking some of the most influential ideas and frameworks that have been used to analyse 'I'-thought, along with standard claims made about temporal experience in the phenomenological literature, and shown their implications for temporal thought. My investigation is exploratory in that I do not offer arguments to support the resources I have drawn on to develop my analysis. It should instead be thought of as a contribution to mapping the area.[18]

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23

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1 This is not to say that consideration of the specific peculiarities of 'now' is completely absent. See, e.g., Blackburn and Jørgensen (2016) for an account of Prior's (1968) analysis of temporal reference, which drew on unpublished work by Kamp (eventually published as Kamp 1971). See, also Prosser (2015) for a discussion of 'now'-thought as part of his account of indexical thinking.

2 There is widespread, but not complete, agreement that 'I' at least *prima facie* has these peculiar features. I will assume it does here for the sake of argument, since I cannot defend these claims in the space available here.

3 Not everyone agrees with this claim. See, e.g., Cappelen and Dever (2014) for a recent argument against this view. I cannot address their arguments here, but the account of how 'now'-beliefs are connected to action I offer below should serve to illustrate how and why I think such beliefs are essential.

4 See Morgan and Salje (2020) for an overview of recent work on first-person thought.

5 Space here prevents me from addressing challenges to this account, the central one originating with Pryor (1999). For what it's worth, I take Coliva (2006, 2017) to have adequately addressed this worry, but I cannot argue for this here.

6 In forming a conception of a particular individual, one will draw on concepts of more general categories – e.g., my conception of my dog Billy draws on my more general concept 'dog' - and these more general concepts may be acquired on the basis of previous experiences. The requirement on perceptual-demonstrative thought is just that the thinker's conception of this *particular individual* – so, this particular instance of a more general class of things – is formed solely on the basis of current experience of it.

7 See, e.g., Bach (1992).

8 Someone could hold that my parrot's noises should not even be classed as an utterance. I will not discuss this possibility here as I take the general point that it is possible at least in principle for an utterance to not express a thought to be uncontroversial.

9 See Peter (2016) for a recent defence of Evans' stronger principle.

10 See, e.g., Bermúdez (1998).

11 This recognitional capacity need not be infallible. See, e.g., Brown (1998) for a discussion of such capacities.

12 See, e.g., Bermúdez's (1998) discussion of self-awareness where he tries to show that proprioception *does* satisfy this requirement and so can provide the subject with a conception of herself as an individual in virtue of its integration into a broader sensory field. Gallagher (2003) also employs Shoemaker's object perception model in his more general discussion of the nature of proprioceptive self-awareness.

13 I think there may be an interesting comparison here with an influential approach to time perception in psychology that appeals to an 'accumulator' to explain awareness that a certain amount of time has passed. If, e.g., we were only able to register temporal cycles such as day and night, we would be aware of whereabouts we were in that cycle, but not of how many such cycles have passed. The hypothesis is thus that there must be some physiological system that registers the accumulation of cycles. A model of this sort was first proposed by Treisman (1963).

14 See Romdenh-Romluc (2011) for a detailed explanation of Merleau-Ponty's account.

15 See Ratcliffe (2015) for an excellent account of this (and other aspects of temporal experience), that draws explicitly on the work of earlier phenomenologists.

16 Prosser (2015) appeals to affordances in his account of the relation between indexical thought and action. The account he offers is different from the one I present here.

17 Recanati (2007) develops a proposal along these lines in some detail, identifying different types of content associated with utterances and the thoughts they express, particularly for what he calls 'perspectival thoughts' such as those typically expressed using 'I'.

18 I'd like to thank audiences at the *About Time* conference at the University of Leeds, and the *Royal Institute of Philosophy* public lecture at the University of Kent, along with my colleagues at the University of Sheffield for much helpful feedback and discussion of earlier versions of this paper. I'd also like to thank the anonymous referee for the *European Journal of Philosophy* for their helpful and considered written comments. It hasn't been possible to deal with all of the suggestions I received due to the length of this paper, but I intend to return to these in future work on the topic.