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**Leon Kojen**  
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Leon Kojen's *An Essay on Philosophical Psychology* opens up and develops several very interesting areas in philosophical psychology: at the most general level, it deals with the problem of 'other minds', at the most basic level, it discusses the psychological concepts neatly arranged in three basic groups: phenomenal psychological concepts which cover the current mental states, and two types of dispositional concepts: one object-focused and the other proposition – focused. However, the primary issue that Kojen is dealing with is the first person/third person asymmetry, formulated first by Wittgenstein. In fact, a lot of what Kojen says can be read against the background of his criticism directed at Wittgenstein and his treatment of mental life generally and asymmetry in particular. In that sense, the book provides excellent introduction to and explanation of some of Wittgenstein's ideas (especially those originating in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*). However, Kojen goes beyond that and provides a very detailed and to my knowledge original explanation and finally a solution to the problem of asymmetry. He is very meticulous in writing, always supporting his arguments with suitable examples and explaining things in a manner that

enables even readers not very familiar with the issues developed to follow the discussion.

Already in the foreword Kojen clearly delimitates his enquiry to "... some open questions dealing with logical nature and epistemic aspects of psychological concepts" and by these concepts he has in mind "...everyday concepts that we use in order to express and explain our thoughts and experience, our actions and reactions"<sup>1</sup>. The importance of these concepts comes, according to Kojen, from the fact that "answers to these questions reveal to us the most general framework against which we are trying to understand and explain different aspects of our inner life, as well as different aspects of our behavior".<sup>2</sup> There are three types of psychological concepts. Phenomenological psychological concepts have descriptive function and refer to our current mental states (i.e. to what we feel, experience or think about at any particular moment). Object-focused dispositional concepts belong to the second type and have an explanatory function. They refer to psychological dispositions such as beliefs, desires, fears etc, which have a direct object (like in the sentence 'I expect the victory of that party at the up coming elections'). Similar to these are proposition-focused dispositional concepts which refer to the beliefs, desires, expectations, fears (etc.) with propositional structure (like 'I expect that party to win at the up coming elections'). These are very important because of their role in practical reasoning and that it's why their function is explanatory as well as deliberative.

Having thus defined his main interest, Kojen goes on to formulate the 'common denominator' which combines the three concepts, and that is the following:

"In all three cases, we rely on observation when we use these concepts in the third person singular in present tense, but not

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<sup>1</sup> Kojen 2009, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

when we use them in the first person singular for the present tense: when I say ‘I feel pain’, ‘I think about my childhood’, ‘I am afraid of that man’, ‘I believe that Vermeer is a great painter’, etc., my judgments are immediate, and in no way am I relying on observation, which is obviously not the case with others who are making those same claims about me. Wittgenstein was the first who noticed the importance of this first person/third person asymmetry for present tense ...”<sup>3</sup>

This quotation summarizes all the main aspects of the book, and later in the text Kojen immediately states the problem with Wittgenstein’s treatment of the matter, claiming that his main fault was the fact that he didn’t realize that asymmetry doesn’t mean the same in all three cases. As he will show, the asymmetry doesn’t take the same form in the case of phenomenal psychological concepts and in the case of dispositional, and showing that is the main aim of this excellent book.

I will now turn to a more detailed analysis of the three chapters. The first one, entitled *Two understandings of the psychological concepts*, brings a more detailed historical account of philosophical treatment of mental phenomena. Two understandings are connected to two different accounts of the mental as advocated by different philosophers and philosophical traditions. According to the first understanding, what is special about psychological concepts (special in the sense that it should be used in explaining them) is the privileged access to one’s mental states. In the Cartesian and empirical tradition, this was usually expressed with the combination of three claims: if A believes that p, then p (i.e. one cannot be wrong about what he thinks); if p, then A knows that p (i.e. if one has or is in some kind of mental state, one knows that) and finally, if A believes that p, then A knows that p (if one believes to be in pain, then one knows he’s in pain). The most important of the tree was the first one (the so

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Kojen 2009, 7.

called Infallibility thesis) and it was for a long time held as the foundation of the self-knowledge ascriptions. However, Kojen goes on, Infallibility thesis is mistaken: one can never eliminate the possibility of error and therefore, we should replace the Infallibility thesis with the following one, which he calls the First person authority thesis: (Va) If A in the first person sincerely says 'p', his claim that p is justified. The idea behind this is the following: even if we cannot eliminate the possibility of error, the fact still remains that the subject himself is in the best possible position to say what he sees, feels, thinks etc. The same however does not hold for the sentences which ascribe mental states to other people (like when a person B says that a person A is in pain), or to the subject in the past (like when someone says 'I was in pain'). In order for these sentences to be justified, "... it is not enough for B to say it sincerely, he has to rely upon A's behavior"<sup>4</sup>. This is of course the first glimpse of asymmetry, applied to our current mental states and expressed through the First person authority thesis. However, this does not explain the whole of our mental life since it does not cover dispositional states. There are two important distinctions here. First, the credibility of the person making a judgment does not rest on her privileged

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<sup>4</sup> Kojen 2009, 18. Kojen believes that the privileged access thesis, supported not by the infallibility but by first person authority, captures the „common sense understanding that each of us has about our current mental states“ (p.18). He then goes on to argue against Ryle's claim that one can know about himself the same things as he can about others. Kojen concludes that this view is „absurd and untenable“. The important conclusion that he reaches in this part is the following: „No matter how we try to explain the authority we have when we speak about what we perceive, think or feel at any given moment, what is not disputable is that we do have such an authority...“(p.27)

access alone: other people are in position to refute her claim by alluding to her behavior, her past deeds and conducts, but also to the things she did not do. That means that whether or not a person is sincere is no longer the sole criteria for accepting or declining her claims about her dispositional attitudes. Second, it is important to notice that from the fact that others can call upon my behavior to accept or decline my claim about my dispositional attitudes, it does not follow that the asymmetry no longer exists: in making a claim about first person disposition, I do not need to rely upon my behavior, but another person has to. At this point, Kojen makes a distinction between two types of dispositional concepts (as explained above) and goes on to show their importance. This is also connected to the second understanding of psychological concepts, the one that has to do with the fact that we use these concepts in order to understand and give account of human behavior: through psychological concepts we ascribe mental states to people, and these in turn are important for rationally explaining human actions<sup>5</sup>. However, at this point Kojen subjects the two types of dispositional concepts to a rather detailed analysis, the final conclusion of which is the following: we can ascribe object-focused dispositional concepts to a person, even in cases when the person herself is not aware of what her dispositions are.<sup>6</sup> This cannot be done in the case of propositional-

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<sup>5</sup> Here is Kojen: "I think that in this we should rely on the idea, the importance of which was rightly insisted on by Davidson, that in explaining human behavior by appealing to desires and beliefs, we are inevitably guided by the assumption that people are basically rational creatures. That means that, on the one hand, in our interaction with people, we take it that they will act rationally in the light of their desires and beliefs, and on the other hand, we ascribe desires and beliefs to them so that what they do can be explainable as rational behavior." (p.38)

<sup>6</sup> Kojen gives the example of a person who loves and admires Vermeer's paintings (and because of that she regularly

focused dispositions. This fact has further consequences for the problem of asymmetry. I will not show all the steps of Kojen's detailed analysis, but his final conclusion is the claim that "classical" asymmetry thesis (A) holds only for current mental states (or as he calls them, phenomenal concepts) and for object-focused dispositional concepts, while for proposition-focused dispositions we have to modify the thesis a bit (E). Here are the two formulations:

*(A) The classical asymmetry thesis:*

When A says 'p' in the first person, claim that p is not stated on the grounds of observation; in the third person the claim that p is always stated on the grounds of observation

*(E) The first person expressive function thesis:*

Saying 'I believe (want, intend, hope, am afraid) that p' expresses the belief (desire, intention, hope, fear) that p immediately; but when someone says 'A believes (wants, intends, hopes, is afraid) that p' he claims on the grounds of observation that A believes (wants, intends, hopes, is afraid) that p.

In the remaining pages of the first chapter, Kojen develops two possible 'models' for explaining the psychological concepts. If we primarily rely upon current mental states, we are more likely to claim that what is distinctive of our psychology is the privileged access that we have toward our inner life. If however, we take dispositional concepts as a model, we will be more focused on the fact that these concepts play a very important role in the explanation and ascription of rationality to people. Kojen however does not want to do that. He claims: "Without privileged access to our current mental states, we would not have the true insight into how our desires and beliefs are formed. On

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goes to see the exhibitions with these pictures, talks about them, thinks about them etc), although she herself is not aware that the painter is Vermeer. But his behavior is best explained if we ascribe to her the claim that she loves Vermeer.

the other hand, without the possibility to ascribe to others desires and beliefs that are elusive to them, we would deprive ourselves of deeper explanations that are often demanding it”<sup>7</sup>. So what Kojen wants is to find a theory that can accommodate both of these important facts of our psychological life: our privileged access (to mental states) and the fact that we ascribe dispositions to others in order to explain their behavior and ascribe rationality to them. What he identifies as the (possible) common ground is the asymmetry, noticed first by Wittgenstein.

In the second chapter, entitled *How to define the area of psychological?* Kojen develops a detailed analysis of Wittgenstein’s *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* and presents different reactions to it, as developed among the others by C. Diamonad, G.E. M. Anscombe, G. H. von Richt and M. Budd. The starting point is the following: in speaking about our inner life, we use notional and phenomenological terms, which means that we should make a distinction between terms we use to refer to current mental states (states of consciousness) and to dispositions. What Wittgenstein actually wants to emphasize is the fact that we use language to refer to our (mental) experience and as he claims, it is a failure not to realize that<sup>8</sup>, even more so

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<sup>7</sup> Kojen 2009, 57.

<sup>8</sup> This is the claim behind his attack on mentalists and behaviorists. As Kojen says, „ it is important (the distinction between two kinds of concepts) for his polemics on two fronts, against mentalists on the one side, and behaviorists on the other, because both of them distort it: mentalists see states of consciousness where there are only dispositions, just like behaviorists see dispositions where undoubtedly there are states of consciousness. Whatever that we try to say about the relation between the meanings in language and immediate experience will not be correct if we do not make this distinction correctly: only when we correctly make a distinction between states of consciousness and dispositions, that is, the terms that refer to

given that “the important difference between dispositions and states of consciousness is the fact that disposition doesn’t end with the break of consciousness or shift of attention”. This fact will be important in the characterization of states of consciousness and dispositions, which is Kojen’s conclusion on the issue: “... there are plenty of reasons to agree with Wittgenstein regarding psychological concepts and duration. To say “I feel pain” or “I am thinking on that conversation yesterday” is about something that has a true duration, that can be interrupted and that can in some way be monitored as a process in time. But to say “I have been wanting for years to travel to Rome” or “For years I believe that this party stands no chance at the elections” is about something that doesn’t have a true duration (although it is a property that I have for a shorter or longer period or time), cannot be interrupted and cannot be monitored as a process in time”.<sup>9</sup>

As already said, Wittgenstein was the first to show the importance of the first person/third person asymmetry and this is what Kojen devotes most of his attention to. The crucial distinction is the one between informing and expressing: as Wittgenstein sees it, psychological verbs are characterized by the fact that third person present tense should be identified with observation, and the first not. The idea is that in the first person present tense, a person can say (give information about) what her mental states are; in the third person case, we have to observe her, that is, see how she expresses them. Now, in Wittgenstein’s overall theory, this is connected to his views on how children learn meanings of words: his example is with the pain, being the physical aspect, and the behavioral manifestations of that feeling – screaming, crying, frowning etc. So what actually happens in the process of learning a meaning is that a child learns to

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them, will we be able to see how meaning and immediate experience are connected.“ (p.69)

<sup>9</sup> Kojen 2009, 75-6,



substitute screaming and crying with the words 'I'm in pain': the spontaneous, natural expression of emotions is substituted with the linguistic one. This is of course oversimplified view on the matter, and there are several arguments that Kojen raises against it, but the crucial one is the fact that Wittgenstein's model does not explain all the psychological states and terms used to refer to them. Two important phenomena are not, and cannot be, accounted for by Wittgenstein's analysis. First, every feeling has different degrees, all of which can be (and usually are) covered by the same word (the phrase I'm in pain covers my very mild headache, my very strong headache, my migraine, my broken heart, my disappointment over something etc) although they lack the characteristic behavior. Second and more important for the asymmetry issue, Wittgenstein's model cannot be applied to the verbs of thinking and perceiving, because in these cases, there is no (characteristic) behavior. This jeopardizes the contrast between informing and expressing that Wittgenstein insists upon and takes to be of prime importance for explaining the asymmetry. But this is just one of the problems in his theory. As Kojen sees it, Wittgenstein was right in claiming that first person/third person asymmetry is the characterizing aspect of psychological verbs, but where he went wrong was his failure to realize that the asymmetry doesn't mean the same with all the psychological verbs. After a very detailed analysis of why that is so, Kojen reaches the following conclusion: (which will prove important in his own account of the asymmetry developed in the final chapter)

- i) each group of psychological concepts manifests some kind of asymmetry, but it takes a different form in each
- ii) in the case phenomenological concepts which we use to refer to our current mental states, asymmetry has a twofold nature: it has to do with what we rely upon in forming judgments in first and third person present tense; and with the epistemic status in the two cases. This twofold nature is not present in

dispositional concepts, but the epistemic difference is: the privileged access does not transfer to the third person case

- iii) in the case of proposition-focused dispositions, the asymmetry has to do with the fact that the first person sentences express dispositional states (belief, desire), while the third person sentences only establish them
- iv) in the case of phenomenological concepts and object-focused dispositions, the first and the third person sentences deliver the same claim

The problem remains to explain why is it that third person psychological verbs can only be identified through observation, and the first not. Wittgenstein failed to do that, which means that he also failed to explain the nature of our psychological notions.

What Kojen identified so far is that asymmetry exists with all three groups of psychological notions, but that it doesn't take the same form in each. Here are its different manifestations:

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Psychological concept	Theses which specify different aspects of asymmetry
Phenomenological concepts	(A) (Va)
Object-focused dispositional concepts	(A)
Proposition-focused dispositional concepts	(E)

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<sup>10</sup> Kojen 2009, 83. This chapter offers a lot more on Wittgenstein and some of the controversial issues in his writings, and it is very interesting and thought provoking to see Kojen's discussion about it.

In the third chapter, *First and third person asymmetry*, Kojen still has some issues with Wittgenstein that he wants to settle before moving on to explain his view on the asymmetry. Given that the last part of the previous chapter was dedicated to his own views on different aspects of Wittgenstein's theory, at the beginning of the third chapter he goes back to the asymmetry problem: "He (i.e. Wittgenstein) noticed distinctive feature of those concepts (i.e. psychological concepts), the asymmetry between using them in the first and using them in the third person in present tense sentences, but he did not manage to give an account of that feature in a way he hoped to, by appealing to his notion of expression of inner states. As I have shown in the previous chapter, his notion of expression can be applied neither to all phenomenal nor to all dispositional concepts. This is particularly so in the case of phenomenal concepts. When we speak about what we think and perceive, or what spiritual state we are in, we cannot say – as in the basic cases of pain, fear and other states that have affective component – that what we say substitutes the natural expression of inner state and in that respect represents spontaneous behavior."<sup>11</sup> A similar problem is with the other psychological concepts as well, all of which Wittgenstein wanted to solve by expressing in the first person, informing in the third, because often this contrast does not hold; the contrast is real only with verbs like believing that, wanting that, hoping that..., because the first person present tense sentence expresses a given belief, desire of hope, and the third person sentence informs that the subject has a given belief, hope or desire.<sup>12</sup> This means that

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<sup>11</sup> Kojen, 2009, p.133.

<sup>12</sup> Stated like this, it may sound oversimplified or unsupported, but Kojen develops quite a long discussion about the difference between two kinds of dispositional concepts and their mutual relationship, especially in the second and third chapter. In

Wittgenstein's explanation of asymmetry, based on this contrast, is not plausible, because the contrast does not hold for all psychological concepts (and asymmetry does). A crucial problem that Kojen identifies is the fact that in the case of object-focused dispositions, what someone says about himself (I hate that man) can be directly refuted through the appeal to the behavior of the person making the claim (and of course, nothing similar holds for current mental states)<sup>13</sup>. Kojen calls this the paradox of object-focused dispositions<sup>14</sup> and the rest of the book will, for the most part, be dedicated to analyzing the paradox and then proving that

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that sense, it provides a great insight not only into psychological sphere, but into philosophy of language and theory of meaning. His examples are very carefully developed and he is very patient in bringing a reader to notice all the shades of the difference in meanings among these concepts. As a result of that, the book has a certain element of tension, and sets a kind of a challenge in front of a reader. See for example pp.30-33, 40-43, 139-147.

<sup>13</sup> Here is Kojen: "It is only naturally to ask, having this in mind, how can it be that the first person/third person asymmetry holds not only for phenomenal psychological concepts, but for object-focused dispositional concepts as well. When I say that I am indifferent to Brahms' music, the credibility of my claim is being evaluated in the light of my overall behavior, not just in the light of what I think, feel or perceive at the given moment. How then can it be that I make the judgment about my indifference to Brahms' music directly, without relying on any facts, even though the facts about my behavior are relevant in evaluating the truthfulness of my judgment?" (p. 150-151).

<sup>14</sup> "We could call this *the paradox of object-focused dispositions*: when we ascribe them to ourselves in the first person present tense, we do that in the same manner as when we ascribe current mental states to ourselves; but when we assess whether or not we really have them, we do it without acknowledging to ourselves the kind of epistemically privileged position that we have regarding what we think, feel or perceive at the given moment". (p. 151)

it is only an illusion. I would say that this is the most interesting and obviously the most original part of the book, with Kojen once again taking up the issues with Cartesian and empirical view on self-knowledge ascriptions, as well as with the theses (A) and (Va). One important element of (A) and (Va) that he identifies is the fact that what is immediately given to us is what we think, experience and feel at the present moment, as well as what we perceive.<sup>15</sup>

One thing that has to be taken into consideration in dealing with the paradox is the time-frame that we take any particular disposition to refer to. Kojen claims that these dispositions refer only to the present (period, not moment) and future. However, what is important for the actual manifestation of disposition are the circumstances in which the subject finds himself: therefore, in ascribing dispositions to someone, we in fact i) refer only to the present period and ii) claim that a person would do certain things only in some circumstances, and the circumstances relevant for manifestation of particular disposition depend on the situation in which a person finds himself and his belief-desire system. That means that a person can sometimes do something although he doesn't have the relevant dispositions, and vice-versa.<sup>16</sup> The last step in solving the paradox is realizing that "When I ascribe to myself some object-focused disposition, what is immediately accessible to me is a stream of thoughts about how I would manifest that disposition (that is, what I would do under relevant circumstances). This is accessible to me in a same

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<sup>15</sup> Kojen call this the thesis D (p.152).

<sup>16</sup> Kojen's example is a person going to a concert of some performer whom she doesn't love (which means that her behavior – her going to the concert - can be taken as evidence against her claim that she doesn't love that performer) because she wants to keep company to a friend. That's the reason for his claim that past behavior plays no role in ascribing dispositions. See esp. pp 156-174.

manner as in some process of thinking. The only difference is, when I claim that I have a certain disposition (...) I am logically obliged to state some things that I would do under particular circumstances”<sup>17</sup>. What is important to notice is that these things do not have to be at once present in one’s mind; they are just “hypothetical claims that show how and in what circumstances this disposition would manifest itself”<sup>18</sup>

Solving the paradox makes one more aspect of the asymmetry clearer. There are two aspects of asymmetry: procedural (what we think or feel is immediately available to us, there’s no point asking Why) and normative (when others claim something about me, their claims ask for justification, they have to give reasons for claiming that). However, in order to fully understand the asymmetry in the case of proposition-focused dispositions, we have to notice one more aspect if it: Kojen calls it deliberative, due to its connection with the practical reasoning<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Kojen 2009, p.171

<sup>18</sup> Kojen 2009, p. 172. Several lines after, Kojen writes: “it seems to me that it is now clear why the object-focused paradox is only illusory. On the one hand, the stream of thoughts on how to manifest the relevant disposition (that is, what I would do under particular relevant circumstances) is immediately accessible to me in the same way as things that are on my mind in some process of thinking are immediately accessible to me, which means that I ascribe that disposition to myself in a same manner as I do when speaking about what I am currently thinking or experiencing. On the other hand, those thoughts, that is, the claims I use to express them, are true or untrue depending on what I will do once I'm in the relevant circumstances“ (p. 172)

<sup>19</sup> One may wonder why Kojen insists so much on portraying different aspects of asymmetry, but that is just part of his argument used to show that Wittgenstein did not manage to give an account of asymmetry that would be entirely satisfying exactly because he failed to see different aspects of it. If Wittgenstein is right in claiming that asymmetry is something that

At this point, Kojen finds it important to raise another question, namely what are the psychological concepts that a person needs to have in order to be able to have the concepts which refer to object – focused dispositions? The importance of this question, and its solution – namely, having the dispositional psychological concepts presupposes the knowledge of the phenomenological concepts, and this is what connects the three kinds of psychological concepts – was already hinted at in the introduction, and at the end of the book it becomes more and more obvious<sup>20</sup>. This idea is expressed in the (F/D) thesis: one cannot have the concepts which refer to psychological dispositions if one doesn't have the concepts which refer to current mental states, thinking in particular. That is why the three kinds of psychological concepts are so different, and yet share the common ground seen in the first person/third person asymmetry. One possibility that Kojen leaves open is some new kind of psychological concepts which may or may not fit this patten. A very interesting discussion along this line can be found in the last few pages of the book, where Kojen, inspired to some degree with Aristotle's ethics and virtue theory, takes the example of character traits and tries to see whether or not they have some features of psychological concepts <sup>21</sup>. This is a great example of ethics, philosophy of mind and philosophy of language working together.

Of course, this overview is rather simplified and it does not do justice to all the ideas, arguments, counterarguments and

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all psychological concepts have in common, but at the same time asymmetry seems to have so many different aspects, it could be dubious whether or not it should be identified as distinctive feature of psychological concepts. For a more detailed discussion on this, see pp. 188-210.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed account, see Kojen 2009, pp.179-188.

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed account see Kojen 2009, pp.195 – 210.

thought-provoking claims one finds in the book. There are many things which are worthy of further attention and analysis. All in all, it is hard to tell whether the strength of the book stems from the brilliance of arguments developed to refute Wittgenstein or in the overall exposition of the subject-theme and the way that Kojen balances his views against those who think differently. One more thing that is exemplary is the methodology of the book: Kojen's style of writing is simple and clear; he presents his arguments in a coherent manner enabling thus a reader to follow a discussion. The whole book is extremely well thought-through discussion about philosophical problem of other minds and our mental life. Kojen is very meticulous in building up his theory, always staying alert to possible misunderstandings and keeping in mind his goal: to explain the importance of first person/third person asymmetry for human psychology. In any case, I would recommend the book to all who are interested in this topic.