The Distinctiveness of Second-Person Mental Attributions

(A Comment on D.I. Pérez and A. Gomila, *Social Cognition and the Second Person in Human Interaction*, Routledge, 2021)

Josep E. Corbí

RESUMEN

En *Social Cognition and the Second Person in Human Interaction* (2021), Routledge, Diana Pérez y Antoni Gomila articulan una compleja red de exploraciones conceptuales y empíricas que, en su conjunto, constituyen una noble defensa del carácter primitivo y distintivo de las atribuciones mentales de segunda persona. Encuentro que su defensa de la primitividad de las atribuciones de segunda persona es muy convincente y está profundamente enraizada su proyecto filosófico, cuya naturaleza específica analizaré en la primera sección. El resto del artículo se centrará en su defensa de la distintividad de aquellas atribuciones mentales que se hacen en las interacciones de segunda persona. Mi conclusión será que las diferentes estrategias de Pérez y Gomila para motivar la distintividad de tales atribuciones son, en última instancia, insatisfactorias.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *atribuciones mentales, genealogía, expresión, segunda persona, tercera persona.*

ABSTRACT

In *Social Cognition and the Second Person in Human Interaction* (2021), Routledge, Diana Pérez and Antoni Gomila articulate a complex web of conceptual and empirical explorations that altogether make a remarkable case for the primitiveness and distinctiveness of second-person mental attributions. I find their case for the primitiveness of second-person attributions quite convincing and deeply rooted in their philosophical project, whose specific nature I will examine in the first section. The rest of the paper will then focus on their case for the distinctiveness of those mental attributions that are made in second- person interactions. My conclusion will be that Pérez and Gomila's various strategies to motivate the distinctiveness of such attributions are ultimately unsatisfactory.

KEYWORDS: *Mental Attribution, Genealogy, Expression, Second-Person, Third-Person*

In *Social Cognition and the Second Person in Human Interaction* [(2021), Routledge], Diana Pérez and Antoni Gomila articulate a complex web of conceptual and empirical explorations that altogether make a remarkable case for the primitiveness and distinctiveness of second-person mental attributions. *Primitiveness* alludes to the fact that such mental attributions provide access to every other sort of mental attribution, both from an ontogenetical and phylogenetical point of view; *distinctiveness* concerns the idea that the second-person perspective gives rise to a specific sort of mental attribution, which is, therefore, crucially distinct from those made from a first-person or a third-person perspective. I find Pérez and Gomila's case for the primitiveness of second-person attributions quite convincing and deeply rooted in their philosophical project, whose specific nature I will examine in section 1. The rest of the paper will then focus on their case for the distinctiveness of those mental attributions that are made in second-person interactions. My conclusion will be that Pérez and Gomila's various strategies to motivate the distinctiveness of such attributions are ultimately unsatisfactory.

To develop my line of argument, I will basically explore the four following questions:

(a) What sort of philosophical project is the book meant to deploy? Is it just a particular research in empirically informed phenomenology, or should it better be construed as a genealogy of mental attribution?

(b) Are second-person attributions genuinely distinctive or just ontogenetically – and phylogenetically – primitive?

(c) Are second-person interactions primarily dyadic or triadic?

(d) Can we express propositional contents?

Regarding (a), I will argue that Pérez and Gomila elaborate a plausible genealogy of mental attribution that saves a crucial role for the second-person perspective at early stages of our ontogenetical – and phylogenetical – development, and this makes Pérez and Gomila's especially suited to defend the primitiveness of second-person attributions. Questions (b) to (d) are, on the contrary, concerned with the distinctiveness of such attributions.

In response to (b), I will argue that Pérez and Gomila fail to adequately motivate the distinctiveness of second-person attribution, although this does not pose a serious problem to their overall genealogical project. Their project is, in my view, so persuasive that it invites a revision

of the standard contrast between the first- and the third-person perspectives and it is in light of this revision that the second-person perspective fails to emerge as distinctive insofar as it permeates a proper understanding of the other two perspectives, which, as a result, may be seen as parasitic or derivative. It is in this specific respect that I will defend the *centrality* of second-person mental attributions. Part of my challenge to the distinctiveness of the second-person attributions has to do with questions (c) and (d), since, contrary to what Pérez and Gomila claim, I will argue that second-person interactions are primarily triadic – and, in this respect, similar to third-person attributions – and, furthermore, that propositional contents can be expressed and, therefore, that the inexpressibility of propositional contents cannot provide the basis for a specifically intimate connection between expression and the second-person perspective.

I. A GENEALOGY OF MENTAL ATTRIBUTION

In chapter 2, Pérez and Gomila dwell on the specificity of their approach with regard to some neighboring philosophical projects. In this respect, they firstly make explicit that they do not aim at elaborating a transcendental argument to the effect that our concepts are necessarily grounded in social interactions, as Wittgenstein and Davidson tried to do on relatively similar assumptions [Wittgenstein (1953), Davidson (1992)]. Pérez and Gomila's projects bears, however, a significant continuity with Wittgenstein's later writings. This continuity concerns the rejection of private language, the emphasis on social practices and the expressive dimension of the mind [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 28], but there is also a specific methodological claim, namely: that concepts are to be identified by a cluster of cases that relate to each other in the way different members of a family resemble each other, that is, by reference to a constellation of features, so that each case to which the concept applies only instantiates a certain portion of those features. This methodological view has a notable impact on the development of Pérez and Gomila's project, for they defend the primitiveness and distinctiveness of second-person attributions by examining a constellation of features that each particular case could only partially implement.

Moreover, they so heavily stress that the phenomenon they are interested in is actually experienced by the participants in social interactions that one may initially be inclined to regard their project as a sort of phenomenological investigation:

> ... It is necessary to emphasize again that the phenomenon that we are describing here belongs to the personal level. We are focusing on what human beings experience, on what they do, and how they interact. And we are considering expressive, interpretative, and attributive practices that involve common sense psychological concepts, applicable to human persons, such as feeling pain, being excited, having beliefs and desires etc. [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 25; see also pp. 30, 44].

This passage continues, however, with an emphasis on the importance of considering sub-personal mechanisms:

> ... This personal-level phenomena, the second person interactions that we are describing, is undoubtedly based on a series of sub-personal mechanisms of various kinds [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 25; see also pp. 21, 67, 68].

In fact, Pérez and Gomila argue that empirical results at a sub-personal level confirm their analysis of our experience of mental attribution; more specifically, they are convinced that the sub-personal mechanisms involved in second-person attributions crucially differ from those that are present – or assumed to be present by the prevalent philosophical views – in third-person attributions. So, we might conclude that Pérez and Gomila's project should be understood as a phenomenology of second-person attribution, validated by investigations at a sub-personal level.

I do not think, however, that Pérez and Gomila's project could be properly understood this way, for their approach contains a diachronic component. After all, they want to affirm not only the distinctiveness of second-person attributions but their basic ontogenetical and phylogenetical role; it is precisely in this second respect that they present second-person attributions as primitive. The use they make of this diachronic component combines empirical data with theoretical reconstructions of the process by which our capacity to attribute to each other psychological states may reach its mature condition. In light of this, we may say that Pérez and Gomila's project is better understood as *a genealogy of mental attribution*, along the lines suggested by Williams (2002), only that, where Williams' genealogy combines speculative and historical reconstructions, Pérez and Gomila combine phenomenological descriptions with theoretical reconstructions as well as neural, evolutionary, and psychological contributions.[1]

II. The Primitiveness and Distinctiveness of the Second-Person Perspective

Pérez and Gomila (2021) are mainly concerned with a certain class of phenomena, namely: *mental attributions in the context of second-person interactions*. Phenomena are the object of philosophical discernment or elucidation. There is already something philosophical in regarding a number of phenomena as bundled together, that is, as forming a philosophically relevant kind, but it is crucial to philosophical investigation that one's conceptual framework is open to challenge or revision in the face of recalcitrant phenomena. This is the kind of openness Pérez and Gomila request from their readers and, thus, they begin with a number of cases – which go from the comforting look, the tango dancers or the arguing couple, to the crucial case of the infant and the caregiver – to bring to light the phenomenon of the sort of social interaction they are concerned with.

When it comes to identifying the sort of mental attribution that is involved in second-person interactions, they mainly make use of two terms: *primitive* and *distinctive* [Pérez and Gomila (2021), pp. 4, 44, 60].[2] Second-person mental attributions are claimed to be primitive insofar as they provide access to all other sorts of mental attribution both ontologically and phylogenetically:

> We argue for a view that we baptized the second person perspective on mental attribution. Our central thesis is that second person interactions... involve a genuine and distinctive form of psychological attribution —second person attribution. We argue that this is the conceptually, ontogenetically, and phylogenetically *basic* way of understanding mentality, the ladder required to master other forms of psychological attribution (such as propositional attitudes) [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 4; my emphasis].

> Our goal in this chapter is to... argue that second-personal attributions are *primitive*, in the sense that they constitute our way to access the mental world: through simpler attitudes and simpler contents. [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 44; my emphasis]

But second-person mental attributions are not only meant to be primitive, but distinctive as well. Pérez and Gomila's argument for the distinctiveness claim goes like this:

> First person ascriptions are self-attributions, such as 'I am in pain' or 'I want to visit India', while third person ones were typically thought of as attributions of propositional attitudes to others, as 'Jane believes that Tar-

zan is playing with the elephants' or 'Tarzan wants to climb a tree'. The
main thesis of this book is that there is still another kind of psychological
attribution, from a second perspective, which is genuinely and irreducibly
different from both [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 109].

First-person attributions are only occasionally approached in the book.
The central issue is whether second-person attributions are irreducibly
distinct from third-person ones and, in this respect, a standard account
of the latter is granted. For this purpose, Pérez and Gomila emphasize
the contrast between *the observer* and the *participant*:

> The third person standpoint can be understood as the perspective of the
> observer... contrasting it with the perspective of the participant, which
> corresponds to the second person view [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 113],

which, in turn, parallels the contrast between a *detached* and an *engaged*
attitude.

> The paradigmatic example of the third person perspective is the one we adopt
> toward people we are not interacting with... But third person attributions are
> not only made in this detached mode [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 114].

So far we are concerned with two kinds of perspectives, the observer's and
the participant's, with their corresponding psychological attitudes, namely,
detachment and engagement, respectively. Still, it is unclear whether such
disparate perspectives, with their corresponding psychological attitudes,
give rise to distinctive mental attributions. Some might think that a partici-
pant engaged in a certain interaction makes the same kind of mental at-
tributions to other participants as a detached observer might do;[3] to put it
another way, what Pérez and Gomila need to prove or motivate is the idea
that differences in perspective give rise to distinctive mental attributions,
that is, that mental attributions from the perspective of the participant are
distinctive from those made from the observer's point of view.

III. SECOND-PERSON MENTAL ATTRIBUTIONS ARE ONTOGENETICALLY AND PHYLOGENETICALLY PRIMITIVE, BUT NOT GENUINELY DISTINCTIVE

The primitiveness of second-person attributions, which I am happy
to grant, does not presuppose their distinctiveness, namely, that mental
attributions made from a second-person perspective are distinct from

those made from the first- and the third-person perspectives. Mental attributions may emerge, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically, in second-person interactions and, moreover, the sort of mental attributions that we make in such a context may not essentially differ from those made from a different perspective. This is why Pérez and Gomila seek to set out the features that make second-person attributions distinct. Specifically, they claim that second-person mental attributions are distinctive because:

(a) they "are automatic, practical, implicit, transparent, reciprocally contingent, and dynamic" [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p.13].

(b) they involve the participant's perspective [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 113].

(c) they are emotionally engaged [Pérez and Gomila (2021), pp. 13, 114].

(d) they have access to privileged information [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 57].

(e) they are primarily dyadic while third-person attributions are essentially triadic.

(f) their content can be fully expressed while the propositional content of first-person attributions cannot be expressed.

As I emphasized in section I, Pérez and Gomila begin their exploration by briefly describing a number of paradigmatic cases concerning the kind of social interaction they are interested in. It is in view of such cases that they seek to discern what the distinctive features of second-person attributions might be. Likewise, third-person perspective ought to be characterized by reference to a number of paradigmatic cases, not just by appeal to a couple of features, such as that of a detached observer, for, otherwise, we run the risk of begging the question. The starting point should be the examination of certain paradigmatic cases of both second- and third-person attributions in order to identify what may be distinctive of them. What must guide us in the selection of such paradigmatic cases could certainly be the contrast between someone who participates in a social interaction and someone who observes how some other people participate in a social interaction. We should leave aside, however, the assumption that participants in social interaction are constitutively engaged while observers are constitutively detached, since this assumption is not required to identify the two bundles of paradigmatic cases we are interested in and, as mentioned, may lead to begging the question.

This said, I do not see, regarding (a), why paradigmatic cases of third-person attribution could not be automatic, practical, implicit, transparent, and dynamic. Third-person attributions may not be practical with respect to the observed social interaction, but they could be practical with regard to some other goal or social interaction where the observer might eventually participate. Moreover, in light of what an agent observes, she may decide – or even feel forced – to abandon this stance and become engaged in the social interaction that, at the beginning, she was only observing; complementary to this, a participant may at some point leave this stance and take up the view of the observer with regard to the particular interaction in which she was originally participating. The possibility – and, occasionally, the inevitability – of shifting from one to another perspective, suggests that third-person attributions are vulnerable to the participants' attitudes and that the latter can also feel challenged or confirmed in their actions by the observer's view. As a result, the participant's and the observer's attitudes emerge as vulnerable to each other.

Regarding (b), I have already granted that the second- and the third-person perspectives are respectively associated with the contrast between the participant and the observer. But, as suggested in section 1, this claim does not suffice to establish that the mental attributions we make from one or another perspective are qualitatively distinct.

Regarding (c), I cannot see why emotional engagement is specific to the participant's perspective. After all, I can be indifferent to what I observe or terribly concerned with it. In this respect, if we interpret the emotional engagement of the viewer with a film as a sign of taking the participant's perspective, as Pérez and Gomila do ([Pérez and Gomila (2021), pp. 119, 133], we may just be begging the question, for one could equally argue that, when watching fiction, we are typically engaged viewers or observers and, therefore, that emotional engagement is not constitutive of the participant's perspective. Reversely, participants in a social interaction may often take an emotional distance from what they are doing, as we do with rituals that at some point fail to make sense to us but in which for some reason we decide to keep on participating. So, it seems that emotional engagement is neither exclusive nor constitutive of the second-person perspective.

Regarding (d), Pérez and Gomila claim that:

> This dynamic information produced by individuals in their interaction is immediately available for those who participate in the interaction, and it is produced because of the interaction. It is certainly possible to pay attention to two interacting individuals, from a detached position, but the information

> available from this standpoint is quite different from the one the interacting partners themselves keep a track of [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 57].

It is unclear to me what specific information this could be. In general, I am inclined to think that there is epistemic virtue in the combination of the participant's and the observer's perspectives, as my remarks about (c) suggest; both perspectives are vulnerable to specific blind spots that the complementary perspective may help to overcome. Hence, a nuanced view of what is going on may require a going back and forth from one to another perspective, but there is no need to understand this dynamic as the accumulation of pieces of information obtained exclusively from one or another perspective.

Moreover, I find the claim that some pieces of information are only available to the participants in a social interaction rather implausible, insofar as the concept itself of information comes with the idea of portability; to put it another way, if i is to be identified as a piece of information, then i can be transmitted from one to another individual, regardless of their specific epistemic perspective, although perhaps conditional on their conceptual and perceptual skills. Of course, Pérez and Gomila could stress that, even though i can be transmitted, there are some pieces of information we can only *directly* access in social interaction. In such a case, I would reply, however, that the idea of portability implies that, even though *in some circumstances i* can be *directly* accessible only from the participant's perspective, it cannot be *constitutively* so; and a merely circumstantial relation to i can hardly serve to vindicate the distinctiveness of second-person attributions. This much for features (a)-(d). I will comment in some more detail on features (e) and (f) in the two next sections.

IV. SECOND-PERSON ATTRIBUTIONS ARE NOT PRIMARILY DYADIC, BUT TRIADIC

Pérez and Gomila distinguish between dyadic and triadic interactions. Triadic interactions involve not only two people but some feature in the world to which, in the typical case, they both refer, while, in dyadic interactions, the world is absent, that is, there are only two people interacting with each other. They regard dyadic interactions not only as the *primitive* form of second-person interaction but as *distinctive* of this kind of interaction; at some point, second-person interactions may become triadic, but third-person attributions are constitutively so:

> Second person interactions may not involve the world beyond the inter-
> acting partners. Each one may just be concerned with the other in the in-
> teraction; the world may play no role in the interaction. The basic form of
> second personal interaction is dyadic; not triadic, even if it may become
> triadic [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 23].

In section 4.1, Pérez and Gomila go through several interactive phenom-
ena that take place mainly during the first year of life and are allegedly
dyadic. I will argue, however, that at least some central phenomena in
their analysis are genuinely triadic.

A fundamental case of second-person interaction is the interaction
between *the infant and her caregiver*. One can safely assume the infant's psy-
che is too simple and inarticulate during the first months of her life for
there to be a feature of the world to which she may even confusedly re-
fer. But this fact by itself does not make the interaction dyadic because
her caregiver has certainly a world and, for instance, when the baby cries
desperately, she will tensely examine the world (including the baby's
body) to look for the cause of her pain in order to alleviate her. To put it
another way, even though the baby's crying is a reaction to some feature
in the world, the world may be absent in the infant's mind, but it is cer-
tainly present in the way the caregiver deals with her. And it could be ar-
gued that this fact suffices to make the interaction – even the most
primitive one – triadic. In any event, it can be further argued that some ini-
tial interactive phenomena involve a reference – however vague – to the
world, not only on the side of the caregiver but on the infant's as well. Let
us consider, for this purpose, two phenomena that Pérez and Gomila re-
gard as fundamental: gaze following and the emergence of fear.

Eye contact is a preliminary ability that allows the infant to develop
some further abilities, such as gaze following and joint attention, at the
end of the first year. Gaze is described by Pérez and Gomila as a pointer
more precise than mere head or body orientation:

> Gaze direction provides information about the attentional focus so that it
> is possible to see what another is attending, in a more precise way than
> head or body orientation. Gaze direction is *a pointer* towards a focus of in-
> terest within the context, which is more precise than head direction or
> body orientation [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 75].

Gaze following is a primary stage that only evolves into genuine interac-
tion when the infant and her caregiver reach the stage of joint attention,
namely: when they are not only looking at the same object but realize

that they are both engaged in this activity. In any event, both gaze following and joint attention presuppose that both the infant and her caregiver point to a common aspect of their surroundings and, in this respect, this primitive kind of second-person interaction is constitutively triadic. Pérez and Gomila could certainly reply that eye contact is still dyadic, at least on the infant's side, but, at this stage, the infant is not yet able to make second-person attributions, which is the phenomenon whose distinctiveness Pérez and Gomila are supposed to defend. And, when second-person attributions emerge through joint attention, we are already confronted with a triadic interaction.

Regarding the emergence of basic emotions such as fear, Pérez and Gomila argue that an infant's reaction to her caregiver's affective states is the first kind of situation where she understands and perceives the mind of others:

> Affective states and our response to them in interactive situations are the first kind of situation in which the minds of others are perceived and understood, where the actions that others display towards us are understood as the open side of their states of mind. By integrating both sides of the situation, and their contingent reciprocity, the basic mental concepts, such as emotions and sensations, are acquired [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 92-3].

Nevertheless, when Pérez and Gomila elaborate their theoretical reconstruction of a particular basic emotion, namely, fear, they describe the infant's experience as a response to a certain situation ('She [the infant] undergoes an embodied appraisal of the situation" [Pérez and Gomila (2021): p. 91]) and, more interestingly, as a response to the caregiver's response to that situation ('She also experiences the reaction of the adult to the situation and to her expression." [Pérez and Gomila (2021): p. 91]). Even though we might interpret the first response as merely automatic in some sense, the latter certainly includes a common reference to the world and, therefore, Pérez and Gomila's theoretical reconstruction essentially involves a triadic interaction.

In light of all this, I conclude that Pérez and Gomila have not managed to provide an account of the emergence of mental attributions where, at some early stage, we have already mental attribution but no reference to the world. Regarding the fundamental scene of the infant and her caregiver, I have firstly argued that the latter certainly takes into account the world to which the infant reacts and this may suffice to regard the interaction as triadic, but, moreover, I have stressed that mental attribution only emerges through joint attention, which is essentially tri-

adic and which plays a central role in Pérez and Gomila's reconstruction of the formation of basic emotions, which is in turn presented as the first context where the infant perceives the mind of others.

V. WE CAN EXPRESS PROPOSITIONAL CONTENTS

The notion of expression plays a central role Pérez and Gomila's approach to mental attribution. They are convinced, moreover, that second-person interactions are the locus of expression. We may see this point as being merely concerned with the genealogy of mental attribution, namely, expression is first grasped in second-person interactions, but then plays a role in every other context where we make mental attributions. Thus, the primitiveness of second-person attributions might be vindicated, but what about their distinctiveness? Pérez and Gomila seem to be defending a positive answer to this question when claiming: "What can be meaningfully perceived from the second person coincides with what can be expressed." [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 95] This claim in isolation is rather neutral regarding distinctiveness, since it does not exclude that the same could be true of the third-person perspective, namely, that what can be meaningfully perceived from a third-person perspective coincides with what can be expressed. They seem to be excluding this possibility, though, when claiming that, even though basic emotions and some mental states can be perceived and therefore expressed, there are some mental states, namely, those with a certain propositional content, that cannot be properly expressed.[4] I do not see, however, how this claim, if true, could help them to motivate distinctiveness, for, it would seem, attributions from the first-, the second- or the third-person perspectives are equally constrained by this limit to our expressive capabilities. Be it as it may, I do not think their argument against the expressibility of propositional contents works. For this purpose, I will try to show why we must distinguish between merely telling or reporting that one has a certain attitude to a particular propositional content and expressing that attitude toward that propositional content, and also that, once this attitude is expressed, we can see that it is this particular propositional content that is being expressed.

In short, Pérez and Gomila's argument goes like this:

(a) What can be expressed can be perceived.

(b) We cannot perceive the propositional content of someone else's thoughts.

Hence,

> (c) The propositional content of someone else's thoughts cannot be expressed.

I happy to grant (a) insofar as I share the view that 'bodily expression is a dimension of the mental.' [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 95], but I do not find (b) really plausible. I will sketch two arguments against (b).

The first line of argument has to do with psychoanalytic therapy [Freud (1991), Moran (2001), Finkelstein (2003), Corbí (2012)]. It is quite uncontroversial that a patient may accept the analyst's interpretation of the source of her symptoms without this acceptance having any therapeutic effect at all, almost the opposite; since this sort of acceptance is typically interpreted as a further resistance on the patient's side to undergo the sort of changes that might eventually attenuate her neurotic symptoms. To put it another way, a patient may become aware of the source of her neurotic behavior, but some other sort of awareness is required for her to be transformed. It can be argued that the patient will only acquire this alternative sort of awareness when she does not simply accept that, for instance, she is unconsciously jealous of her brother, but is able to express her recognition of this fact. Along these lines, we should distinguish two kinds of attitudes regarding the same propositional content: a first which is rather detached, close to the traditional view about the third-person perspective, and a second, which is engaged and expressive. But, if claim (b) were true, there will be no conceptual room for this distinction, given that we have accepted claim (a), namely, that what can be expressed can be perceived.

Pérez and Gomila might reply that, even though we can distinguish between an expressive and a non-expressive self-ascription, in either case the use of language is essentially involved, and what is distinctive about the use of expression and perception they are interested in are those cases where words are not required to express one's mental states:

> These mental states can be directly perceived, those that can *be shown* without *being said*, that is without appealing to a shared language in order to express them. Let us call them '*type a*' states, in order to distinguish them from other kinds of mental states that we cannot directly see: all mental states with propositional content which are mental states that *cannot be shown without saying something*. Let us call these other mental states, '*type b*' [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 105].

Thus, they claim:

> … We cannot express that we believe that snow is white, without uttering the appropriate words, nor we can express the dislike of the way in which someone else is dressed without uttering the appropriate words, nor we can express the dislike of the way in which someone else is dressed without uttering linguistic expressions concerning the dress, nor that we are happy because our son won a prize, without making explicit with our words the content of our joy [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p.105].

It is not so clear to me that one could not *perceive* that a mother is happy because her son has won a prize even though she did not explicitly state that this was the source of her happiness and the same applies to someone's contempt for a certain dress. One should remember at this stage that Pérez and Gomila rely on aspect perception when claiming that one can see someone else's mental states. Hence, seeing E as an expression of certain mental state M is thus construed as seeing E in a certain context C; if one should perceive E in relation to a different context C*, E may no longer be perceived as an expression of M. It can then be argued that, depending on your understanding of the context where E takes place, you may or may not have access to the mental state that is thereby expressed. Someone really familiar with John's tastes might see in his facial expression his dislike for a certain dress and, similarly, someone familiar with Joan will see her bodily behaviour as expressing her happiness for the fact that her son has won a prize. In other words, once we make room for aspect perception, I see no reason why we could not enrich the context within which we perceive E, so that we may really see a very specific propositional content. In fact, our perception may be so robust on some occasions as to challenge John's or Mary's claims to the contrary, thus allowing for some degree of self-opacity concerning the object of one's dislike or one's happiness.

VI. CONCLUSION

Pérez and Gomila defend the view that second-person mental attributions are *primitive* and *distinctive*. They are primitive insofar as they provide access to every other sort of mental attribution, and they are claimed to be distinctive insofar as they are qualitatively different from first- and third-person attributions. For this purpose, they distinguish between the participant's and the observer's perspectives, which they associate with engagement and detachment respectively. I have suggested, though, that one should just focus on a set of paradigmatic cases of both

the participant's and the observer's perspectives in order to discern what features may be specific of each perspective.

I have granted the primitiveness of mental attributions in second-person interactions, but I have objected to their distinctiveness, at least with regard to the features that Pérez and Gomila explore in their approach. Still, I do not see this challenge to the distinctiveness of second-person attributions as a serious objection to Pérez and Gomila's project, but as an invitation to make it more ambitious in a particular respect, namely: an investigation of mental attribution that focuses on second-person interactions and ends up revealing that mental attributions from the perspective of a detached observer are parasitic upon attributions from the perspective of the participant engaged in second-person interactions. So, one might conclude that second-person mental attributions are not *distinctive* precisely because they are *central*, that is, because they permeate every other sort of attribution, which, as a result, are to be regarded as parasitic.

More specifically, I have argued (a) that there is no reason why third-person attributions could not be automatic, practical, implicit, transparent and dynamic, (b) that an observer could be emotionally detached from what she observes, but she could also be emotionally engaged and affected by it, (c) that the notion of information is intrinsically portable and, therefore, ill-suited to grasp anything that might be constitutive of one or another perspective; (d) that distinction between dyadic and triadic interactions is of no help because, at the time when the infant may be able to make mental attributions, she is already engaged in a triadic interaction; and (e) that propositional contents can be both seen and expressed and, therefore, there is nothing specifically inexpressible about propositional contents that could contribute to the distinctiveness of second-person mental attributions.

Universitat de València
Departament de Filosofia
Avda Blasco Ibáñez 30
46010 Valéncia
E-mail: josep.corbi@uv.es

NOTES

[1] See Pérez and Gomila (2021), ch. 10, for an occasional use of the notion of genealogy, although restricted to the moral domain.

² Pérez and Gomila also claim that mental attributions in second-person interactions are more basic than mental attributions from a first- or a third-person perspective. By 'basic', they sometimes mean simpler but quite often they mean primitive. For the sake of simplicity, I will only focus on the primitiveness and distinctiveness of second-person attributions.

³ This is what defenders of the Theory-Theory and the Simulation Theory assume. Pérez and Gomila (2021) is explicitly presented as a case against such views.

⁴ This idea is stated at various points in slightly different ways: "We cannot express the propositional contents of our thoughts in the same way in which we express our feelings" [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 102]. "We can only express our attitudes and never (in the same sense of 'expression') the contents of our mental states" [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p. 103]. "We cannot see (directly perceive) that someone entertains a propositional content" [Pérez and Gomila (2021), p.106].

REFERENCES

CORBÍ (2012), *Morality, Self-Knowledge, and Human Suffering*; New York, NY, Routledge.
DAVIDSON, D. (1992), 'The Second Person'; *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 17 (1), pp. 255-267.
FINKELSTEIN, D. (2003), *Expression and the Inner*; Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
FREUD, S. (1991), *Introductory Lectures to Psychoanalysis*; London, Penguin.
MORAN R. (2001), *Authority and Estrangement. An Essay on Self-Knowledge*; Princeton, Princeton University Press.
PÉREZ, D. and GOMILA, A. (2021), *Social Cognition and the Second Person in Human Interaction*; London, Routledge.
WILLIAMS, B. (2002), *Truth and Truthfulnes*; Oxford, Blackwell,
WITTGENSTEIN, L. (1953), *Philosophische Untersuchungen/ Philosophical investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell.