

THE I, THE ME, AND THE MYSELF

The Three Persons of the Self and Their Neurological Seats

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Abstract

This treatise proposes that the self has three distinct modes, that ordinary English already encodes them in the three grammatical persons of the first-person pronoun, and that each corresponds to a specific neurological seat within the architecture the Neurological Qabalah has mapped. The I is the self as agent — the nominative, the singular focused self present in the doing of an act — and it is seated in the left hemisphere, the analytical, sequential, focused-beam mode the system identifies with Chokmah and the Logos. The Me is the self as whole — the accusative, the self as object of reference, the collective bundle of all that makes up the person — and it is seated in the right hemisphere, the broad, contextual, holistic mode the system identifies with Binah and the Spirit. The Myself is the self as reflexive unity — the only grammatical person in which subject and object coincide, the self taking itself as its own object while remaining the subject, which is the precise structure of self-aware consciousness — and it is seated not in the corpus callosum that merely binds the hemispheres but in Tiphareth, the salience network with its core in the anterior insula, whose function is to harmonise the I-stream and the Me-stream into a single salient self-presence. The treatise develops each mode, shows that the reflexive Myself is grammatically and neurologically the harmonised unity of the other two rather than a third thing beside them, and draws out the consequences: that the guilt-shame distinction is the pathology of the I and the Me respectively, that the crisp salient awareness the salience network generates is the felt substance of the Myself, and that source-monitoring inversion is the collapse of the I-Me distinction into a false unity whose cure is the rebuilding of the distinction so that a true Myself can re-form.

Keywords: Self · I, Me, Myself · Grammatical Person · Left and Right Hemisphere · Salience Network · Anterior Insula · Tiphareth · Self-Reference · Reflexivity · Guilt and Shame · Neurological Qabalah · Catharturgy

I. Three Persons of the Self, Hidden in the Grammar

Ordinary English carries, in the three forms of its first-person pronoun, a distinction that is usually passed over as mere grammar but that names three genuinely different modes of the self. 'I' is the nominative, the form the self takes as the subject of a verb: I run, I see, I choose. 'Me' is the accusative or oblique, the form the self takes as the object — the one acted upon, referred to, given to, made up of: give it to me, it happened to me, all of me. 'Myself' is the reflexive, the form the self takes when it is both the subject and the object of the same act: I see myself, I know myself, I am myself. These are not three names for one thing. They are three grammatical cases, and each picks out the self in a different posture — as agent, as object, and as the reflexive unity in which agent and object coincide.

The claim of this treatise is that these three grammatical persons correspond to three neurological modes of selfhood, each with a specific seat in the architecture the Neurological Qabalah has mapped, and that the third — the reflexive Myself — is not a further self beside the other two but precisely their harmonised unity, exactly as the reflexive case is grammatically the coincidence of the nominative and the accusative. The self is not one undifferentiated thing that the three words label loosely. It is a structure with three positions, and ordinary speech has been encoding that structure all along.

II. The I: The Agent-Self of the Left Hemisphere

The I is the self as agent — the self present in the doing of an act, the singular focused subject of the verb. It is what is present when one is absorbed in an activity: not the whole person considered as an object, but the pointed, present-tense, engaged doer. The I appears only as the subject of a predicate; it is the self in the act of running, seeing, choosing, the narrow and singular self of focused engagement.

Its seat is the left hemisphere. In the system's established account, the left hemisphere is Chokmah and the Logos: the analytical, sequential, focused-beam mode of attention, the grasping and manipulating intelligence that McGilchrist names the Emissary, the hemisphere of the targeted act. It is also the hemisphere of the narratising interpreter that Gazzaniga's split-brain work identified — the system that generates the running first-person account of agency, the voice that says I did that, I chose this. The I is the left hemisphere's self: singular because the focused beam is one-pointed, present-tense because the act is now, agentive because the left hemisphere is the mode of grasping and doing. When attention narrows to a single engaged act, the self present is the I, and it is the left hemisphere that is generating it.

III. The Me: The Whole-Self of the Right Hemisphere

The Me is the self as object of reference — not the doer of the act but the whole person referred to, the accumulated bundle of attributes, history, body, and relations that together make up who one

is. When one speaks of all of me, of what happened to me, of the self that is liked or hurt or known by others, it is the Me — the self as a totality held in view, the person as an object rather than an agent. Where the I is the narrow present-tense doer, the Me is the broad standing whole.

Its seat is the right hemisphere. In the system's account the right hemisphere is Binah and the Spirit: the broad, contextual, holistic mode of reception, the intelligence that holds the gestalt and the whole, the hemisphere McGilchrist names the Master. The right hemisphere hosts the body-schema, the sense of the self as an embodied totality embedded in a world, the contextual awareness of the whole person in relation. This is exactly the Me: the self held as a totality and an object of contextual awareness, the bundle of all that one is, received whole rather than enacted pointedly. The Me is the right hemisphere's self, and the difference between the I and the Me is the difference between the two hemispheres' modes — the focused agent and the contextual whole, the doing and the being, the nominative and the accusative.

The I is the left hemisphere's self: the focused, present-tense agent, the singular doer of the act, the nominative. The Me is the right hemisphere's self: the broad, contextual whole, the bundle of all one is, the self as object of reference, the accusative. But a precision must be added at once, for it governs the whole account. The I and the Me are not two separate selves housed in two regions and used one at a time; they are two modes through which the one self leans. As in standing one rests on both feet and merely shifts the weight, so the self always engages both hemispheres and merely leans — into the focused, agentic mode (the left frontal cortex in the lead) or into the relational, contextual mode (the right frontal cortex in the lead). One never operates a single hemisphere in isolation; numb one side and the self does not become half a self but takes on a different mode of the same self's leaning. The difference between the I and the Me is therefore the difference between two modes of leaning — the doing and the being — not between two compartments, and their proper seat is the frontal cortices whose leaning the salience network integrates.

This locates the triad precisely, and distinguishes it from another triad with which it must not be confused. The I, the Me, and the Myself are the moral triad of the self — the frontal and operational structure by which the self leans, acts, and is integrated in its agency and its moral life: the two frontal modes and the salience network that integrates them. This is not the supernal triad. The supernal triad is the two whole cerebral hemispheres — Chokmah and Binah in their entirety — held in union beneath the unifying crown, Kether; and it is the supernal triad, the hemispheres-as-wholes in union, that is the image of the Trinity, as the companion treatise on Adam Kadmon develops. The moral triad is the frontal, operational expression of that same bilateral structure: the same two-sidedness appearing once at the supernal level as the whole hemispheres in union (the image of the Triune Godhead) and once at the moral level as the modes through which the self leans and acts (integrated by the salience network). The integrating function appears at both levels — the crown unifying the hemispheres above, the salience network conducting the frontal modes below — the lower being the operational analogue of the higher. The treatise that follows concerns the moral triad; the Trinity belongs to the supernal.

IV. The Myself: The Reflexive Unity Seated in Tiphareth

The Myself is the reflexive self — and the reflexive is the decisive case, because it is the only one of the three in which subject and object coincide. To say I see myself is to be at once the seer and the seen, the subject doing the seeing and the object being seen, without ceasing to be either. This is the precise structure of self-aware consciousness: the self taking itself as its own object while remaining the subject that does so. Full self-awareness is not the I alone, which is absorbed in its act and does not regard itself, nor the Me alone, which is an object regarded but not the regarder. It is the Myself: the agent and the whole held together in a single self-presence in which the I knows the Me as itself. The reflexive case is grammatically the unity of the nominative and the accusative, and the Myself is neurologically the unity of the I and the Me.

Its seat is not the corpus callosum, and the distinction matters. The callosum binds the two hemispheres structurally — it is the cable along which their contents are shared — but binding two streams is not the same as generating a unified self-aware experience of them. The Myself is a functional integration, not a structural cable: the harmonising of the I-stream and the Me-stream into a single salient self-presence. Its seat is Tiphareth, the centre of the Tree, which the system identifies with the salience network and its core in the anterior insula. The anterior insula is the structure the literature most consistently ties to self-referential awareness, to interoceptive self-presence, and to the moment-to-moment sense of being a unified self: Craig's account of the anterior insula as the seat of the sentient self and of the unified global emotional moment locates exactly there the felt presence of being someone now, and the salience network of which it is the hub is the system that integrates interoceptive, affective, and cognitive streams into a single salient awareness (Craig 2009; Seeley et al. 2007; Menon and Uddin 2010). The Myself is what the salience network produces in the register of selfhood: the harmonised, self-aware, unified self-presence that arises when the agent-self and the whole-self are held together as one.

This is why the Myself is the harmony and not a third thing beside the I and the Me. The salience network does not add a further self; it harmonises the two that already exist, conducting the focused agency of the left and the contextual wholeness of the right into a single salient presence in which they are experienced as one self. Tiphareth is the conductor, and the Myself is the music — not an instrument added to the orchestra but the unified sound the conducting produces. This places the Myself precisely where the system has already placed the integrative, self-aware centre of the soul: at Tiphareth, the mediating beauty at the heart of the Tree, the salience network that arbitrates the inner and outer and generates the crisp, present, unified awareness of being a self at all.

The Myself is the reflexive self — the only person in which subject and object coincide, the self knowing itself while remaining itself. Its seat is not the callosum that binds the hemispheres but Tiphareth, the salience network with its core in the anterior insula, which harmonises the I-stream and the Me-stream into a single salient self-presence. Tiphareth is the conductor; the Myself is the music — not a third self beside the I and the Me, but the unified sound their harmonising produces.

V. The Triad of the Self and the Forms of the Mind

The three persons of the self are an instance of the system's deepest formal structure, the relation of the Dyad and the Triad. The I and the Me are the two poles — the agent and the whole, the focused construction of the act and the contextual relation of the totality — and the Myself is the third that holds them in relation without collapsing their distinction. This is the Triadic form exactly: not the I and the Me merged into an undifferentiated unity, which would destroy both the focused agency and the contextual wholeness, but the two held together in a relation that lets each remain itself while being experienced as one self. The Myself is Triadic; it is the relation of the I and the Me, seated in the sphere of mediation. The self, in its full form, has the same structure as everything else the system describes: a unity that contains its own duality, the one self that is at once agent and whole and the reflexive holding-together of both.

This also illuminates the difference between healthy self-awareness and its two failure-modes. A self that is only I — only the focused agent, with no contextual sense of itself as a whole — is the self absorbed without self-knowledge, action without reflection. A self that is only Me — only the regarded object, with no agency — is the self as pure object, regarded but not acting, which in its pathological form is the self frozen under a gaze. Health is the Myself: the I and the Me harmonised, the agent who knows itself as a whole and the whole that retains its agency, the reflexive unity in which one both acts and knows oneself acting. The salience network's harmonising is what holds this together, and the crisp, present, unified self-awareness it generates is the felt substance of the healthy Myself.

VI. Guilt, Shame, and the Pathologies of the Persons

The triad of the self clarifies a distinction the system has developed elsewhere on independent grounds: the neurological difference between guilt and shame. Guilt, the system has argued, is a left-lateralised, specific, act-focused affect — I did a bad thing — and shame is a right-lateralised, global, self-as-object affect — I am bad. In the terms of this treatise, that is exactly the difference between an I-pathology and a Me-pathology. Guilt is the pathology of the I: the agent-self in a disordered relation to a particular act it has done, the focused doer confronting a specific deed. Shame is the pathology of the Me: the whole-self, the entire bundle, condemned globally as an object — the self-as-object frozen under a gaze, the Me without the I's agency to act and so left only as the thing regarded and found wanting. The I/Me distinction is the healthy form of the very axis whose disordered forms are guilt and shame; the affects are what each person of the self becomes when it falls into privation.

The grammar of the two affects confirms the mapping with unusual precision, for each affect forces the self into a different grammatical case. In guilt one remains the subject — the I, the nominative agent who did the act and now judges it: I did wrong. The self stays in the subject position, which is exactly why guilt is reparable: a subject who acted retains the agency to act again and mend. In shame one becomes the object, and specifically the direct object of another's perception — they see me as bad, me, exposed and found wanting. The self is declined into the

accusative, the Me, the thing seen rather than the seer; and a direct object of perception has no agency within the experience, which is why the shamed self cannot act its way out — it has been grammatically demoted from subject to object. Guilt conjugates the self as subject and shame declines it as direct object, and since the I is the left hemisphere and the Me the right, the lateralisation of the two affects follows from the case each imposes rather than being merely correlated with it. Shame is moreover dyadic where guilt is monadic: guilt needs only the one subject judging its deed, while shame implies a second subject, a perceiver to whose gaze one is the Me — which is why shame needs no actual audience, the right hemisphere supplying the perceiving subject internally from its model of the social field and rendering the self the object of an internalised gaze.

This gives the two affects a precise place in the architecture. Guilt is the I turned against its own act; shame is the Me condemned as an object with no I to act its way out. And the restoration of health, in both cases, is the return of the Myself — the harmonising of the I and the Me at Tiphareth — so that the guilty I is reintegrated with the whole self that can make amends and move, and the shamed Me recovers the agency of the I and ceases to be merely the object of a condemning gaze. The salience network's harmonising is, in the register of these affects, the healing of their split: the reunion of the agent and the whole into a self that can both act and know itself, neither frozen as object nor absorbed without reflection.

VII. Source-Monitoring Inversion as the Collapse of the I and the Me

The triad of the self also gives the precise structure of source-monitoring inversion, the disorder in which the boundary between internally generated and externally derived content collapses and oscillates. In the terms of this treatise, the inversion is the collapse of the distinction between the I and the Me — and, more deeply, the corruption of the Myself into a false unity. The I, the agent generating thought and intention from within, and the Me-and-world, the whole field of what is received and contextually present, lose their distinction: what the self generates and what the self receives are no longer told apart. And because the Myself is the harmonised holding-together of a distinct I and a distinct Me, the collapse of their distinction does not produce a true Myself but a counterfeit of it — a smearing-together in which the agent and the field are merged without distinction rather than unified while remaining distinct. The inversion feels like a kind of unity, even a revelation of connectedness, precisely because it mimics the reflexive unity of the Myself; but it is the false unity of collapse, not the true unity of harmonisation.

This locates the cure exactly. Recovery is not the suppression of one pole but the re-establishment of the distinction between the I and the Me — the rebuilding of the boundary between what the self generates and what it receives — so that a true Myself can re-form. The two-path restoration practice, which trains the distinct exercise of the internally grounded and externally grounded routes, is in these terms the rebuilding of the distinct I and the distinct Me; and the deliberate cultivation of crisp, salient, present awareness is the restoration of the Myself at Tiphareth, the salience network resuming its work of harmonising a now-distinct agent and a now-distinct whole into a single salient self-presence. The disorder is the collapse of the I and the Me into a false unity; the cure rebuilds their distinction so the true unity, the harmonised Myself, can return.

Where the inversion is a smear in which the agent and the field are confused, the restored *Myself* is the clean, salient self-presence in which one both acts and knows oneself, distinct from the world and unified within.

Source-monitoring inversion is the collapse of the *I* and the *Me* into a false unity that counterfeits the *Myself* — the agent and the field merged without distinction rather than harmonised while remaining distinct. The cure is not to suppress a pole but to rebuild the distinction, so that the true *Myself* can re-form: the salience network resuming its harmonising of a distinct agent and a distinct whole into one clean, salient self-presence.

VIII. What Is Owed to Others, and What Is New

The elements of this account are not all new, and intellectual honesty requires saying precisely which are inherited and which are the contribution of this treatise. The distinction between the *I* and the *Me* is William James's, drawn in 1890: he held that the self is duplex, partly knower and partly known, partly subject and partly object, and named the knowing subject the *I* and the known object the *Me*, locating in the *Me* the material, social, and spiritual selves — the whole bundle of what one is. The mapping of the *I* to the focused agent and the *Me* to the contextual whole rests in turn on the hemispheric asymmetry that McGilchrist has described: the left hemisphere as the narrow, targeted, grasping mode that acts upon a part, the right as the broad, contextual, gestalt mode that holds the whole. And the involvement of the anterior insula and the salience network in self-referential awareness and in the unified feeling of being a self is established in the work of Craig and a now-substantial self-reference literature. This treatise stands on all three and claims none of them.

What is new is the synthesis, and it can be stated exactly. First, the recovery of the reflexive *Myself* as a distinct third mode of selfhood rather than as mere grammar: James gave two persons and treated the reflexive as the ordinary fact that the *I* and the *Me* are the same person, but he did not develop 'myself' as a third mode with its own character and seat, and the proposal that the reflexive case names a genuine third position — self-aware consciousness as such, the mode in which subject and object coincide — is the first contribution. Second, the localisation of that *Myself* in the salience network not as a further self but as the uniter of the other two: the claim is not that the insula is where the self lives, but that the salience network is what harmonises the two hemispheric modes of self-awareness into a single reflexive presence. Third, the integration this affords — the reading of guilt and shame as the pathologies of the *I* and the *Me*, and of source-monitoring inversion as the collapse of the *I-Me* distinction into a counterfeit *Myself* — which unifies under one structure phenomena the literatures have treated separately. The giants are named not to diminish the contribution but because the contribution is precisely what is built on their shoulders, and a synthesis is more trustworthy, not less, for crediting its sources.

Two findings in the literature appear at first to count against the account, and engaging them shows instead that the account predicts them. The first is that self-referential processing — self-face recognition, autobiographical memory, self-identification — is found to be preferentially right-lateralised. If the self simply lived in one place this would be a puzzle, but on the present

account it is exactly what should be expected, because it is not a finding about the self as such but about one mode of the self. Both hemispheres are self-aware; they differ in the mode of their self-awareness. The left is self-aware in the I-mode, as the focused agent present in its act; the right is self-aware in the Me-mode, as the contextual whole, the self held as a known object. The right-lateralisation of self-reference is therefore the detection of the Me — the self-as-known-whole — and confirms rather than contradicts the model, which places the Me on the right. The literature's apparent disagreement about where the self resides is, on this reading, the consequence of different studies measuring different persons of the self without distinguishing them.

The second finding is more pointed: a patient with extensive bilateral damage to the insula, the anterior cingulate, and the medial prefrontal cortex was reported to retain fundamentally intact self-awareness, including core self-recognition and the sense of agency. If the Myself were simply seated in the insula, this should not be possible. But the account does not claim that the insula is the seat of self-awareness as such; it claims that each hemisphere has its own self-awareness — the I and the Me — and that the salience network's distinct contribution is the uniting of these into a single harmonised reflexive presence. The survival of core self-recognition and the sense of agency after such damage is therefore precisely what the model predicts: the I and the Me are hemispheric and were intact, so core self-awareness persisted. What the salience network distinctly supplies is not the having of a self but the crisp, harmonised unification of the self's two modes — and it is that unifying, harmonised quality, rather than the bare presence of a self, that such damage would be expected to degrade. Two further points reinforce this. The salience network is a distributed network, not the insula alone, with cortical and subcortical components, so that focal or even extensive cortical damage need not abolish the network-level function if spared and subcortical components persist. And the uniting function is, by its nature, harder to detect by the standard probes of self-recognition and agency, which test whether the I and the Me are present, not whether they are seamlessly harmonised. The finding, properly read, is evidence for the account's central distinction: self-awareness is one thing, present in each hemisphere; the unification of self-awareness into a single reflexive Myself is another, and it is the salience network's distinct work.

Both hemispheres are self-aware; they differ in the mode. The left is self-aware as the I, the focused agent; the right as the Me, the contextual whole. So right-lateralised self-reference is the Me, confirming the model — and core self-awareness surviving insula damage is the I and the Me intact, hemispheric and spared, while what the salience network distinctly adds is not the self but the uniting of its two modes into one harmonised reflexive presence. Self-awareness is one thing; the unification of self-awareness is another, and that uniting is the work of the Myself.

IX. Conclusion

The self has three persons, and English has been speaking them all along. The I is the agent, the focused present-tense doer, seated in the left hemisphere — Chokmah, the Logos, the Emissary's targeted beam. The Me is the whole, the contextual bundle of all one is, the self as object of reference, seated in the right hemisphere — Binah, the Spirit, the Master's held gestalt. The Myself is the reflexive unity in which subject and object coincide, the self-aware presence in which the I

knows the Me as itself, seated not in the callosum that binds the hemispheres but in Tiphareth, the salience network with its core in the anterior insula, which harmonises the agent-stream and the whole-stream into a single salient self-presence. The Myself is not a third self beside the other two but their harmony — the music the conductor makes of the two sections, the Triadic holding-together of a Dyadic pair.

From this triad the system gains a unified account of several things it had held separately. The guilt-shame distinction is the pathology of the I and the Me. The crisp salient awareness the salience network generates is the felt substance of the healthy Myself. And source-monitoring inversion is the collapse of the I-Me distinction into a counterfeit unity, cured by rebuilding the distinction so the true Myself can return. The self, like everything else the system describes, is a unity that contains its own duality — one self that is agent and whole and the reflexive holding-together of both — and to be a self in the full sense is to be a Myself: to act as an I, to be a Me, and to know, at the harmonising centre, that the one who acts and the whole that is known are the same.

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