ABSTRACT. Reflection on the self’s way of being “in” consciousness yields two arguments for a theory of self-reference not based in any way at all on self-cognition. First, I show that one theory of self-reference predicts an experience of the self because the theory inadequately analyzes the semantical facts about indexicality. I construct a dilemma for this cognitivism, which it cannot get out of, for it requires even solitary self-reference to be based on some original self-knowledge, which is not available. I describe my “kinetic model” of unspoken self-reference, and I show how it fits the facts of four forms of consciousness, all of which presuppose self-reference, rather than yield it. Second, a speaker uses the first person pronoun in sentences because she is aware of the unmediated role in agency of the beliefs she would express, and not because she is aware of herself in their content. The cognitive model, in contrast, succumbs to a vicious regress and is exposed as an obstacle to an understanding of consciousness.

I begin with bad news: The self is not present in consciousness. The Buddha discovered that fact two thousand five hundred years ago. Two hundred fifty years ago David Hume repeated the Buddha’s experiment for the benefit of the behind-the-times Europeans and reconfirmed that selves are not present to their own consciousnesses. Both of them also knew that one can be conscious without one’s self being even represented in consciousness, where some concrete particular would represent the self, that is, stand proxy for it.

But the good news is that we can better understand self-reference as it occurs unspoken in the solitude of one’s mind and as it is expressed in speech. From these negative facts I will argue in two ways for my kinetic model of solitary, unspoken self-reference: destructively, for the two facts – no presence of self or proxy for it – put a dilemma to the alternatives to my model, and constructively, for only my model fits the two facts. I also will argue for a model of the expression of self-reference in speech that does not rely on any self-cognition.

1. COGNITIVE VERSUS KINETIC MODELS OF SELF-REFERENCE

The weight of opinion wrongly favors the view that all reference in thoughts and expressions of thoughts is, or depends on, a kind of knowing awareness of the referent. The awareness is either in those who think the
thoughts or in those who originated the name of the referent and passed it on to those thinkers. For, common opinion wonders, how else can the referent be discriminated from its background and identified as the referent? All the models of reference I call cognitivist share this assumption, although they differ about whether the gnosis that discriminates the referent is always a component of the judgment about the referent. The original cognitivism said it always was; modified cognitivism denies it always is, the gnosis underwriting indexical reference being one of the exceptions. I, in opposition to both cognitivisms, favor the view that the most basic reference, the kind expressed when we use the indexical expressions, “I” and “now”, is a kind of motion. The most basic reference is a self-reference, and the motion it consists of is purposive self-control where no consciousness at all need enter, not just no consciousness of one's self. Purposive motion discriminates the self from its background and identifies it in a way that allows information to be exploited in its interest. Reference based on cognition presupposes this most basic kinetic reference.

The analysis of indexical self-reference as this identificatory kinesis, rather than as a discriminative gnosis, solves problems of reference that have puzzled thinkers from Plato to Perry. I explained this solution in an earlier essay. The chances are, however, that many within hearing distance are of the first opinion, that all reference is, or depends on, a kind of knowledge, and want me to explore the arguments for that opinion as it applies to self-reference first. Let's state and refute them.

1.1. The Original Cognitive Model

Some original cognitivists come straight out with it, without preamble or fanfare: They experience themselves in a way that makes self-reference possible. Other original cognitivists set the stage for the experience. As these others see the matter, wrongly see it, the science that predicts selves exist is semantics: “Ontology recapitulates philology”. It's a fact that the word “I” denotes each of us, whenever each of us utters it, as a singular term and a first-person pronoun denote things. From that incontestable semantic fact the second group of cognitivists deduce fallaciously that selves exist. They say, “Selves are what the referents of ‘I’ must be to be referents of ‘I’. Selves are meant to be you and me just as we must be for it to be right for us to refer to ourselves with the pronoun ‘I’ or ‘me’”. This way of describing the knowledge is equivalent to the claim that what we know in knowing the meaning of “I” is an ingredient in the proposition; it is the reference portion of the self-ascribed judgment. They continue, “Not all selves are able to use the pronoun, either to communicate their self-reference to others or even within the confines of their own thinking. But it