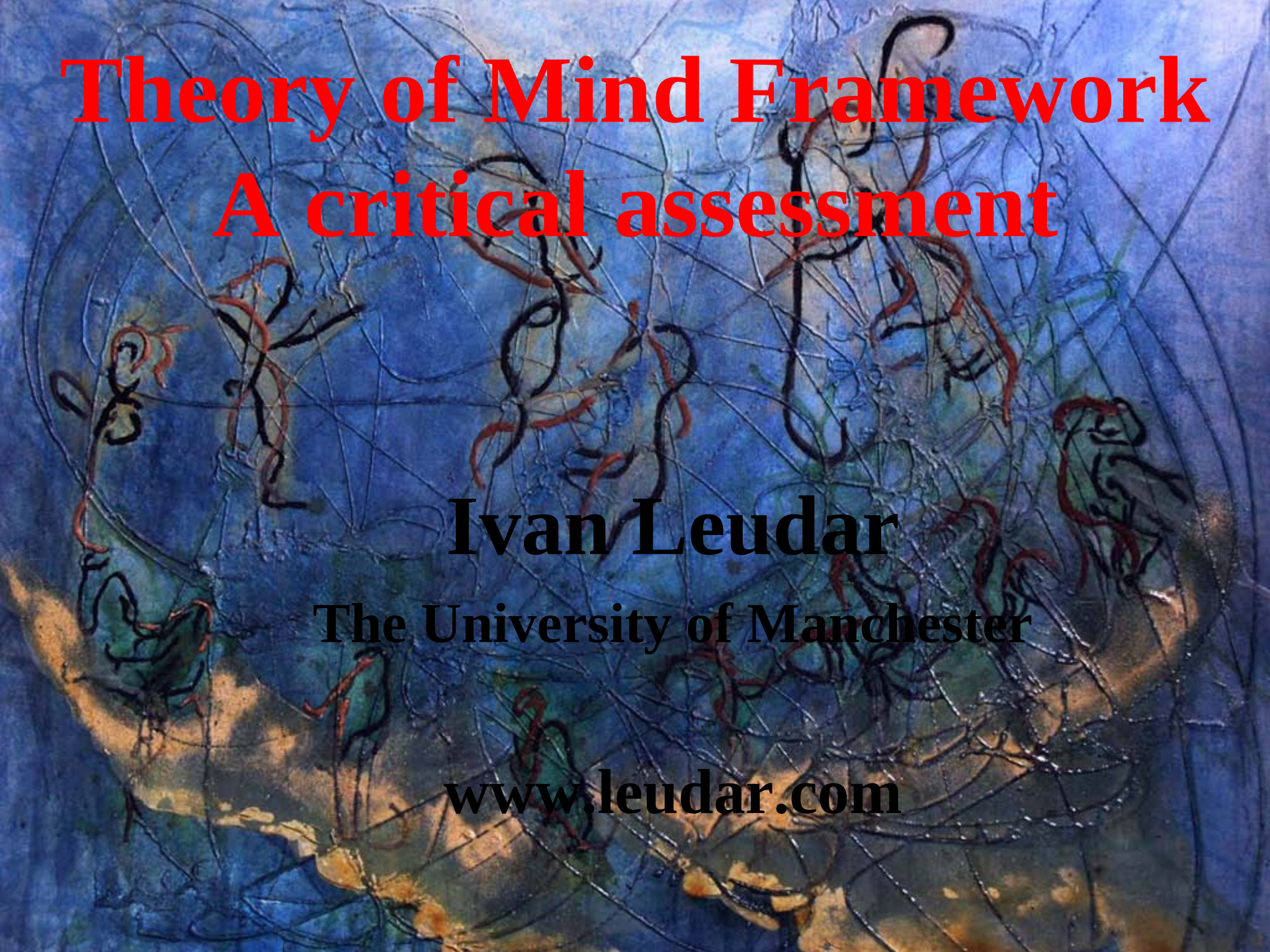
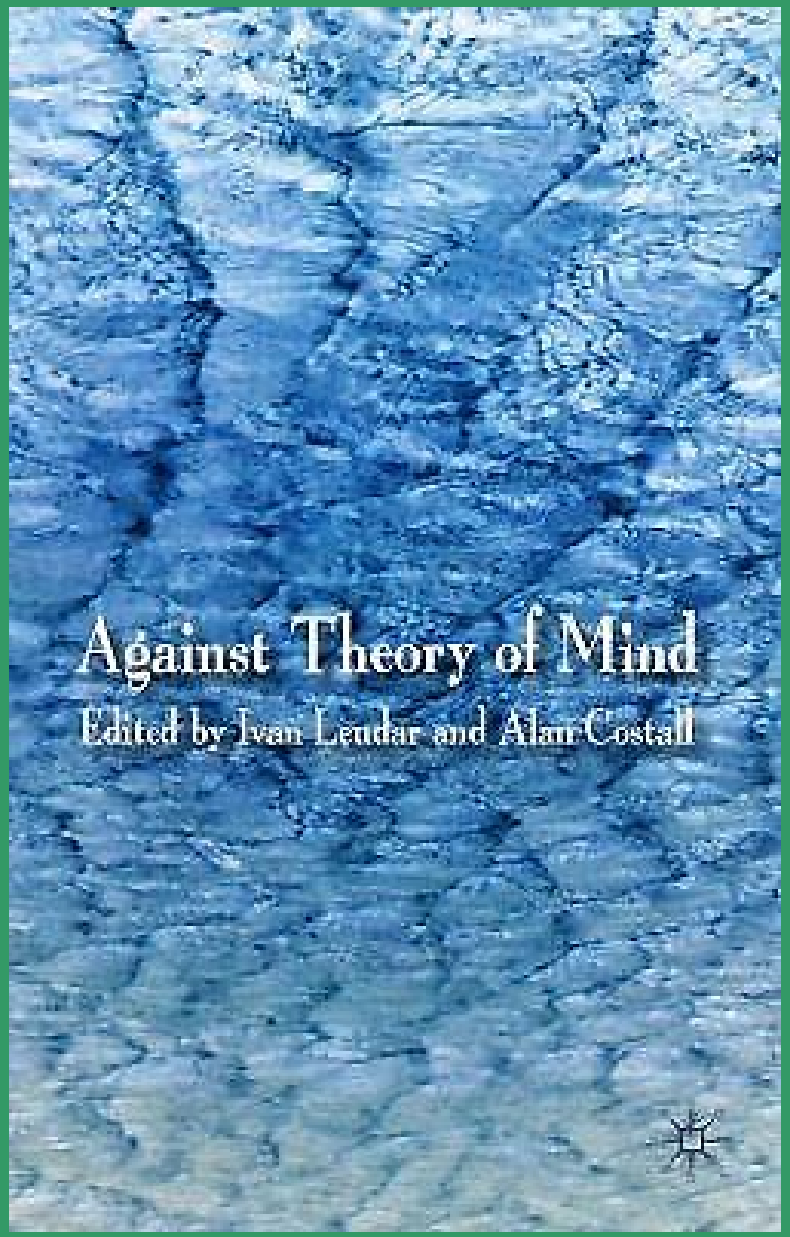


Theory of Mind Framework
A critical assessment

Ivan Leudar

The University of Manchester

www.leudar.com



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1. **Problems with theory of mind framework (conceptual problems and historical origins)**
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3. **Alternative framework (structured immediacy)**
4. **A studies in an alternative framework (Tom & Schizophrenia)**

Putting theory of mind framework in context

1. Plurality of scientific objects

'Unlike any kind of bodily or physiological functioning, *thought is a self-criticizing activity*. *The body passes no judgment on itself*. Judgment is passed on it by its environment, which continues to support and promote its well-being when it pursues its ends successfully and injures or destroys it when it pursues them otherwise. *The mind judges itself*, though not always justly. Not content with the simple pursuit of its ends, it also pursues the further end of discovering for itself whether it has pursued them successfully. *The sciences of body and mind respectively must take this difference into the account*.' (Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, pp. 107-108, my italics)

2. Plurality of Sciences

‘Thus a science of feeling must be ‘empirical’ (i.e. devoted to ascertaining and classifying ‘facts’ or things susceptible of observation), but a science of thought must be ‘normative’, or as I prefer to call it ‘criteriological’ … In the sixteenth century the name ‘psychology’ was invented to designate an ‘empirical’ science of feeling. In the nineteenth century the idea got about that psychology could not merely supplement the old ‘criteriological’ sciences by providing a valid approach to the study of feeling, but could replace them by providing an up-to-date and ‘scientific’ approach to the study of thought. *Owing to this misconception there are now in existence two things called ‘psychology’: a valid and important: ‘empirical’ science of feeling, and a pseudo-science of thought*’ (Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, 1938, 171 ff, my italics).

3. Historicity of Human Sciences

The mental scientist, believing in the universal and therefore unalterable truth of his conclusions, thinks that the account he gives of mind holds good of all future stages in mind's history: he thinks that his science shows what mind will always be, not only what it has been in the past and is now. … Not the least of the errors contained in the science of the human nature is its claim to establish a framework to which all future history must conform. (Collingwood, 1936, p. 21).

... knowing oneself is historical - It is only by historical thinking that I can discover what I thought ten years ago, by re-reading what I then thought, or what I thought five minutes ago, by reflecting on an action that I then did, which surprised me when I realized what I had done. In this sense all knowledge of mind is historical. (Collingwood, 1936, p. 19)

4. Enactment as a historian's method

In anthropological science man is trying to understand man; and to man his fellow-man is never a mere external object, something to be observed and described, but something to be sympathised with, to be studied *by penetrating into his thoughts and re-enacting those thoughts for oneself*. Anthropology … is an historical science, where by calling it historical as opposed to naturalistic I mean that its true method is thus to get inside its object or re-create its object inside itself (Collingwood, 2005, pp. 153-4).

What is theory of mind?

‘In saying that an individual has a theory of mind, we mean that the individual imputes mental states to himself and others. . . .

A system of inferences of this kind is properly viewed as a theory, first because such states are not directly observable, and second because the system can be used to make predictions, specifically about the behavior of other organisms.’

(Premack and Woodruff, 1978, p. 515)

False belief task

I was struck at the European Conference on Developmental Psychology held in Scotland in 1990 that theory of mind researchers seemed to have got stuck on the criterion of false belief [...] To equate grasping other minds with getting a False Belief Diploma at Graduation Day is to oversimplify its form and function. To equate 'having' a theory of mind with grasping the epistemological distinction between true and false belief obscures the contribution of the three or four years of development that preceded it. (Bruner and Feldman, 1993, p. 269)

A single ingenious experiment originally suggested by philosophers has spawned an experimental industry. That is often the case in psychology, where new experimental ideas are as rare and as hard to invent as deep mathematical proofs or truly new magic tricks. (Hacking, 1999, p. 115)

Some problems with theory of mind theory

1. **Cartesian assumptions**

2. **Restricted pragmatics**

3. **Where is theory in ToM**

Tom as a theory of communication

A theory of ‘theory of mind’ is in fact not a theory of mind at all but a theory of communication.

Tom as a theory of communication

‘Social interaction is really an interaction of minds, of mental states’ (Astington, 1994, p. 43).

‘The account of communication and social interaction is *telementational*—individual social behaviours are caused by their doers’ mental states, and properly understood in terms of those states. Organisms do not react directly to the behaviour of others but instead to the occluded ‘mental states’ which these indicate. On this view, communicative behaviours mediate interactions that are effectively mental. (Leudar and Costall, 2004)

1. **Theory of mind (ToM) is not a discovery but a set of inherrited presuppositions about how people engage with each other which psychology retained in ‘cognitive revolution’**
2. **ToM amounts to an attempt to resolve ‘the problem of other minds’**
3. **Focus here on how these presuppositions were inscribed in psychology through the work of Chomsky and Grice**
4. **The role of thoughts, feelings and intentions in social engagements needs to be re-thought along Austinian lines.**

Gilbert Ryle on Cartesian Myth

... every human being has both a body and a mind. ... Human bodies are in space and are subject to the mechanical laws which govern all other bodies in space. Bodily processes and states can be inspected by external observers. So a man's bodily life is as much a public affair as are the lives of animals and reptiles and even as the careers of trees, crystals and planets.

But minds are not in space, nor are their operations subject to mechanical laws. The workings of one mind are not witnessable by other observers; its career is private. Only I can take direct cognisance of the states and processes of my own mind.

A person therefore lives through two collateral histories, one consisting of what happens in and to his body, the other consisting of what happens in and to his mind. The first is public, the second private. The events in the first history are events in the physical world, those in the second are events in the mental world.

The problem of other minds

The problem:

‘How do we know that another person is angry? . . . Do we ever know?’

A sceptical answer:

‘We can never *know*, but we may believe it, with varying degrees of certainty and on the basis of inference.’

ToM as a solution of the problem of other minds

1. **Treating other people as reflecting, feeling and willing human beings is a necessary precondition of communication 'as we know it'.**
2. **It is so very easy to regard Descartes' epistemic dualism as a profound insight (cf. Shanker, 2004)**
3. **ToM assumes that the problem of other minds is basic and a universal problem for people**
4. **Children recapitulate Descartes and have to discover the 'proper' understanding of other minds (as opposed to the mere *appearance* of understanding.)**

Problem of other minds – do we need a solution or a cognitive therapist?

John Austin found ‘the problem of other minds’ not difficult to misconceived (Austin, 1979, p. 76).

‘The problem of other minds does not reflect something timeless and transcultural about the human condition, but is instead a problem which makes sense in specific historical conditions and in its current form is partly of psychologists’ own doing.’ (Leudar and Costall, 2004)

The problem of other minds

‘In psychology, it does not usually arise as a formally stated philosophical problem but is instead inscribed in theories, methods of investigation and in the language of psychology itself—in this respect it is a historical problem and should be treated as such.’ (Leudar and Costall, 2004)

How did ToM get into Psychology – Noam Chomsky

1. Downgrading learning and intellectualising language acquisition

‘I would take the view that the child’s knowledge of pre-linguistic communication, related as it is to world of action and interaction, provides him with tell-tale cues for *constructing and testing hypotheses* about the meaning and structure of the discourse into which he quickly enters. He does, as LAD [the Language Acquisition Device] would have us believe, have a stunning *capacity to infer and to generate rules*, indeed to overgeneralize them.’ (Bruner, 1978, p. 83)

How did ToM get into Psychology – Noam Chomsky

2. Downgrading ‘behaviour’

a. Poverty of stimulus argument

b. Logical status of behaviour

‘But I see no reason to deny that there is a fact of the matter, however difficult it may be to establish, on that *behavior is only one kind of evidence—sometimes not the best, and surely no criterion of knowledge*.’ (Chomsky, 1980b, p. 6, our emphasis)

How did ToM get into Psychology - Chomsky

3. Modularity thesis

‘Pragmatic competence may include what Paul Grice has called a ‘logic of conversation’

(Chomsky, 1980a, pp. 224–225).

How did ToM get into Psychology – Paul Grice

‘Speech Act Theorists such as Grice (1967/1975), Austin (1962), and Searle (1965) had argued that a theory of mind is also essential for normal communication, both verbal and non-verbal.’ (Baron-Cohen, 1992)

Grice's theory of meaning and ToM

1. Communication is mediated by means of intention recognition (i.e. non-natural meaning)
2. The distinction between meaning and implicature (the latter requires defeasible inference)

How did ToM get into Psychology – Paul Grice

‘a certain psychological state Y1 in certain circumstances is followed by a certain utterance U, made in certain circumstances, which in turn, if the circumstances are right, is followed by a particular instance of a further psychological state Y2, a state not now in the communicating creature but in the creature who is communicated to.’

(Grice, 1989, p. 287)

Wittgenstein on telling of one's intentions

Why do I want to tell him about an intention too, as well as telling him what I did. … because I want to tell him something about myself, which goes beyond what happened at the time. I reveal to him something of myself when I tell him what I was going to do.- not, however, on grounds of self-observation, but by the way of a response (it might be also called an intuition).

(*Philosophical Investigations*, §659)

Elizabeth Anscombe on ‘actions under descriptions’

1. **‘Are we to say that the man who (intentionally) moves his arm, operates the pump, replenishes water supply, poisons the inhabitants, is performing *four* actions?’ (Anscombe, 1957, §26)**

2. **‘… in the acts of pumping poisoned water nothing in particular is necessarily going on that might not equally well have been going on if the acts had been pumping non-poisonous water. Even if you imagine that pictures of inhabitants lying dead occur in the man’s head, and please him – such pictures could also occur in the head of a man who was *not* poisoning them, and *need* not occur in this man. The difference appears to be one of circumstances, not of anything that is going on *then*. (ibid, §24, the last emphasis ours)**

3. **‘For moving his arm up and down with his fingers round the pump handle *is*, in these circumstances, operating the pump; and, in these circumstances, it *is* replenishing the house water-supply; and in these circumstances, it *is* poisoning the household. (ibid, §26)**

John Austin on how to do things with words

Locution – ‘phonetic’, ‘phatic’, ‘rhetic’ acts

He said to me ‘Shoot her!’ meaning by ‘shoot’ shoot and referring by ‘her’ to her.

Illocution

He urged (or advised, ordered, &c.) me to shoot her.

Perlocution

He persuaded me to shoot her.

(John Austin, *How to do things with words*, lecture VIII)

Engagement and communication

1. Interactions between people are immediate yet they are situated in culture, and participants personal histories

2. Circumstances do not contain interactions but are made relevant and consequential by participants

3. An element of our project is to document the *methods* people use to make circumstances consequential in locally managed talk and otherwise organised immediate interactions

4. Analysts of engagements have to take on board what is important to participants in those engagements and so the analysis has to be a *participant analysis*.

Managing settings – structured immediacy

… every interaction takes place in a concrete environment but that environment can be understood under varied descriptions through being connected by participants to wider ranges of circumstances. Such circumstances range broadly and may include aspects of culture, institutions and personal histories of participants as well as the happenings that more immediately envelop activities. (Leudar et al., 2008)

... participants enrich the here-and-now of action by connecting it to the past: what shared practices do they have available to historicize the settings of activities and what does such historicizing afford? (Leudar & Nekvapil, 2011)

Applications of the framework

1. **Psychotherapy as structured immediacy**
2. **Politicians as practical historians**
3. **Schizophrenia and Theory of mind theory**

Tom & Schizophrenia

Extract 1: Co35: 52

(Dr 5 psychiatrist, P 5 patient)

1. P .hhh I live at (.) in (place) with my girlfriend at the moment

2. Dr .hhh and what does she think about the medication

3. P =she sort of ah (0.2) <I don't know (0.2) she (0.1) she I donno she she's >the

4. negative side of it a lot of the time

5. Dr =what's the negative side of it

6. P =I donno .hhh (.) she always thinks I have a bad memory you know (.) it makes

7. me s:orta slow down an stuff <but it>

(McCabe, 2009)

Tom & Schizophrenia

Extract 2: Co35: 57

1. Dr .hhh <ye:s she has known yo:u quite a long time>=
2. P =yes <she is totally fin:e with it to the point where she.> (.) you know she
3. recently did some re:search on the internet of <schizophrenia> (.) .hhh and er
4. <you know she just I mean read a thing about Risperidone.> about a woman who
5. had writt:en <written a> page on some website you know she said .hhh that this
6. wom:an didn't (.) under:stand why other people were not given Risperidone it
7. was sort of <it (.) it> such such a good medicine. .hhh (.) so I me:an <it's a good
8. goo:d she knows it's a good pill> and that it do:es does the do. (0.2) .hhh <But I
9. mean> she s:een me i:ll on pill:s <but she never (...)> You know I know what I
10. was like when I wasn't taking (0.1) any:thing and that was not pleasant sort of
11. Thing

(McCabe, 2009)

Tom & Schizophrenia

Extract 5: Co23: 124

1. Dr = <right> .hhh does that mean you don't need to take care or yourself o:r
2. P no not at all .hhh theoretically I could die=
3. Dr =yeah=
4. P =but in practi::ce er (.) in practi::ce er (.) er (.).hhh the um (0.3) .hhh eternal life
5. will be he:re before <I (.) I> reach the point at which (.) which <my my> natural
6. life will expir:e
7. Dr so if you got hit by a car or a bus or something like that <what would (.) what
8. would> happen to you
9. P I'd probably die but I'd come back again
10. Dr right (.) does that mean <you (.) you> are vigilant when you cross roads or
11. P of course I am <I don't want (.) I don't want.> to test the thesis
12. Dr you don't want to test it out!
13. P no!

(McCabe, 2009)

Tom & Schizophrenia

Extract 6: Co23: 97:142

1. Dr right (.) right m (.) right its always conce:rning when people have (.).hhh

2. thou:ghts about <about> sort of

3. P what thinking they're immortal? right (.) <obviously (.) obviously> that's just a

4. thought .hhh I don't go ar::ound thinking I'm immortal

5. Dr no=

6. P =I'm just thinking about a theoretical issue

7. Dr okay alright

(McCabe, 2009)

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