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'A Perspective on Prior's 'Thank Goodness' Example'

Recent scepticism about the first-person perspective has tended to focus on the explanation of actions. While I remain convinced that a certain kind of egocentricity is indeed essential for action, it is less often noted that it is also essential for certain emotional responses. Why, in Arthur Prior's famous example, do we thank goodness that a traumatic event is over, but feel dread when it is still to come? An important part of the solution, I believe, lies in the evolutionary story given by James Maclaurin and Heather Dyke (2002). But that's not the whole story. There must be a difference between thinking that an event is past, and thinking that it is future, that makes it appropriate to have different emotional reactions to the event depending on which of those thoughts occurs. What we need is a kind of thought that can only be had when one stands in the right kind of relation to the event – a version of what Perry (1977) called a 'self-locating' thought. I shall explain how this works in the temporal case by appealing to an epistemic property that I call 'first-person redundancy'. In my view the first-person perspective is fundamental, but that's because I assume the stage theory of persons; someone who rejects the stage theory may reinterpret my account in terms of the *de nunc*.