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# Explaining *oneself*

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An investigation into the indefinite and self-inclusive pronoun *one*

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THE AIM of this review is five-fold: (1) to consider *one* both as an indefinite pronoun meaning 'someone' or 'a person' and as a self-inclusive pronoun; (2) to investigate the possessives and reflexives used with *one*; (3) to pinpoint in time the arrival of *one's* and *oneself*; (4) to show differences between British and American use; and (5) to look at parallels to self-inclusive *one* in English and other languages.

## Identifying self-inclusive *one*

The English third-person pronoun *one*, as in, for example, *One has so little leisure these days*, can be described as 'self-inclusive'. The speaker means himself or herself among the generality of people:

- 1 Surely one is allowed to behave badly once in a while?
- 2 One must learn to accept people as they are.

Self-inclusive *one* can occur as direct or indirect object, or as object of a preposition:

- 3 Unexplained delays make one so angry.
- 4 The authorities give one too much paperwork.
- 5 People are constantly writing to one asking for money.

*One* is interesting in having possessive *one's* and reflexive or emphatic *oneself*:

- 6 One has one's pride.
- 7 In such circumstances one can only blame oneself.
- 8 One must make sure of the facts oneself.

And *one's* and *oneself* can be used without *one* as antecedent:

- 9 Inevitably one's standards slip.
- 10 The hardest bit is making oneself get down to work.

- 11 It's important to deal with such matters oneself.

The question quickly arises, what happens in other languages? I hope to make a few observations on this towards the end of this article. The immediate concern however is to look at the history of *one* in English.

## *One* as an indefinite pronoun

Before it acquires a self-inclusive sense, *one* occurs as an indefinite pronoun meaning 'someone' or 'a certain person' from the end of the 13th century, as a derived use of the numeral *one*. It occurs with an identifying addition (see below) rather earlier. This indefinite *one* is no longer in use in everyday English, but can still be found in literary contexts. It is referred back to with *he*, *him*, *his*, *himself* or *she*, *her*, *herself*. Here are two Shakespearean examples:

- 12 SIR TOBY There's one at the gate.  
OLIVIA Ay, marry; what is he?  
(*Twelfth Night*, 1601)

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13 My lord, there's one arriv'd, if you will see her.  
(*All's Well that Ends Well*, 1604)

And for a 20th-century example:

14 If one, settling a pillow by her head, should say: 'That is not what I meant at all' (T S Eliot, *The Lovesong of J Alfred Prufrock*, 1915)

In the New Testament (Authorized Version of the Bible, 1611), *one* is found translating Greek *tis* 'someone' or *heís* 'one, a person':

15 One [*tis*] ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar. (Mark 15.36)

16 There came one [*heís*] running, and kneeled to him. (Mark 10.17).

*One's* occurs as the possessive of indefinite *one*, meaning 'someone's', or 'a certain person's'. In the following example, *one's* is interestingly picked up by *they*:

17 DAUPHIN I once writ a sonnet in his [= his horse's] praise and began thus: 'Wonder of nature –'

ORLEANS I have heard a sonnet begin so to one's mistress.

DAUPHIN Then did they imitate that which I composed to my courser; for my horse is my mistress. (Shakespeare, *Henry V*, 1598)

And *OED* quotes:

18 A mad dog had suddenly tore in pieces a garment about ones body. (Edward Topsell: *The Historie of Four-footed Beastes*, 1607).

### Indefinite *one* with an identifying addition

The indefinite pronoun *one* is often accompanied by a defining adjectival phrase or relative clause. *The Oxford English Dictionary* has found occurrences of this use from the early 13th century. Here are some later examples, the Bacon citation showing possessive *one's* followed by a relative clause:

19 Her clothes spread wide, And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up: Which time she chaunted snatches of old tunes, As one incapable of her own distress. (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1600)

20 HAMLET Who is to be buried in't?

CLOWN One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul, she's dead. (ibidem)

21 Then must you speak Of one that loved not wisely but too well. (Shakespeare, *Othello*, 1603)

22 One that gives out himself Prince Florizel ... desires access to your high presence. (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, 1609)

23 As we say, that a blister will arise upon one's tongue, that tells a lie. (Bacon, *Essays, Of Praise*, 1612, completed 1625)

24 And, therefore, it is lawful for me to treat him as one who has put himself into a state of war with me. (Locke, *Civil Government*, 1690)

25 Holmes was silent and buried in thought with a pained expression upon his face, as one who finds himself in a perplexing position. (Conan Doyle, *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*, 1891)

There are occurrences of *one* with an identifying addition in the 1611 New Testament where in the Greek there is no word for 'someone' at all, simply an adjective or participle functioning as a noun. For example, in *the voice of one crying in the wilderness* (Isaiah's prophecy in Matthew 3.3, Mark 1.3, and Luke 3.4), *one crying* is a translation of *boôntos*, the genitive present participle of *boân* ('to shout'). And in Mark 2.3 *paralytikos* is translated 'one sick of the palsy'.

Until fairly recently, *one* + relative clause or adjectival phrase was normal style in dictionary definitions. The following come from the 1952 edition of *Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary*:

26 **polymath**, one who knows many arts and sciences

27 **self-seeker**, one who looks mainly to his own interests

28 **leper**, one affected by leprosy

### *One* as a self-inclusive pronoun

*One* gets its self-inclusive sense about the beginning of the 15th century, according to *OED's* most recent analysis of its citations. There is a definite hit in 1477:

29 He herde a man say that one was surer in keping his tunge, than in moche speking, for in moche langage one may lightly erre. (Earl Rivers, translating from French *The Dictes or Sayenges of the Philosophres*, 1477)

There are plentiful occurrences in Shakespeare at the end of the following century; a selection follow:

- 30 It is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden;  
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be,  
Ere one can say 'It lightens'.  
(*Romeo and Juliet*, 1595)
- 31 Why then, can one desire too much of a good thing?  
(*As You Like It*, 1599)
- 32 O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!  
My tables! Meet it is I set it down That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.  
(*Hamlet*, 1600)
- 33 Try what repentance can? What can it not? Yet what can it when one cannot repent? (ibidem)
- 34 Even so quickly may one catch the plague (i.e. fall in love)?  
(*Twelfth Night*, 1601)
- 35 One would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him.  
(ibidem)

Bacon makes use of self-inclusive *one* in his Essays:

- 36 You shall have sometimes fair houses so full of glass, that one cannot tell where to become, to be out of the sun or cold. (*Of Building*, 1625)
- 37 It is true greatness, to have in one the frailty of a man, and the security of a God. (*Of Adversity*, 1625)
- 38 To use too many circumstances, ere one come to the matter, is wearisome; to use none at all, is blunt. (*Of Discourse*, 1597, completed 1625)
- 39 It is better to sound a person with whom one deals afar off than to fall upon the point at first. (*Of Negotiating*, 1597, completed 1625)

And for later examples:

- 40 One might as well infer out of the first verse of the Bible that by heaven is meant the Pope, and by earth the king. (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651)
- 41 How does the fowler seek to catch his game By divers means! All which one cannot name: His guns, his nets, his lime twigs, light and bell. (Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678–84)
- 42 How can one forbear laughing to think of it. (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, 1700)

### **Self-inclusive one followed up by he, him, his, himself**

All the citations except the first in the previous section show *one* on its own, with no indication of what pronouns, reflexives or possessives might be used to pick it up. Predictably enough, usage initially was the same for self-inclusive *one* as for indefinite *one*: the regular accompaniments were the third-person *he, him, his, himself*. The 1477 source already cited follows *one* with *his* (though reverting to *one* as subject of the co-ordinate clause):

- 43 He herde a man say that one was surer in keping his tunge, than in moche speking, for in moche langage one may lightly erre. (Earl Rivers, translating from French *The Dictes or Sayenges of the Philosophres*, 1477)

And self-inclusive *one* continued to be used with *he, him, his, himself* during the 16th century and most of the 17th:

- 44 TOUCHSTONE Hast any philosophy in thee, shepherd?  
CORIN No more but that I know the more one sickens the worse at ease he is.  
(Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 1599)
- 45 The breaking off, in the midst of that one was about to say, as if he took himself up, breeds a greater appetite in him with whom you confer, to know more. (Bacon, *Essays, Of Cunning*, 1612, rewritten 1625)
- 46 ...as if one should say he saw his own ghost in a looking-glass (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651)
- 47 ...as when one imagineth a man, or horse, which he hath seen before (ibidem)
- 48 They went till they came into a certain country, whose air naturally tended to make one drowsy, if he came a stranger into it. (Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678–84)
- 49 ...that most unshaken rule of morality and foundation of all social virtue, 'That one should do as he would be done unto' (Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, 1690)

And *one* taken up by *he, him, his, himself* has persisted in American use to the present day, though by no means universally preferred by American writers:

- 50 There is no sight which makes one realize

more that he is drawing near home, than to see the same heavens, under which he was born, shining at night over his head. (Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years before the Mast*, 1840)

- 51 Is it not as if one should have, through majestic powers of science, the comets given into his hand? (Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men*, 1850)
- 52 One is glad when an imperative leaves him no option. (Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: First Series*, 1841)
- 53 Whether Captain Vere ... was really the sudden victim of any degree of aberration, one must determine for himself by such light as this narrative may afford. (Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*, 1880s, published 1924)
- 54 One cannot appreciate the horror of this disease until he looks upon it in all its ghastliness. (Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, 1869)
- 55 See what one can accustom himself to. (ibidem)
- 56 Outside was a man at work sharpening others (= other swords) on a grindstone. He understood his business; for when a sword left his hand one could shave himself with it. (*A Tramp Abroad*, 1880)
- 57 As one turns the pages he is impressed with the depth to which one date has been driven into the American child's head – 1492. (Mark Twain, *What is Man? and Other Essays*, 1906)
- 58 The last is a curiously plausible sentence; one seems to know what it means, and yet he knows all the time that he doesn't. (ibidem)
- 59 I shall really be very unhappy unless you give me the sort of courage that makes one forget he is afraid (Frank L. Baum, *The Wizard of Oz*, 1900)
- 60 She was at that age when one is no more conscious of the forces locked up within his unexplored and untested character than the dynamite cartridge is of its secrets of power and terror. (David Graham Phillips, *Susan Lennox*, 1917)
- 61 In 1970 one psychologist stated that 'an active and rewarding sex life ... is indispensable if one is to achieve his full potential as a member of the human race'. (Mary Batchelor, *Forty Plus*, 1988)

### **Self-inclusive one followed up by they, them, their, themselves**

Sir Kenelm Digby (1603–65) is quoted by *OED* using *their* and *themselves* to pick up self-inclusive *one*:

- 62 To whom one giveth love, one giveth also their will and their whole self. (*Private Memoirs*, 1648)
- 63 Hereby one may take to themselves a lesson. (ibidem)

*They, them, their, themselves* had the advantage of being common-gender, but the use of these with *one* was outlawed as ungrammatical. Somerset Maugham some centuries later put the following into the mouth of would-be-refined but semi-literate ex-waitress Mildred:

- 64 One can't force themselves. (*Of Human Bondage*, 1915)

And Canadian Lucy M Montgomery allows her impulsive heroine Anne this use:

- 65 In May one simply can't help being thankful that they are alive. (*Anne of Green Gables*, 1908)

### **The advent of one's (self-inclusive), and oneself**

*One's* is found, as has been noted above (where *one* is an indefinite pronoun), as the possessive of indefinite *one* towards the end of the 16th century – that is, in the sense 'somebody's' or 'a certain person's'. At about the same time it can be seen being used self-inclusively, sometimes intensified by *own*. *One's self* (an earlier and alternative form of *oneself*) is found in the mid 16th century. *OED* quotes:

- 66 For a suretie, the myscheffe of lovyng of ones selfe, is a noyeng (injurious) or hurtyng pestylence. (John Palsgrave, translating Fullonius's *Comedye of Acolastus*, 1540)

*One's* and *oneself* at first very rarely occur with *one* as an antecedent subject, presumably because it was usual to pick up *one* (whether indefinite or self-inclusive) with *his, himself*. To start with, *one's* and *oneself* are in frequent use with *to*-infinitives and gerunds, or with an impersonal or exterior subject. Some Shakespearean and later examples follow:

- 67 Who should be trusted, when one's own right hand is perjured to the bosom?

- (Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 1590)
- 68 a gentleman of princely parentage ... Proportion'd as one's thought would wish a man. (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1595)
- 69 It does one's heart good. (Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, 1602)
- 70 How fearful And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low! (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 1605)
- 71 To apply one's self to others, is good; so it be with demonstration, that a man doth it upon regard, and not upon facility. It is a good precept generally, in seconding another, yet to add somewhat of one's own. (Bacon, *Essays, Of Ceremonies and Respects* 1597, completed 1625)
- 72 To do injury (= injustice) to oneself is impossible. (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651)
- 73 Killing one's self is easier said than done. (Roger Boyle, *Tryphon*, 1669)
- 74 But Sister, is't a Sin to hang one's self? (Aphra Behn, *The Revenge*, 1680)
- 75 The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart. (Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 1678-84)
- 76 There was a pleasure in hearing one's praises from such a person. (Anon, *The London Jilt*, 1683)
- 77 Is it not a greater sign of Judgment to hold one's tongue, than to talk Reason to People who cannot hear it? (John Dennis, *The Impartial Critick*, 1693)
- 78 Whistling to one's self – as thus – or taking Snuff gravely – as thus – passes for Thought, and serious Consideration. (George Granville, *The She-Gallants* 1696)
- 79 There is a great difference betwixt real fire for instance, and the idea of fire, betwixt dreaming or imagining oneself burnt, and actually being so. (Berkeley, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1710)
- 80 To think of death, is to dye, and to be always thinking of it, is to be all one's Life-long a dying. (Defoe, *Captain Singleton*, 1720)
- 81 Sir, it is not necessary to be drunk one's self, to relish the wit of drunkenness. (Johnson, 1776, in *Boswell's Life*, 1791)
- 82 I should think he must be rather a dressy man for his time of life. Such a number of looking-glasses! oh Lord! there was no getting away from one's self. (Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 1817)

### **One followed up with one's and oneself**

Towards the end of the 17th century, self-inclusive *one* begins frequently to be picked up by *one's*, *oneself*:

- 83 It is impossible; the World is so, One cannot keep ones Friend, and Mistress too. (William Wycherley *Love in a Wood* 1671)
- 84 'Tis rare one can get so happy an Opportunity as to tell one's Heart. (Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*, 1688)
- 85 One no more owes one's beauty to a lover, than one's wit to an echo. (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, 1700)
- 86 Well, 'tis a lamentable thing, I swear, that one has not the liberty of choosing one's acquaintance as one does one's clothes. (ibidem)
- 87 There's nothing like a sincere Friend – for one is not a Judge of one's self. (Richard Steele, *The Lying Lover*, 1704)
- 88 After all, when one is made so very much to one's Advantage, so agreeable, so handsome ... and when one has so fine a Discernment to understand it very well one's self, Jealousie is a Passion that perhaps after all is as little troublesome as any Passion in the World. (Nicholas Rowe, *The Biter*, 1705)
- 89 Marriage were a happy State, cou'd one be always five or six Miles from one's Husband. (Thomas Baker, *Hampstead Heath*, 1706)
- 90 One can never have a Minute to one's self in this Family. (John Breval, *The Play is the Plot*, 1718)
- 91 One should always comply, Brother, in some Measure with the Majority, and never make one's self be star'd at. (James Miller, *The Man of Taste*, 1735)
- 92 One might as well address oneself, for Information, to a Bucket of Water. (Samuel Foote, *The Englishman Return'd from Paris*, 1756)

Contrary, perhaps, to expectation, plenty of American writers have been happy to pick up *one* with *one*, *one's*, *oneself* – or to vary between *one ... one*, etc and *one ... he*, etc (notice Richard Henry Dana and David Graham Phillips here, both shown previously to be users of *one ... he*):

- 93 If one might make an inference from what the devils do ... one cannot forbear dream-

ing that there are degrees of devils. (Cotton Mather, *Of Beelzebub and his Plot*, 1693)

- 94 So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable Creature, since it enables one to find or make a Reason for every thing one has a mind to do. (Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1771)
- 95 a very pretty face; very pretty: but then one sees so many pretty women in one's travels. (Washington Irving, *The Alhambra*, 1832).
- 96 It is strange that one should be so minute in the description of an unknown, outcast sailor, whom one may never see again. (Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years before the Mast*, 1840)
- 97 But it does seem as if the more one gets, the one wants, doesn't it? (Louisa M Alcott, *Little Women*, 1868)
- 98 Provision for a little healthy rudeness, savage virtue, justification of what one has in one's self, whatever it is, is demanded. (Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas*, 1871)
- 99 One was not therefore to conclude that one had no vocation, no beneficent aptitude of any sort, and resign one's self to being frivolous and hollow. (Henry James, *Portrait of a Lady*, 1881)
- 100 When one reads hurriedly and nervously, having in mind written tests and examinations, one's brain becomes encumbered with a lot of choice bric-a-brac. (Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*, 1901)
- 101 What a world! What a grotesque confusing of motion and progress! What fantastic delusions that one is busy when one is merely occupied. (David Graham Phillips, *Susan Lennox*, 1917)
- 102 One must lie under certain circumstances and at all times when one can't do anything about them. (Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1960)

### Continuation with *one* or *he* after *one's*, *oneself*

The next question is, if you start with *one's* or *oneself*, do you remain in *one* mode, or can you pick *one's*, *oneself* up with *he*? Certainly remaining in *one* mode seems to be the norm, whether in British or American English (the following examples are American):

- 103 For my part, I never will live nursery maid again where there are children who can

talk. When the poor little dears are in arms, there is pleasure in nursing them, for if a friend, or one's sweetheart comes, one can toss them into a cradle, or tie them in a chair. (Anon, *The Good Mother-in-Law*, 1791, from *Dramas of the Revolutionary and Early American Period*).

- 104 It is no easy matter to initiate one's self into the midst of family secrets, when one is comparatively a stranger. (William Alexander Caruthers, *The Kentuckian in New York*, 1834)
- 105 One's real self is vastly different from one's impulses. (David Graham Phillips, *Susan Lennox*, 1917)
- 106 There is something inexpressibly moving about cradling in one's hands a cranium drawn from one's own ancestry. (Phillip E Johnson, *Darwin on Trial* 1991)

But some American writers do pick up *one's* in *he* mode:

- 107 It is enough for the satisfaction of one's honour that he knife his enemy. (William Gilmore Simms, *The Damsel of Darien*, 1839)
- 108 Coin is getting so scarce, daily, that the face of a Carolus is almost as great a stranger, as the face of a debtor ... While one's creditors meet him, at every corner. (James Fenimore Cooper, *The Water-Witch*, 1841)
- 109 It was a pine wood, with so thick and soft a carpet of brown needles that one's footfall made no more sound than if he were treading on wool. (Mark Twain, *A Tramp Abroad*, 1880)
- 110 The door stood a trifle ajar. We approached it stealthily – on tiptoe and at half-breadth – for that is the way one's feeling makes him do, at such a time. (Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, 1889)

### The royal *one*: self-referring as distinct from self-inclusive

The royal *one* is the *one*, *one's*, *oneself* associated in modern satire with the British royal family, actually meaning *I*, *me*, *my*, *myself*, but affected as a kind of distancing device, and laughed at long ago by Congreve:

- 111 I am persecuted with letters – I hate letters – Nobody knows how to write letters, yet one has 'em, one does not know why.

They serve one to pin up one's hair. (Congreve, *The Way of the World*, 1700)

But as early as Shakespeare, there is a hint of self-referring one:

- 112 ROMEO And we mean well, in going to this masque; But 'tis no wit to go.  
MERCUTIO Why, may one ask? (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1595)

And here are a few examples from later literature:

- 113 'But where did you meet him?' repeated Orlando impatiently. 'Don't bite one's nose off,' said Betty. (Charlotte Smith, *The Old Manor House*, 1793)
- 114 I should very much like to send them to a school there is in this place – the High School I think they call it. 'Tis said to be the best school in the whole island, but the idea of one's children speaking Scotch – broad Scotch! (George Borrow, *Lavengro*, 1851)
- 115 Mr. and Mrs. Gibson were sitting in the drawing-room, quite ready to be amused by any details of the evening. Cynthia began, 'Oh! it wasn't very entertaining. One didn't expect that.' (Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters*, 1866)

And *OED* quotes:

- 116 'Do you often have your fan-mail in person?' 'Not often. One isn't in the telephone book.' (E.H. Clements, *High Tension*, 1959)

### Parallels to self-inclusive one in other European languages

This may be a good moment to think about self-inclusive pronouns in other European languages.

In German, *man* is the usual self-inclusive pronoun, and is used with the third-person reflexive and the third-person masculine possessive. Here are some recent examples from the internet:

- 117 Man muss sich organisieren können ('One must be able to organise oneself').
- 118 Kann man sich mit den eigenen Händen selbst erwürgen ('Can one strangle oneself by oneself with one's own hands')?

And from an online beauty magazine:

- 119 Wie kann man seine Lippen verfeinern ('How can one improve one's lips')?

The reflexive pronoun can be used self-inclusively in German without the support of *man*:

- 120 Heutzutage ist es nötig, sich durch eine besondere Qualifikation auszuzeichnen ('Nowadays it's imperative to distinguish oneself by means of a special qualification').

With more difficulty, the third-person possessive can, in the right context, be understood self-inclusively without the support of *man*:

- 121 Es ist töricht seine Bücher auszuleihen ('It's foolish to lend one's books').

*Man* occurs only as subject in German. *Einen, einem* are employed as self-inclusive object and indirect-object forms respectively:

- 122 Das kann einen irritieren ('That can irritate one').
- 123 Die Nachricht gibt einem Hoffnung ('The news gives one hope').

French *on* comes from Latin *homo* ('man'), so is semantically similar to German *man*. It is used, like *man*, with the third-person reflexive and possessives:

- 124 A 18 ans on peut se marier, mais pas acheter de champagne pour son mariage ('At 18 [in Sweden] one can get married, but not buy champagne for one's wedding').
- 125 Il faut se regarder dans le miroir et se demander si on veut gagner (It's essential to look at oneself in the mirror and ask oneself if one wants to win').

And we need think only of the French reflexive verbs to observe that third-person *se* can be understood self-inclusively without the support of *on*: for example, *se flatter de son habileté* ('to congratulate oneself on one's adroitness').

The third-person possessives can, in the right context, be understood self-inclusively without *on*:

- 126 C'est fou de prêter ses livres ('It's foolish to lend one's books').

*On*, like German *man*, is a subject form only; for a self-inclusive object form French resorts to second-person *vous*:

- 127 C'est désagréable quand la vendeuse vous ignore ('It's annoying when the salesgirl ignores one').

In Spanish *uno* is used as a self-inclusive pro-

noun, with third-person reflexive *se* and third-person possessives, and *se* can itself be used as a subject self-inclusively (*Se puede pensar eso*, ‘One may think that’) provided it is not employed in the same pronouncement as a reflexive. Swedish runs parallel to German with *man* + third-person reflexive and possessive, and *en* as an object form, interestingly with a possessive *ens*, a match for English *one’s* (*Ens fritid är viktigare än ens arbete*, ‘One’s free time is more important than one’s work’). Certain other languages (for example Czech, Greek) employ indefinite pronouns meaning ‘someone’, ‘a person’, in the self-inclusive slot, using the masculine form where there are both masculine and feminine forms. For example, modern Greek *kaneis* has the feminine *kamia*, but the masculine is used as the self-inclusive pronoun, followed up naturally by masculine forms the equivalent of ‘himself’, ‘his’, etc. English *one* is lucky with its dedicated common-gender reflexive *oneself* and possessive *one’s*.

## Conclusion

As part of summing-up, I should like to consider some other third-person self-inclusive expressions in English, so will deliberately exclude self-inclusive *you* from this brief survey. Certainly, the form *a man* is used from Chaucer onwards:

- 128 A man sholde eek thynke that God seeth and woot alle his thoghtes and all his werkes. (‘One should also be aware that God sees and knows all one’s thoughts and all one’s deeds’: Chaucer, *The Parson’s Tale*, 1060, late 14th-century)
- 129 It does a man’s heart good. (Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, 1602)
- 130 Can’t a man pay his wife a compliment? (BBC radio serial *The Archers*, 18 February, 2005)

In Chaucer *he*, *him*, *his*, *himself* are used self-inclusively, without *a man* as antecedent:

- 131 First is the lovyng of God principal, and lovyng of his neighebor as hymself. (‘First

is the loving of God principally, and loving of one’s neighbour as oneself: *The Parson’s Tale* 515)

- 132 Agayns ... wanhope (despair) he shal thynke that as oft as he falleth he may rise again by penitence; and though he never so longe have leyn in synne, the mercy of Crist is redy to receiven hym to mercy. (‘Against despair one shall remember that as often as one falls one may rise again by penitence; and, however long one has lain in sin, the mercy of Christ is ready to receive one into mercy’: *ibidem*, 1070)

Such forms as *a fellow*, *a chap*, *a girl* can all be used self-inclusively or self-referringly:

- 133 Can’t a fellow have a moment’s peace?  
 134 Give a chap a chance!  
 135 Let a girl have her own way for once!

There is, in addition, the form *a body* in Scots, which is used both indefinitely and self-inclusively. Here is my reading of its uses in the traditional song *Gin a body meet a body*:

Gin a body [self] meet a body [someone]  
 Comin thro’ the rye,  
 Gin a body [someone] kiss a body [self]  
 Need a body [self] cry?

To sum up: *One* appears during the 13th century as an indefinite pronoun, and has added its self-inclusive aspect by the late 15th century. The additions *oneself* and *one’s* arrive during the 16th century, but *one* rarely appears as an antecedent subject with these until the last quarter of the 17th century. British English has embraced *one*, *one’s*, *oneself*, to pick up self-inclusive *one*, whereas however American English has traditionally been happy with *he*, *him*, *his*, *himself* as an alternative. ■

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