

Epistemology of Mind 1/6
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1. Welcome...

You know about a lot of different things (the weather right now, the weather last week, how the weather works, the weather next week)

Standard routes to knowledge:

- Perception
- Memory
- Testimony
- Inference

Some ordinary features of knowledge

- i. Sometimes you think you know something but you turn out to be wrong.
- ii. Often others disagree with you, and they may have good grounds to do so.
- iii. You may consult others and let their views determine your own on a particular topic

You also know a lot of things about your own mind...

- What you believe
- What you're thinking about right now
- What you are currently feeling (pain, tiredness, emotions...)
- How you are disposed to respond to things (Are you prone to tears? What makes you angry?)

How do you know those things? What's the route to that knowledge?

- Ordinary routes don't seem like good candidates...
- That knowledge doesn't seem to manifest (i) to (iii)... why not?
- How and why is knowing about your own mind different to knowing about other people's minds?

(Compare: knowing about your own bicycles isn't fundamentally different to knowing about other people's bicycles)

What is it that you know *about* when you know things about your own mind?

- Do you just learn about mental states and events or do you (inevitably?) also learn about the self that is the seat of those mental states?
- Is knowledge of your own mind really so separable from knowledge of your body?
 Gareth Evans: "If there is to be a division between the mental and the physical, it is a division which is spanned by the Ideas we have of ourselves."

It's particularly strange that these things are so mysterious given that knowledge of one's own mind has often been accorded a foundational role in our epistemology...

- Some kinds of knowledge of this sort seem to be infallible...
- So the hope is that we can use them as the secure basis of a larger structure of knowledge about the external world.

This week we're focusing on the first of those questions (the how-do-you-know-these-things question), but the others are bubbling away in the background....

Candidate ways of knowing:

- Behaviourism: you infer your mental states from your own behaviour
- Inner Sense: a special kind of perception – introspection
- Acquaintance: you are directly acquainted with your own mental states
- Transparency: you come to know about your own mental states through knowing about their objects, i.e. through learning about the external world you come to know what it is you believe about it.

2. The inner sense view

How does introspection actually work?

John Locke

“...the other fountain from which experience furnisheth the understanding with ideas is,—the perception of the operations of our own mind within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got;—which operations, when the soul comes to react on and consider, do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas, which could not be had from things without. And such are perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing, and all the different actings of our own minds;—which we being conscious of, and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understandings as distinct ideas as we do from bodies acting our senses. This source of ideas every man has wholly in himself; and though it be not sense, as having nothing to do with external objects, yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be called internal sense. But as I call the other sensation, so I call this reflection, the ideas it affords being such only as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself. By reflection then, in the following part of this discourse, I would be understood to mean, that notice which the mind takes of its own operations, and the manner of them, by reason whereof there come to be ideas of these operations in the understanding. (An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (II, 1, iv)

Armstrong (1968) (a materialist)

“In sense-perception, we become aware of current happenings in the physical world. A perception is therefore a mental event having as its (intentional) object situations in the physical world. In introspection, on the contrary, we become aware of current happening in our own mind. Introspection is therefore a mental event having as its (intentional) object other mental happenings that form part of the same mind. Nevertheless, introspection may properly be compared to sense-perception...”

Do we *need* introspection? What is it *for*?

According to Armstrong, purposive physical behaviour requires perception. And so purposive mental activity requires introspection. “Only so can we adjust mental behaviour to mental circumstances. For instance, if we are doing a calculation ‘in our head’, we will need to become aware of the current stage in the mental calculation that we have reached. Only if we do become so aware will we know what to do next.”

- Does a computer need to introspect in order to perform calculations?

Key features

- Materialist friendly: introspection a self-scanning process in the brain
- Allows for continuity between knowledge of world / others and knowledge of self
- A *causal* and *contingent* relationship between your inner states and your knowledge of them
- Possible for introspection, like perception, to be erroneous (whilst on many other occasions satisfying the conditions for knowledge.)

Oddities of introspection

- What's the relevant sense organ? How can it be analogous to perception if there just isn't one?
- Why do we only learn about our own mental states in this way, but nothing else?

3. Testing the Inner Sense View

The Inner Sense view is based on an analogy with perception. But there are various points at which that analogy begins to break down. These places raise some difficult questions for the view.

➤ What are the objects of introspection? What is it that the inner sense view detects or “sees”? We are all familiar with the kind of external objects and properties which the senses detect. What are the equivalent objects in the case of introspection?

Sidney Shoemaker raises this as a particular worry in “Introspection and the Self”...

- i. Could it be *the self itself*?

David Hume raises an initial worry for that claim...

“For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception.” ‘On Personal Identity’ from *A Treatise on Human Nature*

- ii. Could it be mental states or events, without any need to posit a distinct *self*?

“It hardly makes sense to suppose that there could be a mode of perception that has as its objects bendings of branches and risings of the sun, but never branches or the sun. And it makes equally little sense to suppose that there might be a mode of perception that had as its objects experiencings but never experiencers – never subjects of experience. Experiencings and the like seem as ill-suited as sun-risings and branch-bendings for being the primary non-factual objects of a model of perception.” Shoemaker P.125

So: “...if we have introspective perception of anything, we have it of the self, and that only the self could be the primary non-factual object of introspective perception, if such a model of perception exists.”

- iii. Ah, ok, back to the idea that you're perceiving a self doing a thing in that case...

But at this point, Shoemaker points out that the analogy with perception *really* begins to break down...

- In ordinary cases of perception we can perceive multiple different objects of different sorts, which we can variously misidentify and reidentify as the same token, and track over time.
- NONE OF THIS SEEMS TO APPLY IN THE CASE OF INTROSPECTION
 - o If the self is the object of introspection then each person has maximum one self they can pick out
 - o But we don't distinguish that from other selves by its perceived properties...
 - o And we can't misidentify the self...(or can we?? For more on that wait till we get to week 6...)

A regress looms....

“Obviously, however, the introspective observation of a self being angry is not going to yield the knowledge that *I* am angry unless I know that that self is myself. How am I supposed to know this? If the answer is that I identify it as myself by its perceived properties, we have to point out that this requires that I already know that I have those properties. So I would already have to have some self-knowledge, namely the knowledge that I have certain identifying properties, in order to acquire any self-knowledge by self-observation.”

- So it seems like we need *some* non-observational knowledge about the self to start the whole thing off...
- Which might leave you wondering why *all* your knowledge about your own mind couldn't be of that form...

iv. What's the phenomenology of this kind of inner perception?

- There's generally *something it's like* to enjoy a perceptual experience. E.g. there's something it's like to see the colour red, or hear a middle C.
- So if introspection is a kind of perception, what's *its* phenomenology? What's the phenomenology not of pain, but of introspecting the face you're in pain?

Shoemaker again: “it seems plain that this ‘something it is like’ is just the phenomenal character of the states themselves, and not the phenomenal character of still other states that are sense impressions of them.” P.134

Recommended reading:

- Armstrong, D. M. (1994). Introspection. In Quassim Cassam (ed.), *Self-Knowledge*. Oxford University Press. pp. 109--117.
- Shoemaker, Sydney (1986). Introspection and the self. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 10 (1):101-120.
- Kind, Amy, (2003), “Shoemaker, Self-Blindness, and Moore's Paradox”, *Philosophical Quarterly*, 53: 39–48