

## Epistemology of Mind 2/6: From Inner Sense to Transparency

Ostensibly, our current enquiry investigates the nature of *introspection*... but it turns out that any such investigation also requires us to have a view about *the kinds of things* we're introspecting. Is the object of introspection a *self* or just a series of mental states? What *are* mental states? In particular, how can we determine how we know our own beliefs unless we also have an account of *what a belief is*?

### **1. 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...

- 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

## **2. Transparency**

- Maybe your mental states are *transparent*: you don't directly introspect *on them* but you do introspect on their contents.
- Figuring out what you think or see doesn't involve looking within. It involves looking to the outside world.
- You could think of this as a bit like looking through a window at the world outside: features of your experience of the world help you figure out the kind of window you're looking through.
- We are not entirely leaving behind the comparison with a kind of perception (though Evans would disagree). See Dretske's description of self-knowledge as “a form of perceptual knowledge that is obtained – indeed, can only be obtained, by awareness of non-mental objects” (1994:264)
- N.b. this methodology seems most plausible for belief, and that's what this discussion will focus on.

*Q:* Is transparency method limited to beliefs? Is that a good thing (respects diversity amongst mental states and need for corresponding specificity of introspective methods) or a bad thing (we want to understand what different forms of introspection have in common, which intuitively feels like Quite A Lot actually)

- i. This view is frequently associated with Gareth Evans (but see also Fred Dretske and Alex Byrne).

“If someone asks me ‘Do you think there is going to be a third world war?’, I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question ‘Will there be a third world war?’ I get myself in a position to answer the question whether I believe that *p* by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether *p*.” Evans p.202

“...whenever you are in a position to assert that *p*, you are *ipso facto* in a position to assert ‘I believe that *p*.’”

“...in a state of information on the basis of which a subject may ascribe to himself an experience as of seeing, say, a tree, what *he* observes (if anything) is only the tree, not his own information state. .. Secondly, any information state in which the subject has information about the world is *ipso facto* a state in which he has information about himself, of the kind we are discussing, available to him.”

“For what we are aware of when we know that we see a tree, *is nothing but a tree.*”

- How strong is Evan’s claim? Is that you must *always* use this method? Can we *ever* gather internal evidence that supports our self-attribution of beliefs?

## ii. Transparency and Rationality

“As I conceive of myself as a rational agent, my awareness of my belief is awareness of my commitment to its truth, a commitment to something that transcends any description of my psychological state. And the expression of this commitment lies in the fact that my reports on my belief are obligated to conform to the condition of transparency: that I can report on my belief about X by considering (nothing but) X itself.” (Richard Moran 2001: 84)

i.e. we have agential authority over our own beliefs. We are committed to fitting one’s beliefs to one’s evidence (*is it really a belief if you aren’t?*)

## iii. Transparency and Privileged Access

Alex Byrne argues that this account of introspection accounts for our privileged access to our own beliefs (see too Jordi Fernandez).

Byrne’s rule for self-ascribing beliefs: “If *p*, believe that you believe that *p*”

“[A]s a contingent matter, trying to follow BEL will usually produce knowledge of what one believes. Venturing out on a limb—of course the matter requires more discussion—we may tentatively conclude that privileged access is thereby explained. (2005: 98)”

Because results in self attributions that

- i. Are especially reliably and
- ii. result from the use of a uniquely first-person method

Thereby explaining why

- i. Beliefs about one's mental states acquired through the usual route are more likely to amount to knowledge than beliefs about others' mental states (and, more generally, beliefs about one's environment)
- ii. Knowledge of one's mental states is *peculiar* in comparison to one's knowledge of others' minds. One has a special method or way of knowing that one believes that the cat is indoors.

iv. Brie Gertler's (2011) objection to Transparency

These accounts can't distinguish newly formed judgments from previously formed beliefs.

We know what we believe *at the time the question is asked* but this methodology perturbs our beliefs, potentially leading to the formation of *new* beliefs.

"These methods do not help us to discover pre-existing states of affairs... The work by *bringing about* these states of affairs." (p.129) which we can then knowingly self-attribute.

"[a] disposition to believe that *p* is not a dispositional belief that *p*" (p.131)

"In determining what we believe about *p*, it is often useful just to think about *p*, and not about our beliefs *as such*. But if this method is to reveal our pre-existing beliefs, we must not gather new evidence concerning *p*. That is, *we must limit ourselves to looking inward*." (Pp.132-133)

But that conflicts with transparency. E.g. Moran's condition: "I can report on my belief about X by considering (nothing but) X itself".

Gertler claims the account relies on an overly rationalistic conception of belief, one on which there's a constitutive tie between your belief and what you recognise as your evidence.

- This definition of belief struggles to accommodate many states we intuitively recognise as beliefs that are resistant to evidence or somehow inconsistent.
- It's a particular problem for access to our dispositional beliefs, because our current evidence can diverge from factors that shape one's dispositional beliefs.
- Even accepting that definition of belief, Gertler is concerned that transparency will yield inaccurate results unless it includes a way of limiting your introspection to evidence that is already 'internal' in some sense.

N.b. Gertler is happy to allow that someone might wind up saying "spilling salt does not bring bad luck, but I believe that it does" (and assumes they will then set about making their belief consistent with their evidence). Those with a more rationalistic conception of belief might resist the claim that that's ever a coherent thing to say.