

24.500 spring 05
topics in philosophy of mind
session 4

- readings
- slides
- warrant transmission
- teatime

self-knowledge

plan

- Boghossian's "content and self-knowledge"
- Shoemaker

content and self-knowledge

- we don't know our thoughts inferentially
- on an internalist conception of justification, self-knowledge *has* to be non-inferential
- we don't know our thoughts on the basis of inner observation
- but there are serious objections to the suggestion that we may know our thoughts on the basis of nothing

1. we know our own thoughts immediately (i.e. not by inference)
2. either non-inferential self knowledge is based on some form of inner observation or on nothing—at any rate, on nothing empirical
3. since you cannot tell by mere inspection of an object that it has a given *relational* or *extrinsic* property, inner observation is not the source of self-knowledge
4. self-knowledge is based on nothing, and so is not a cognitive achievement (from 1, 2, 3)

but this conclusion is absurd

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against inner observation

- an uncontestable principle:
- you cannot tell by mere inspection of an object that it has a given relational or extrinsic property
- so, “mere inspection” won’t tell you what you’re thinking
 - this seems to lean much too heavily on features of outer perception (seeing a dime, etc.)
 - in any case, what about *speech* perception?

So long as knowledge of thought is construed as dependent on evidence, it seems impossible to understand how we could know our own thoughts. That is what the argument of the previous two parts amounts to.

- so perceptual knowledge of tomatoes etc. is “dependent on evidence”, but what is this evidence?

evidence: two options

- A. propositions about the “external world” (here is a hand, here is a pink thing, etc.)
- B. propositions about the “internal world” (it looks to me that there is a hand here, here is a pink sense datum, etc.)



- option A: we know some things about the external world without inference from evidence, and so this knowledge is “based on nothing”
 - so, presumably, this is not what Boghossian has in mind

- option B: we know some things about the internal world (sense data, etc.) without inference from evidence, and so this knowledge is “based on nothing”
 - then perceptual knowledge is “dependent on evidence”
 - but the very availability of option A shows that it is a mistake to lump knowledge “based on nothing” together with infallibility and completeness, as Boghossian appears to do

Ordinarily, in order to know some contingent proposition you need either to make some observation, or to perform some inference based on some observation. In this sense, we may say that ordinary empirical knowledge is always a *cognitive achievement* and its epistemology always *substantial*.

examples of cognitively insubstantial knowledge:

a. the judgment *I am here now*

b. the judgment that the world contains substances (on the Kantian assumption that this is a precondition for experience)

c. the judgment that I am jealous (on the view that this is essentially self-verifying)

- self-knowledge can't be like *that*, because it is fallible and incomplete
 - very odd to call the epistemology of a, b, c, 'insubstantial'
 - in any case, assimilating all c.i.k. to examples like a, b, c is not (obviously) correct

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endive

chicory

chicory

endive

see Ludlow, the prevalence of slow switching

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slow switching

- appears in two slightly confusing locations in the paper (once against inner observation, and once against Burge)
 - if S knows p at t_1 , and hasn't forgotten anything at t_2 , then S knows p at t_2
 - why does slow switching S not know today that he had a chicory thought last year?
 - he did not *forget*
 - therefore he never knew
 - admittedly, S might have a perfectly good memory by usual standards
- at any rate, no need to deny that S loses some information—whether or not it's “forgetting”

on knowing one's own mind

- cartesianism:
 1. infallibility
 2. “special access”(“self-acquaintance”) is of the essence of mind
- shoemaker denies (1), argues for (2)
- special access seems to be a combination of peculiar access and (weak) privileged access

- anti-cartesian perceptual analogies
 - mental states independent of being detected
 - independent causal mechanism

- focus on knowledge of one's beliefs, desires, intentions
 - role in dealings with others
 - role in deliberation
- self-acquaintance not essential to mentality in one sense: dogs have mental states, but no self-acquaintance

- self-acquaintance essential to mentality in this sense: no self-blindness
 - S is self-blind iff S has the conception of the various mental states and can entertain the thought that she has this or that belief, etc., but is unable to become aware of the truth of this thought except in a third person way
 - in other words...
 - not quite: the official definition leaves out any privileged access

argument 1 (§IV)

- A. in the case of belief-revision, it is *as if* the system contained a desire to be a rational and coherent belief-desire system, and (true) beliefs about what beliefs and desires it contains
- B. ...if everything* is *as if* a creature has knowledge* of its beliefs and desires, then it does have knowledge of them
- C. a rational belief-reviser has self-knowledge**

*so, not *quite* valid

**"I realize that some will be skeptical..."

- A. in the case of belief-revision, it is *as if* the system contained a desire to be a rational and coherent belief-desire system, and (true) beliefs about what beliefs and desires it contains
- but what about animals?
 - won't there be other behavior that will indicate that the system doesn't have self-knowledge?
 - past beliefs and desires
 - beliefs and desires that are the products of revision
 - how about the desire to be irrational plus false beliefs about one's beliefs and desires?

argument 2 (§V)

- A. self-blind speaker George will recognize the paradoxical character of 'P but I don't believe that P'
- B. since he is rational, this recognition will lead him to avoid Moore-paradoxical sentences
- C. further, George will recognize that he should give the same answer to 'do you believe that P?' and 'P?'
- D. there is nothing in his behavior, verbal or otherwise, that would give away the fact that he lacks self-acquaintance
- E. if George really is self-blind, then perhaps we are too!
- F. it seems better to take this as a reductio ad absurdum of the view that self-blindness is a possibility

- next time:
 - Shoemaker, contd.
 - warrant transmission
- no class next week (Muh)