

24.500 spring 05  
topics in philosophy of mind  
session 7

- teatime

self-knowledge

# plan

- self-blindness, one more time
- Peacocke & Co.
- immunity to error through misidentification:
  - Shoemaker's self-reference and self-awareness, Evans and Wittgenstein

## 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 reduction ad absurdum of the view that self-blindness is a possibility

- another way of stating the conclusion of the argument:

if

- rational intelligent George has the conception of the various mental states and can entertain the thought that he has this or that belief, wants to find out about his mental life, etc.,

then [modulo a later qualification]

- after an initial period in which he appears (and is) self-blind (at least partly)\*, George will have self-knowledge that is similar in extent to ours, and that he can attain in the sorts of circumstances in which we can attain self-knowledge

\*George is of normal intelligence, etc., not a genius; it may take him some time to go through the Shoemakerian reasoning

note: George's self-knowledge is not supposed to depend on empirical evidence about other human beings, because our self-knowledge does not so depend (at least according to Shoemaker)

- OK, but what about a case where there would be a point in speaking with Grice-2 intentions? (when the audience already believes that p)
  - George would have a motive for saying 'p':
    - it's true that p, so:
    - I should act as if I believed that p
    - in this instance so acting would mean saying 'p', because plainly this would have good consequences for me

how can this be right? cf. 'p, so Smith should act as if he believed that p'

- first attempt:
  1. the audience needs to know whether I believe that p
  2. now, it's true that p
  3. so, if I assert that p, the audience will come to know that I believe that p
- this reasoning will combine with my desire to help the audience, leading me to assert that p
- but the step from (1) and (2) to (3) is suspect—I can reach (3) only if I know (or have good reason to believe) that I believe that p
- and this can't be assumed, because I am supposed to be self-blind
- also the objection to the suggestion on the next slide applies here

- a suggestion:
  1. the audience needs to know whether I believe that p
  2. if a speaker informs an audience whether p, the audience will typically know whether the speaker believes that p
  3. now, it is true that p
  4. so, by asserting that p, I will inform the audience whether p
  5. if I assert that p, hence inform the audience, by (2) the audience will (probably) come to know whether I believe that p
- this reasoning will combine with my desire to help the audience, leading me to assert that p
- the problem is that (2) is an empirical generalization about human communication, and George's self-knowledge is not supposed to rely (supervene) on such things
- one can have peculiar and privileged access to one's beliefs, even if one does not know (2)

# conscious attitudes, attention, and self-knowledge

- topic: conscious thoughts, conjectures, decisions, etc.
- claim: there are certain “constitutive features” of these “states” [events?], “which can be identified by broadly philosophical investigation”



# part I

- consciously recalling  $p$  is (always?) “subjectively different” from consciously recalling (or seeming to consciously recall) a distinct proposition  $q$
- activities like trying to remember something can “occupy your attention” [?]
- these activities are not “objects of attention”, because they are not “experienced”
- the kinds of attention involved in conscious thought and perception are subspecies of “a single, general kind of attention”

the following can occupy your attention:

- trying to find a proof
- trying to remember something
- trying to find evidence... (64)
- that is: a certain kind of mental process (“attention”) occurs when one is trying to find a proof, etc.
- but, this process (when it occurs in cases like the above, although not in other cases), does not involve perceiving an object

- perceptual attention does not suffice for the “occupation of your attention by your doing something”
  - the driving example on p. 68
  - what is true is that attending to the movement of x (e.g.) is not sufficient for trying to move x
  - it’s not obvious that the trying should be described as “occupying your attention”

- if what I have said about the occupation of attention by conscious thought is along the right lines, then the occupation of attention at least in directed thought also performs a function of selection
  - is this more than the observation that what one thinks about is to some extent under voluntary control?
  - when one's attention is occupied (in thought), one is attending to something, namely the thoughts' subject-matter (see Martin, 103, 119, interpreting Peacocke)
- without such selection, human thought would be chaotic
  - how does that follow?

## part II

1. an apparent memory that Peacocke taught at NYU
  2. a judgment that Peacocke taught at NYU
  3. a self-ascription of the belief that Peacocke taught at NYU
- the “mental event” described in (2) might be one’s “reason” for making the self-ascription described in (3)

[I]n making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward—upon the world. 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?”. (Evans 1982, 225)

- Peacocke's point: the memory example is a “special case of Evans' procedure, rather than any kind of rival to it”
  - Martin seems to interpret Peacocke differently at 114 (“Peacocke's own interpretation of Evans...”)

# “failure of pseudo-transitivity”



1. an apparent memory that Peacocke taught at NYU
  2. a judgment that Peacocke taught at NYU
  3. a self-ascription of the belief that Peacocke taught at NYU
- (1) is not (does not give) a reason for (3), although one may achieve self-knowledge by moving straight from (1) to (3)
    - the particular event (1) gives a reason to judge that p; the particular event (2) gives a reason to self-ascribe the belief that p (what is rationalized in the first step—a type—is not what does the rationalizing in the second—a particular event)
      - suppose that’s right—why doesn’t (1) give a reason to self-ascribe the belief that p?

## part III

- against:
  - the “no-reasons” account (derived from Shoemaker)
  - internalist introspection
  - the spurious trilemma (recall Boghossian: either observation, inference, or nothing)



# Boghossian's paradox

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

- Peacocke: (2) is false, because one's experience can "make reasonable" the second-order judgment that one is having an experience
- contrast our earlier response, namely that the conclusion is not absurd

- no reasons: never a personal-level, causal, reason-giving explanation of why a thinker believes he believes that p
- natural no reasons epistemology: reliabilism
  - is that because it doesn't give "personal level" explanations?—and what are these?
  - note the quote from Shoemaker on 77 does not express his own view
- the no-reasons view is false because conscious states "can give reasons" (83)
  - note that they "are reasons" earlier
  - it is somewhat unclear what Peacocke's talk of "reasons" amounts to
  - see Unger, *Ignorance*, for some considerations in favor of taking reasons to be known propositions (see also Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*, ch. 9); this seems to be at odds with Peacocke's talk of reasons

- internalist introspectionist: Goldman; one treats self-knowledge of attitudes like self-knowledge of sensations (where the latter is a matter of “introspecting qualia”)
- conscious attitudes are subjective states and one (only) has access to their narrow content
  - Peacocke dismisses this on mostly familiar grounds
  - but what’s going on with the discussion of the “second factor” (80-82)?
  - is Peacocke denying that consciously recalling p is always “subjectively different” from consciously recalling a distinct proposition q?

## part IV

- what account is available in the present framework of the nature of the first-order(?) property, the property whose instances in the thinker are to be tracked by properly made self-ascriptions?
  - i.e., what's the property of believing that p?
- how do the points in the preceding sections of this chapter...contribute to answering the question of how properly made self-applications of the concept of belief track instances of the property of believing a given content?
  - i.e. how does the earlier stuff help explain why one's belief that one believes p is usually correct?

- a bit of Peacockean background
- concept (a.k.a. Fregean sense) possession:
  - concept  $F$  is that unique concept  $C$  to possess which a thinker must meet condition  $A(C)$
  - a simplified example: the concept *red* is that unique concept  $C$  to possess which a thinker must be disposed to apply  $C$  to an object that looks red to her (cf. Martin, 112)
  - note that ‘applies  $C$ ’ needs to be explained in terms of judging a content with  $C$  as a “constituent”
- see *A Study...*, ch. 1

# Peacocke's (necessary) possession conditions for the concept of belief

- a relational concept  $R$  is the concept of belief only if:
  - (F) the thinker finds the first-person content that he stands in  $R$  to  $p$  primitively compelling whenever he has the conscious belief that  $p^*$
  - (T) in judging a thought of the third person form  $aRp$ , the thinker thereby incurs a commitment to  $a$ 's being in the state that has the same content-dependent role in making  $a$  intelligible as the role of his own state of standing in  $R$  to  $p$  making him intelligible, were he to be in that state

\*what's a conscious belief? (not a belief that one believes one has, evidently—see *A Study*, 152, and Martin, 105); and could one have the concept of belief without having conscious beliefs, according to Peacocke? (probably not)

- note that not even Shoemaker agrees with (F) [?— more cautiously, he shouldn't]

Peacocke's link between possession conditions and knowledge:

- “take any mental state that a possession condition for a concept says is sufficient for the thinker finding primitively compelling a given content containing the concept
- then when a thinker judges that content and for the reason that he is in that state, his judgment constitutes [not just truth but] knowledge” (*A Study...*, 157)

- determination theory: how the semantic value (reference) of a concept is determined from its possession conditions (together with the world)
- the determination theory..should make the judgmental practices in the possession condition correct
  - what about the concept *phlogiston*, *witch*, etc?
  - anyway, this bit yields:
- when a thinker judges that content and for the reason that he is in that state, his judgment is true (knowledge requires more argument)
- Peacocke holds a version of Shoemaker's supervenience thesis (84)



## part V

- what about NICS (“no-intermediate-conscious-state”) examples?
- a NICS ascription of a belief that p is knowledge only if it is made in circumstances in which the thinker is also willing to make the first-order judgment that p (“the requirement of first-order ratifiability”)
  - a NICS ascription is knowledge iff...what? (see 94)

# An eye directed outward

- the question is, given that the self-ascription is made for a reason [on Peacocke's account], what kind of evidence can there be for this self-ascription
- if there cannot be evidence for the self-ascription, in what sense is the ascription made for a reason?
- but Peacocke would reject this worry as simply being in the grip of the 'spurious trilemma'
  - clearly some distinction is being made here between reasons and evidence, but the distinction is not clearly explained (111 suggests that evidence is propositional, and typically is a proposition about the world, not one's mental states)

- the suggestion that Peacocke makes, that self-ascriptions based on ‘intermediate conscious states’ will endorse the commitments of the ascribed state, does not seem to me to be invariably correct
  - that is, one may [truly] believe one believes that p on the basis of “a subjective feeling of conviction”, which one does not endorse
    - this is a bit confusing: what does “endorsing the commitments of the belief that p” mean?—believing that p? (see the remark about “identification” on 116)

- some of our self-ascriptions of belief on the basis of conscious thoughts lack authority
  - because they're false? (presumably: "...error is conceivable..." (116))
- two cases: Evans-style (one's attention is directed upon the world) and Hume-style (in which we can discern a distinctive kind of evidence, a feeling of conviction...)
- if it is in the former kind of case that we possess the interesting properties of authority, it is that which we have reasons to explain
- upshot: it's a mystery how my conscious state, which is an attending to some aspect of the world, can give me a reason to self-ascribe my state of mind
  - a.k.a. the puzzle of transparency, to be discussed later

- next time:
  - Wittgenstein, Evans, Shoemaker on IETM; selections from Bar-On, *Speaking My Mind*