

24.500 spring 05
topics in philosophy of mind
session 13

- teatime
- beertime

self-knowledge

plan

- Dretske, etc., on transparency

[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)

With respect to the attitude of belief, the claim of transparency tells us that the first-person question “Do I believe P?” is “transparent” to, answered in the same way as, the outward-directed question as to the truth of P itself. (Moran 2001, 66)

1. too epistemically indirect
 - but isn't it conceded that the transparency procedure is right for some cases?
2. limited scope ("I'd really like a cup of tea right now")
 - unclear why this is a problem, given the earlier suggestion about desires
3. phenomenal avowals aren't good candidates
 - but see Dretske
4. transparency method is not especially secure
 - the democrat and dog examples are quite different—the former isn't a case where transparency leads one astray, although the latter is
5. applies to some non-avowals (seeing, remembering,...)
 - what's the problem?
 - * objection to transparency as a method; not to the claim that transparency explains security





what is the problem?

- 5 applies to some non-avowals (seeing, remembering,...)
- the problem is supposed to be that, on Evan's approach, 'I seem to see a tree' is no more secure than 'I see a tree', a "conclusion that Evans himself welcomes"
 - if that's correct, then it would be devastating
 - since 'I remember that p' entails 'I believe that p', this implies that one is never right about 'I believe that p' but wrong about 'I remember that p'
 - but why does she think this is Evans' view?
 - cf. "it is not easy to make sense of his making a mistake" (in the case of 'I seem to see a red thing') (VoR, 229)

against the epistemic approach in general

- presumption of security applies to any avowing subject... (125)
 - but we do have other general epistemic expectations (people know their names, etc.)
- not a specific subject matter—just pertains to time of avowal
 - but what about birdwatchers, umpires, etc?
- can't establish reliability of avowals (126)
 - there is an issue here about testimony, but the claim seems too strong
 - and the argument about “internal physical conditions” is fallacious

the puzzle of transparency

And, in general, that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us: it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent—we look through it and see nothing but the blue; we may be convinced that there *is something* but *what* it is no philosopher, I think, has yet clearly recognised. (Moore, “The refutation of idealism”)

- that the mug is blue is feeble evidence for the proposition that one sees blue
- a similar phenomenon for *belief* and *knowledge*
- the puzzle of transparency: how can we have knowledge of our own mental states on the basis of such seemingly irrelevant evidence?

...the claim of Transparency *is* something of a paradox: how can a question referring to a matter of empirical psychological fact about a particular person be legitimately answered without appeal to the evidence about that person, but rather by appeal to a quite independent body of evidence? (Moran 2003, 413)

We can restate the puzzle...thus...by directing her eyes outward, so to speak, she gains knowledge of her own mind. Why should this be so? (Martin, "An eye...", 117-8)

Dretske on zombies

- “Zombies”, in Dretske’s usage, are “human-like creatures who are not conscious and, therefore, not conscious of anything” (2003, n. 1, 9)

In normal (i.e. veridical) perception, then, the objects you are aware of are objective, mind-independent objects. They exist whether or not you experience them...Everything you are aware of would be the same if you were a zombie. In having perceptual experience, then, nothing distinguishes your world, the world you experience, from a zombie’s. This being so, what is it about this world that tells you that, unlike a zombie, you experience it? What is it that you are aware of that indicates that you are aware of it? (2003, 1, note omitted)

how do I know I'm seeing a duck?

- suggestion: from information about the relation between the duck and myself (e.g. that I am facing a duck), and about the state of my body (e.g. that my eyes are open)
- Dretske's reply: this information also characterizes the zombie scenario
- but this isn't the right reply—skepticism about other minds is not the issue
 - rather, proprioceptive evidence is not needed; relational evidence is too weak
 - and the proposal cannot explain how one knows that it looks to one that there is a duck there
 - further, the suggestion is of no help in the case of belief—I do not need to appeal to evidence about myself in order to know that I believe that Dretske wrote *Naturalizing the Mind*

sensations to the rescue?

- pains, unlike ducks, are necessarily objects of awareness (or so some think)
- if so, then there are no pains in the zombie-world
- if I can't come to know that I'm not a zombie by seeing a duck, perhaps I can come to know I am not a zombie by feeling a toothache—the *toothache* would not be there if I were a zombie

- a crock is a rock that “you [in particular] see... So when you see a crock, there is something that you are aware of—a crock—that depends for its existence on your being aware of it”
 - but this is not a good analogy for the toothache case, because crocks (if they are like toothaches as Dretske’s opponent conceives of them) plausibly do not exist
- however: even if it is granted that pains are necessarily objects of awareness (which it shouldn’t be), the present suggestion is (a) incomplete and (b) redundant

Skeptical suspicions are, I think, rightly aroused by this result. Maybe our conviction that we know, in a direct and authoritative way, that we are conscious is simply a confusion of what we are aware of with our awareness of it (see Dretske forthcoming). (9)

- but then what's the explanation of how avowals amount to knowledge at all?

three puzzles of transparency

For what we are aware of, when we know that we see a tree, is *nothing but a tree*. In fact, we only have to be aware of some state of the world in order to be in a position to make an assertion about ourselves.

Now this might raise the following perplexity. How can it be that we can have knowledge of a state of affairs which involves a substantial and persisting self, simply by being aware of (still worse, by merely appearing to be aware of) a state of the world? (Evans, *Varieties*, 231)

- this is not quite the puzzle of transparency (which is not centrally a puzzle about the self)
- but it's close enough:
 - How can it be that one can have knowledge of a state of affairs—as it might be, *that one sees that there is a tree there*—simply by seeing that *there is a tree there*?

the first puzzle

Argument K

there is a tree there

I know that there is a tree there

Argument B

there is a tree there

I believe that there is a tree there

- P1: how can I come to know that I believe/know that p , by determining whether p ?

the second puzzle

Argument S

there is a tree there

I see that there is a tree there

there is a tree
behind this wall

- problem: *Argument S* does not seem to set out the transparent reasoning
- so: what is the transparent reasoning, and how can it yield knowledge?
- P2: how can I come to know that I see that p , by looking at the scene before my eyes?

the third puzzle

Argument L

there is a tree there

it looks to me that there is a tree there

- P3: how can I come to know that it looks to me that p when I *don't* believe things are as they appear?

- epistemic rules:
 - if conditions C obtain, believe that p

(DOORBELL) if the doorbell rings, believe that there is someone at the door

- following a rule
 - S believes that p because she recognizes that conditions C obtain
 - hence: S knows that conditions C obtain, conditions C obtain, S believes that p

- good and bad rules

(NEWS) if the *Weekly World News* reports that p,
believe that p

- a schematic rule
- also a neutral rule (the antecedent conditions C do not concern the rule-follower's mental states)
 - 'if you intend to go swimming, believe that you will get wet' is not neutral
- it is not in dispute that we follow some good neutral rules (including rules with mental consequents)

the first puzzle

- (BEL) if p , believe that you believe that p
 - yet surely BEL is a bad rule
- recall the “rule of necessitation” in modal logic:
- if ‘ p ’ is a line of a deduction, you may write down ‘ $\Box p$ ’ as a subsequent line
 - this is not a “bad” rule (even though ‘if p then $\Box p$ ’ is invalid)

- something analogous holds for BEL: one is only in a position to follow BEL by believing that one believes that p when one has recognized that p (and recognizing that p is coming to *believe* that p)
- further, when one *tries* to follow BEL but fails by falsely believing that p one will *still* arrive at a true belief (and sometimes knowledge) about one's belief
- what about knowledge that one knows that p?
 - (KNOW) if p, believe that you know that p

errors:

- type I: not-p, and one falsely believes that conditions C obtain
- type II: not-p, and one truly believes that conditions C obtain
 - type IIa, one knows that conditions C obtain; type IIb, one doesn't
- type III: not-p, and one believes that p, but not because one knows or believes that conditions C obtain
 - BEL only allows for type III errors

the second puzzle

- (SEE?) if p , believe that you see that p
 - hopeless
- (SEE) if p , believe that you see that p
 - where allowable substituends for ' p ' express visually distinct contents (V-contents)
 - (SEE) needs further modification [(SEE+)]

the third puzzle

- (LOOK) if p, believe that it looks to you that p
 - problem: doesn't cover every case
- (LOOK*) if, going by how things look, p, believe that it looks to you that p
 - but this seems to amount to:
- (LOOK**): if it looks to you that p, believe that it looks to you that p
 - the proposal:
- (LOOK†) if, bracketing all but the present V-facts, p, believe that it looks to you that p

privileged and peculiar access revisited

- no “inner sense” or special faculty of introspection is needed—taking the ability to follow good neutral rules for granted, self-knowledge is unproblematic
 - in this respect, the present account is economical, like behaviorism (cf. Shoemaker)
- peculiar access is nicely explained
 - self-knowledge requires no observation of oneself, and often no observation at all
- but what about privileged access?

Evans on privileged access

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...If a judging subject applies this procedure, then necessarily he will gain knowledge of one of his own mental states: even the most determined sceptic cannot find here a gap in which to insert his knife.

(Varieties, 225)

- according to Evans, transparency supports a strong version of privileged access (for belief), one which is immune to the “most determined sceptic”
- on the present account, this is incorrect: privileged access is simply a contingent matter that is no great surprise
 - privileged access (in the case of belief) can be explained by noting that BEL only allows for type III errors
- however, perhaps privileged access amounts to nothing more (but see Shoemaker)

- the account is quite limited (see Bar-On)
 - one knows that one believes one has a beer by looking outward and discovering a beer in one's hand
 - one does not know that one wants a beer by the same procedure
 - Sosa on knowing that one is not in M

- transparency:
 - if p , believe that you ϕ that p
- translucency:
 - if q , believe that you ϕ that p
 - where the substituents for 'q' are a certain function of the substituents for 'p'

- the puzzle of opacity: if a special faculty of introspection is required, why can't it be directed towards the states and events covered by transparency?
 - a two-tiered account is not entirely comfortable
- but perhaps the present account could be extended
 - the epistemology of desires (hopes, fears...) is not transparent, but maybe it is economical

an example

(DES) if A is a better option than B, believe that you prefer A to B

- a disanalogy with BEL—because of ‘weakness of will’, sometimes one believes that A is the best option but one does not prefer A
- to solve this problem, we need an economical account of intention