The Varieties of Self-Awareness

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Self-Awareness

- Self-awareness = awareness of oneself

- One is self-aware if one stands in a relation of awareness to oneself and/or one’s properties.

- There are many different ways of construing (i) the relation of awareness and (ii) the object of awareness.
Awareness of Self vs Awareness of Properties

- Awareness of the self
  - Jesse, John, Sydney

- Awareness of one’s (mainly mental) properties
  - Alex, Brent, Eric, Fred, Nathan
Awareness of Self

- Jesse: *Experience* of the self
- John: *Beliefs* about the self
- Sydney: *Memories* about the self
Awareness of One’s Properties

- Alex, Brent, Eric, Fred, Nathan:
  - Knowledge of one’s (mainly mental) properties

- Alex: knowledge of one’s desires (beliefs, intentions)
- Brent: knowledge of one’s qualia
- Eric: knowledge of one’s experiences, attitudes, traits
- Fred: knowledge of one’s thoughts
- Nathan: knowledge of one’s beliefs
Optimists vs Pessimists about Self-Awareness

- Pessimists about self-awareness: suggest that the relevant sort of self-awareness is problematic: difficult, nonexistent, impossible…
  - Jesse on experience of the self
  - Brent, Eric, Fred, Nathan on knowledge of one’s properties

- Optimists about self-awareness: try to vindicate the relevant sort of self-awareness, perhaps in light of these difficulties
  - John, Sydney on beliefs and memories about the self
  - Alex on knowledge of one’s properties
Transparency

- A common theme: transparency

- There is no experience of the self (Hume, Jesse, Sydney)
  - One looks right through the self at one’s perceptions?

- There is no experiences of one’s mental states (Moore, Fred, Alex)
  - One looks right through one’s mental states at the world
Hume on the Self

“For my part, when I look inward at what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure, or the like. I never catch myself without a perception, and never observe anything but the perception.”
"The moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see what, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. Yet it can be distinguished if we look attentively enough, and if we know that there is something to look for."
“In making a self-ascription of belief, one’s eyes are ... 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?”
The Transparency Challenge to Self-Knowledge

1. We have no experience of our mental states.
2. If we have no experience of our mental states, we have no introspective knowledge of our mental states.
3. We have no introspective knowledge of our mental states.
Other Transparency Challenges

- One could use analogous arguments to suggest:
  - We have no introspective concepts of our mental states
  - We have no introspective beliefs about our mental states
  - We have no knowledge of ourselves
  - We have no first-person concepts of ourselves
  - We have no first-person beliefs about ourselves
Option 1: Skepticism

- Some accept premises 1 and 2 and so accept the skeptical conclusion
  - E.g. we have no introspective self-knowledge
  - Fred

- I take this to be a reductio of the combination of 1 and 2.
Option 2: Nonexperiential Models

- Some deny 2, embracing nonexperiential models of self-knowledge (etc)
  - E.g. introspective knowledge of mental states is grounded in something other than experience of mental states (Alex)

- Memory of self grounded in something other than experience of self (Sydney)

- Concepts/beliefs/knowledge of self grounded in something other than experience of self (Jesse, John?)
Another strategy: deny 1

- We do have experiences of ourselves and our mental states
- These experiences can ground our self-knowledge (self-concepts, self-beliefs, etc).
Experience of Self

- Q: Does “I” enter into contents of experience
  - A: Plausibly yes. I can experience the table as being in front of me, a body as being my body, etc.
    - This is already enough to ground much self-knowledge (as well as self-concepts, etc)

- Q: What about experience of self as subject (of mental states)?
  - A: This would need experiencing oneself as in mental states
    - Jesse, Fred: skeptical about experience of mental states
    - To address this, need to first address transparency of mental states
Transparency of Mental States

- Strong transparency thesis: in experience, one is aware of non-mental contents of those states, but one is never aware of one’s mental states
  - Vision: aware of colors, shapes, objects, but not of seeing them
  - Conscious thought: aware of third world war (etc) but not of thinking about it

- Distinguish from weaker transparency theses:
  - Difficult to attend to mental states (Moore, Amy Kind)
  - One attends to mental states by attending to their contents (Evans)
  - There’s no element of “mental paint” corresponding to these mental states
I think the strong transparency thesis is implausible. Why accept it?

(1) Prior commitment to a strong representationalism
- To have an experience is to have a content
- Access to experience is just access to content
- But: This is a non sequitur

(2) Fred’s developmental argument
- One can think P without being able to think that one thinks P
- But: awareness of x doesn’t require ability to think about x (Dretske!)

(3) Phenomenological argument
- One doesn’t find awareness of mental states in one’s experience.
Phenomenological Argument?

- Prima facie: upon introspection, the experiencing of thinking that P differs from the experience of seeing that P, and both differ from the experience of wanting that P, hoping that P, fearing that P, ...
  - E.g. P = there’s a red dot in front of one.

- This is strong prima facie evidence that one’s relation to P makes a difference to phenomenology

- Maybe not conclusive evidence (phenomenology is hard!)
- But at least enough to suggest that the denial of this claim isn’t a datum
Awareness of Mental States

- Natural view: at least on introspection, one is aware of thinking P, wanting P, seeing P, etc.
- Fred: one is aware of wanting and aware of P, but not aware of wanting P?
  - But: the experience of seeing a blue dot and wanting a red dot differs from that of seeing a red dot and wanting a blue dot.
- Another alternative: The wanting/seeing/thinking makes an experiential difference only as mode of awareness, not object of awareness.
  - Requires impure representationalism
  - Seems less phenomenologically plausible (in the introspective case)
Two Models

Q: When one conscious sees, thinks, wants P, is one *always* aware of seeing/thinking/wanting P? Or only on introspection?

- Introspective model: Only on introspection
- Ubiquity model: Always
Introspective Model

1. In ordinary cases of consciously seeing/wanting/thinking P, one is aware of P, but not of seeing/wanting/thinking P
   - These are just modes of awareness of P

2. On introspection, one becomes aware of seeing/wanting/thinking P
   - A special kind of introspective experience

Worry 1: A new component of experience on introspection?
Worry 2: Are there pre-introspective grounds for introspection?
Ubiquity Model

- (1) In ordinary cases of consciously seeing/wanting/thinking P, one is aware both of P, and of seeing/wanting/thinking P
  - P is in foreground of awareness, seeing/wanting/thinking is in background?

- (2) Upon introspection, one attends to the seeing/wanting/thinking, so that seeing/wanting/thinking P is in the foreground of awareness

- No new components, just a reorientation of attention, and pre-introspective grounds for introspection

- Worry 1: Phenomenologically plausible?
- Worry 2: Regress?
Two Versions of the Ubiquity Model

- Self-representational model (Kriegel):
  - Experience involves a phenomenal representation of that content, and a phenomenal representation of that representation
  - Phenomenally representing P entails phenomenally representing phenomenally representing P

- Acquaintance model:
  - Experience involves a phenomenal representation of a content
  - Phenomenal representation entails acquaintance with phenomenal representation
The Role of Acquaintance

- Acquaintance with X is a primitive (?) relation to X, one that serves to ground
  - Attention to X
  - Ability to demonstrate X
  - Ability to form a concept of X
  - Knowledge of X

- A nonconceptual epistemic relation (Russell)
So e.g. acquaintance with (consciously) thinking P will ground knowledge that one is thinking P.

The resulting acquaintance with (consciously) thinking “I’m thinking P” will ground knowledge that one is thinking “I’m thinking P”.

- No actual regress, just a potential regress.
Acquaintance and Experience of the Self

- Acquaintance with thinking P arguably involves acquaintance with one’s thinking P
  - Prereflective, preconceptual consciousness of self as subject
  - Brentano, Husserl, Sartre?

- If not: introspective contents “I’m thinking P” grounds reflective consciousness of self as subject
What of the unreliability of introspection (Eric)?
- Does the acquaintance model suggest that introspection is easy?
- It does yield a very limited class of infallible introspective beliefs
- But much can go wrong when acquaintance is used in cognition

Limitation 1: The model doesn’t apply to nonconscious states
Limitation 2: Introspection requires attention, so gives no direct guidance regarding nonattentive experience
Limitation 3: Judgment requires cognitive input as well as acquaintance, with potential distortions.

...
Conclusion: What of the Self?

- What about the self, as opposed to the experience thereof?
  - This view of the phenomenology and epistemology of the self is compatible with many accounts of the metaphysics of the self.

- My own view: We are essentially subjects of conscious states.
  - If so: Then knowledge of consciousness is knowledge of our essential nature

- Perhaps: Conscious states ground the meaningfulness of our lives.
  - If so: Knowledge of consciousness is central to grounding knowledge of meaning in our lives.