



# The Varieties of Self-Awareness

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# Self-Awareness

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- 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.
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# Awareness of Self vs Awareness of Properties

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- Awareness of the self
    - Jesse, John, Sydney
  - Awareness of one's (mainly mental) properties
    - Alex, Brent, Eric, Fred, Nathan
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# Awareness of Self

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

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- 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
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# Optimists vs Pessimists about Self-Awareness

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- 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
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# Transparency

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- 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
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# Hume on the Self

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- “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.”
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# Moore on Diaphanousness

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- "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. “
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# Evans on Self-Ascription

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- “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?”
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# 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.

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- 3. We have no introspective knowledge of our mental states.
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# Other Transparency Challenges

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- 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
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# Option 1: Skepticism

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- 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.
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# Option 2: Nonexperiential Models

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- 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?)
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# Option 3: Experiential Models

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- 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

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- 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
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# Transparency of Mental States

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- 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

# Why Accept Strong Transparency?

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- 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.
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# Phenomenological Argument?

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- 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
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# Awareness of Mental States

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- 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)
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# Two Models

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- 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

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- (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?
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# Ubiquity Model

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- (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?
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# Two Versions of the Ubiquity Model

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- 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
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# The Role of Acquaintance

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- 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)

# Acquaintance and Introspective Knowledge

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- 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.
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# Acquaintance and Experience of the Self

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- 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

# Unreliability of Introspection

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- 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.
  - ...
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# Conclusion: What of the Self?

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- 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.
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