

Phil 490: *Consciousness and the Self*
Handout [22]

Sidney Shoemaker: *Introspection and the Self*

Professor JeeLoo Liu

§ Shoemaker's Main Theses

1. His main objective is to argue that the perceptual mode of introspection is the wrong model of self-awareness.
2. The Humean denial of the self is a rejection of the view that in introspection we have anything like a *perceptual* awareness of a self.
3. We do not *introspect* our "self" as we perceive external objects. Introspection does not play the role of providing *identification information*, while perception does.
4. Perception allows the possibility of misidentification, while introspection is *immune from error of misidentification*.
5. We do not *observe* ourselves as the same person in the past and in the present and we do not *track* ourselves over time. First-person memory judgments are not grounded on criteria of personal identity. The fact that I remember a past action (from the inside) is evidence that I did that action.
6. There is no such thing as introspective perception of the self, or indeed of anything else.

§ The Humean Denial

* Hume's denial that there is introspective awareness of a self or the mental subject:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. — Hume

Q: What conclusion could Hume draw from the above observation?

[Hume's Argument] (First formulation)

1. Through introspection, I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.
2. If I cannot observe anything but the perception, then there is nothing but the perception.
3. Therefore, there is nothing called 'myself'. [a metaphysical claim]

[Hume's Argument] (Second formulation)

1. Through introspection, I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.

2. I can only be acquainted with *X* if I could directly observe *X* or perceive *X*.
3. Therefore, I can never have introspective acquaintance with myself. [an epistemological claim]

Shoemaker's Criticisms:

1. **The basis of Hume's denial is not empirical.** (Hume is quite emphatic on the point that he has no idea of 'self' (*qua* subject of experiences) and so, presumably, no idea of what it would be like to introspect one.)
2. **The meaning of Hume's denial is unclear. Is he denying the existence of a self or the knowledge of a self?**

§ Different Interpretations of Hume's Denial

1. **Introspection = perceptual awareness by an 'inner sense', but by this model, one cannot perceive the *self*.**

The Humean denial, on this suggestion, is that in having introspective knowledge, one stands in a perceptual or quasi-perceptual relation to a self.

Q: How does one *perceive* one's self?

S perceives *O* just in case [**'perception' in the narrow sense**]
S uses one of the senses to perceive *O*

S perceives *O* just in case [**'perception' in the broad sense**]
S stands to *O* in a relation *R* such that,
For any *x* and *y*,
x's standing in *R* to *y* is apt for the production in *x* of (direct) knowledge of *y*.

On this definition it is beyond dispute there in introspection we *do* perceive a self; here *R* can be the relation *x* has to *y* just in case *x* is a conscious subject and identical to *y*. So this definition does not permit the Humean denial to get off the ground.

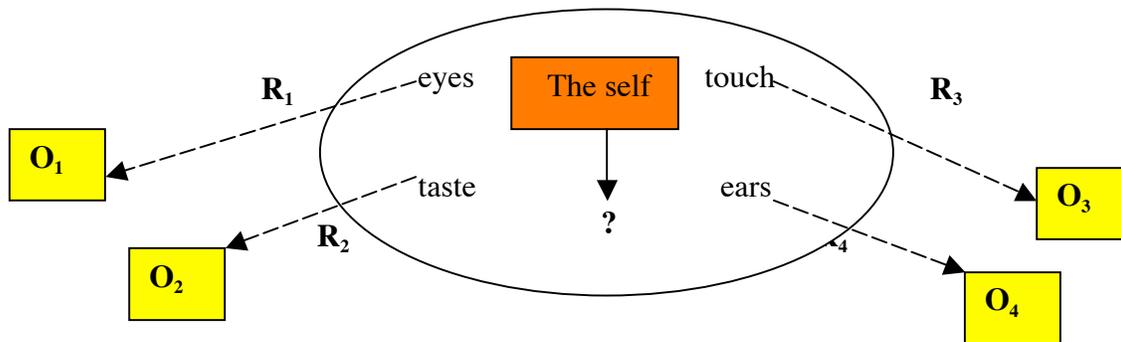
(Armstrong)

Perception is the acquiring of information or misinformation about our environment. Introspection is the getting of information or misinformation about the current state of our mind.

Armstrong seems to be endorsing this broad perceptual model analysis of introspection, but he denies that the self is among the objects perceived by this inner sense.

2. **Introspection, like all mental states, is a relational knowledge, but the *self* is non-relational. Hence, one cannot introspect the *self*.**

1. All mental states are relational (act – object relation) – that having a mental state always consists in having a certain relation, namely perceiving, to a perception (impression or idea) of one sort or another.
2. If there were a mental subject, which is something over and above particular perceptions, its mental properties would all have to be relational properties of this sort.
3. Given that on this conception all mental states of selves would be relational rather than intrinsic, it would follow that a self could not have any intrinsic states at all that could be accessible to introspective awareness.
4. But it makes no sense to speak of being aware of something, if the thing has no intrinsic properties whatever that it could be perceived as having by that kind of perception.
5. Therefore, a mental subject could not be introspectively perceived.



§ The Act-Object Conception

An important ingredient in this line of thought is what is sometimes called the ‘act – object conception’ of sensations and other mental states.

Humean perceptions are precisely the sorts of entities the ‘act – object conception’ calls for on the object side.

The ‘act – object conception’ of mental state goes naturally with, and may be said to incorporate, what I have called the perceptual mode of introspection – the idea that our access to our own minds is to be conceived on the model of sense-perception, different from other sorts of perception only in being, in Kantian terminology, ‘inner sense’ rather than ‘outer sense’.

§ Shoemaker’s Critique: The Disanalogy between Introspection and (the Act-Object) Perception: (1) Identification Free (2) Immunity from Error of Misidentification

Ordinary modes of perception allow different sorts of perceptually based identification:

- (i) sortal identification — one can identify one of them, or misidentify it, as being of this or that sort.
- (ii) Particular identification — one can identify one of them, or misidentify it, as being a certain particular thing.
- (iii) Reidentification — the identification of something observed at one time with something observed at another time.

*** Shoemaker: Now none of this seems to apply in the case of one's introspective awareness of oneself.**

Summary of Argument:

1. In perceptions, there is such a thing as singling out one from a multiplicity of perceived objects, distinguishing it from the others (which may be of the same kind) by its perceived properties and its position in a space of perceived objects.
2. But none of this seems to apply in the case of one's introspective awareness of oneself. There is no such thing as picking out a self and distinguishing it from other selves by its introspectively perceived properties. There is also no such thing as introspective misidentification of non-selves with selves.
3. Therefore, perception provides identification information while introspection does not.
4. Therefore, perception is not the right model we should use to interpret introspection.

§ Introspective Self-Knowledge

1. I know that I have thus and such a mental state – that I am angry, in pain, or desirous of a drink – because I introspectively observe myself having it.
2. Obviously, however, the introspective observation of a self being angry is not going to yield the knowledge that *I* am angry unless I know that that self is myself.
3. How am I supposed to know this? If the answer is that I identify it as myself by its perceived properties, we have to point out that this requires that I already know that I have those properties.
4. Indeed, it requires that I know that I am the unique possessor of that set of properties, because otherwise the observation that the perceived self has them would not suffice to identify it as me.
5. So I would already have to have some self-knowledge, namely the knowledge that I have certain identifying properties, in order to acquire any self-knowledge by self-observation.
6. If it is supposed that this self-knowledge is in turn acquired by self-observation, then still other self-knowledge is required: namely, the knowledge that one has whatever identifying properties one used to identify as oneself the self that one observed to have the first set of identifying properties. And so on.
7. On pain of infinite regress, it must be allowed that somewhere along the line *I have some self-knowledge that is not gotten by observing something to be true of myself.*

* **Shoemaker's argument:**

1. The introspective observation of a self being angry is not going to yield the knowledge that *I* am angry unless I know that that self is myself.
2. If I know that the self is *myself* because I identify it as myself by its perceived properties, then I must already know that I am the unique possessor of that set of properties.
3. If I know that I am the unique possessor of that set of properties, then I must already have some knowledge of myself.
4. Therefore, I must have some self-knowledge that is not gotten by observing something to be true of myself.
5. Therefore, self-knowledge is not derived from any introspective observation of a self.

§ **Personal identity and Memory**

[First-person judgments vs. Demonstrative judgments] (e.g., 'That is pretty'):

- (i) Both sorts of judgment are "identification free" (e.g. it's not the case that I say 'I am angry' because I find that someone is angry and identify that person as myself) and "immune to error through misidentification".
- (ii) When we turn to the past-tense versions of these judgments, the situation is different: The immunity to error through misidentification is preserved in memory, whereas that of demonstrative judgments is not.

___ How do I know that the *I* that I remember from the past is the same *I* remembering now?

___ Answer: My awareness that I remember *from the inside* a past action is decisive evidence that I did that action – but it is not the sort of evidence that grounds observationally based identification.

Objection: Couldn't we have **quasi memory** of things that we *did not do*?

[**quasi-remember**]

___ remember past experiences or actions that are not one's own (e.g. in the case of fission)

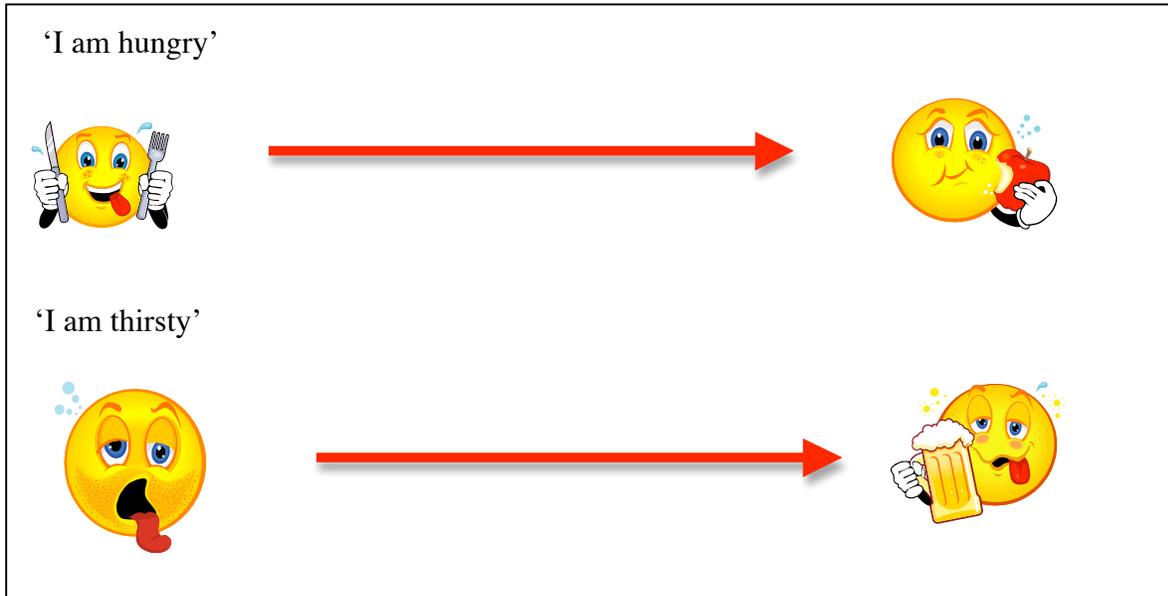
Shoemaker:

___ Such cases might be logically possible; they have not occurred in our own case. our general knowledge of the world supports a presumption that this kind of things do not in fact occur.

§ **Self-belief and Explanation of Behavior**

1. One of the distinctive features of first-person belief is the role it plays in the explanation of behavior.

2. Part of what makes a belief a belief about the person who has it (in the way beliefs expressed by first-person sentences are about the speaker) is the fact that it plays this distinctive role in the determination of action.
3. It is a consequence of this that the reference of 'I' in the idiolect of a particular speaker is determined very differently than the reference of other expressions, including demonstratives.
4. The reference of 'I', when used as first-person pronoun, is determined by the causal role of the beliefs it is used to express.



§ Final Argument: There is no introspective perception of anything whatsoever

1. Feeling pain and being in pain are the same thing, and the introspective knowledge that I am in pain is at the same time the introspective knowledge that I feel pain.
2. There is not a feeling of the feeling that is something over and above the feeling of pain.
3. There is something it is like to be in pain, but there is nothing additional it is like to be aware of pain, or of feeling pain; and the same goes for other sensory states.
4. And so there is no such thing as a sense impression of a sensory state, having a phenomenal character of its own.
5. One does have beliefs about oneself in introspection. And no doubt it is possible for some of these beliefs to be mistaken. But having a mistaken introspective belief cannot be said to constitute the self's appearing to itself other than it is.
6. **Therefore, there is no such thing as an introspective sense impression of the self, just as there is no such thing as a sense impression of a pain or other mental state and (assuming that sense impressions are essential to perception).**
7. **Conclusion: There is no such thing as introspective perception of the self, or indeed of anything else.**