

Phil 490: *Consciousness and the Self*
Handout [12]
Alex Byrne: Introspection

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Byrne's Theses:

1. There *is* a mechanism for detecting one's mental states but in an important respect it does *not* "resemble perception." (There is an inner mechanism for detecting one's beliefs. The mechanism comes with our capacity for **reasoning** about the external world — **there is no inner eye.**)
2. Claim of **Transparency** (in the case of belief): one can *typically* answer the question "Do I believe *P*?" simply by considering whether *P* is true.
3. A statement of one's belief about *X* is said to obey the Transparency Condition when the statement is made by consideration of the facts about *X* itself, and not by either an "inward glance" or by observation of one's own behavior.
4. Procedure of self-knowledge: **One reasons from the evidence that it's raining, to the conclusion that one believes that it's raining.**
5. Self-knowledge is a form of self-constitution: making up one's own mind with regard to the truth of one's belief.
6. Knowledge of one's beliefs may be obtained by following the neutral schematic rule:
BEL If *p*, believe that you believe that *p*
7. BEL is self-verifying in this sense: if it is followed, the resulting second-order belief is true. Because BEL is self-verifying, the truth of one's **second-order belief** is guaranteed.
8. **Conclusion:** self-knowledge is simply a matter of following a self-verifying epistemic rule which is also transparent: BEL.

[Privileged and Peculiar Access]

Self-knowledge vs. knowledge of mental states of others:

- (i) Knowledge of one's mental states is **privileged** in comparison to knowledge of others' minds. Beliefs about one's mental states are more likely to (but not necessarily always) amount to knowledge than beliefs about others' mental states.
- (ii) Knowledge of one's mental states is **peculiar** in comparison to one's knowledge of others' minds. One has a *special method or way of knowing* that one believes that the cat is indoors, that one sees the cat, that one intends to put the cat out, and so on. One can gain access to one's mind without observing oneself at all.

Q: What is this special epistemic access?

§ View 1: Self-Knowledge as Self-Constitution (Moran)

___ Arriving at self-knowledge (specifically, about one's beliefs) is not accurately viewed as a process of *self-discovery*, but rather as a process of *self-constitution*. Coming to know whether one believes *P* is not a matter of taking a *theoretical* stance toward oneself. Rather, it is a matter of *practical or deliberate question* about “making up one's mind” as to the truth of *P*.

[Transparency]

Evans:

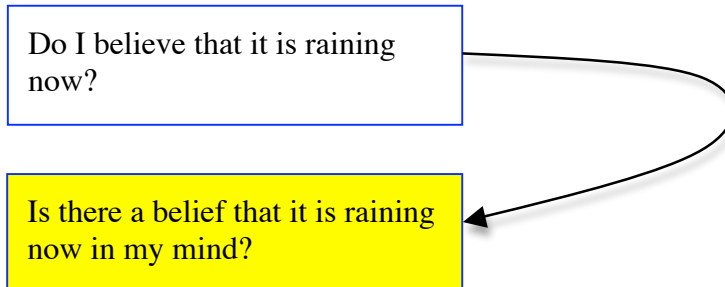
“In making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, directed outward — upon the world. If someone asks me “Do you think there is going to be a third world war?,” I must attend, in answering to him, to precisely the same outward phenomenon as I would attend to if I were answering the question “Will there be a third world war?” (Evans 1982, 225)

Claim of transparency

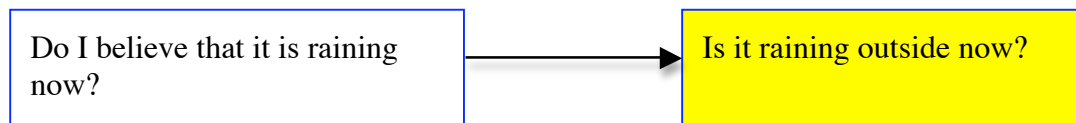
... the correct formulation of Evans' observation is that one can *typically* answer the question “Do I believe *P*?” simply by considering whether *P* is true.

A statement of one's belief about *X* is said to obey **the Transparency Condition** when the statement is made by consideration of the facts about *X* itself, and not by either an “inward glance” or by observation of one's own behavior (Moran 2001, 101)

HOP:



Transparency:



* Byrne's Critique:

___ In many cases of beliefs I do not need to make up my mind since it is already made up. Self-knowledge of mental states in general cannot possibly be explained in terms of “self-constitution.”

§ View 2: Self-Knowledge as a Prerequisite of Rationality (Shoemaker)

___ Believing that one believes that P can be just believing that P plus having a certain level of rationality, intelligence and so on. (Shoemaker 1994, 244)

___ There is a conceptual, constitutive connection between the existence of certain sorts of mental entities and their introspective accessibility. (225)

___ This is a version of the view that certain mental facts are ‘self-intimating’ or ‘self-presenting’.

___ It is impossible for a rational, intelligent and conceptually competent agent to be *self-blind* — to affirm something while denying that one believes it.

___ Therefore, a rational, intelligent, conceptually competent agent must already have self-knowledge of her own beliefs.

Self-Blindness is impossible for rational agents:

It is raining now. But I don't believe that it is raining.



* Byrne's Critique:

___ Shoemaker hasn't shown that self-blindness is an impossibility. I could have the total evidence to support the belief that it is raining now: (a) the cat has come indoors soaking wet; (b) the weather forecast is for rain, but the total third-person evidence supports the proposition that I do not believe that it is raining: (c) I am going out without my umbrella, carrying important papers that will spoil if it's raining.



§ View 3: Byrne's Proposal — Self-knowledge As Rational Rule-Following

1. Self-knowledge is related to one's own mental state via a causal mechanism, but this mechanism is not perceptual, but a form of reasoning.
2. One reasons from the evidence that it's raining, to the conclusion that one believes that it's raining.
3. **Reasoning = Following Epistemic Rules**
4. If one can reason (can follow the epistemic rule **BEL**), then one can gain knowledge of one's own beliefs. Hence, following BEL leads to self-knowledge.
5. The subject might not have followed BEL, in which case the first-order belief would have been present without the second-order belief.
6. Knowledge of what one believes is a capacity that belongs to the department of reasoning, not perceiving.

* An epistemic rule:

[*R*] If conditions *C* obtains, believe that *p*.

e.g. **DOORBELL** If the doorbell rings, believe that there is someone at the door.

* A neutral rule:

___ If the antecedent conditions *C* of an epistemic rule *R* are not specified in terms of the rule follower's mental states, *R* is *neutral*. (e.g. 'if you intend to go swimming, believe that you will get wet' is not neutral.)

* A transparent rule:

Moran's "claim of transparency" can be recast using the apparatus of epistemic rules as follows. Knowledge of one's beliefs may be obtained by following the neutral schematic rule:

BEL If *p*, believe that you believe that *p*

___ **Following BEL leads to self-knowledge**

Since the antecedent of BEL expresses the content of the mental state that the rule-follower ends up believing that she is in, BEL can be called a *transparent rule*.

* Rule of necessitation:

NEC If '*p*' is a line, you may write ' $\square p$ ' as a subsequent line.

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 (*inter alia*) coming to *believing* that *p*.

BEL is *self-verifying* in this sense: if it is followed, the resulting second-order belief is true.

→ If ‘one recognizes that p , then necessarily \square , one believes that p .



* Shoemaker’s idea that the source of self-knowledge can be traced to “rationality” is vindicated, albeit not via his preferred route.

* **My interpretation:**

___ Byrne’s position seems to be that self-knowledge is simply a form of reasoning from the external states of affairs to the belief state one has. If one sees that P is true, then one necessarily knows that one believes that P . There is no need for any further internal scanning or perception of one’s own mind.

___ This reasoning seems to be based on the evidence (or conditions) for P .

___ The evidence for *my believing that P* is simply the fact that I now recognize P to be true. If I recognize that P , I can’t fail to believe that P . Hence, the second-order belief that *I believe that P* is self-verifying from the fact that I recognize that P .

___ Having a second-order belief about one’s first-order belief is a matter of following this simple epistemic rule, BEL.