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Review

A Philosophical Debate over the Concept of Self-Knowledge

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Regarding the epistemic status of self-awareness, it is philosophically a question about our existence and how we choose to be in the world. One thing that is certain is that we are all engaged in introspection about who we think we are at any given time. However much or less of this self-knowledge that we want to attribute to an absolute truth is based on our personal choice. Understanding who we truly are, is a life-long exploration that is not static, and we can only define self-awareness from a philosophical perspective to clarify how we may attempt to conceptualize self-awareness or self-knowledge which describes an entirely subjective state of feeling, sensing and reasoning. In the present study we are aiming at illustrating two senses of directness like epistemic sense referring to the mental states without inference that there is no observation and metaphysical directness as the second sense.

Keywords: Self Knowledge, Awareness, Introspection, Metaphysical Perception

INTRODUCTION

The terms self-knowledge or self-awareness attempt to denote having an in-depth perception of one's subjective internal state of mind in general. This article will mark out the philosophical exploration of what self-awareness illustrates. As mentioned, self-awareness and self-knowledge both refer to knowing one's inner subjective awareness such as mental state, emotions, sensations, beliefs and desires. While the definition standpoint of the term self-awareness endorses this, the true philosophical perspective needs to be pondered a bit more.

Generally, self-knowledge may be applied to the knowledge of human beings' particular mental status in philosophy, having its focus mostly on human being's beliefs, desires, and sensations. Along with such a meaning, it brings the attention to the knowledge of a persisting self and its existence, identity conditions, or the qualities of its character. To have a look at the following time of Descartes, many philosophers made an attempt to support the idea that self-knowledge is different from the outside knowledge that can refer to the others' thoughts; although, little agreement faces differences between self-knowledge and knowledge by itself in other fields. Considering this disagreement, philosophers have confirmed how we acquire self-knowledge. Such

confirmations influence the scope of mental content, mental existence, and personality traits or identity.

Self-awareness is undoubtedly hard to define in its epistemology, but this matter did not prevent philosophers like Descartes to assign a lifelong exploration for such a valuable discourse. So what is noteworthy about the epistemology of self-awareness? It is known to be peculiar in that it is certain, and each individual needs a specific path breaking method to investigate one's own mental state. The distinguished feature of self-awareness relies on the fact that this certainty of one's knowledge of his/her mental state can be considered reliable. Nobody can endanger the knowledge we possess of ourselves, it is reliable in that we are the only one that knows our internal mental state.

Regarding certainty, Descartes argues that as long as you refer to your own thoughts with a high awareness, nothing and nobody can challenge your thinking because you have your true existence. Existential philosophers like Heidegger and Sartre depict an opposite inclination to defend their philosophy of existence, however, their contemplation lead to a very distinguished discourse. In such a realm, it is tried to illustrate that some philosophers are found to say that self-knowledge can occur through this higher thinking, yet others contest the possibility of absolute self-awareness in any realm.

The concept of certainty has a realm over our perception of external objects and this is evident in an apparent gap between self-knowledge and knowledge of objects. This fact shows a clear distinction between inner and outer world emerging from the subject of metaphysics for us. To focus better, we can say that one can grasp his/her mental status without reasoning. However, metaphysically speaking, there is no other state or object that mediates between one's self-attributing beliefs and object. This means that both types of directness are equal. This idea tries to show that mental state, appearance and the reality beyond them are identical.

The Philosophy of Self-awareness

The stated premise goes further to discuss that by the help of certainty, a person's self-knowledge causes a mental state in a way that self-attribution is safe from doubt but there is still a claim that self-attributions are illusions instead of a mental case. Certainty but not reliability is a philosophical base of introspection regarding Descarte's cogito argument.

This argument shows that nothing endangers the fact of one's existence as long as he/she is thinking; while others do not accept that absolute certainty is possible in any case. In the realm of such a problem there is also a different debate that our comprehension of the external world seems to be far from certain. This means a big skepticism or solipsism to the self-knowledge, the

knowledge of objects and the knowledge of external world.

In order to deal with the above-mentioned controversies, we need to look at the world with a better contemplation. The term 'introspection' which refers to 'looking within' literally illustrates how we get our own mental state. This term shows a distinction between an 'inner' world and an 'outer' world in spatial language. For most philosophers, this language is purely metaphorical: to say that a state or entity is internal to the mind is not to say that it falls within a given spatial boundary. The term 'introspection' is used to mean a unique method of knowing self-knowledge, a term that we use to get the 'outer' world's perception. Yet how does introspection differ from other methods of knowledge? An answer to this question is that introspection gives one direct access to its objects. There are two senses of directness here which seem to be relevant. First of all, epistemic sense is the claim that we can get our own mental states without inference that there is no observation. The second sense of directness is metaphysical: there is no state or object that mediates between my self-attributing belief (that I am now thinking that it will rain, feeling thirsty) and its object (my thought that it will rain, my feeling of thirst). (On some views, these types of directness require that the self-attribution is happening at the same time with the state attributed; reliance on memory would constitute a failure of directness.

These two types of approaches are closely related. Some have argued that if my access to my own mental state is direct, it must be metaphysically quick as well. For anything standing between my self-attributing belief and its object, there would be a mediating factor. For instance, Russell (1917) believed that introspection is unique among the methods in that it gets non-inferential knowledge of contingent truth. He took the epistemic directness of introspective self-knowledge to show that nothing mediates between a subject and a mental state of which one is aware that we stand in a relation of getting to know these mental objects.

The introspective access as a claim is both epistemically and metaphysically direct that shows an appearance and the reality are numerically identical in mental states. While the term 'introspection' means looking within, some philosophers have claimed that the method unique to self-knowledge requires precisely the opposite. On this view, we understand our own thoughts by looking outward, to the states of the world they represent. This is known as a 'transparent' method, in that one looks 'through' the mental state, directly to the state of the world it represents. Dretske argues that this is how we come to know our mental pictures, but the 'looking outward' claim is common regarding beliefs.

The claim that the distinctive feature of self-knowledge is epistemic appears compatible with the basic idea that each of us is the authority of one's own state. For we may

be the authority of our own states; precisely because our beliefs about them are especially safe, or because we possess a special privileged mode of access to them. The default authority view radically departs from this claim, by identifying the specialness of self-attributions in a conceptual or pragmatic factor. What is special about self-attributions, on this view, may be that they are non-epistemic. Wittgenstein appears to hold that an understanding of what it means to 'know what someone is thinking' will prevent all claims of knowing one's own thoughts.

'I can know what someone else is thinking, not what I am thinking'. It is correct to say 'I know what you are thinking', and wrong to say 'I know what I am thinking (Wittgenstein 1953, p.222).Strictly speaking, then, this position is not primarily concerned with what is special about self-knowledge, but is instead concerned with the distinctive feature of self-attributions.

It would not be out of our discussion if we explore here somewhat about the doubts relevant to the difference of self-knowledge. The denial that self-knowledge is truly special was especially prevalent during the heyday of behaviorism. For instance, Ryle (1949) claims that the difference between self-knowledge and other-knowledge is at most a matter of degree, and stems from the ordinary fact that each of us is always present to observe our own behavior.

To some extent, some deny that self-knowledge is special, relative to knowledge of others' states, by claiming that ordinary ('folk') concepts of psychological states are theoretical concepts. If psychological states are theoretical entities, both self-attributions and other-attributions will precede by inference from observed data—presumably, behavior. This understanding of folk psychology is known as 'theory theory'; it stands in opposition to 'simulation theory' (Gordon 1986), which is usually thought to be more conducive to the claim that self-knowledge is special. According to simulation theory, one learns about another's state by imaginatively projecting oneself into the other's situation and this means determining what one would believe or desire.

Another general epistemological contention which generates doubt about self-knowledge is the familiar concern that the observational process unavoidably changes the aim of observation. The introspective process may be especially weak to this concern, since the observer arguably has some control over what she/he observes. One reaction to this worry is to adopt the position, mentioned above, that denies that thoughts are stable entities. An important reaction is to claim that thoughts are never fully grasped: the attempt to get a thought inevitably changes the thought, so unobserved thoughts have a nature which is distinct from what we get in introspection. Current philosophers reject this global skepticism about self-knowledge.

Many different issues support self-knowledge to

remove this skepticism. Issues about knowledge of the self include: (a) how it is that one distinguishes oneself from others, as the object of a self-attribution; (b) whether self-awareness yields a grasp of the material or non-material nature of the self; (c) whether self-awareness yields a grasp of one's personal identity over time; and (d) what sort of self-understanding is required for rational or free agency. These issues are closely connected with referential semantics, the mind-body problem, the metaphysics of personal identity, and moral psychology, respectively. This section briefly sketches some prominent views about knowledge of the self arising from debates in these areas.

Self-deception

One of the prominent views about knowledge of the self, a contemporary theory of practical reasoning, which is offered by Velleman (1989), casts knowledge of the self in a particularly important role. Velleman notes that we strongly desire to understand ourselves and, in particular, to understand our reasons for acting. On his view, this desire leads us to try to discern our action-motivating desires and beliefs. (He calls this attempt to gain self-awareness "reflective theoretical reasoning".) But strikingly, Velleman thinks that the desire for self-understanding also leads us to model our actions on our predictions about how we will act. In this way, our expectations as to how we will act are intentions to act, themselves. "Intentions to act … are the expectations of acting that is issued from reflective theoretical reasoning" (Velleman 1989, 98). Thus, Velleman can say that our desire to understand what we are doing and hence our beliefs about what we will do are "self-fulfilling expectations".

One who lacks self-knowledge may simply be ignorant about some aspect or state of the self, perhaps because he or she has not formed any relevant belief. But in extreme cases, an absence of accurate self- reflection, or ignorance about what is guiding one's reasoning, may allow one's interests to shape one's beliefs. When false beliefs are formed due to such motivations, the subject is self-deceived. The phenomenon of self-deception has received a great deal of attention; our discussion here will only touch the surface of this topic.

It seems clear that rational persons may sometimes engage themselves in self-deception: in the face of clear evidence to the contrary, hopes and fears may lead one to believe that her spouse is faithful, or that she is popular, or (even) that she has a fatal disease. However, the idea of self-deception poses conceptual difficulties. The basic problem is that self-deception appears to involve a paradox (Davidson 1985): given that "deception" refers to a deliberate attempt to make someone believe a proposition may be false, self-deception seems to require that one believes the

proposition in question to be false. Yet when self-deception succeeds, one (also) believes the proposition in question to be true. And it is doubtful that a rational person can have two explicitly contradictory beliefs.

One way of resolving this difficulty is to see self as partitioned, and to claim that rationality requires that only each "part" of the self is internally consistent. Self-deceived rational persons can be accommodated so long as the deceiving part of the self is distinct from the deceived part. This approach is exemplified by the claim (Freud 1923) that the unconscious may mislead the conscious self in an effort to shield it from awareness of facts.

Holton (2001) argues that cases which are added as cases of deceiving oneself are simply cases in which one is deceived about the self. No paradox arises if the self is not the deceiver in these cases.

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