

The Priority of Self-Knowledge (I)

PHIL 971 Kant Seminar

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1 Moran on Self-Knowledge

The Difference Thesis: Introspection provides a relation to ourselves as subjects that is epistemically/psychologically distinctive from our relation to any other part of nature

- Self-knowledge is *immediate & authoritative*
- Self-knowledge is *transparent*¹

Transparency: Answer the question ‘do I believe that *P*?’ by answering the question ‘*P*?’

- Q₁: Why is self-knowledge transparent in this manner?
 - Moran’s answer: because deliberating as to whether *p* is constituted by one’s making up one’s mind as to whether *p*²
- One’s warrant for self-knowledge achieved via application of *Transparency* stems from one’s competence with (or “possession” of) the concept <belief>³
 - Q₂: Why call this kind of self-knowledge “agential”?⁴
 - Q₃: Why & in what sense is this self-knowledge *fundamental*?⁵
 - * Objection: There are some instances of self-knowledge that don’t require deliberation (e.g. recalcitrant attitudes, previously acquired beliefs)—so it cannot be fundamental in the sense of being the form an account of which can serve as the model for an account of all immediate, authoritative self-knowledge

2 Self-Knowledge & Uniformity

Uniformity Thesis: the nature of self-consciousness is fundamentally uniform in the manner that it provides immediate & authoritative knowledge of the self⁶

- Q₄: Why think that self-knowledge is uniform in the manner described?
 - An account of self-knowledge *simpliciter* assumes that a uniform account is available

¹ What Moran finds striking about our knowledge of our own attitudes is this: we often seem to be able to know whether we hold them by deliberating about the topics they concern. If I want to know whether I believe that *p*, it seems that I can normally answer this question by considering whether there is reason to believe that *p*—whether there are persuasive grounds for thinking that *p* is true. (Boyle 2009, 136)

² What right have I to think that my reflection on the reasons in favor of *P* (which is one subject-matter) has anything to do with the question of what my actual belief about *P* is (which is quite a different subject-matter)? Without a reply to this challenge, I don’t have any right to answer the question that asks what my belief [about, e.g., whether it will rain] is by reflection on the reasons in favor of an answer concerning the state of the weather. And then my thought at this point is: I would have a right to assume that my reflection on the reasons in favor of rain provided me with an answer to the question of what my belief about the rain is, if I could assume that what my belief here is was something determined by the conclusion of my reflection on those reasons. (Moran 2003, 405)

³ our ability to speak authoritatively about our own beliefs without looking for signs of belief in our behavior becomes intelligible if we suppose that to conclude that *p* on the basis of deliberation normally just amounts to coming to believe that *p*, and that a subject who possesses the concept of belief will understand that this is so. (Boyle 2009, 137)

⁴ it seems appropriate to describe such knowledge of one’s own beliefs as reflecting a kind of agency, for the subject’s concluding that a certain proposition is true would be what made it the case that he believed the relevant proposition. (Boyle 2009, 138)

⁵ [I have] argued the case for seeing the ability to avow one’s belief as the fundamental form of self-knowledge, one that gives proper place to the immediacy of first-person awareness and the authority with which its claims are delivered. (Moran 2001, 150)

⁶ The assumption underlying...criticisms [of Moran’s view] is evidently that we should seek some common explanation of all of the cases in which we can speak immediately and authoritatively about our own mental states. We could call this the *Uniformity Assumption*, for it amounts to the demand that a satisfactory account of our self-knowledge should be fundamentally uniform, explaining all cases of “first-person authority” in the same basic way. (Boyle 2009, 141)

3 The Priority of Agential Self-Knowledge

A minimal condition on self-knowledge: If S is to count as having *knowledge* of itself then S must also be able to *represent* itself (i.e. self-knowledge that *p* requires the capacity to self-represent that *p*)⁷

BOYLE'S STRATEGY: the capacity for self-representation presupposes the capacity for self-knowledge of deliberative kind described by Moran⁸

3.1 Self-Representation & Language

Self-Representation: a personal-level representation of the subject's mental state *as her own* mental state (p. 148)

- Note that the locution "as her own" is stronger than typical locutions involving S's representing *p* as ϕ
- Q₅: What kinds of abilities must be exhibited in the comprehending linguistic expression of a self-representation?
 - A) What is involved in understanding something as a complex representation composed from meaningful elements?
 - B) What is involved in understanding the particular elements that figure in a self-representation?

3.2 Self-Representation & the Entitlement to Self-Knowledge

- We are entitled to Moran-type self-knowledge on the basis of the conditions for understanding our own utterances
- Conditions on understanding the content of one's utterances:^{9,10}
 1. Understanding involves the possession of systematically related capacities for generating representations
 2. Representations generated from such systematically related capacities are those for which the subject can state truth-conditions (i.e. the subject knows what it is for their representations to be true or false)
 3. Knowledge of truth conditions requires the appreciation of connections between various statements that one might assert
 4. Appreciation of the connections between possible assertions requires a grasp of the grounds (reasons) for which they hold the attitude
 5. Someone who can appreciate the grounds for which they hold an attitude towards some content is thereby entitled to ascribe beliefs to herself in a way that conforms to Moran's Transparency Condition¹¹

⁷ What is crucial is not that the creature should express its self-knowledge in an articulate language but that whatever sort of activity is supposed to manifest this knowledge should have a certain kind of explanation: one that adverts, not merely to the creature's being in the mental state supposedly known, but to the creature's representing its own state as of a certain kind. (Boyle 2009, 144)

⁸ the power to represent one's own mental states presupposes the power to know one's own deliberated attitudes in the way that Moran specifies. If this is right, then the kind of self-knowledge Moran describes must find a fundamental place in any satisfactory account of self-knowledge. And if, as everyone agrees, Moran's account cannot serve as a model of self-knowledge in general, then it follows that we must reject the Uniformity Assumption. (Boyle 2009, 147)

⁹ A comprehending speaker, then, must be able to make claims in a way that reflects a grasp of the relation of the content of any given claim to the contents of a system of possible other claims. (Boyle 2009, 150)

¹⁰ a comprehending speaker must be able to entertain a certain sort of "Why?"-question about the claims she makes, a question that asks for grounds that show the claim in question to be true. Or again, we could say that she must, as it is sometimes put, be able to "play the game of giving and asking for reasons," where "reasons" here means considerations bearing on the truth of the claims she has made. (Boyle 2009, 151)

¹¹ a subject who can say that *p* just when she takes there to be sufficient grounds for supposing *p* to be true is a subject whose speech already expresses her beliefs: when she (nondeceptively) says "*p*," she will be affirming something she takes to be true, and since to take something to be true just is to believe it, she will also be entitled to say "I believe that *p*." (Boyle 2009, 151)

3.3 *Self-Representation & Self-Understanding*

- A condition of understanding any expression that counts as a form of the first-person (i.e. of competence with any first-person expression) is that the use of such an expression be necessarily linked with the subject's capacity for deliberation¹²
1. If there were no necessary link between competence with the first-person and deliberation, then Moore-paradoxical statements wouldn't be paradoxical
 2. Moore-paradoxical statements *are* paradoxical
 3. ∴ There must be a non-contingent link between competence with a first-person expression and the possession of a capacity for deliberation concerning what to do/believe

¹² imagine a subject who was able to say "p" in the way we have described, on the basis of reflection on grounds for and against, but who was then uncertain whether the thing he called "A" was prepared to say that p. Knowing that he is prepared to say that p, we ask him whether A would say that p, and he is unsure and needs to look for behavioral evidence. (Boyle 2009, 154-5)

3.4 *Against the Uniformity Assumption*

1. If the Uniformity Assumption is correct *and* Moran-type self-knowledge is necessarily available to any self-knower, then *either* all self-knowledge is Moran-type self-knowledge or none is¹³
2. Not all self-knowledge is Moran-type self-knowledge
3. Moran-type self-knowledge is necessarily had by any subject capable of self-knowledge at all
4. ∴ The Uniformity Assumption is false

¹³ An account of self-knowledge which accepts the Uniformity Assumption must either rule out the kind of self-knowledge Moran describes, or else maintain that all of our self-knowledge is of this kind. Everyone agrees that the latter option is untenable. But we have seen that no account of self-knowledge can afford to deny the possibility of Moran-type self-knowledge, for to deny it would be to deny a precondition of thought of oneself, and would thus undermine the possibility of self-knowledge in general. (Boyle 2009, 156)

4 *Questions About Boyle's Argument*

- How can a pre-condition on self-knowledge be a pre-condition on *self-consciousness*?¹⁴
- Is Boyle's conception of knowledge (and thus of self-knowledge) overly demanding?
- Is Boyle correct that the view he sketches is similar to Kant's in at least the following ways?
 - Both accounts draw a distinction between "active" and "passive" forms of self-knowledge
 - There is a dependence relation that holds between these kinds of self-knowledge

¹⁴ What Moran has given us, then, is not a model that can be generalized to account for all varieties of self-knowledge, but an account of the way of knowing one's own mind that is a precondition of self-consciousness. (Boyle 2009, 156)

References

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