

24.500 spring 05
topics in philosophy of mind
session 1

self-knowledge

- no class next thursday

- self-knowledge = knowledge of one's mental states
- “But what shall I now say that I am, when I am supposing that there is some supremely powerful and...malicious deceiver..?...At last I have discovered it—thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist—that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking”
- Descartes claims that he can't rationally doubt that he is thinking, but he can rationally doubt that he has a hand, or that his father has a mind, etc.

self-knowledge: privileged and peculiar access

Image removed due to copyright considerations

- privileged access (roughly): one's beliefs about one's mental states are more likely to amount to knowledge than beliefs about one's environment and others' mental states (at least in nonfactive cases)

I may, in saying that I see the cigarette case, be claiming more than the experience strictly warrants: it is logically consistent with my having just this experience that there should not be a cigarette case there, or indeed any physical object at all. It may be suggested, therefore, that if I wish to give a strict account of my present visual experience, I must make a more cautious statement. I must say not that I see the cigarette case, if this is to carry the implication that there is a cigarette case there, but only that it seems to me that I am seeing it. (Ayer 1956, 96)

peculiar access

Image removed due to copyright considerations

- one knows that there is a cigarette case on the table, that it contains cigarettes, that Freddie wants a cigarette, etc., “by observation”
- one’s access to one’s own mind is *not* like this
- (if there is such a thing as “inner” observation, it is quite unlike the more familiar sort)
- privileged and peculiar access can come apart
 - Ryle (privileged but not peculiar)
 - The superiority of the speaker’s knowledge of what he is doing over that of the listener [indicates]...only that he is in a very good position to know what the listener is in a very poor position to know. The turns taken by a man’s conversation do not startle or perplex his wife as much as they had surprised and puzzled his fiancée, nor do close colleagues have to explain themselves to each other as much as they have to explain themselves to their pupils (1949, 171)
 - myopic inner eye (peculiar but not privileged)

- the main topic of the seminar
 - understanding *privileged* and *peculiar* access
- but we'll start with the inevitable
 - the apparent conflict between *externalism* and privileged access
- first, some other themes and issues

- detectivism/Shoemaker's "broad perceptual model"
 - inner sense theories (Armstrong, Lycan)
 - Block's attentional theory
- expressivism
 - letter-expressivism (inspired by Wittgenstein)
 - neo-expressivism (Bar-On)
- self-knowledge as a necessary condition of:
 - rationality (Shoemaker)
 - critical reasoning (Burge)

- extravagance vs. economy
 - inner sense theories—extravagant
 - behaviorism—economical
 - Shoemaker's view—economical
- unity vs. diversity
 - behaviorism—unified
 - Block's attentional theory—diverse

the puzzle of transparency

And, in general, that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us: it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent—we look through it and see nothing but the blue; we may be convinced that there *is something* but *what* it is no philosopher, I think, has yet clearly recognized. (Moore 1903, 37)

- that the mug is blue is feeble evidence for the proposition that one sees blue
- a similar phenomenon for *belief* and *knowledge*
- the puzzle of transparency: how can we have knowledge of our own mental states on the basis of such seemingly irrelevant evidence?

[I]n making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, 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?”. (Evans 1982, 225)

With respect to the attitude of belief, the claim of transparency tells us that the first-person question “Do I believe P?” is “transparent” to, answered in the same way as, the outward-directed question as to the truth of P itself. (Moran 2001, 66)

...the claim of Transparency *is* something of a paradox: how can a question referring to a matter of empirical psychological fact about a particular person be legitimately answered without appeal to the evidence about that person, but rather by appeal to a quite independent body of evidence? (Moran 2003, 413)

Dretske on zombies

- “Zombies”, in Dretske’s usage, are “human-like creatures who are not conscious and, therefore, not conscious of anything” (2003, n. 1, 9)

In normal (i.e. veridical) perception, then, the objects you are aware of are objective, mind-independent objects. They exist whether or not you experience them...Everything you are aware of would be the same if you were a zombie. In having perceptual experience, then, nothing distinguishes your world, the world you experience, from a zombie’s. This being so, what is it about this world that tells you that, unlike a zombie, you experience it? What is it that you are aware of that indicates that you are aware of it? (2003, 1, note omitted)

Dretske's conclusion

Skeptical suspicions are, I think, rightly aroused by this result. Maybe our conviction that we know, in a direct and authoritative way, that we are conscious is simply a confusion of what we are aware of with our awareness of it (see Dretske forthcoming). (9)

three puzzles of transparency

For what we are aware of, when we know that we see a tree, is *nothing but a tree*. In fact, we only have to be aware of some state of the world in order to be in a position to make an assertion about ourselves.

Now this might raise the following perplexity. How can it be that we can have knowledge of a state of affairs which involves a substantial and persisting self, simply by being aware of (still worse, by merely appearing to be aware of) a state of the world? (Evans 1982, 231)

- this is not quite the puzzle of transparency (which is not centrally a puzzle about the self)
- but it's close enough:
 - How can it be that one can have knowledge of a state of affairs—as it might be, *that one sees that there is a tree there*—simply by seeing that *there is a tree there*?

the first puzzle

Argument K

there is a tree there

I know that there is a tree there

Argument B

there is a tree there

I believe that there is a tree there

- P1: how can I come to know that I believe/know that p , by determining whether p ?

the second puzzle

Argument S

there is a tree there

I see that there is a tree there

there is a tree
behind this wall

- problem: *Argument S* does not seem to set out the transparent reasoning
- so: what is the transparent reasoning, and how can it yield knowledge?
- P2: how can I come to know that I see that p , by looking at the scene before my eyes?

the third puzzle

Argument L

there is a tree there

it looks to me that there is a tree there

- P3: how can I come to know that it looks to me that p when I *don't* believe things are as they appear?

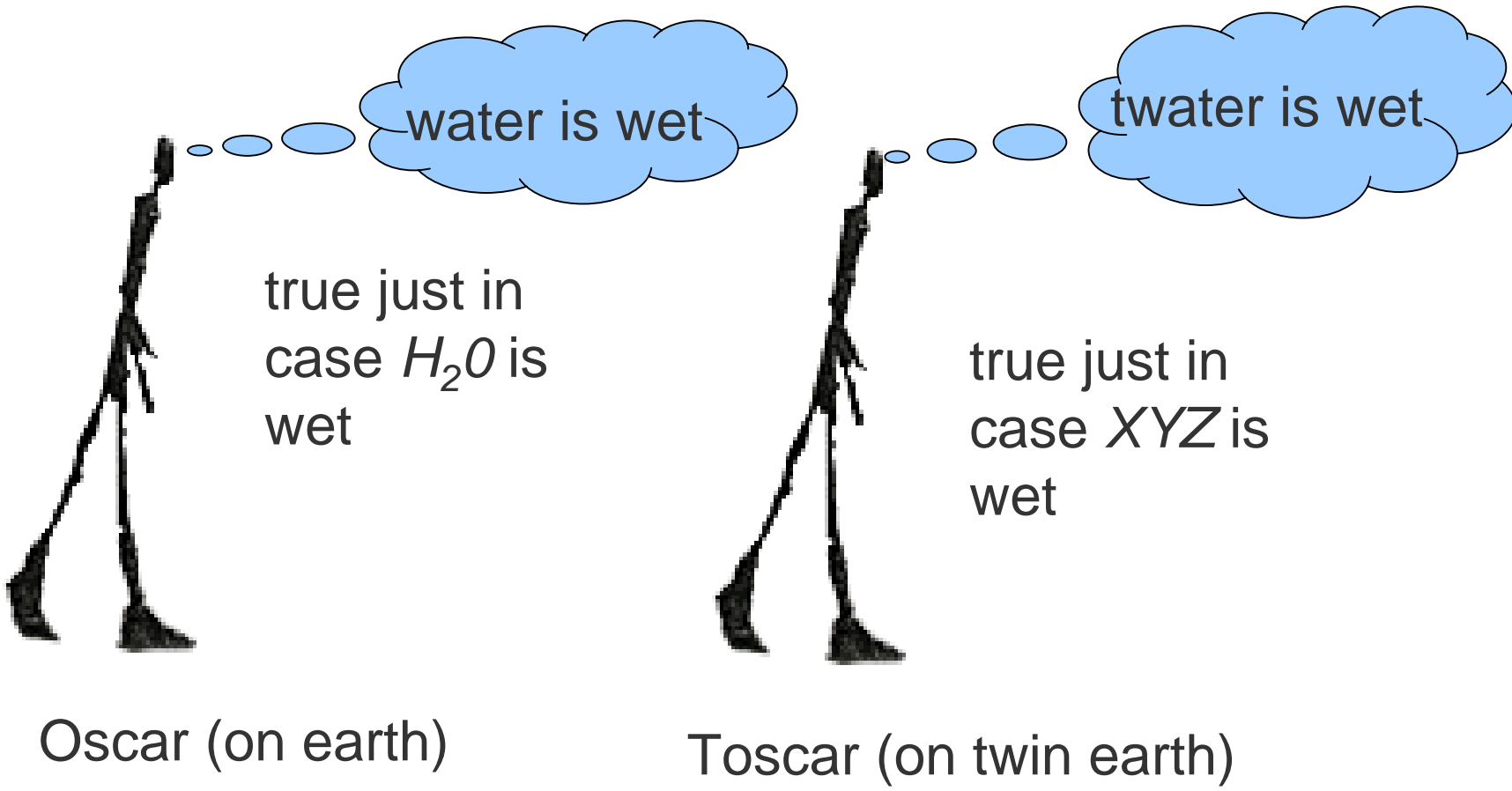
externalism and self-knowledge

Putnam's twin earth

earth

twin earth

...the oceans and lakes contain "XYZ", which is a very different chemical kind from H_2O , although superficially like it at normal temperatures and pressures



- By...privileged self-knowledge, I mean the view that we are able to know, without the benefit of empirical investigation, what our thoughts are in our own case
- compatibilism: externalism and privileged self-knowledge are compatible
- Anti-compatibilist arguments with this general form have been attempted in the past, but...those earlier efforts have misstated the case
- See...McKinsey, 'Anti-individualism and privileged access'...and the effective response by Anthony Bruecker (Boghossian, 'What the externalist can know a priori')

two incompatibilist arguments

- discrimination—“slow switching”, etc.
- consequence—a priori knowledge that water exists, etc.

McKinsey and Brueckner

- “each of us can know the existence and content of his own mental states in a privileged way that is available to no one else” (McKinsey)
- “**privileged way**”: some version of *privileged access*

- “**available to no one else**”: some version of *peculiar access*
- merely by sitting in an armchair, one can know, “just by thinking” (“a priori”), that one is thinking that water is wet, for example



McKinsey's argument - I

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair (“a priori”) that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies E (according to externalism)

hence:

- C E can be known from the armchair

McKinsey's argument - II

hence:

1, 2, and 3 are inconsistent (so, if 1 and 3 are true, 2 (and so externalism) is false)

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 The proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies E
- 3 E can't be known from the armchair

note that the argument just relies on *peculiar* access

the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet
implies [?] E

- *P metaphysically implies* (entails) Q iff it is impossible that P is true and Q is false (i.e. there is no possible world in which P is true and Q is false; in every possible world w, if P is true in w, Q is also true in w)
 - that the glass is full of water metaphysically implies that the glass is full of H₂O
 - that Paris Hilton exists metaphysically implies that Rick and Kathy Hilton exist

the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet
implies [?] E

- *P conceptually implies* Q iff it is knowable a priori that it is not the case that P is true and Q is false (i.e. it is knowable a priori that if P is true, Q is true)
 - that the glass is full of water does *not* conceptually imply that the glass is full of H₂O
 - that Jones drinks quickly conceptually implies that Jones drinks
 - that Jones is a bachelor conceptually implies (?) that Jones is male

'implies' must mean *conceptually implies* (else
C would not follow)

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet **implies** E (according to externalism)

hence:

- C** E can be known from the armchair

the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet
implies **E** [?]

- McKinsey's E is a proposition describing Oscar's environment
- premise 2 says that one can know a priori (by considering Putnam's "twin earth" thought experiment) that if Oscar is thinking that water is wet then E is true
 - but what is E, exactly?

the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet
implies E [?]

- suggestion (Brueckner, interpreting McKinsey)
 - E is the proposition that Oscar inhabits an environment containing H₂O and not XYZ
- one cannot know E from the armchair
- but is it true that the twin earth thought experiment shows (a priori) that one can only think about water if there is H₂O in one's environment?

E = the proposition that water exists?

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 The proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that water exists (according to externalism)

hence:

C Oscar can know from the armchair that water exists

C is obviously false so externalism is false

but is 2 true?

2 The proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that water exists (according to externalism)

- suppose hydrogen and oxygen exist, but hydrogen hydroxide doesn't
- scientists “theorize that H₂O exists” (Brueckner, p. 202)
- they introduce a term, *swater*, for this chemical compound, and use it on Nova broadcasts, in *Scientific American* articles, etc.
- Oscar reads these articles and learns the new word (perhaps without remembering the chemical composition of swater)
- Oscar might say, “I wonder whether swater is wet”
- wouldn't he be wondering (in a waterless world) whether *water* is wet?

E = the proposition that either water exists or some in Oscar's speech community theorize that H₂O exists?

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 The proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that either water exists or... (according to externalism)

hence:

C Oscar can know from the armchair that either water exists or...

C is obviously false so externalism is false

but is 2 true?

- 2 The proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that either water exists or some in Oscar's speech community theorize that H₂O exists?
- no—not if 'implies' means *conceptually* implies

Brueckner's final suggestion

- E is the proposition that there exist some physical entities distinct from Oscar
- Brueckner's response: are we so sure that this E is *not* knowable from the armchair?

OK, but what about:

E = the proposition that either water exists or some in Oscar's speech community theorize that water exists?

- 2 is (arguably) conceptually implied by the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet, yet surely it is not knowable from the armchair

enter Boghossian

I claim that Oscar is in a position to argue, purely a priori, as follows:

- 1 If I have the concept water, then water exists [or other speakers who have the concept water exist]
- 2 I have the concept water

Therefore,

- 3 water exists

- next time:
 - Boghossian, 'What the externalist can know a priori'
 - McLaughlin and Tye, 'Externalism, twin earth, and self-knowledge'
 - Boghossian, 'Content and self-knowledge'
 - Burge, 'Individualism and self-knowledge'
 - optional background: McKinsey and Brueckner