

Appearance and Expression
290-4
Handout 1

1. *Traditional Problem of Other Minds*

I conclude that other human beings have feelings like me, because, first, they have bodies like me, which I know, in my own case, to be the antecedent condition of feelings; and because, secondly, they exhibit the acts, and other outward signs, which in my own case I know by experience to be caused by feelings. I am conscious in myself of a series of facts connected by an uniform sequence, of which the beginning is modifications of my body, the middle is feelings, the end is outward demeanor. In the case of other human beings I have the evidence of my senses for the first and last links of the series, but not for the intermediate link. I find, however, that the sequence between the first and last is as regular and constant in those other cases as it is in mine. In my own case I know that the first link produces the last through the intermediate link, and could not produce it without. Experience, therefore, obliges me to conclude that there must be an intermediate link; which must either be the same in others as in myself, or a different one: I must either believe them to be alive, or to be automaton: and by believing them to be alive, that is, by supposing the link to be of the same nature as in the case of which I have experience, and which is in all other respects similar, I bring other human beings, as phenomena, under the same generalizations which I know by experience to be the true theory of my own existence. (J. S. Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*, 6th edition (London, 1889)) pp. 243-244.

Different (Allegedly) Conceivable Scenarios:

- A) Spectrum Inversion
- B) Robots/Zombies
- C) Deceptive Actors

Note that scenario (C) draws on an intelligible extension of our ordinary experience of the world; neither (A) nor (B) do.

A more limited use of (A) or (B) is consistent with our knowledge of the world – that one can on occasion be mistaken about the way someone is, or whether there is a shop dummy there. But such occasional errors don't ground a general sceptical challenge independently of the argument from illusion.

Scepticism about what:

- i.) the 'qualitative' aspects of mind, in particular, ways phenomenal experience may be independent of any 'content' aspect;
- ii.) any aspect of the mind which has a first-personal dimension, such that the manner in which a subject is aware of his or her own mental states contrasts with how he or she can be aware of the states of others;
- iii.) any psychological state whatsoever.

(Note that Mill, Malcolm and McDowell all talk about 'feeling' which could be a focus on (i) and hence be associated with the concerns with (A) and (B), but is in fact more general.)

A common ground for pursuing (A) or (B) is a focus on (i), and typically involves, at least implicitly, the following assumptions:

- (1) Each of us is acquainted with the qualitative character of his or her own phenomenally conscious states in a way that she is acquainted with the qualitative character of no other person's phenomenally conscious states;
- (2) Acquaintance with the qualities of phenomenal consciousness suffice [in the manner specified in (1)], at least in us (may be not in other animals), for one to

- possess concepts of those qualities, and thereby make judgements about their presence or absence;
- (3) We are related to the qualitative states of others through their manifest physical properties and behaviour only;
 - (4) It is conceivable that the correlation claims should be false (that is may in fact be true for me and for others, but not knowably not possibly false):
- States with this quality Q are responsible for that pattern of behaviour

Rather than a standard sceptical scenario of going wrong, the stories offered for (A) and (B) are supposed to lead us to accept (4), and (4) is supposed to explain the conceivability of (A) and (B) and hence be grounds for rejecting any philosophical view which denies that (A) or (B) is a genuine possibility.

[Note (B), no less than (C) can be used to generate a sceptical challenge which is not particularly focused on the unknowability of the qualitative states of others but rather on our social competence. It is not scenario (B) as such but rather the significance drawn from it (one closely allied to (A)) that is at issue.]

(Slimming Down to Basics)

Standard way of setting out this position assumes we only have knowledge by description of others qualitative states, and knowledge by acquaintance with our own. But in its simplest form, it can allow that we have acquaintance with the qualitative states of others. The driving assumption is that any concept we have for the qualitative states of others has a descriptive correlate, but the acquaintance we have with our own qualitative states lacks any descriptive correlate – it is a bare pointing. Identities which involve descriptive information on both sides may be informative and explanatory, but, it is alleged, cannot be when a term derived from ‘bare pointing’ is involved.)

Given (1)-(4), what is wrong with Mill’s use of the argument from analogy is that he has no grounds for assuming that the quality of his feeling states flow from the nature he has in common with other human beings.

2. Some Questions about Malcolm & McDowell

Why does Malcolm suppose that the sceptical problem will be dissolved if we solve the ‘conceptual’ problem?

Proposal: Malcolm assumes that the sceptical problem is of interest only because of the background assumptions which lead to affirming the possibility of (A) and (B) (i.e. 1-4 or some equivalents). Malcolm thinks that (1)-(4) are one of the targets of LW’s discussion of privacy. In particular, he denies that we could have a concept of some quality of phenomenal consciousness possession of which was independent of our propensity to be aware of others instantiating this quality as well. That is, for Malcolm the only interest in the sceptical problem is the mistaken conception of the inner which it draws on. [That is, Malcolm appears to reject (1) and thereby (2), in turn rejecting (4) as incoherent.]

Does McDowell take us to be able to perceive the mental states of others?

According to this position, what warrants the assertion that another person is in pain, on one of the relevant occasions, is the detectable occurrence of the circumstances of that person’s being in pain: an instance of a kind of circumstance – another person’s being in pain – that is available to awareness, in its own right and not merely through behavioural proxies, on some occasions,

including this one, although on other occasions, the obtaining of other instances can be quite beyond detection. ('On "The Reality of the Past"', p.304)

...we should not jib at, or interpret away, the common-sense thought that, on those occasions that are paradigmatically suitable for training in the assertoric use of the relevant part of language, one can literally perceive, in another person's facial expression or behaviour, that he is in pain, and not just infer that he is in pain from what one perceives. ('On "The Reality of the Past"', p.305.)

It will help me to articulate my epistemological distrust if I let the 'criterial' position define its stance towards our knowledge of other minds in explicit contrast with a possible alternative: namely, a position according to which, on a suitable occasion, the circumstance that someone else is in some 'inner' state can itself be the object of experience. [Note 5 I introduce this position here not in order to defend it (see §3 below for some difficulties in it), but just to exploit the contrast in order to clarify the 'criterial' view. (CDK, 370.)

Here we might think of what is directly available to experience in some such terms as 'his giving expression to his being in that "inner" state'; this is something that, while not itself actually being the 'inner' state of affairs in question, nevertheless does not fall short of it in the sense I explained. [Note 34 M-realism might be accused of proposing a general assimilation of the second case to the first. How plausible the assimilation is in a particular case depends on the extent to which it is plausible to think of the particular mode of expression, as, so to speak, transparent. (This is quite plausible for facial expressions of emotional states... But it is not very plausible for 'avowals', except perhaps in the special case of the verbal expression of thoughts... (CDK, p.387.)

[What is the import of this? If McDowell holds to the perceptibility of other minds does that mean he rejects (3)? But in the 'slimmed down' version question of acquaintance with others' mental states is not critical. McDowell *does* reject (2) (in contrast to Malcolm he doesn't reject (1). In rejecting (2) he can reject the idea that we have some specially direct acquaintance with the qualitative aspects of our own mental states which would make us fixate on the explanatory gap.]

Commonality with Malcolm

The sceptic's picture involves a corpus of 'bodily' and 'behavioural' information unproblematically available to us in a pictured cognitive predicament in which we are holding in suspense all attributions of psychological properties to others. One way of approaching Wittgenstein's response is to remark that such a picture is attainable only by displacing the concept of a *human being* from its focal position in an account of our experience of our fellows, and replacing it with a philosophically generated concept of a *human body*. (CDK 384)

In an objectifying view of reality, behaviour considered in itself cannot be expressive or significant; human behaviour no more, than say, the behaviour of the planets. [Note 47 This movement of thought can find support in the idea that the mental is conceptually captured by introspective ostensive definition. (That idea is perhaps naturally understood as a response to the obliteration of the notion of intrinsically expressive behaviour.)... (CDK 393)

Attack on Epistemological Kinds

In a schematic picture of a face, it may be the curve of the mouth that makes it right to say the face is cheerful. In another picture the mouth may be represented by a perfect replica of the line that represents the mouth in the first picture, although the face is not cheerful. Do we need a relation of defeasible support in order to accommodate this possibility? Surely not. (CDK, p.378)

What is the importance of the analogy with perception, in the talk of awareness and within our consciousness?

What is the connection between the claim of directness and the infallibilism concerning knowledge?

What is the importance of the argument from illusion?