

Boghossian's argument that self-knowledge can be justified by neither inference nor introspection

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1 Three ways to understand self-knowledge

Boghossian's aim in "Content and Self-Knowledge" is to argue that each of the three possible ways of understanding our justification for our beliefs about our own mental states faces a fundamental problem. His three options are:

1. *Inference*: we know our thoughts on the basis of reasoning or inference from other beliefs.
2. *Introspection*: we know our thoughts 'on the basis of looking'; i.e., on the basis of some sort of quasi-perceptual introspection.
3. *Nothing*: our thoughts are not based on any evidence at all.

The paradigm case of (3), for Boghossian, is the position sketched by Burge in 'Individualism and self-knowledge.' We've already discussed his arguments against that view. Now we turn to his arguments against the first two views of self-knowledge.

2 Against self-knowledge as inferential

The argument Boghossian gives is not against inferential views of self-knowledge, but rather against the combination of such views with (what I take to be) a plausible internalism about justification.

The intuitive motivation for internalist views of justification; reliabilism as an alternative; the case of the clairvoyant.

Internalism: If evidence E justifies an agent in believing p , then the agent must
(i) believe that E obtains and (ii) believe that E justifies p .

To see the consequences for inferential justification, note that in such cases — where one belief is inferred from another — the belief from which the inference is drawn plays the role of evidence for the belief inferred. Given this, we get the following internalist view about inferential justification:

If an agent is justified in believing p on the basis of inference from his belief q , then: (i) the agent must believe that she believes that q , and (ii) the agent must believe that the belief that q justifies the belief p .

This is enough to generate Boghossian's regress. The idea is this: suppose (for reductio) that some bit of self-knowledge is inferential. If this is so, then there is some belief p about one's own mental states — say, the belief that I am thinking of Ohio — which is justified by inference from another belief q . But if the belief q is to serve as evidence for my belief about what I am thinking (says the internalist) I must believe that I believe q (since I must believe that the evidence obtains) and I must believe that my belief q justifies, or provides evidence for, my belief about my thoughts (since I must believe that the evidence justifies the belief in question). But what this means is that in explaining the justification for my self-knowledge, *I have appealed to other bits of self-knowledge*. We can then ask: how are those bits of self-knowledge justified? If we answer: on the basis of inference from other beliefs, then it looks like we're off on a regress. If we give another answer, then we give up on the idea that self-knowledge is, in general, inferential knowledge.

The problem, put more simply, is that on an internalist view of justification, inferential justification presupposes self-knowledge, and so cannot be used generally to explain it.

Note: this does not count against the view that *some* self-knowledge might be justified inferentially.

3 Against introspective justification for self-knowledge

As Boghossian notes, the idea that we have knowledge of our own mental states introspectively is initially quite plausible. As he puts it, "It is not simply that I have reliable beliefs about my thoughts. I catch some of my thoughts in the act of being thought. I think: If she says that one more time, I'm leaving. And I am aware, immediately on thinking it, that that is what I thought" (156-7).

As above, Boghossian does not present a problem directly for introspective views of self-knowledge; rather, he presents a problem for the conjunction of such views with externalism.

The argument is simple, and relies on only one contestable premise (for these purposes, 'extrinsic', 'relational', and 'externalist' may all be treated as synonymous):

No perceptual knowledge of extrinsic properties: It is impossible to know the extrinsic properties of an object on the basis of perceiving (inspecting) it.

This claim is, Boghossian thinks, supported by the dual claims that (i) one cannot know an object's extrinsic properties on the basis of knowing its intrinsic properties, and (ii) one can only perceive an object's intrinsic properties.

How this principle leads to the conclusion that self-knowledge cannot be justified by introspection.

An apparent counterexample: the property of being a dime. Boghossian's reply: (i) no such correlation in the case of thought; and (ii) our knowledge of the dime's worth is really inferential.

Other possible counterexamples: (1) colors (on some views); (2) weight; (3) wealth.