

24.500 spring 05
topics in philosophy of mind
session 9

- teatime

self-knowledge

plan

- recap
- Bar-On's *Speaking My Mind*, chs. 6, 7

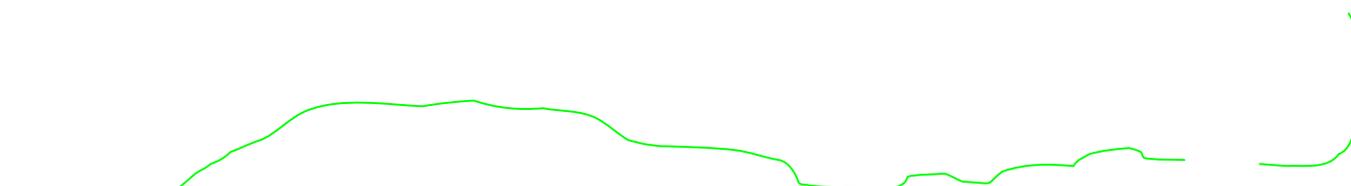


distinguish

1. the essential indexical
2. IETM
3. 'I's guaranteed reference
4. the fact that one can think about oneself while floating in a sensory deprivation tank
5. peculiar and privileged access

phenomenon 1: the “essential indexical”

- what did I come to believe, when “I stopped following the trail around the counter and rearranged the torn sack in my cart”?
 - one option: a “centered proposition” (a possible worlds property: a function from worlds to individuals) (see Lewis, Attitudes de dicto and de se)
 - another option: nothing new—my belief state changed, not what I believed (see Perry, The essential indexical)
 - yet another option: I came to believe a proposition of the ordinary sort (see Stalnaker, Indexical belief)



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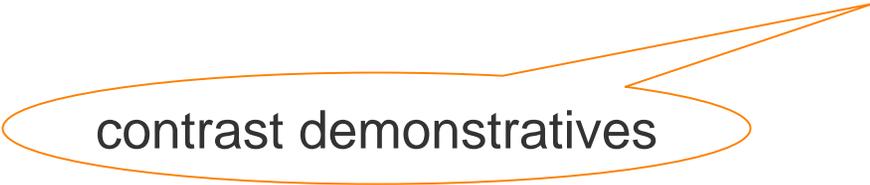
phenomenon 2: IETM

- S knows that a is F in a way subject to error through misidentification iff:
 - S's evidence for the proposition that a is F is:
 - that b is F (that the G is F, that the Gs are F, that some x is F)
 - that a = b (that a = the G, that a is one of the Gs, that a = x)
 - and S's identification evidence (i.e. the second bit) could be defeated without her instantiation evidence (i.e. the first bit) also being defeated
- otherwise, S knows that a is F in a way immune to error through misidentification
- if we like, we can speak of a proposition (or “statement”) being SETM (IETM), but this must be relativized to evidence (Evans/Shoemaker)

- SETM (relative to the usual way of knowing)
 - ‘I am bleeding’
 - ‘my arm is moving’ [looking at the arm]
- IETM (relative to the usual way of knowing):
 - ‘I feel pain’
 - ‘I see a canary’
 - ‘I am waving my arm’ [not looking]
 - ‘I am facing a table’
 - ‘that is yellow’
 - ‘my legs are crossed’

phenomenon 3: 'I's guaranteed reference

- a) the referent of 'I' is guaranteed to exist (i.e. uses of 'I' are not subject to reference failure, unlike 'that', etc.)
- b) the user of 'I' is guaranteed success in referring to herself (72)



contrast demonstratives

phenomenon 4: “suppose that I am floating through empty space in a sensory deprivation tank, having been struck by amnesia as well as paralysis...I should be [able] to think to myself, ‘I don’t like this one bit!’” (73-4)

phenomenon 5: our old friends, peculiar and privileged access

- recall they 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 (*The Concept of Mind*, 171)
 - myopic inner eye (peculiar but not privileged)

- the “essential indexical” is unrelated to IETM
 - indeed, Perry’s shopper finally comes to know that he is making a mess in a way that is subject to error through misidentification
 - propositions expressed by some indexical free sentences can be known in a way that is IETM
 - e.g. that Perry wrote “The essential indexical” (imagine one knows this, but has forgotten any distinct evidence one had for it)
- and it has no particular connection to self-knowledge (that I am making a mess is not about my mental states)

the guaranteed reference of 'I' has little to do with the other phenomena

- the “essential indexical” phenomenon arises for demonstratives (which aren’t guaranteed to refer)
- thinking about oneself in a tank has (on the face of it) nothing to do with the semantics of ‘I’
 - guaranteed reference is anyway explained by the rule “‘I’ refers to the speaker”
- and there’s no special connection with self-knowledge (‘I’ in ‘I am a philosopher’ is guaranteed to refer, ‘now’ in ‘it’s now teatime’ is equally guaranteed to refer,...)
 - still, guaranteed reference (or something approximating it) is a necessary condition for utterances of ‘I am in M’ to be epistemically privileged

Speaking My Mind again

- “avowals”: utterances that ascribe current states of mind, “I am (in) M” (3)
 - “ I have a terrible headache’
 - “I’m wondering whether it’s going to rain”
 - for all appearances, avowals are ‘baseless’/*non-evidential* (2); no evidence, inference, or ordinary observation (27)
 - they express the subject’s knowledge
 - they are not normally *subjected to ordinary epistemic assessment*

- phenomenal avowals
 - “I am feeling thirsty”
- intentional avowals
 - “I am mad at John”
 - “I believe it is going to rain”
- my goal is to identify and explain a kind of security—special, even if not absolute—that we seem to enjoy whenever we issue an avowal
- avowals exhibit epistemic asymmetry but semantic continuity: ‘I am in M’ is true iff the speaker is in M, etc.
- the account does not invoke any special epistemic method or access we have to our own present states of mind
- but: avowals do express “non-deflationary” self-knowledge

- three questions
 - 1) what accounts for avowals' unparalleled security? (i.e., why are they strongly presumed to be true, etc.)
 - another way [? - this is taken back on 14] of putting this question: how can avowals be understood in a way that preserves semantic continuity while fully respecting epistemic asymmetry?
 - one need not subscribe to the epistemic approach (11), and my own answer to (i) will be non-epistemic
 - but see the explanation of epistemic asymmetry on 10; “[seem?] much less subject to ordinary mistakes”
 - 2) do avowals articulate privileged self-knowledge?
 - 3) how do we have privileged self-knowledge?
- a non-epistemic non-cartesian answer to (1), which is consistent with non-deflationary answers to (2)
- there is something misleading about (3)

- avowals again
 - “I am in (psychological condition) M”, right?
 - well, no:
 - “I am very tired” (looking in the mirror)
 - “I am mad at my mother” (at the therapists, see 25)
 - “I am a very patient person”
 - “I am seeing a red cardinal”
 - are not avowals (16)
 - further, some thoughts and judgments (in addition to utterances) are avowals (17)
 - so what are avowals?
 - mental self-ascriptions, in language or thought, that we think are epistemically privileged?
 - this mixing of thought and language is problematic (often the argument is just about ‘I’)

“the motion of the Earth is without any doubt against Scripture”

- ch. 6
 - 1) what accounts for avowals' unparalleled security? (i.e., why are they strongly presumed to be true, etc.)
- ascriptive security: “when avowing, I enjoy...a special security in the ascription of the occurrent mental state to myself...of a kind I do not enjoy when making any non-mental ‘I’-ascriptions [e.g. ‘my legs are crossed’]. I shall refer to this as the ‘ascriptive security’ of avowals” (93)
- ascriptive security is “immunity to a certain kind of error” (189), namely “immunity to error through misascription” (192)

S knows that a is F in a way subject to error through misascription iff:

- S's evidence for the proposition that a is F is:
 - that a is G (that a has some property X; note: this is just equivalent to the proposition that a exists)
 - that if a is G, it is F (that $X = Fness$)
- and S's identification evidence (i.e. the second bit) could be defeated without her instantiation evidence (i.e. the first bit) also being defeated
- otherwise, S knows that a is F in a way immune to error through misascription
 - not clear that there are any examples of the “a has some property X and X is Fness” sort (see 193)
 - and is it really so odd to wonder whether what one is feeling is thirst, or anger (193)?
 - see also “overstaying my welcome” (226)

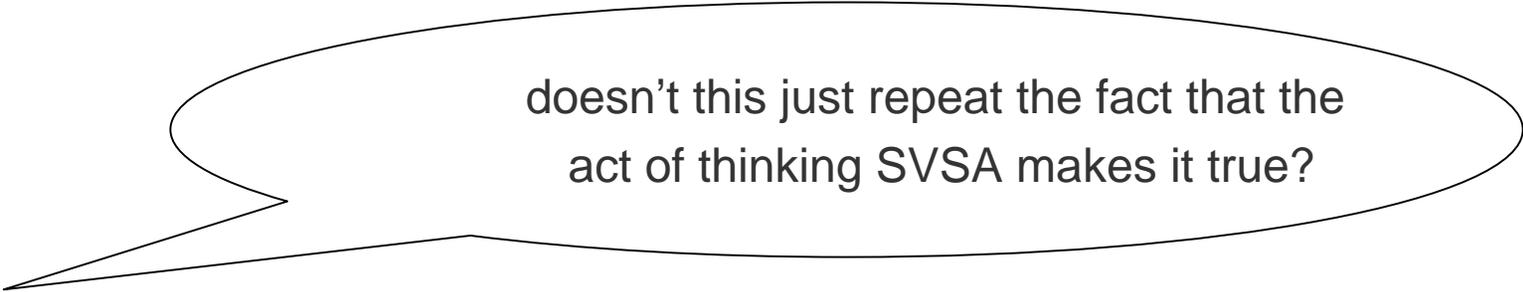
- avowals are both IETMi and IETMa
 - disputable that they are always IETMa
- “this combined immunity can serve to mark a significant contrast between avowals and all non-mental ‘I’-ascriptions”
 - what about: ‘I am facing a yellow thing’?
 - isn’t this (relative to the usual way of knowing) both IETMi and IETMa?
 - and can’t ‘that is yellow’ be IETMa?

- “possessing immunity to error clearly does not signal the presence of a highly secure epistemic basis” (200)
 - it doesn’t signal the presence of any kind of secure basis
- “a person who is immune to error does not go astray in her pronouncements” (200)
 - that may be, but the phenomenon of IE is perfectly compatible with falsehood (see 201, 203)
 - the jargon of ‘immunity to error’ is misleading: I can be right that someone is in pain, and wrong that it’s me
 - why is the Epistemic Approach incompatible with the claim that avowals have both kinds of IE (203)?

- in the remainder of this chapter, I shall try to show that the ascriptive immediacy that attends AIE is no bar to achieving...correct self-ascriptio
 - unclear why there is a problem here
- I shall do this by considering...self-verifying avowals
- a key feature of them will enable us to understand the source of AIE of avowals (210)
- my next task will be to understand how avowals might be seen not only as protected from various epistemic errors and criticisms, but also as especially apt to be true
- this will be accomplished by connecting IETMa with the idea that avowals serve to express subjects' mental states, rather than report them (206-7)

- SVSA: I am thinking (presently entertaining the thought) that p
 - if SVSA is thought, it is true (cf. Burge); just as the proposition that I am writing that p is true when written by me
 - the key feature of SVSA, shared by (intentional) avowals, is that the content of the thought is “explicitly articulated” or “spelled out”
 - i.e. the content of SVSA has as a constituent the content of the ascribed thought (at any rate on some structured view of propositions)
 - OK, but what’s the connection between that and the claim that “there is no need for any recognitional identification” of the content? (212)
 - cf. she is thinking/saying/writing that p (these need not be IETMa)

- SVSA: I am thinking (presently entertaining the thought) that p
 - I can tell that a certain thought is crossing my mind...simply by telling it—i.e. that content
 - this is because, in my own case, articulating the content serves directly to give voice to my present state; it constitutes expressing the very thought I am ascribing to myself



doesn't this just repeat the fact that the act of thinking SVSA makes it true?

- Sellars' three senses of expression
 1. the action sense: S expresses her state A by intentionally F-ing
 - but we don't get much of an explanation here (yet), unlike (2) and (3)
 - hugging, saying 'it's so great to see you', expresses₁ my joy at seeing you (248)
 2. the causal sense: utterance U/behavior B expresses state A iff being caused by something's being in A
 3. the semantic sense: sentence s expresses the proposition that p iff s means that p (ignoring context sensitivity)
 - according to Bar-On, an avowal 'I am in M' expresses₁ M, as well as my belief that I am in M

ch. 7

- avowals are not portrayed as absolutely incorrigible...we can see [because of IETMa] why...they are ordinarily protected from epistemic challenge...unlike other empirical assertions
 - how can this be right?
 - plenty of ordinary empirical assertions are IETMa

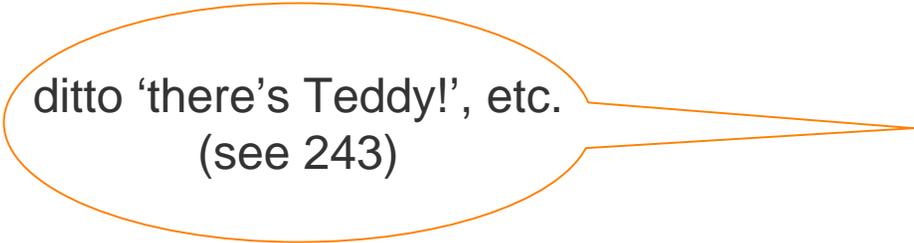
- simple expressivism
 - “I have a toothache” is just a way of moaning
 - pretty implausible
 - the Geach point is even stronger here, because “ow!” doesn’t function at all like a premise, unlike “let it be the case that no one steals!”
 - 1) if stealing is wrong, getting Bart to steal is wrong/if I have a toothache, I need aspirin
 - 2) stealing is wrong (let it be the case...)/I have a toothache (ow!)
 - 3) getting Bart to steal is wrong/I need aspirin

- the fact that ethical sentences...can be embedded...does not tell against the expressivist claim that the standard function of ethical utterances is to express attitudes and feelings... (234)
- but (modulo some unclarity about “standard function”), who’s disagreeing?
 - on this point, see Harman, *The Nature of Morality*
- what’s going on on the top of 238?
 - how can the avowal be “truth conditionally equivalent” to anything?

- a difference between the emotivist and expressivist: the former thinks that all ethical discourse is “non-factual”; the latter thinks that only some mental discourse is (236)
- the expressivist might make her theory apply to all mental discourse, following the emotivist
- but this makes no sense, because the expressivist theory assumes that there are states of mind (and hence that there are mental facts)



- avowals proper (242)
 - I want Teddy!
 - I feel so hot!
 - I hate this mess!
 - I'm wondering what she'll do next
- verbal acts, spontaneous, unreflective, no audience-intention, etc.



ditto 'there's Teddy!', etc.
(see 243)

- Sellars' three senses of expression again
 1. the action sense: S expresses her state A by intentionally F-ing
 2. the causal sense: utterance U/behavior B expresses state A iff it's caused by something's being in A
 3. the semantic sense: sentence s expresses the proposition that p iff s means that p (ignoring context sensitivity)
- against Alston, some natural expressions fall under (1)
 - reaching for the teddy, rubbing one's eyes, dancing a jig

1. the action sense: S expresses her state A by intentionally F-ing
 - S expresses₁ mental state M by intentionally F-ing iff M is a reason (or ‘rational cause’) for the act (249)
 - a rational cause of my reaching for Teddy is my desire for Teddy
 - an utterance of ‘p’ expresses₁ my belief that p (the belief was its “rational cause”; the fact that p was not its rational cause, on this Davidsonian conception of a reason* [n.b. this seems to be the wrong interpretation])
 - what about an utterance of ‘I believe that p’?
 - that should only express₁ my second-order belief, not my first-order one—which is not what Bar-On says
 - *see Davidson, “Actions, reasons, and causes”

- it is no more obligatory to regard her avowal ‘I am so excited’ as resting, epistemically, on her judgment about how things are with her...than it is obligatory in the case of her saying ‘this is great!’
- what matters..is not the absence of a self-judgment...but rather [its] irrelevance...to the treatment of the avowal as a secure performance, protected from epistemic criticism or correction
- [the explanation of this] is that avowals...simply serve to vent (express₁) the subject’s mental condition (258)

- “I want that bear” is not entirely criticism-free, because one may be demonstrating a non-bear, or nothing
- and what about “I love you”?
 - when things go well, it expresses₁ my love, but it’s hardly immune to criticism (even granted that you exist)

- if ‘that’s great!’ and ‘I am so excited’ expresses₁ my excitement (in addition to expressing₁ my belief that that’s great/I am excited), then:
 - ‘I see Teddy!’
 - ‘I know where you are!’ (said during hide-and-seek)
 - ‘I’ve got it!’ (said while doing a crossword puzzle)
- (can) express₁ my seeing Teddy, my knowledge of your whereabouts, and my discovery of the answer; yet these are not epistemically secure
 - but then it is unclear why “the expressive character of avowals...help[s] us see why avowals seem protected from the kinds of epistemic...criticism that are appropriate to ordinary perceptual reports” (263)

- further, if 'I want Teddy' expresses₁ my yearning for Teddy, isn't it just terminology that prevents 'Teddy is furry' from expressing₁ Teddy's furriness?
- that I want Teddy is my reason for uttering 'I want Teddy', ditto that Teddy is furry



you might just be
venting, airing,
giving voice to,
my furriness!

- next time:
 - more from *Speaking My Mind*