

What am I doing?

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Overview

- ▶ I think that consciousness and agency are the same thing: 'what it's like' is 'what I'm doing'.
- ▶ This is the thesis that *experience is action*.
- ▶ Today I will talk about the consequences of this view for epistemology.

How I am thinking of action

Actions are extended: I was studying for my BA for four years.

Actions overlap: while I was studying for my BA, I did a lot of other unrelated stuff, such as spend a couple of weeks building a bicycle. We multitask.

Actions go 'live' and 'dormant'. While my building of a bicycle was live, my studies were dormant. During certain periods during the building of the bike, that went dormant and my studies became live.

We can think of actions as 'strands' coexisting within us; over time, there is variation in which strand is live.

Morals

- A. The given consists of kinds of actions
- B. Epistemic voluntarism is true
- C. Beliefs are assigned to actions rather than subjects

Plan

I. What is given

II. What is evident

III. What is reasonable

Apocalyptic conclusions

I. What is given

- ▶ I am going to argue that the objects of acquaintance are kinds of action.
- ▶ Argument: the theory of acquaintance is much neater on this assumption than if they are, say, qualia.
- ▶ Letting 'the given' for one at a time be just the true self-ascriptions of objects of acquaintance, the given consists of true self-ascriptions of action.

Acquaintance

Basic idea

- ▶ Objects of acquaintance for one are the features that 'provide the contours of subjectivity': that are the kinds of experience one is undergoing.
- ▶ Candidate objects of 'direct' or 'nature-revealing' conceptualization;
- ▶ Candidate objects of 'certain' or 'evident' knowledge.

Varieties of acquaintance

Occurrent, latent, and simulated

Classical theory of acquaintance (Russell, Lewis, Chalmers) distinguishes three sorts of acquaintance:

- ▶ the sort one has with one's current kind of experience (*occurrent* acquaintance)
- ▶ the sort one has with kinds of experience one has recently undergone or can otherwise imagine (*latent* acquaintance)
- ▶ the sort one has with kinds of experience one is not undergoing but is imagining or remembering undergoing (*simulated* acquaintance)

Varieties of acquaintance

Their jobs

These have distinct jobs:

- ▶ the merely latently acquainted can't token direct concepts;
- ▶ only the occurrently acquainted have certain or evident knowledge;
- ▶ Black-and-White Mary's problem is that she lacks latent acquaintance.

Varieties of acquaintance

Links among them

1. Ordinarily, if one is occurrently acquainted with F , one will be latently acquainted with F for some time afterward;
2. Ordinarily, if one is latently acquainted with F , one has been in the past occurrently acquainted with F ;
3. Ordinarily, if one is latently acquainted with F , one can attain simulated acquaintance with F .

Experience as action

Defining the varieties of acquaintance

- ▶ One has occurrent acquaintance with the kind *A-ing* just if one is *A-ing*;
- ▶ One has simulated acquaintance with the kind *A-ing* just if one is 'A-ing at a projected index' (basically, taking up the point of view of one's past self, another actual person, or a merely possible person, and, within this supposition, *A-ing*);
- ▶ One has latent acquaintance with the kind *A-ing* just if one knows how to *A*.

Experience as action

Explaining the links

1. A-ing requires knowledge how to A, which is a persistent state;
2. Ordinarily, knowledge how to A arises only through A-ing;
3. One knows how to A at a projected index just if one knows how to A simpliciter.

If experience isn't action . . .

Interpreting the modals

How are we to make sense of the various appeals to the 'ordinary' in (1) and (2), and to the 'can' in (3)? Such modal appeals generally rely on some tacitly understood context, but in light of the highly theoretical character of the discussion, the context is not easily fixed.

- ▶ By contrast, my view appeals only to very ordinary notions: various specific concepts of kinds of action, and the general concepts of know-how and projection

If experience isn't action . . .

An asymmetry at the present index

What is the difference between occurrent acquaintance and simulated acquaintance such that latent acquaintance provides the ability to get into the latter but not the former?

- ▶ By contrast, my view can answer this: sometimes external factors prevent doing something which the unconstrained context of projection does not

If experience isn't action . . .

Patterns of know-how

As Stanley and Williamson have observed, 'imagining' is a kind of action, something one knows how to do. By (3), latent acquaintance with F therefore entails with knowledge of how to 'imagine' an F experience. By (1), occurrent acquaintance with F therefore entails knowledge of how to 'imagine' an F experience. But why? Why not a G experience, or no experience at all?

- ▶ By contrast, my theory explains this by appeal to the evident facts that A -ing brings knowledge how to A , and that this is in turn coextensive with knowledge how to A at a projected index.

II. What is evident

- ▶ I am going to argue for a kind of epistemic 'voluntarism'.
- ▶ Argument: if actions are the given then my evidence includes propositions not determined by the given but rather boldly conjectured.
- ▶ Letting 'the evident' for one at a time be those truths on which one should then conditionalize, the evident consists of some of the given together with some other stuff.

Know-how and action

Know-how is conditional

- ▶ One doesn't know how to cross Central Park *simpliciter*, but rather if various 'ordinary' conditions are in play.
- ▶ The form of know-how is *S knows how to A when P*.
- ▶ Bill may know how to *A* when *P* (but not when *Q*), whereas Anne knows how to *A* when *Q* (but not when *P*).

Know-how and action

Know-how and knowledge of action

- ▶ One knows (via first-person authority) that one is *A*-ing just if, for some *P*, one knows that:
 - ▶ one is exercising the knowledge how to *A* when *P*;
and
 - ▶ *P*.
- ▶ Call *P* the ‘success-condition’ of one’s action; call the conjunctive proposition one’s ‘presupposition of practical self-knowledge’.

Know-how and action

Success-conditions are external

- ▶ The success-condition of one's action at t does not supervene on one's intrinsic character at t :
After all, actions are temporally extended and (mental actions aside) spatially extended.
- ▶ It follows that if one knows one is A -ing, one knows some proposition that does not supervene on one's intrinsic character.

The evident, the given, and the taken

The classical view

Lewis, 'Why conditionalize?':

Internalism

The evident entails the given;

- ▶ Internalism about the given, that is: no aspect of the given could be beyond one's epistemic ken

Infallibilism

The evident is entailed by the given.

- ▶ Infallibilism about the evident, that is: it is impermissible to conditionalize on anything 'blankly external' to the contours of subjectivity

The evident, the given, and the taken

The classical view is false

But the classical view is false, if experience is action:

- ▶ Internalism is false because one might be *A*-ing unknowingly: unconfidently but successfully trying to *A*, so to speak;
- ▶ Infallibilism is false because in general it is possible to *A* when *P* and it is possible to *A* when not-*P*.

What then could the given have to do with the evident?

The evident, the given, and the taken

On the taken

The 'taken' for one consists of:

- ▶ The known given;
- ▶ All known presuppositions of one's practical self-knowledge of the known given.

So for example if one is knowingly *A*-ing by exercising the knowledge how to *A* when *P*, the taken for one consists in part of 'I am *A*-ing and I am exercising the knowledge how to *A* when *P* and *P*'.

The evident, the given, and the taken

The evident is the taken

Externalism

The evident entails the taken;

Fallibilism

The evident is entailed by the taken.

Voluntarism

A psychological question

What is the source of one's belief in the success-condition?

- ▶ Not perception
- ▶ Not rational intuition
- ▶ It's independent of the contours of subjectivity
- ▶ It's not epistemically necessary in light of one's evidence prior to deciding to *A*: Hume proved that it is coherent to suppose that our expectations are violated

This belief is the product of a bold conjecture!

Voluntarism

The inevitability of the will to believe

Whenever one has evidence, this includes a claim one believes not because it was somehow forced upon one but because one in effect chose to believe it in choosing to take a certain action.

If the given consists of one's actions, I see no way to preserve a link between the given and the evident without accepting voluntarism.

III. What is reasonable

- ▶ I am going to argue that we as subjects do not have beliefs: instead, beliefs go with particular strands of action.
- ▶ Argument: in light of my voluntarism, accommodating Lewis's 'Dutch book' case for the classical view requires this.

Lewis in a nutshell

When we believe at will

- ▶ The difference between taking oneself to be *A*-ing and taking oneself to be trying to *A* is confidence in success; the similarity is that in both cases one chooses means to optimize one's completed *A*-ing (roughly).
- ▶ Suppose that one is faced with a choice of whether to *A*, to try to *A*, to *B*, or to try to *B*.
- ▶ Since one has not yet chosen whether to even try to *A*, one is not yet confident that one will eventually have *A*-ed.
- ▶ So the choice between *A*-ing and trying to *A* consists in a choice of whether to conditionalize on some success-condition for *A*-ing appropriate to one's know-how: say, *P*.

Lewis in a nutshell

Bad case insurance

- ▶ Prior to the decision, one is not yet certain that P . One buys Bad Case Insurance: for a certain positive sum of money, one will receive a certain larger sum of money in the event that not- P .
- ▶ Suppose that one then decides to A . One conditionalizes on P . One's credence that P is now 1.
- ▶ So now one knows that the Bad Case Insurance won't pay off. So one should trade the policy for a stick of gum.
- ▶ That's cuckoo!

Lewis in a nutshell

Imprudence and contradiction

What is cuckoo about it? Lewis:

the point of any Dutch book argument is not that it would be imprudent to run the risk that some sneaky Dutchman will come and drain your pockets. After all, there aren't so many sneaky Dutchmen around; and anyway, if ever you see one coming, you can refuse to do business with him. Rather, the point is that if you are vulnerable to a Dutch book, whether synchronic or diachronic, that means that you have two contradictory opinions about the expected value of the very same transaction. To hold contradictory opinions may or may not be risky, but it is in any case irrational.

We can massage the contradiction by fixing the imprudence.

Beliefs of strands

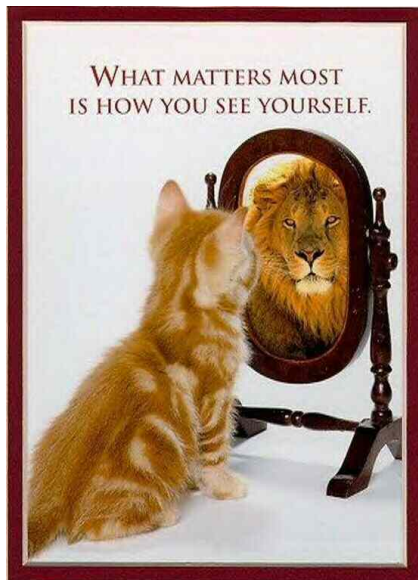
Why be confident?

To ward off a quick response, note that it is provably sometimes practically rational to be confident.

That's complicated so instead I'll show this motivational poster:

Beliefs of strands

Why be confident?



Beliefs of strands

Old actions persist

One initially commenced *A*-ing confidently in order to advance some governing action, a case of *G*-ing. Since the *A*-ing is a means to the *G*-ing, the *G*-ing persists.

We may suppose that one bought the insurance policy in the course of *G*-ing. Since one is still *G*-ing (if perhaps dormant), it is plausible that if in the course of *A*-ing one takes steps to sell the insurance policy, one's *G*-ing will go live and stop this madness.

That is what happens when we take out insurance, then proceed in confidence.

Believing at will is not therefore distinctively imprudent.

Beliefs of strands

Old and new actions have different beliefs

This story only works if the governing action continues in its state of uncertainty whether P . Otherwise it would see nothing wrong with what the means is up to.

It follows that in G -ing, one has a different system of beliefs than one has in A -ing.

The best way to address this is to treat actions as mini versions of classical agents, and agents as bureaucratic hierarchies of actions. On this picture, agents don't have beliefs except relative to actions.

Beliefs of strands

We are incoherent

Subjects are incoherent, harboring strands which, though individually coherent, collectively hold contradictory opinions.

Does that make us irrational?

It certainly doesn't entail that one is ever in a position where one cannot make sense of what one is doing. Perhaps only one action is ever live at one time.

Nor is there any plausible sense in which we should stop doing this. In order to carry on in a complex and uncertain world, agents do best harboring a mix of optimism and pessimism.

Apocalyptic conclusions

Belief has always been at the center of analytic philosophy. If we head off on a path of messing around with belief in the way I have suggested, it will not be long before we reach territory in which things look very different.

Apocalyptic conclusions

The twilight of intentionality

On the view I am advancing, beliefs have a much reduced stature in the philosophy of mind than they have become accustomed to.

In the classical analytic philosophy of mind, intentionality serves as the aspect of mind that is more than mere sensation: the 'rational' or 'personal' aspect. This makes beliefs central to the mind.

In my view, what is central to the mind is action-slash-experience. Actions rationalize and are rationalized; actions constitute the person. Beliefs are a mere instrument in systematizing the rationalizing power of action.

Apocalyptic conclusions

The twilight of knowledge

On the view I am advancing, knowledge has a much reduced stature in epistemology than it has become accustomed to.

Does one *really* know that one will succeed? If so, one should get rid of the insurance policy; if not, one should stop proceeding in confidence. But one shouldn't do either. So *real* knowledge is a chimera.

Instead of investigating knowledge, epistemology should therefore investigate the point of knowledge-discourse. I personally am a fan of the view that its point is to facilitate agreement on who the authorities are. But that is a topic for the bar.