

New Issues in Epistemological Disjunctivism

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17 Ringers for Belief

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1. Introduction

Epistemological Disjunctivism in the epistemology of perception holds that a subject can know that p on the basis of a reason, seeing that p , which is both reflectively accessible and factive, indefeasible, or truth-guaranteeing, as it is variously put. That way of stating the view leaves out the disjunction, though. It is between good cases, cases of seeing that p , and bad cases, such as hallucination, where it merely seems to one that one sees that p .² Against those who accept a “highest common factor” conception of justification for perceptual beliefs, the Disjunctivist insists that the good and bad cases differ in the sort of justification they provide.³ The good case provides better justification than the bad case, specifically truth-guaranteeing justification.⁴ In John McDowell’s hands, Disjunctivism is not restricted to perceptual knowledge; he has defended versions of Disjunctivism for knowledge of other minds (1998a), testimony (1998b), and knowledge generally (1998c). This paper considers a Disjunctivist treatment of self-knowledge of belief, which I will call Disjunctivism about Doxastic Self-Knowledge (DDSK). Specifically, the chapter examines whether such a Disjunctivism faces a well-known objection: that one cannot possess a factive, reflectively accessible reason since the subject cannot distinguish, by reflection alone, whether she is in a good or bad case. Some recent defenders of DDSK have insisted that it doesn’t face this worry. But I don’t think things are so straightforward.

Like other contributions to this volume, this chapter aims to consider a familiar Disjunctivist view in a domain other than perceptual knowledge. And it aims to determine whether the considerations that have been brought to bear against Disjunctivism apply in this other domain. But its aims are also broader than this. I will argue that whether a familiar objection to Epistemological Disjunctivism applies to a Disjunctivist treatment of doxastic self-knowledge depends on how we conceive of conscious judgment. My suggestion at the end will be that the objection can be avoided if we opt for the conception of judgment that has been adopted by some Disjunctivists about perceptual knowledge, but that this

conception faces serious difficulties. This is to say that an additional goal of the chapter is to show how reflection on self-knowledge can bring out something about at least some versions of Epistemological Disjunctivism about perception.⁵

The next section sets out the objection and Disjunctivism about doxastic self-knowledge. Section 3 looks at arguments purporting to show that this Disjunctivism doesn't face the objection. Section 4 articulates a constraint on an adequate theory of self-knowledge: it must explain how the possession of self-knowledge is intelligible from the subject's point of view. Section 5 proposes that self-knowledge is intelligible in light of the experience of conscious judgment. It also argues that, on perhaps the standard conception of conscious judgment, what I call the "inner assertion model", this gives rise to a version of the objection. I conclude by considering an alternative conception of judgment defended by some Epistemological Disjunctivists and suggest that it might fare better. That conception of judgment, and the package of views about self-consciousness and knowledge of which it is a part, are quite radical. The tentative suggestion at the end, then, is that, if our account of self-knowledge is to avoid the familiar objection, we might need to accept the more radical view.

2. Disjunctivism, Indistinguishability, Self-Knowledge

The Disjunctivist position about perceptual knowledge can seem puzzling. Suppose that what is reflectively accessible to one at a time is what one is in a position to know at that time (Gibbons 2006). The Disjunctivist holds that, when you see that *p*, when all goes well, you are in a position to know both that *p* and that you see that *p*. One worry is that, given that good and bad cases are subjectively indistinguishable, it is hard to see how one is in a position to have that self-knowledge when one is in the good case. If the appearances cannot rule out that one is in a bad case, then being in the good case is not sufficient to put one in a position to know that one is. Now John McDowell has long insisted that a false conception of self-consciousness is at the root of this familiar source of resistance to Disjunctivism (1998a, 1998d, 2013, this volume). And, of course, others have offered responses.⁶ For now, it will suffice to note that the "objection from subjective indistinguishability", as we can call it, arises because the knowledge in question, perceptual knowledge, is based on an appearance. Therefore, we should expect the objection to arise in other domains where knowledge is based on an appearance, such as memory, another's say-so, or their behaviour.

It is for this reason that DDSK is thought to be better positioned than its cousins in other areas. Here is a statement of DDSK.

DDSK: One can know that one believes that *p* because one believes that *p* itself. Second-order beliefs are based directly on their truthmakers.

DDSK is a thesis about doxastic self-knowledge, but not yet a full-fledged theory since it doesn't articulate the precise way in which second-order beliefs are based on first-order ones. There are different options here. According to *Constitutivists*, part of what it is to believe that p , in a non-trivial range of cases, is to believe or know that you believe that p (Shoemaker 1996, 2012; Zimmerman 2006; Rödl 2007; Boyle 2011; Travis 2012; Marcus 2016). On this view it is wrong to suppose that one makes a *transition* in thought between the first and second order, or that there is a causal relation between them. Belief is itself a self-conscious condition. Others accept that first and second-order beliefs are, in Hume's terms "distinct existences". Why is the transition from one to the other licit? There are options here, as well. Some philosophers appeal to doxastic agency (Moran 2001), others to the requirements of rationality (Roessler 2013b), and Dorit Bar-On suggests that we are "entitled by default" to self-ascriptions given that they are grounded in their truthmakers, when all goes well (Bar-On 2004: 384).⁷ The Belief Account is a thesis accepted by a family of theories of self-knowledge. Our focus here will be on the thesis.

The thesis should be contrasted with views on which self-knowledge is arrived at by inference from a premise about the world (Byrne 2005), by inference from a premise about one's behaviour about one's behaviour or sensory evidence (Cassam 2014), by inner sense (Armstrong 1968 [1993]), or by introspecting one's conscious experiences (Pitt 2004). On DDSK, self-knowledge of belief is based on belief itself, conceived of as a nonconscious, standing attitude. As I will understand it, DDSK denies that self-knowledge is based on evidence or reasons at all. As we'll see, DDSK holds that self-knowledge is *baseless*.

As others have noted (Bar-On 2004; Zimmerman 2006), DDSK is Disjunctivist because, on it, one can know that one believes that p in virtue of possessing a ground that is both factive and reflectively accessible. Indeed, both conditions are trivially satisfied. According to DDSK, one can form a self-ascription noninferentially on the basis of the self-ascription's truthmaker. Since p entails p , one's ground is factive. And since the method outlined by DDSK just is a method of reflectively accessing one's beliefs, the ground is reflectively accessible. Furthermore, there is an asymmetry in the support one receives between good and bad cases. If you believe that you believe that p because you believe that p , then you are in possession of a truth-guaranteeing ground. But if you spontaneously but falsely believe that you believe that p , then, obviously, you are not (Bar-On and Johnson this volume).

Now it is not entirely clear how to make sense of a bad case on this view, given that the first-person method is simply forming a self-ascription on its truthmaker. What could be an instance of that process, or an exercise of that capacity, gone wrong? Yet we are surely fallible about our beliefs. And we can get things wrong in circumstances where we take ourselves to have

first-person knowledge, that is, where we take ourselves to know what we believe in the way set out by a theory of self-knowledge like DDSK.⁸ We can be wrong about what we believe when we occupy the first-person perspective on our mental states. I will return to this issue later.

Despite being Disjunctivist in the sense outlined, DDSK differs from other versions of Epistemological Disjunctivism because the form of knowledge it specifies isn't possessed on the basis of an appearance. As Bar-On puts it:

When I avow being in M, my epistemic position is *not* one of somehow moving from a judgment that someone, who appears to me to be me, is in some mental state, which appears to me to be M, to the self-ascription that I am in M. I have no reason for thinking that someone is in M, or that I am in some mental state—other than whatever reason I have for thinking, simply, that I am in M.

(2004: 393)

The objection we are considering alleges that when one's ground for believing that *p* is an appearance that *p*, then one cannot rule out, by reflection alone, that one is not fooled by the appearance. But on DDSK, one's ground is not an appearance: it is simply the fact that one believes that *p*, the self-ascription's truthmaker. So there is no question of being fooled by the ground one possesses.

That it simply falls out of DDSK that it doesn't face this objection doesn't clearly speak in its favor, since it might be thought that what looks like a benefit is actually a cost. That's because it might be thought that the view is psychologically unrealistic in failing to make sense of our fallibility in knowing our beliefs. You might think that self-knowledge is like other forms of knowledge in that one's subjective condition could lead one into error or leave one in doubt about whether one is really in a position to know what one believes. However, defenders of DDSK have insisted that this is not so. Here is how Charles Travis puts it:

[H]allucinating the wind blowing your hair is, while improbable, an unproblematic idea as such. Whereas it is difficult to make sense of the idea of hallucinating believing, for example, that Chez Fred has changed its menu. Someone might be presented, in a way he is presented to himself alone, with a ringer for the wind blowing his hair. It is at best difficult to imagine one being presented with a ringer for his believing that Chez Fred has changed the menu—especially in some way he is presented to himself alone.

(Travis 2012: 393)

Now Travis has principled reasons for thinking there isn't a state subjectively indistinguishable from believing that *p*. I will return to these

reasons. In this passage, though, the thought goes that we can't imagine a case where there is a "ringer" for believing that *p*, something about one's condition in virtue of which it would seem to you, in the first-personal way, that you believe that *p*, though you don't. Aaron Zimmerman makes a similar point and explains why we shouldn't expect there to be ringers for belief. His argument goes like this. In the good case one believes that *p*, in the bad case one doesn't. There can't be a ringer for the good case because believing that *p* and not believing that *p* are subjectively distinguishable: when you don't believe that *p* you can tell that you don't. That's because believing that *p* constitutively involves a disposition to consciously judge that *p*, whereas not believing that *p* doesn't.

[A] subject with [a conscious] belief must be so disposed that were she to consider the matter she would occurrently and consciously judge that *p*, then any alteration in a subject's set of [conscious] beliefs will bring with it changes in the kinds of experience to which that subject is prone. There is therefore no reason why a constitutivist should allow that the absence of [a conscious] belief might be subjectively indistinguishable from its presence.

(Ibid.)⁹

Believing that *p* and not believing that *p* seem different from the subject's point of view, because in one case, but not the other, the subject is disposed to consciously judge that *p*.¹⁰

3. Evaluating the Arguments

We have seen two reasons for thinking that there aren't ringers for belief. The first is that there can only be ringers when one's belief is based on an appearance, which it isn't in self-knowledge. The second is that, from the subject's point of view, cases of believing that *p* and not believing that *p* are subjectively distinguishable. They are distinguishable on the grounds that one involves a disposition to judge and the other does not. You can tell whether you believe that *p* or not based on the experience of conscious judgment. Notice that to say this much is not to say that one possesses self-knowledge on the basis of introspecting the experience of conscious judgment. All versions of DDSK agree that one knows what one believes simply on the basis of the belief itself. The point is rather that any purported ringer for belief would actually be a case of belief.

Is this right? Are there really no ringers for belief? I'm not so sure. There are many attitudes that are not belief, but which involve many of the same dispositions as belief. Imagining is an obvious example. More controversial ones are delusion and self-deception. Tamar Gendler (2007) has argued that in cases of self-deception, a subject engages in imaginative pretense that *p*, while believing that not-*p*. Here is a stock example

(Funkhouser 2005). Carol has an overwhelming amount of evidence that her husband is having an affair with her friend. Other friends report seeing his car at the friend's house at night. Much of Carol's behaviour suggests that she is aware of this; for example, at night, when her husband is supposed to be at work, she avoids driving by the friend's house, even when it requires her to go out of her way. Yet, if asked, Carol assures people that her husband is faithful and she thinks this to herself as well, whenever the issue arises. On Gendler's proposal Carol is simply pretending that her husband is faithful. Pretense differs from belief in that it isn't responsive to evidence and doesn't have the same behavioural manifestations (Velleman 2000). (For example, in high-stakes cases one will drop the pretense but act on one's belief.) Despite these differences, pretense disposes one to consciously entertain the content one is imagining. Gendler's view of self-deception is controversial, of course. But the more general point—that in cases of imagining or pretense, a subject is disposed to entertain the content imagined—is highly plausible. It is also plausible in other cases, such as monothematic delusion. Some philosophers think that it is wrong to conceive of states like the Capgras delusion as belief (Currie and Jureidini 2001). But whatever state it is, these subjects are disposed to entertain the content of their state in consciousness and to assert it.

This strongly suggests that, contra Zimmerman, there are states other than believing that *p* that dispose a subject to consciously judge that *p*. Delusion, imagination, pretense, and perhaps self-deception are all plausible, if not wholly uncontroversial cases. If you are fooling yourself, as we say, about whether a spouse is faithful or whether you are well prepared for a job interview, then you are disposed to affirm such things in conscious thought, even though you don't really believe them. But affirming the content in consciousness is subjectively indistinguishable from consciously judging so, when that judgment is the manifestation of one's belief. Further, it is plausible to suppose that in just these cases one will be led astray about what one believes. Delusional subjects take themselves to believe their delusions. Likewise with cases of self-deception. Carol is likely not only to imagine that her husband is faithful, in spite of the evidence to the contrary, but to self-ascribe the belief that he is.¹¹ It may after all not be too difficult to imagine ringers for belief, contra Travis, precisely because other cognitive attitudes dispose one to make conscious judgments, contra Zimmerman. And of course, this is what we should expect, given that we are in need of some explanation of how we can be led astray about what we believe.

One seeming way to resist this conclusion would be by holding that judgment entails belief. If judgment entails belief, then judgments can't be ringers for belief. But this response won't do. Either judgment entails belief or it doesn't. If it doesn't, then there are cases of conscious judgment without belief, and these cases, whatever underlies them, would,

from the subject's point of view, count as ringers. If judgment does entail belief, then we can rephrase the point as follows: there are episodes in consciousness—telling oneself, fooling oneself, imagining—that are subjectively indistinguishable from judging. These episodes are ringers for belief. In such cases, one's thoughts are presented to one in a way they are only presented to one, as beliefs, and yet, one does not believe what one takes oneself to believe. It seems, then, that we should reject Zimmerman and Travis's arguments.

It might be objected that whether there are ringers for belief depends on how we conceive of the phenomenology of conscious judgment. Is there a proprietary phenomenology for each attitude type? Is there something it is like to judge that *p* that is different from what it is like to imagine that *p* or to simply entertain the proposition that *p*? Some philosophers think the answer is yes (Pitt 2004). In their view, each attitude type has a distinctive phenomenology. This topic deserves more attention than I can pay it here. The following will have to do.

For present purposes I assume a particular picture of conscious judgment, what I will call the "inner assertion" model of judgment (cf. Peacocke 1998; Cassam 2010). On this model a conscious judgment is an event in phenomenal consciousness, the sort of thing that makes a difference to what it is like for the subject. Conscious judgment is an act, manifest in conscious experience, of affirming a proposition. It is "inner assertion" because it is an analogue of the public act of assertion. Judgment is a private act of affirming a proposition for oneself. For our purposes it won't matter whether judgment, so conceived, is an action or deed of the agent's (Peacocke 1998). And it won't matter how precisely we think of the phenomenology of conscious judgment, for example, whether it is manifest in auditory or cognitive phenomenology.¹² Now I am not sure how to establish a negative phenomenological claim, and I am not going to run through examples insisting that I don't find a phenomenology of attitude type when I reflect on them. Instead, here are two principled reasons for doubting that there is such a phenomenology.

The first comes from taking the analogy with public assertion seriously. It is plausible to suppose that, qua inner assertion, the phenomenology of judgment is more or less like the phenomenology of outer speech.¹³ It represents a particular content to the subject in a particular medium, in this case some form of imagery. Asserting that *p* sounds the same when it is a lie and when it expresses the speaker's belief. Likewise, one might think that asserting to oneself that *p* will "sound" the same whether this expresses one's belief or is a bad case, like delusion or self-deception. Indeed, it will "sound" the same when it is simply a different kind of act, such as imagining an interlocutor. The second consideration is this. I argued that there are cases where a subject entertains a proposition in thought, but where this is the manifestation of pretense, delusion, or self-deception instead of belief. And in just these cases, the subject is likely

to be in error about what she believes. This strongly suggests that the conscious thought she entertains is subjectively indistinguishable from a judgment that expresses her belief. If we want a plausible explanation of first-person error, we should grant that there are ringers for belief.

But perhaps this is beside the point. Bar-On concedes the possibility we are considering, but argues that it doesn't give rise to a version of the objection from subjective indistinguishability. As she puts it: "We may remain neutral on the *psychological* question whether, when I avow, there is some psychological state I am in that does remain invariant regardless of whether I am in the avowed state or not" (Bar-On 2004: 383 fn. 40, emphasis in original). On DDSK one's ground for self-ascription is one's belief. The objection from subjective indistinguishability gets going when the ground is subjectively indistinguishable from a corresponding bad case. But the ringers we have considered are not like that. At the level of grounds, then, there is no cause for concern. Indeed, it might be thought that ours is a happy development for the Disjunctivist, since, as we saw, she needs to explain what happens in bad cases. We now have an explanation: in a bad case one is misled by one's conscious judgment (or an episode in consciousness indistinguishable from judgment) into thinking that one believes that *p*, when one doesn't. But in the good case, one's ground is simply the fact that one holds the belief. There isn't a ringer for this.

This is right, as a claim about the consequences of DDSK, and further, unlike Travis and Zimmerman's claim, it is backed by something psychologically realistic. Stuart Hampshire observed that when someone makes a claim to self-knowledge, for example, by saying "I believe that *p*", it is typically inappropriate to ask her *how* she knows it (Hampshire 1979). While we ask people to defend and justify their beliefs, we don't ask for evidence or reasons for a subject's self-ascriptions. Now Hampshire implausibly concluded from this observation that there isn't any explanation at all for one's self-knowledge. We needn't follow him there (after all, DDSK is such an explanation).¹⁴ Still, the most natural conclusion to draw from Hampshire's observation is that we don't ask for reasons or evidence because self-ascriptions *aren't based* on evidence, at least of the sort that would be apt in conversation. In this spirit, philosophers have claimed that first-person knowledge is baseless, groundless, or silent (McDowell 1998d; Wright 1998; O'Shaughnessy 2000). As Johannes Roessler puts it, "the first-person perspective affords no insight into how we know what we believe" (2013b: 1). The Disjunctivist's claim that self-ascriptions of belief aren't based on appearances sits well with our practices of avowing mental states.

I have argued that there is something subjectively indistinguishable between good and bad cases, specifically the judgment that *p* (or an episode in consciousness indistinguishable from judging that *p*). But whether *that* matters—that is, whether it gives rise to a version of the objection

from subjective indistinguishability—depends on the role of conscious judgment in the possession of self-knowledge. It might be thought that, since conscious experience is not the basis of self-knowledge of belief, and since it is inappropriate even to ask the avowing subject for her reasons, conscious judgment doesn't play a significant role. But that is too quick. Even if we concede that the objection doesn't arise at the level of grounds, it might arise elsewhere. In the next section I explain what role conscious judgment plays in the possession of self-knowledge and how this gives rise to a version of the objection.

4. The Intelligibility of Self-Knowledge

DDSK denies that, when one knows what one believes in the first-personal way, one's ground is a conscious judgment. But I think conscious judgment still plays an important role in the possession of self-knowledge, such that the fact that there are ringers for conscious judgment poses a problem for DDSK. That role is this: rendering the possession of self-knowledge intelligible to the subject. Given some of the peculiarities of self-knowledge (it is based on its truthmaker, it is groundless, it is not subject to the "how do you know?" question, etc.) it should not be surprising that we need to invoke less familiar ideas to make sense of it. The basic idea I have in mind is brought up by Johannes Roessler in a defense of Stuart Hampshire's account of our knowledge of our future intentional actions (2013a). On Hampshire's view, "your practical reasoning can make it intelligible how you are in a position to know what you will do" (Ibid.: 51). He writes:

Even a non-philosopher who declares she will come to the meeting may find her possession of the knowledge expressed in her statement unmysterious in the light of the practical reasoning on which the statement is based. This should not be taken to mean that she has a good answer to the question "*How do you know* you'll come to the meeting?" For that question is naturally heard as a question about the means by which she obtained her knowledge; and as indicated, in the normal case she will not have employed any means. Still, it is clear to her, given her awareness of her grounds for the statement, that she did not make her statement irresponsibly. It is not, for example, as if the statement were merely a matter of speculation or wishful thinking. On the one hand, then, she is aware of having good grounds for her statement; on the other hand, clearly her grounds are not adequate evidence for the truth of the statement.

(2013a: 52; emphasis in original)

I want to bring out four related features of the idea of intelligibility at play here. First, the fact about the subject's condition in the light of which

her possession of self-knowledge is intelligible needn't be evidence, that is, something that is taken to support the truth of what is believed. Your practical reasons don't support the proposition that you will act in that way. Second, self-knowledge isn't subject to the "how do you know?" question, where an answer cites a non-circular reason for belief. So the idea of rendering self-knowledge intelligible isn't the same as justifying it or defending it with reasons. Third, what renders the self-ascription intelligible reveals to the subject that she is responsible in making it, and, fourth, this is manifest in her being able to rule out alternatives to her possessing self-knowledge, such as that she is confused, self-deceived, or engaging in wishful thinking.

Here is how this applies to our case. Suppose I take myself to know that I believe that *p* and I tell you this. My claim to know cannot be challenged on the basis of my reasons, evidence, or sources. Self-ascriptions aren't subject to ordinary forms of criticism and doubt (Bar-On 2004). But one shouldn't get carried away with first-person authority. Even if we cannot challenge self-ascriptions in *that* way—by asking the "how can you tell?" question—there are others. You might challenge me by suggesting that I am insincere, confused, or deluded. You suggest that I am not in a position to know my own mind. And if you can issue me a challenge like that, I can issue it to myself. I can wonder whether I am confused or self-deceived, if I am really in a position to know. The thought, then, is that there must be something about my condition in virtue of which I can rule out these alternatives.

We can get a handle on the idea of intelligibility by considering how challenges like this are met in the interpersonal case.

Suppose a friend tells you that she believes that climate change is a hoax perpetuated by the Chinese government. Surprised, you ask: "Do you really believe that?" This is a way of challenging the self-ascription: you imply that your friend is insincere or confused. What might she say in response? Hampshire is surely right that she won't go on to provide reasons that support the claim that she believes that climate change is a hoax. We could say: she won't *justify* her self-ascription. But that doesn't mean that there is nothing for her to say. Instead, what she is likely to do is offer support for the first-order belief itself. She'll provide reasons for believing that climate change is a hoax, respond to some well-known objections, and maybe defend others who hold it. In doing this, she isn't providing you with reasons for the proposition that she believes that climate change is a hoax, since the considerations adduced aren't evidence about what she believes at all. (She doesn't say: "I have a real weakness for wild conspiracies and right wing propaganda".) She doesn't provide evidence that she holds the belief; she manifests the belief or expresses it in her behaviour. What she says doesn't provide you with reasons for believing that she believes that climate change is a hoax, but the fact that she says these things does. In the interpersonal case, then, a subject can

reveal that she is in a position to know, and so rule out that she is self-deceived, by expressing her belief or providing a rationalizing explanation of it.

That's the interpersonal case. How does it work in the intrapersonal case? How can a subject render her possession of self-knowledge intelligible to herself? We are looking for something about the subject's condition in virtue of which it makes sense to her that she is in a position to know what she believes. Here is an answer: the fact that she believes. The first-order belief itself figures in one's subjective point of view and renders one's possession of self-knowledge intelligible. The response here involves treating doxastic self-knowledge on a par with knowledge of one's sensations and phenomenally conscious events more generally. But beliefs are nonconscious states. So I don't think the quick response will work; we cannot treat doxastic self-knowledge on a par with our knowledge of our conscious experiences (Moran 2001; Boyle 2009). Indeed, this is what we should expect if we take seriously the idea that we don't know what we believe by any method or conscious procedure. Wittgensteinian quibbles notwithstanding, there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with responding to challenges to self-ascriptions of sensations by saying: "yes, I am nauseous; I can *feel it!*"¹⁵ In the case of sensations, we can safely assume that the same fact that provides one with a reason for self-ascription—the conscious experience—renders that self-ascription intelligible from your point of view. But it can't work that way for one's beliefs since beliefs aren't episodes in conscious experience.

5. Subjective Indistinguishability Again

It should be clear where we are headed. The experience of conscious judgment renders the possession of self-knowledge intelligible from the subject's point of view. Conscious judgment plays the same role, for the subject, that manifesting one's belief by justifying does for others. It makes sense to you that you are in a position to know what you believe because, from your point of view, it strikes you that *p* is the thing to think. You can, as it were, feel yourself affirming it. Notice, again, this has nothing to do with the grounds for one's self-ascription. One knows what one believes because one believes it. But when a challenge to one's position to know arises, this can be met by attending to the experience of judgment.

This is why it matters that there are ringers for belief. Think back to Carol. Suppose that you confront her with her self-deception. You suggest that she has good reason for avoiding the evidence and trying to escape from seriously entertaining the question whether her spouse is having an affair. You survey the evidence that she herself possesses, and you suggest that, deep down, she really believes that he is having an affair, perhaps even that she knows this. But, as a committed self-deceiver, Carol resists. She undermines your evidence, perhaps not in an

entirely convincing way, and she avows that she believes that he is faithful. Afterward, she leaves, thinking to herself that he is, surely faithful. Now, *ex hypothesi*, Carol does not believe this. She is merely telling it to herself, engaging in some soothing imaginative pretense or fantasy. But, from her point of view, she is (or seems to be) judging that *p*. She is not in a position to know her own mind, and yet, from her point of view, it seems that she is, it seems that “my husband is faithful” is the thing to think, and that she affirms this.

That’s the bad case, but things are the same in the good case. How can we respond to the challenge that we aren’t in a position to know our minds? We know from personal experience and experimental psychology that we are often self-deceived. We are often irrational, confused, and so on. How can we assure ourselves that we are in a position to know? I have claimed that the experience of conscious judgment does this for us. But since there are ringers for belief, it seems that we cannot take ourselves to have hold of a factive reason for belief. We cannot say, “of course I believe that *p* because I believe that *p*!” since that is precisely how things would strike us if we were self-deceived or confused. We can grant that the objection from subjective indistinguishability does not arise at the level of grounds or reasons, but it does arise for intelligibility, our ability to rule out that we aren’t in a position to know our minds. This is enough to show that DDSK is faced with an analogous, and serious, objection.¹⁶

One might object as follows.¹⁷ Suppose we assume a Functionalist conception of belief. We are considering two experiences, sincerely manifesting one’s belief in judging that *p* and its merely seeming as if one is doing that. These experiences are either associated with the same functional role, or they are not. If they are, then they are the same state, and there is no subjective indistinguishability between distinct states. If they are not, if they are manifestations of different states, then there is bound to be some introspectible difference between them.

We can happily grant that any difference in functional role entails a difference in what is introspectibly discernible, but only in the following sense. If two states are functionally different, then there will be some circumstance in which the states are manifest in ways that render them introspectibly distinct. There will be some circumstances in which, by reflection alone, one can tell that one doesn’t believe that *p*, if one doesn’t. But that is irrelevant to the present point. The objection I am pressing against DDSK doesn’t require that there are two states that are subjectively indistinguishable in every situation; it requires only that for any conscious judgment, there is a state of appearing to judge that is subjectively indistinguishable from that experience. That is, the objection requires only subjective indistinguishability of an experience at a particular time.

Still there may be an important difference between perceptual knowledge and self-knowledge. You might think that what’s especially vertigo-inducing

about the perceptual case is that one can be fooled by a ringer through no fault of one's own. That is, no matter how well you attend, reflect, and introspect, you can't tell that you are in the bad case when you are. By contrast, you might think that self-knowledge is immune from "brute error": any errors in forming beliefs about your beliefs are attributable to irrationality or some kind of mistake on your part (Burge 1996). Even if there are ringers for belief, we shouldn't be troubled by them in the way that we are troubled by hallucination.

Let's grant that self-knowledge is immune from brute error and that ringers for belief always involve irrationality, insincerity, or something else going wrong. The worry is that this undermines the claim that good and bad cases are subjectively indistinguishable. That's because you might suppose that two items are indistinguishable if and only if a subject cannot tell the difference between them no matter how well she tries. That is how it works in the perceptual case. Hallucinations are subjectively indistinguishable from perceptions because, if I am under a hallucination, no amount of focused introspection of my perceptual state can reveal to me that I am not perceiving. But if ringers for belief require a failure on my end, then it would seem to follow that there is something I can do to reveal to myself that I am in the bad case when I am.

If ringers for belief require irrationality, then there is something one can do to recognize that one is in the bad case, namely overcome irrationality, see through one's own self-deception, and so on. But we should reject the proposed interpretation of subjective indistinguishability. Subjective indistinguishability concerns how two conscious experiences seem from the subject's point of view. Overcoming irrationality is not a matter of attending better to the subjective character of one's experience. This difference between the cases of self-knowledge and perceptual knowledge doesn't undermine the parallel point about subjective indistinguishability.¹⁸

6. The "Creative Nature" of Judgment

Perhaps it shouldn't come as a surprise that the objection has reemerged at the level of intelligibility. DDSK denies that self-knowledge is based on an appearance: one's ground is the self-ascription's truthmaker. But self-knowledge is intelligible in light of the experience of conscious judgment. I have assumed what I called the "inner assertion" model of conscious judgment. And on that model, conscious judgment is a sort of appearance. It is something one can observe or "hear" in one's head. Since we have reintroduced the idea of an appearance, we shouldn't be surprised that the objection has returned. That introduction was well-motivated, though, for four reasons. First, something must explain how false self-ascriptions are arrived at in the first-personal way. Second, examples like self-deception reveal that there must be something psychological shared between good and bad cases. Third, it is plausible to suppose that

conscious judgment renders the possession of self-knowledge intelligible to the subject. Finally, fourth, it was appropriate to introduce the particular model of conscious judgment we have looked at, the inner assertion model, because, arguably, it is the dominant one in the literature. I want to end by considering whether we can avoid the objection by adopting a different conception of conscious judgment. We'll see that perhaps we can, but that there are costs of doing so.

Charles Travis thinks there aren't ringers for belief. Earlier, we considered the idea that this claim is supported by the absence of examples. But he also offers principled reasons. His suggestion is that there cannot be ringers for belief because belief has a "creative nature". Here is what he means. In Travis's view, belief involves a feeling of rational compulsion.

To believe is to be under the sway, or influence, of something: (one's encountering of) things being as they are. To be under such influence is to feel it—to feel compelled to think as one thus does. One might think of belief in this respect as Lutheran: one so stands towards things, unable to do other.

(2012: 396)

Talk of feeling here certainly suggests that this is an event in conscious experience, though, as he emphasizes the feeling is of *rational* rather than *psychological* compulsion (Ibid.). At a minimum it seems that what Travis has in mind is a certain *event*, that of finding oneself under a compulsion. For this reason, it seems plausible to suppose that what he says here applies to an act of judgment as well as the state of belief; indeed, it is easier to understand it in that case, since it is hard to see how the state of believing that *p*, which one is in while sleeping, would always involve a feeling. On the picture, judgment is self-conscious: to be under a rational compulsion is to feel it, that is, to be aware of oneself as under it. But there is more: the self-conscious element is constitutive of or sufficient for the act of judging. As he puts it:

I cannot, while seeing nothing else for me to think, treat the question as open whether so to think. Nor can I treat the question as closed without believing. . . . My so seeing myself is my *having* nothing else to think. So it just *is* my believing things to be the way in question. My view of myself thinking as I do is in this way decisive. If I so see myself, the question what to think . . . is settled for me.

(Ibid.: 398, emphasis in original)

If I am aware of myself as under a compulsion to affirm that *p*, in the first-personal way, then it just *follows* that I do believe that *p*. The creativity lies in this: the self-conscious element—self-awareness of an act of judgment—is *sufficient* for the state of which it is conscious. There is no

gap between having *that* sort of awareness and believing, so there is no possibility of a ringer.

I want to draw attention to the fact that a view very much along these lines has been invoked by some Epistemological Disjunctivists about perceptual knowledge to rebut the subjective indistinguishability worry. Here are some representative passages.

According to the internalism I have been elaborating, someone who makes a perceptually knowledgeable judgment knows, at least implicitly, that her ground for her judgment is an experience in which it is manifest to her that things are as she judges them to be. And that knowledge of her ground is an act of the same capacity for knowledge that is in act in the perceptually knowledgeable judgment she makes on that ground, the capacity for perceptual knowledge of how things are in the world. Her knowledge of what grounds her judgment is part of the self-consciousness with which she engages in the act of the capacity for perceptual knowledge that her perceptually knowledgeable judgment is.

McDowell (pp. 34–35)

Her belief that *p* on the basis of her perception that *p* realizes two kinds of knowledge in one and the same act: knowledge about how things are around her as well as self-knowledge about how she knows these things around her.

Kern (2017: 122)

[I]f my first person thought is true, then I know that it is true from spontaneity. When I know that *p*, exercising my power of receptive knowledge, my receptively knowing that *p* and my knowing that I receptively know it are one reality.

Rödl (2007: 145)

On this view, perceptual judgment is a self-conscious act involving awareness of one's judgment thanks to awareness of its ground in perceptual experience. One knows that one judges that *p* thanks to one's encountering, in perception, things being that way. My claim is not that these writers commit to Travis's picture of judgment in all its details. But there are strong affinities with Travis's view here, even if these philosophers don't make use of the concepts of feeling or rational compulsion.¹⁹ If, as Rödl puts it, knowing that *p* and knowing that I know that *p* are "one reality", then it would seem that one couldn't be confronted in the first-personal way with what seems to be an act of knowing that *p*, say, thanks to one's capacity for perceptual knowledge, which wasn't an instance of *at least*, believing that *p*. For, as they are quick to point out, these philosophers do not assume that we cannot be wrong about whether we *know that p*. In a bad case, when under a hallucination, both one's perceptual

experience and one's self-consciousness is "defective": one is mistaken both in believing that *p* and in believing that one knows and sees that *p* (De Bruijn et al. 2018: 100–101). Still, if this self-consciousness is part of what it is to exercise one's capacity for perceptual judgment, in good and bad cases, then it is hard to see how one could have the relevant form of self-consciousness without it being self-consciousness of an act of judgment.

Like Travis, these Disjunctivists deny that a judgment is a certain way of representing that *p*, in inner speech rather than outer; instead, it is an implicitly self-referential act of affirming a proposition in awareness of its ground. In judging that *p*, one represents oneself (implicitly) as under the authority of what one takes to be a reason.²⁰ Hence, it is thought, being in a position to know that *p*, by seeing that *p*, is sufficient to put one in a position to know that one sees that *p*, and so know that one knows that *p*.

It is *this* picture of judgment and self-consciousness in judgment to which McDowell and others have appealed as part of their response to the objection from subjective indistinguishability for the case of perceptual knowledge (McDowell 1998a, 1998d, 2013, this volume; Rödl 2007; Kern 2017; Haddock this volume). According to them, the objection gets going by assuming that knowing that one sees that *p* must be achieved by some capacity other than one's capacity for perceptual knowledge, something like an infallible capacity of inner sense. But on the alternative view, one knows that one sees that *p* by the very same means as one knows that *p*: through one's capacity for perceptual knowledge. Having justification for my belief that *p* brings with it, for free, justification for believing that I see that *p* and believe that *p*.

It isn't my aim here to assess this view on its merits, at least as a response to the objection from subjective indistinguishability for perceptual knowledge. Instead, I want to consider the view of self-consciousness in judgment. There is something to be said for this conception and something against it. I'll end by mentioning both.

We already know what is to be said for it. If there is no gap between awareness of conscious judgment and belief, then, as Travis claims, there are no ringers for belief. And if there are no ringers for belief, then the objection from subjective indistinguishability doesn't face the Disjunctive conception of doxastic self-knowledge. That this should be important to Disjunctivists about self-knowledge should be clear.²¹

But avoiding the objection comes at the cost of rejecting our earlier claim: that our capacity for first-person knowledge is fallible and thus that there is something subjectively indistinguishable between good and bad cases, something that misleads us when we err about our own minds. To deny this seems, on the face of it, quite implausible. It seems to require denying the familiar (and less familiar) examples of self-deception, imagination, and delusion. More generally, the worry is that denying that there

is a gap between the experience of judgment and the reality of belief requires accepting that we are infallible about our beliefs. Of course, it must be said that defenders of this picture of judgment largely deny that we are infallible.²² But they avoid that commitment by adopting other radical claims. Zimmerman argues that errors in self-ascriptions are always attributable to other forms of evidence (like observation or inference from behaviour) and so do not genuinely arise from the first-person perspective (2006). Otherwise, one might reject the commitment by rejecting the view that “I” is a referring term (Haddock this volume). Travis holds that self-ascriptions of belief (and other mental states) aren’t really the expressions of knowledge at all. Such claims aren’t liable to error because they are not “environmentally embedded” (Travis 2012: 407–408). If according a status (such as “believing that p”) to an object cannot come apart from the object’s having that status, then no “question of truth turns on claims according the status” (Ibid.).²³ That these are highly controversial claims should, I take it, be clear.

It appears, then, that we face a dilemma, for the following two claims are inconsistent:

FALLIBILITY: Our capacity for first-person knowledge is fallible, in the sense that it is possible to be presented, in the first-personal way, with what seems like a belief, but is not.

CREATIVITY:²⁴ Necessarily, if you take yourself to believe that p in the first-personal way, you believe that p.

If Fallibility is true, then there are ringers for belief, and the objection from subjective indistinguishability gains purchase. This is true even if one accepts DDSK, since there are ringers for that which we would appeal to in meeting challenges to our self-ascriptions. On the other hand, if Creativity is true, then there aren’t ringers for belief. If you are presented to yourself as believing that p in the first-personal way, by judging that p, then it just follows that you do believe that p. But this seems out of step with our common sense understanding of our own fallibility, and, perhaps worse, it may require that we accept a radical view of self-knowledge as either infallible or as failing to be genuine knowledge altogether.²⁵ I am not sure which horn of this dilemma to grab, but I do think it confronts the Disjunctivist about self-knowledge.

Notes

1. I have benefitted from written comments from Dorit Bar-On, Lucy Campbell, Joe Milburn, Ben Sorgiovanni, and Preston Stovall. Some of the material was presented at the University of Helsinki and the Oxford Mind Work in Progress Seminar. Thanks to the participants and especially to Anil Gomes, Alexander Green, and Nick Shea. Finally, as will be clear, I have been helped a great deal by the other contributions to this volume.

2. Nothing here hangs on the characterization of the content of perception as propositional, nor on which side of the disjunction we place illusion.
3. This is what French (2016) calls the Disjunctivist's negative thesis, it is the rejection of the New Evil Genius Hypothesis.
4. This specification of the way in which the good case lends better support is what French calls the Disjunctivist's "positive thesis", *ibid.*
5. I say "some" since, for example, Pritchard (2012) doesn't develop any particular view about introspection or reflective access to one's mental states.
6. Neta (2008) argues that subjective indistinguishability is asymmetric: when you are in the bad case you can't tell that you aren't in the good case, but when you are in the good case you can tell that you are. Pritchard (2012) responds to the objection by distinguishing between 'favouring' and 'distinguishing' evidence. One's total evidence can favor the good case even though one cannot distinguish them.
7. It is worth emphasizing that Bar-On suggests but does not commit to this view. See her (2004: ch. 9), as well as Bar-On and Johnson, this volume.
8. For this reason it does not seem to me plausible that false self-ascriptions can always be chalked up to "third-personal" sources of information about oneself, like observation or inference, as Zimmerman (2006) claims.
9. Zimmerman couches his point in terms of access conscious beliefs, Constitutivism, and a background commitment to Functionalism. This is because he defends Shoemaker's Functionalist Constitutivist account of self-knowledge. But none of these commitments are necessary for his general point, which I have captured in dispositional terms.
10. For our purposes we can treat withholding belief as a case of not believing.
11. That self-deception involves a failure of self-knowledge is convincingly argued by Holton (2001), Funkhouser (2005).
12. See the essays collected in Bayne and Montague (2011).
13. 'Phenomenology' is used here to refer to the distinctive "what it's likeness" of an experience, as opposed to the first-person investigation of the structure of conscious mental life.
14. See Cassam (2009) for discussion.
15. Falvey (2000) makes a similar point.
16. It is worth emphasizing that this issue arises because belief is a nonconscious standing attitude. It seems to me that it would make sense to respond in this way to challenges to self-ascriptions of sensations like pain.
17. I am grateful to Ben Sorgiovanni for raising this issue.
18. Thanks to Lucy Campbell and Ben Sorgiovanni for raising these worries.
19. The view is anticipated by Cook Wilson: "The consciousness that the knowing process is a knowing process must be contained within the knowing process itself" (1926: 107).
20. On "implicitly", see Boyle (2011).
21. To be clear: the discussions from which the passages are quoted earlier are not concerned with the question of whether there are ringers for belief. I am not assuming that McDowell, Kern, and Rödl would necessarily agree with Bar-On, Travis, and Zimmerman. I am only drawing attention to the affinity between Travis's view of judgment and theirs, and so the relevance of the current discussion to the analogous issue in the case of perceptual knowledge.
22. Cook Wilson is an exception.
23. Travis tries to explain away cases of self-deception (see 2012: 401–402). I won't go into his discussion here. It is sufficient for our purposes that he denies that one can be presented in the first-personal way as if one believed that *p* when one doesn't. And that is at odds with our earlier discussion.

24. So named for Travis's way of putting the point. Creativity is not quite the same thing as Constitutivism, a view mentioned earlier. The latter view holds that, necessarily, if you believe that *p*, you believe that you believe that *p* (Shoemaker 1996; Boyle 2011). Others hold that, necessarily, if you believe that you believe that *p*, then you believe that *p* (Heal 1994; Bilgrami 2006; Coliva 2016). Both are claims about the nature of the state of first- or second-order belief. Creativity is a thesis about an act of 'taking' oneself to believe that *p*, i.e. being presented with what one takes to be a belief in the first-personal way, which I have claimed is realized in an act of self-conscious judgment. One could accept that a self-conscious feeling of rational compulsion is sufficient for belief while denying that first-order belief entails second-order belief and that second-order belief entails first-order belief.
25. There is another reason for someone of a Disjunctivist temperament to be suspicious of Creativity. Some Disjunctivists diagnose their opponents as assuming what Martin calls a 'substantive epistemic principle', namely that there are aspects of the subjective realm about which we are infallible (2004: 50). (See also the Introduction to this volume, sec. 2, and McDowell 2013). The Disjunctivist who denies that there is anything about the subjective about which we are infallible should reject Creativity. Our minds are a part of the environment, and we are liable to error about them.

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