

Closing in on Dualism

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Let us start with what appears to be a congruence of viewpoint shared by Jesse Butler (Butler 2015) and myself (Holbrook 2014). We both agree on two things:

(1) Objectless knowing is not tantamount to mere personal bias, false impressions, illusions, distortions imposed by the mind, or in other words is not tantamount to subjectivity in contradistinction to whatever may constitute objective truth. As Butler writes, “I do not mean that the knowledge [of my own experience] is subjective in the sense of being inaccurate with regard to the objective world” (Butler 2015, 23).

(2) Objectless knowing is infallible in that it is not about propositional statements of truth. Hence, it is neither falsifiable nor verifiable. “I do say that phenomenal knowledge is infallible, but only in the deflationary sense that it contains no propositional content by which it could possibly be fallible, or inaccurate” (Butler 2015, 23).

Where is Sensory Experience?

However, our agreement so far—if I am correct about this—even so rests on somewhat precarious grounds and for the following reasons.

First, I have misgivings that “phenomenal knowledge can be understood as an objective feature of the world, despite the fact that it is an objectless kind of knowledge” (Butler 2015, 23). And it seems that my hesitation about this is justified on the basis of the incessant and ongoing debate as to the whereabouts of sensory experience (Smythies 2012, 225; Robbins 2013, 169; Velmans 2007). To use examples from Butler’s book, a color, a bodily sensation, the taste of chocolate, the smell of wasabi (Butler 2013, 62, 66, 73). Well where are they—that color, sensation, that taste and smell? Are they restricted to the head and hence objectless?

The issue underlying such questions is: whether sensory experience is located indoors (in cranium) or outdoors (extra-cranial)? Now there may be phenomenal knowledge that is objectless, but in taking as among his examples such qualia experiences as taste and smell, it seems to me Butler has entailed a mighty task before him: It’s one thing to claim that one’s mind is the private enclosure of phenomenal knowledge. It’s quite another to show and demonstrate how and why qualia are delimited to that enclosure, rather than permeating the world and objects in the world. One cannot simply assumed they are delimited. That begs the question.

Butler himself, in mentioning externalist philosophers like Tye and others, acknowledges or at least implies in his JCS article the ongoing debate over where to locate qualia such as redness, etc. (Butler 2011, 135). Furthermore, it doesn’t add support (in my opinion) to say that one’s subjectivity [in a nonpejorative sense] and one’s experience of it are a feature of the objectively real world, or to say that phenomenal knowledge “exists in the

world as a feature of my embodied existence as a subject”, and yet still keep objectless knowledge offbounds from objects in the world, unless one first grounds that offbounds thesis on a full-fledged investigation of where sensory experience belongs. The embodiment philosophers say it’s in the world. The representationalists and cognitivists say in the head. Clash of civilizations, you might call it.

The problem is this and Searle unwittingly, it seems, hit upon it when he writes:

... where conscious subjectivity is concerned, there is no distinction between the observation and the thing observed, between the perception and the object perceived. The model of vision works on the presupposition that there is a distinction between the thing seen and the seeing of it. But for ‘introspection’ there is simply no way to make the separation (Butler 2013, 25).

That’s precisely the point! Look out the window. Where is the demarcation between the observation and the thing observed? Do you see it? I don’t see it. I don’t even see the demarcation between the observer and the observing. All I see is the observed. The only way I can reify a distinction is by adopting the artifice of Cartesian dualism (i.e., a 3rd person perspective) whereby a little amorphous me pretends to hover outside of nature and define a distinction in the abstract between the experiencer “me” and my experience (Strawson 2003). Hence, conscious subjectivity can’t have claim to legitimacy on the basis of Searle’s differentiation.

There may indeed be qualia that are not about sensory experience, not about taste and smell and sight, just as there may be phenomenal knowledge that is objectless. That’s a different story. The problem as I see arises from some examples Butler used in his book. They were about taste, smell, redness, etc. (Butler 2013, 66, 73).

Can the NOW be Both Phenomenal (internally restricted) and in the External Sensory Realm?

While we cannot speak of the NOW as being itself sensory (it doesn't answer to one of our sense organs), it nevertheless can be maintained that we know of the NOW, its evidence shows up, by our being awake to the world, as opposed to dreaming and subjective fantasies. (I speak of lucid dreams below.) And that is my argument for why the NOW is external. We know of it via sensory means—events, changes around us, etc., not by what comes from us. Butler suggests that the NOW is both external and phenomenally restricted as well (2015, 24), but where or how do we find the evidence for a bipartite NOW? Where are we to look for evidence of such bifurcation? In nature? In sensory experience? In dreams?

Objectless *Knowing*

Aside from the locality issue, another reason for my hesitation on the initial two points of agreement concerns that second point of apparent accord concerning infallibility. Let’s suppose the taste of wasabi, or the taste of chocolate, can be a phenomenal knowing that

is cranium-restricted, even if the person tasting is actually deluded and only imagining it's wasabi or chocolate she's tasting; likewise, Jack and his emotions (Butler 2013, 71).

Let's say they're infallible, even if from everyone else's perspective they're blind and delusional. Assuming everyone else's opinion constitutes an objective judgment in the objective world, it seems we can therefore legitimately suppose that Jack is mistaken about his phenomenal knowing, more specifically about his emotions. One can contend that his emotions belong to his private world, and in that respect are an infallible knowing. But the infallibility is subjective, nonetheless, subjective "in the sense of being inaccurate with regard to the objective world", according to our shared meaning of subjectivity (Butler 2015, 23). Furthermore, the question arises whether we can legitimately call the infallible knowing in this case a "knowing" in the first place?

Let's consider the Mary colorblind scenario. In this case Mary is presumed not to be misconstruing. When Mary sees the color red for the first time (or has the color red experience for the first time), it may be that she mislabels what she sees or calls it xyz, but she does know what she sees; hence, infallible knowing. She knows the experience correctly regardless of what name she gives it. At least, the way the thought experiment is posed, it's not of a kind where an experience, such as a taste, is taken for something other than it is. The problem in her case is whether seeing the color red for the first time constitutes new knowledge. Mary, in other words, is not suffering from sensory dysfunction.

By contrast, in the misconstrual scenario I proposed above relating to the taste and smell examples, the issue concerns mistaking one's private experience for a different experience. Misconstruing the taste of chocolate as horse radish, or wincing in pain at the smell of wasabi, or in the case of Jack, construing one's violent emotions as nonviolent. The cognitive and experienced understanding is itself in error. How do we describe such misunderstanding? As knowing or misknowing? True belief? False belief? Shouldn't we limit knowledge and objectless knowing to true belief? And furthermore, apply to the misunderstanding and misconstrual features of these cases the label "subjectivity" in the pejorative sense we have both agreed on?

On the other hand, if we do that, is the knowing still objectless and non-propositional?

Again, I am not denying that there may be objectless experiences that are internally derived and not sensory in an external sense. But once we tap the latter, it becomes harder to vouch for objectlessness and the validity of a knowing that is not in fact subjectivity that is "inaccurate with regard to the objective world."

Clairvoyant Dreams

One category of experience that can be defended as objectless knowing is clairvoyant dreams in that they shun the immediate sensory experience we open our eyes to when awake. Of course ordinary dreams are fantasy. They are our fabrications. But what about lucid dreams or altered states of mind where it is claimed that the experiencer wakes up to a reality that is not the everyday world (Shanon, 2003)? It seems what this actually

translates to is neither objectless knowing nor subjectivity in a pejorative sense but exposure to a metaphysical reality of some kind that comes to the experiencer, just as the everyday world we are awake to comes to us via sensory means. So we end up in this case with neither sealed off subjectivity nor sealed off objectless knowing, but knowing that impinges upon and is impinged upon by some kind of an outside world and its objects. After all, what is lucidity if not awakening to a world of some kind?

What About Pain, Thoughts, Feelings and Hunches, Moods, Depression, Inter-Subjectivity, Core Consciousness?

Obviously it is not my intention to attempt to address all of these parameters of mental activity here, but rather simply raise a suspicion. It was Descartes who struck upon this cleavage between mind and extended things, claiming that the one phenomenon he could be certain of was *cogitans*—that he was in fact thinking. By contrast there are philosophers like Strawson who claim the one thing they can be certain of is conscious experience (Strawson 2006). My suspicion is that most of those terms in boldface above are hooked on to the latter, namely experience, conscious and sensory experience. The constructivist may say: You are constructing the fact that you're awake. The answer? You have to be awake to do the constructing of the condition that you're awake—chicken and egg question.

When I close my eyes, a lot might go on in my mind, none of it particularly clairvoyant. I would contend that what goes on in my mind comes from my mind, its imaginings, memories, and so forth, and hence is not a knowing that comes with being awake to the world, but one version or another of subjectivity in the sense that both Butler and I have agreed upon.

Closing in on Dualism

I agree with Butler that we humans cannot but be a part of nature, creatures intriguingly related to animals despite civilization. And therefore even objectless knowing must be out there in nature and a part of nature, as Butler says (Butler 2015, 24). But even so, isn't there a dualism implied by “objectless knowing”, a divide between the purely phenomenal and the outer sensory world? And between the knower's isolate knowing and that which is known? Unless, of course, we adopt the constructivist approach that the “known” is not really other than the knower but rather is part of the knower's subjectivity.

The main adversary in these days, it seems to me, to Butler's and my shared discomfort with dualism is traditional science (with the possible exception of quantum physics) and the obvious success of science. The paradigm underlying that success is an ethereal ego in some mysterious mental location swooping down on its prey, the mysteries of nature, this ego uncovering nature's secrets by pretending not to be a part of nature's deterministic laws.

So let's try a different paradigm: the self/other paradigm. Nature becomes simply the other by virtue of its being not oneself. The binary self/other becomes a nature in itself that is being created now, but not created by the (measured) past. By “now” I do not

mean nows in succession, because that takes us back to a measurable spatial/temporal nature that gets located on one side of the dualism, with the non-spatial/non-temporal ego on the other side. Suppose, in other words, both the other and the self are intrinsically neither spatial or temporal.

That would mean the self/other composite or capsule is not “in” [spatial] nature. (Cp. Smythies, 2012, on near death experiences, 230-231). Nor is it at one or another (measured) time “in” measured nature. We get rid of the “ins” and “outs”, and we exclude as well the word “subjective”—as signifying a metaphorical “in” as opposed to an “out”—from the meaning of “1st person” (Cp. Butler 2013, 72). On the other hand, we preserve the self/other corporate capsule or dichotomy nonetheless, but with any suggestion of an outside measurable space/time umbrella thrown out of the picture.

I grant that this relational or ontological relative approach hardly dents the cul-de-sac of dualism, but it seems to me that this cul-de-sac problem is as much about the “in” and “out” of spatial metaphors as it is about the countable abstracting faculties and our proclivity to count—perhaps the single most important key to science's success.

For one thing, in my reading the “now” is uncountable and indivisible. At least it seems so when I'm awake. A now that is all the time but doesn't take time. Could be interesting. Let's start there.

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