Phil 490: Consciousness and the Self
Handout [14]
Fred Dretske: The Mind’s Awareness of Itself

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§ The Goals

1. To solve the puzzle of phenomenal consciousness: the puzzle of how one can be aware of internal affairs — aware of what one’s experiences are like — without being aware of these experiences themselves or of the properties that give them their phenomenal character.
2. To argue that the mind’s awareness of itself is an awareness of facts about itself — it is an awareness of the fact that a mental experience e has the property β.

§ Different forms of Awareness: Objects, Properties, and Facts

1. awareness of the object x
2. awareness of the property P of the object x
3. awareness of the fact that x is P

When an object is moving, I can be aware of
(A) the moving object → o-awareness
(B) the fact that it is moving → f-awareness
(C) the movement → p-awareness
(D) all of these
(E) none of these.

I will call these three forms of awareness o-awareness (for object-awareness), f-awareness (for fact-awareness), and p-awareness (for property-awareness).

Everyday perception is generally a mixture of object-, fact-, property-awareness. Usually we become aware of facts by becoming aware of the objects and properties that constitute those facts.

§ Awareness of Mental States

o: the mental event (experience)
β: the phenomenal quality of the experience
f: the fact that the mental event has this phenomenal property
Once the distinctions between kinds of awareness are in place, privileged awareness of what it is like to have an experience may simply be a form of fact-awareness, an indirect awareness of a fact about an experience that is both psychologically immediate and epistemically privileged.

**Dretske’s Proposed View:**

1. The qualities of our experiences are simply the objects and properties these experiences make us aware of.
2. One becomes f-aware of experience — that it is \( \beta \) — by p-aware of \( P \) — the pumpkin’s properties.
3. The reason p-awareness of \( P \) can make one f-aware that one’s experience is \( \beta \) is that \( \beta \) is the property of being an experience, in fact a p-awareness, of \( P \).
4. The key to this account is the relation between \( P \), the property we are p-aware of in having experience \( e \), and the property of the experience (\( \beta \)) that we thereby become f-aware that \( e \) has.
5. What this means is that if we follow philosophical convention and take qualia to be properties of one’s experiences (and not the properties one experiences), then it is \( \beta \), not \( P \), that is the quale. Nonetheless, it is \( P \) (i.e., the orange color), not \( \beta \) (an awareness of the color), that one is p-aware of.
6. One is aware of the quale \( \beta \), to be sure, but this is fact-, not property-awareness.

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**E.g.** I have the experience that is an orange experience (\( \beta \)) both when I see a pumpkin and an orange. The property I am p-aware of is simply the property (\( P \)) of the pumpkin and the property (\( P \)) of the orange.

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One’s being aware of one’s having the experience of seeing the pumpkin’s movement

Fact-awareness

One’s having the experience of seeing the pumpkin’s movement (\( P \))
I can become \( f \)-aware that something in me has \( \beta \) by an awareness of \( P \).

7. On pain: Having a headache is not an awareness — certainly not an \( o \)-awareness — of a mental entity: a pain in the head. In saying that one feels pain, what one is saying is that one feels (is aware of) a part of the body the feeling (awareness) of which is painful.

8. The case of Mary: Emerging from the color-free room gives her an awareness of properties (\( P \)) that figure in the facts (that \( o \) is \( P \)) she was already aware of, but it doesn’t give her an awareness of any new facts.

§ Prerequisites of Self-Awareness — fact-awareness and concepts

1. F-awareness, unlike \( p \)-awareness and \( o \)-awareness, requires an understanding of what one is aware of.

2. Since the mind’s awareness of itself is always (according to this account) f-awareness, there is no way one can be aware of one’s mental states without a mastery of relevant concepts.

3. We must first develop suitable concepts, those that pick out properties we are \( p \)-aware of, before we can be made conscious of what transpires in my own minds.

4. The mind becomes aware of itself, of its own conscious experiences, by a developmental process in which concepts needed for such awareness are required.

5. In the case of such concepts as ‘experience’, this doesn’t happen with children until around the age of four to five years. In most animals it never happens.

6. The mind is the first, and indeed, the only — thing we are aware of, but it is among the last things we are aware of.

\( Q \): Do you agree that children before the age of acquiring concepts and nonlinguistic animals do not have fact-awareness, and hence cannot be aware of their own minds?