

## The Rylean Theory Theory, or Inferentialism

The claim: at least many, and perhaps all, paradigmatic instances of self-knowledge are inferentially based on evidence.

*Gilbert Ryle*

“But in principle, as distinct from practice, John Doe’s ways of finding out about John Doe are the same as John Doe’s ways of finding out about Richard Roe.”

- Most people hear this as a claim about how impoverished self-knowledge is, but it is equally a claim about how robust and seemingly immediate other-knowledge is.
- Just as we frequently know what other people are thinking by what they say, or what they’re looking at, “much of our ordinary thinking is conducted in internal monologue or silent soliloquy, usually accompanied by an internal cinematograph-show of visual imagery.”

*Key commitments:*

1. The inference is often swift and unconscious, although can be drawn consciously and explicitly.
2. It is generally mediated by a theory of mind.

SP: this is ambiguous between “general, folk-psychological theory of minds” and “autobiographical theory of one’s own mind.” Clearly, the former plays a crucial role, but the latter might also be important.

*Advantages:*

1. Economical: appeals only to capacities we independently know that we have.
2. Can easily accommodate breakdowns in self-knowledge, unlike Shoemaker’s “Constitutivism”.
3. Fits with traditional epistemology.

*Objections and replies:*

1. Can’t account for The Asymmetry between self and other.
  - First prong: deny the asymmetry.
    - Confabulation data: we make mistakes in self-attribution that are similar in kind to those we make in mindreading.
    - Mindreading is really good: we often just see or hear others as having a certain mental property.
    - Evolutionary considerations: mindreading is evolutionarily more important than metacognition, but could easily be used on the self once in place.
  - Second prong: rescue some asymmetrical features.
    - We generally have more evidence in our own case.
    - Our access to some kinds of evidence is more direct in our own case.
    - Our social practice treats self-ascriptions as more authoritative.
2. It generates a vicious regress – how do we know what our evidence is?

- There's no regress with respect to our standing attitudes if our evidence consists of something other than our standing attitudes.
- Carruthers: the mindreading faculty has access to inner speech, visual and motor imagery, affective feelings, as well as any sensory data, and our knowledge of these things is "transparent" (non-interpretive).
- Even if access to "internal promptings" is inferential, we can be Coherentists about self-knowledge and deny that any circularity is vicious.

### 3. Obvious counterexamples/obviousness of transparency.

- Debunk transparency intuitions: perhaps our belief in transparency is explained by the rules that are built into our model of our own minds, for reasons of efficiency rather than because they are true.
  - Evidence: illusory transparency. Confabulated self-ascriptions apparently feel just as transparent to the thinker as any other.
- Explain all cases that can't be explained by appeal to behavior or the immediate environment (a) by appeal to inner speech, imagery, and affect, or (b) as confabulations.

### 4. Inferential self-knowledge is alienated, but many cases of self-knowledge are not alienating.

- Some theoretical self-attributions fail to cohere with what we take to be the reasons supporting those attitudes, but most will cohere. So why feel alienated from an attitude that fits with everything else you think?

### *Questions about ISA account*

1a. How is 'tomato there' good evidence for 'I see a tomato there?' Perhaps there is in fact no tomato, in which case the "evidence" is false. And there are plenty of tomatoes I do not see (Boyle).

1b. How does the mindreading system recognize that 'tomato there' indicates a visual relation, rather than some other relation (Byrne)?

- Carruthers: contents have different properties. Visual contents represent color, fine detail, are synchronic. Tactile contents are generally diachronic. Auditory contents represent timbre and pitch but not color, etc.
- If you currently have a fine-grained, colored representation of a tomato, perhaps that suffices for the truth of "I am having the perceptual experience of a tomato?" or suffices for an IBE?

3. Why think mindreading is implicated in this kind of inference at all (Byrne)?

- Could Carruthers just say that it's by definition that part of the mind that aims to arrive at higher-order representations?

4. Why not think that occurrent judgments and decisions are also globally broadcast (Paul)?

- Carruthers: no evidence of anything other than inner speech and imagery being broadcast, and these need to be interpreted just like outer speech. They are evidence of subconscious decisions and judgments occurring, but do not constitute such things.

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