

# Knowledge and Reality A: Lecture Eight

## 1. The Problem of Other Minds

The problem revolves around knowing about the *inner states* that people have. *Outer states* are easy to see – we can *easily* see that there are some such states of people (e.g. we can see that they are a certain height, that they are of a certain weight, of a certain race etc.). Inner states are to do with the workings of our minds (e.g. Is Nikk in pain?; Bored?; Lusting after Eliza Dushku?).

The problem is whilst it is easy to see how we come to *know* that people have certain outer states (are 5'10'' say) it's *not* easy to see how we come to know about their *inner states*.

### *Inverted Spectrum*

For instance, take you and me. When you see blue objects you have blue experiences. But imagine that when I see blue objects, I see the *inverted* colours. So where you have a blue experience, I see (say) yellow.

How would you ever know the *experiences* I was having were different from yours? If *every* experience I have is inverted, I'd act *exactly* like you. I'd call blue things 'blue' (but see yellow things); I'd call yellow things 'yellow' (but see blue things) etc.

The worry is that if I had such an inverted spectrum, there's no way to tell. So how can you tell exactly what my inner states are? How do you *know* that when I say 'I'm seeing a blue thing' that I'm seeing *blue* rather than *yellow*?

### *Zombies*

But the problem of other minds only really kicks in when we consider a spin-off of inverted spectra. A philosophical zombie looks just like you and I – but rather than having *different* inner states than you'd imagine it doesn't have *any*. And if inverted spectra make sense, don't zombies?

### *The Problem of Other Minds*

So how do you justify your belief that people around you aren't zombies? What evidence do you have? What reasons can you give for believing such a thing? And surely you must believe it!

## 2. The Analogical Argument

It's Mill who comes up with the *analogical argument* for escaping this problem.

*You're* a kind of thing that has inner states. *Other people* are very similar to you in all relevant ways (they have the same attitudes, behaviours, relevant reactions to things, brain make-up etc.). So, as you're *that* kind of thing and have mental states, and *other people* are that kind of thing then (by analogy) they have inner states too.

### *Problem*

It's an *inductive* argument. Take a generic inductive argument form:

These F's I have observed are G

*a* is an F

Therefore *a* is G

So it's just like:

I'm a thing with certain kinds of behaviour, physical properties etc. and I observe that I have inner states

*You're* a thing with a certain kind of behaviour, set of physical properties etc.

*Therefore* you have inner states

Think back to last lecture – I said you need to ensure that you have a wide enough *sample space* to carry out an induction.

*Example one:* The mean girlfriend

*Example two:* The lucky first lottery player

What *awful* arguments. An inductive argument of *that form* only works if you've got a *wide enough sample space*. If I played a game a million times, and always won, maybe *then* I'd have a reason to think I'd win every time. If I met a group of a 1,000 people (terrorists say) who were all mean, *then* I'd have a reason to think they were all mean. Mill is generalising from *a single case*, which isn't (normally) good inductive reasoning.

### **3. The Explanatory Argument**

You might impute inner states to people to *explain* what they do. That the *best explanation* of people do things (like cry out in pain etc.) is that they have inner mental states. An argument *a bit like this* is discussed in the readings. Have a think through it.

### **4. Behaviourism**

A final way out is to *dissolve* the problem. This is the move of *behaviourists*. They say that a mental state, like being in pain, isn't *really* an inner state at all. Rather, to be in pain is *just* to act in a certain way. To *behave* in a certain way. Our talk is apparently *not* about the goings on inside a 'mind', but *just* about the behaviour we exhibit.

If *this* was the case, there'd be no problem. Now, engaging in certain behaviour *is just what it is* for it to be correct for me to impute 'inner states' to you. Notice the scare quotes – in a way, I *don't have* any inner states. They're *all* outer states.

### **5. Private Language**

But *why* do they believe it? It's not just to solve this problem. In general, that's a bad idea. After all, beh. sounds a bit odd. So you can't argue for believing an *odd* thesis on the grounds that it solves problems.

As laid out in the reading, the idea is that you can't have a 'private language'. That is, a language where the meaning of the sentence can *never* be uncovered. So not just a *really difficult to understand language*, but one that is *necessarily* impossible for others to understand. After all, in what way could that be a language?

But when you utter 'I'm in pain', if you had inner states I could *never, ever* know what you meant by that. I don't have access to your inner states (remember, that's the problem we started with!). I could never know whether what *I* felt when *I thought* I was in pain was the same as you. So I can't be sure what you mean. But that makes it a private language, the meaning of which I will never discover.

So, says Wittgenstein, if there were inner states that you were reporting, we'd have a private language. There's no private language. So you're clearly not reporting inner states. And if there are no inner states, and only outer states, clearly you must be talking about your behaviour when you say 'I'm in pain'.

Or, at least, that's how some philosophers took him to be arguing. Is that *really* what Witty had in mind? Who knows. He's one of those 'tricky to pin down' philosophers. But certainly some did take that version of the argument and run with it.