

Our Knowledge of the Internal World

V. Acquaintance and Essence

The Simple Analysis

To say that Pierre believes that London is pretty is to say that Pierre believes the singular proposition that is true in possible worlds in which the actual city, London, is pretty, and false in possible worlds in which it is not.

Pierre “lacks information, not logical acumen. He cannot be convicted of inconsistency: to do so is incorrect.”

Kripke, “A puzzle about belief”

.Anyone is in principle in a position to notice and correct a state of the head which can be characterized by assigning contradictory propositional objects, but why should philosophical and logical acumen help him if the trouble lies partly outside? As soon as we accept the consistency of Pierre’s beliefs as a datum - as I did, on Kripke’s invitation - we are committed to the narrowly psychological conception of belief and its objects.

Lewis, “What puzzling Pierre does not believe”

The identification thesis

The knowledge I gain by having an experience with quale Q enables me to know what Q is - identifies Q - in this sense: any possibility not ruled out by the content of my knowledge is one in which it is Q, and not any other property instead, that is the quale of my experience. Equivalently, when I have an experience with quale Q, the knowledge I thereby gain reveals the essence of Q: a property of Q such that, necessarily, Q has it and nothing else does.

Lewis, “Should a materialist believe in qualia?”

Lewis’s definition of knowledge

Subject S knows that P iff S’s evidence eliminates every relevant possibility in which not-P.

I say that the uneliminated possibilities are those in which the subject’s entire perceptual experience and memory are just as they actually are. . . . A possibility *W* is *uneliminated* iff the subject’s perceptual experience in *W* exactly match his perceptual experience and memory in actuality.

Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge”

Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted.

Russell, "Knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description"

A thought is transparent in the sense that, if you grasp it, you thereby know everything about it as it is in itself.

Michael Dummett

When we mention an object in describing a thought we are giving only an extrinsic characterization of the thought (since the mention of the object takes us outside the subject's mind); but there must be an intrinsic characterization available (one which does not take us outside the subject's mind), and that characterization would have succeeded in specifying the essential core of the thought even if extra-mental reality had not obliged by containing the object.

McDowell, describing an internalist view attributed to the Fregean