A MIND WITHOUT A WORLD WITHIN

by Ian White

I

What this paper is about. Imagine that you are toiling away in the philosophy lab and, finally, you find feature f. f seems very special. If you remove f from an epistemological subject their view of the world radically changes. Prior to f-removal the subject enjoys a comfortably familiar world with just a few aberrations: missing car keys, a vague object or two. After f-removal the subject’s world is such that the past regularly changes and there are countless contradictory facts.

Eureka! you might well exclaim. Epistemological subjects aim to represent the world truly. f-removal drastically impedes this aim. So it looks as if you may have found in f a necessary feature of epistemological subjects.

André Gallois, in his book The World Without, the Mind Within,1 wants to defend the thesis of first-person authority (FPA). I have FPA over, say, my beliefs if I can know that I have a particular belief in an epistemically significant way in which no one else can know that I have that belief. Having FPA over my beliefs is having a special way of forming justified beliefs about my beliefs.

FPA has recently come under attack from the results of psychological experimentation and from content externalism. I shall not be concerned with Gallois’ response to these and other attacks on FPA, but rather with his major defensive move—a move that seemingly counters any attack on FPA. Moreover, this move has some interesting philosophical ramifications. Unfortunately, it seems that the argument at the centre of Gallois’ defence is unsuccessful.

II

Moore’s paradox and the self-blind individual. Back to the lab: feature f is the ability to make a Moore-inference. A Moore-inference is an inference from ‘p is the case’ to ‘I believe that p’.

1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. All page references refer to this work.
The term ‘Moore-inference’ comes from Moore’s paradox: that there is something unintelligible in making the claim ‘p but I believe ¬p’. The paradox arises in that it is not immediately clear what is wrong with such claims. It can’t be that they are necessarily false. For

(1) It is raining but I don’t believe it is raining

may be true. But there is something quite odd about asserting or believing (1).

Moore’s paradox would seem to show us something about the relationship between our beliefs and our higher-order beliefs. It seems that, within the first-person perspective, the questions ‘Do I believe p?’ and ‘Does p obtain?’ arise together.

An explanation of Moore’s paradox may perhaps make this relationship clear. To this end Gallois introduces the doxastic schema (DS):

\[
\begin{align*}
p \\
\hline
\text{So, I believe } p.
\end{align*}
\]

This schema characterises Moore-inferences. If the DS is justified we can see what is wrong with statements that are Moore-paradoxical. By conjunction elimination and the DS, (1) gives: ‘I believe that is raining and I don’t believe that it is raining.’

The DS is a formulation of FPA. The DS entitles me to form justified beliefs about my beliefs in a way in which I cannot form beliefs about anyone else’s beliefs.

But we need to know why the DS is justified. We need to know why we can be justified in forming a belief about our beliefs without having to rely on anything that counts as evidence for that belief. To do this Gallois tries to show what it would be like for a subject if they lacked FPA as characterised by the DS. This turns out to be a sorry state of affairs. Thus Gallois introduces the self-blind individual (SBI):

Here is what it takes to be self-blind. You are self-blind if you satisfy the following conditions. You have a full repertoire of semantic and epistemic concepts including the concepts of belief,

2. The DS is no ordinary argument schema. It appears to be neither deductively, nor inductively valid. Gallois admits that taking the DS to be providing objective justification is indeed wrong. Yet the DS provides subjective justification (pp. 47, 110–112).
justification, truth and falsity. You form your beliefs in a fully rational manner. Nevertheless, you are only justified in holding beliefs about what you believe on the basis of evidence.\(^3\)

An example might help. I am observing D as he becomes gripped, once again, by the prospect of sheep conspiring against him. To infer justifiably that D believes that a sheep is hiding in his wardrobe, I have to have evidence. Examples of good evidence for this are: D is looking intently at his open wardrobe; D has just uttered ‘Can you hear the bleating?'; and so on. A sheep being in the wardrobe does not count as evidence for D’s belief. But, within my perspective, a sheep being in the wardrobe justifies the inference to ‘I believe that there is a sheep in the wardrobe.’ This is because (assuming that the DS is justified) I can justifiably make Moore-inferences.

An SBI cannot make this last move. An SBI can, however, ascribe to herself a belief that there is a sheep in the wardrobe if she notices herself behaving in much the same way as D is behaving. That is, SBI’s can self-ascribe beliefs on the basis of third-personal evidence.

Gallois hopes to show that

\textbf{(S)} A self-blind individual is committed to a deeply irrational world-view.\(^4\)

The form of Gallois’ argument is very much like a \textit{reductio ad absurdum}. In defending FPA he shows what a subject is like without it. Such a subject enjoys a deeply irrational, and alien, worldview. Therefore, subjects like us must have FPA.

**III**

\textit{A case study in self-blindness: Kylie and Jason.} To argue for (S) Gallois constructs scenarios involving SBI’s that are supposed to deliver solid intuitions that the SBI’s in question will indeed be forced to have a view of the world that is deeply irrational.\(^5\)

\textbf{Self-blind Kylie.} Kylie believes

\textbf{(2)} Ed is at the party or Fred is at the party,

\(^3\) p. 75.
\(^4\) p. 76.
\(^5\) I give two of Gallois’ five scenarios (pp. 76–79). In my view the remaining three can be dealt with similarly.
but without knowing which. When asked where Ed is, a normal believer would give an agnostic answer. For a normal believer would recognise that there is an answer to the question, but that they don’t have enough evidence to answer it one way or the other. Therefore the normal believer replies ‘I don’t know’, on the basis that they have no belief about the matter.

Kylie, however, is prevented from self-ascribing a statement about her beliefs without evidence. Suppose that she is asked, ‘Is it true that Ed is at the party?’ She cannot answer, ‘Maybe, maybe not’; for this seems to imply that one has no belief either way. She does in fact have no belief, but because she is self-blind she cannot infer this. Thus it would seem that she will answer ‘No, it is not true that Ed is at the party’, because she has no belief that it is true that Ed is at the party. She will answer similarly to a question about the whereabouts of Fred. But, combining these answers with (2), she now finds it to be the case that, from her point of view,

(3) It is true that Ed or Fred are at the party, but not true that Ed is, and not true that Fred is.

Self-blind Jason. Yesterday Jason believed that the world was 6000 years old. Last night he was presented with new evidence and came to believe that the world is now several thousands of millions of years old. And in this case he has no behavioural evidence to suggest that he has held either of these beliefs. Because he is self-blind he cannot form the corresponding self-ascriptions of belief.

Jason’s beliefs have changed. How will the change in belief be represented for him? He can’t do it like this: ‘My beliefs about the age of the Earth have changed.’ Rather, he represents the change in belief as a change in the world. Therefore he has the view that

(4) Yesterday the Earth was 6000 years old; today it’s billions of years old.

(3) and (4) illustrate (S). Lacking FPA is becoming deeply irrational. Furthermore, it seems that we normal believers do enjoy the standard, not deeply irrational, world-view. There are philosophical ramifications if the argument for (S) is sound. One is that we can have non-observational knowledge
about parts of the world, specifically that we are in certain psychological states. Furthermore, this route to knowledge is necessary if we are to avoid a deeply irrational world-view.

Indeed any third-person epistemology is found lacking. A theory that holds that beliefs are essentially ascribed from or as from a third-person point of view, or are essentially posited to make sense of experience, is a prime candidate for Gallois’ reductio. For the SBI does not lack anything according to such theories.

IV

A similar case: Euclidean geometry. But what should we expect when we remove a schema?

I’ll examine a similar situation, that of a system of axioms for forming theorems about geometrical objects: Euclidean geometry. We apply our theorems to the world and happily find that we can predict the shapes and sizes of middle-distance dry goods with a high degree of success.

Consider what would happen if we changed one of the axioms. Suppose that we change the 5th axiom to: ‘Parallel lines don’t intersect unless they are very long.’ We should expect that our theorems will change. Pythagoras’ theorem may well now have it that the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle whose shorter sides are 3 and 4 units long will be 6 units long. Yet when we measure such a triangle we find that its hypotenuse is rather 5 units than 6 units long. We should turn our attention to revising our axioms. For we find this revised system justifying sentences that we don’t want justified.

Consider now what would happen if we remove this axiom. We should not expect that our theorems would change, or proliferate. Rather we should expect that the sentences we can justifiably form would be less. Forming theorems is a process of applying rules of inference to the axioms. Take an axiom away, and we have a set of sentences that is a subset of the previous set. We should expect that a theorem that was derived from the now missing axiom is not a theorem of this 4-axiom system. In particular our new system has nothing to say about the hypotenuses of right-angled triangles.

The analogy with Gallois’ argument is obvious and worrying. How is it that when we remove a schema, the resulting subject’s
beliefs change, perhaps even grow, instead of becoming a subset of a normal subject’s beliefs? This is not what we should expect. We should expect the subject’s beliefs to be a subset of those of a normal believer. In a slogan: \textit{if you don’t have Moore-inferences, then you have less inferences.}

But what about Jason and Kylie?

V

\textit{Kylie and Jason redeemed.} Self-blind Kylie is apparently forced to assert that either Ed or Fred is at the party, and that they are both not at the party. She has to assert this because she believes (2), and has been asked a few cunning questions. Gallois claims that when she is asked whether Ed is at the party, she must answer negatively, for she cannot know that she has no belief on this matter.

This simply does not follow, for two reasons. Firstly, the DS does not straightforwardly apply to Kylie. What would be required here is schema with no input, and a negative output.

Secondly, given that the reader accepts the analogy in §IV it seems that self-blind Kylie can legitimately have \textit{no} answer. Forcing her to answer is like forcing the 4-axiom system to come up with a theorem about the hypotenuses of right-angled triangles. This demand is an unreasonable one. Therefore Kylie is no evidence for (S).

Self-blind Jason is apparently forced to assert things like (4) when he changes his mind and yet has no evidence that he has changed his mind. A normal believer will represent her change of belief by ascribing a change in belief to herself. This move is beyond Jason, and thus he represents his change in belief as a change in the world.

There is an unmentioned assumption doing a lot of work here—that the change of belief must be represented. This might seem obvious until we consider the details of Jason’s case. By hypothesis, he has no evidence that he has held any of these beliefs. If he did, then he would self-ascribe a past belief on the basis of this evidence and be done with it. It would seem that a

6. If a schema acts as a filter, i.e. it \textit{removes} theorems, then the removal of it may result in more theorems. But the DS is not a filter. The DS generates new beliefs from current beliefs.
normal believer, when representing to herself a change of mind, will remember evidence of her past belief. She will remember evidence of what she said and how she felt when considering the proposition—how she came to believe it. Jason too must be able to remember believing propositions in this way. However, in this case he has no evidence about what he believed.

Also consider what a representation of change is for. We generally need to represent change in ourselves in order to reconcile our past and present behaviour. But in Jason’s case there is no such behaviour. Thus his case seems to be atypical, and so it does not seem unreasonable to assume that, when he forms a new belief that contradicts a previous one, the latter will simply disappear from his set of beliefs. His belief about the age of the Earth will be simply that it is billions of years old.

The intuition that Gallois wants us to have about Jason is going to depend on much more than just imagining life without the DS. If one is even remotely holist about cognitive processes or epistemic concepts, then the mere idea of removing a schema is going to undermine any intuitions that might arise from this. How can we tell how Jason’s memory is going to work in these conditions? Given the information that we have, it doesn’t seem that there is any clear way. What does seem clear though is that we shouldn’t expect the sort of results that Gallois claims, for reasons external to his setting-up of the problem.

VI

Conclusion. So the argument for (S) seems to fail: the SBI cases that Gallois presents do not lead us to view SBI’s as having a deeply irrational world-view. Furthermore, we have an external reason, given in §IV, to doubt that the SBI’s would end up in such a position. Thus the philosophical ramifications mentioned earlier must find their source elsewhere.7

Department of Philosophy
University of Sheffield
Sheffield, S10 2TN
i.w.white@sheffield.ac.uk