

Is it true that we are always the best authority about our own mental states? What conclusions do you draw from your answer to that question regarding the distinction between the 'inner' and the 'outer'?

At first sight, it may seem reasonable to assume that we are the best authority about our own mental states. After all, who other than us has access to our inner selves? Surely, it is only 'I' that can experience what 'I' am experiencing. Who else possesses the subjective qualities which only belong to me?

To investigate our authority about our mental states further, firstly, what it means to be a best authority needs to be addressed. Secondly, what constitutes a mental state? The manner in which mental states are defined is bound to circumscribe our area of investigation. It may be that in some instances we are the best authority about our mental states, but in other instances we are not. Finally, a discussion of the 'inner' and the 'outer', their relationship to one another and how they help us in defining the 'I' will allow for the presentation of a comprehensive, but more complicated picture.

As an authority on a specific matter, I would have, "extensive or specialized knowledge about a subject" – as defined by Oxford dictionaries. Therefore, as a best authority on my own mental states, I would have the 'most excellent extensive or specialized knowledge' about my mental states. Thus to be the best authority, my knowledge about my mental states needs to be above and beyond that of others.

But what are these mental states that I may or may not be the best authority on? Mental states can be defined as subjective qualities, experiences specific to an individual such as pains and sensations. Thoughts and feelings are linked to what we experience when we taste an apple or see the 'blue' in the sky, a feeling which is ours and ours alone. No one else can experience our sight of 'blue'. Others may experience a sensation when they see the 'blue' of the sky, but that would not be the same as our experience of the 'blue' of the sky.

Even if telepathy was possible, tastes and sounds would remain an enigma to anyone but the person experiencing them. Those viewing my innermost thoughts and sensations telepathically would experience how my subjective experiences appear to them, but not to me.

More specifically, Peter Carruthers in 'Introducing Persons', on page 30, states, "...it is impossible to be mistaken in simple judgments of recognition of one's own experience; where the terms of those judgments do not bring anything extraneous to current experiences such as causes, earlier times or numbers; and where the judging subject adequately understands the terms involved in the judgment, and uses the terms which they intend to use"

Do our mental states contain more than the above description implies? For example, could a therapist possibly be a better authority on our mental states? He/she may be more knowledgeable about what we are experiencing. If we are to maintain the definition above, and assume that my therapist was of the opinion that I resented my partner and I took him to be an authority on my mental states, yet he turned out to be wrong, I, nonetheless, would be the best authority on seeming to think that I resented my partner. On the other hand, if my therapist was correct about

me resenting my partner and I was initially unaware of the matter, then he/she would be a better authority on my mental states.

The above example expands mental states beyond mere introspection. The knowledge my therapist has of my mental states is a result of technical knowledge that he/she possesses, but I lack. Thus the introduction of such knowledge to our investigation requires for an expanded definition of mental states, one that includes beliefs and desires (for example, a belief that it may snow), knowledge and thoughts (thinking that something is), emotions and moods (deception, example feeling peaceful), in addition to, perceptions and sensations (seeing the 'blue' of the sky, feeling pain, tired) then one may begin to consider that he/she may not always be the best authority on his/her mental states.

Selective attention or our inclination to use schema that we believe are closely related to a situation even though they may not be, can result in us not being the best authority on certain matters. The saliency of a schema may allow it to overshadow a more pertinent one due to it being more in line with a narrative we have created and/or as a result of how we perceive our surroundings. Conversely, others may simply have a better authority of our mental states in some instances – due to knowledge they possess and/or their perception of the situation, which may be more comprehensive than our perception. Our limited perception may be a result of a certain mood or emotion, which impedes us from viewing matters wholly. Also, thinking that something 'is' may need to be addressed contextually. What 'is' may be caused by something. Consequently, such instances, resulting from the expanded definition of mental states, requires us to investigate the 'inner' and the 'outer' and their relationship to one another.

More specifically, the 'inner' may be considered a picture of mental or conscious states, states incapable of being shared with others, or brought to the outside. They can be described, but the information given out may be considered indirect.

The 'outer' can be described as being associated with physical processes or movements. It would also include what inhabits our common, objective world, the world of our ordinary, common sense beliefs as well as the world of science. Perceptions of different persons converge on objects, establishing a common subject matter for discussion.

With the expanded definition of mental states in mind, it is conceivable that there is a relationship between the 'inner' and the 'outer' that must be taken into consideration when attempting to decipher our authority on our mental states.

The 'outer' affects the inner and vice versa. In a sense the 'inner' may not be able to be an 'inner' without an 'outer', especially since it is the 'outer' that brings us as human beings together and gives us the opportunity to differentiate between what is out there and what is inside. One may be physical and the other non-physical, but they do not necessarily act in a mutually exclusive manner, nor is one necessarily superior to the other, at least in our temporal human condition, governed by time and space implications.

Furthermore, whoever is doing the experiencing is not necessarily clear. Is it 'I' as a mental state, or 'I' as a physical body? What is the relationship between the two? This questions who is doing the experiencing. In other words, in the question, "Is it true that we are always the best authority about our own mental states?" who is the 'we' referring to?

In conclusion, being a best authority on my mental states requires that I have the most excellent extensive or specialized knowledge about my mental states, states that do not only include pains and sensations, but also consider knowledge, emotions, beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and desires. Such information is related to the 'outer' world and cannot only be addressed from an 'inner' point of view. Bringing the 'inner' and the 'outer' into the equation also brings to light a question about who is actually doing the experiencing, is it an 'I' that has always been there, an 'I' that was formed over time. Even, if 'I' was the best authority on my mental states, how accurate is this authority? What other perspectives or factors play a role in this authority and how am I deceived by them, or how do I deceive myself? It is not only a question of am 'I' the best authority on my mental states, but how accurate this authority is (considering our temporal existence).