

Showing and Self-Presentation of Experiences – Some Philosophical Cases

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Experiences

Experiences (*Erlebnisse* in German) are of *phenomenal character*. There is something it is like to be in a conscious mental state; there is something it feels like to be in pain, and there is something different it feels like to be glad. Some experiences are *purely phenomenal* – pains and moods, for instance –, and some are *intentional*, i.e. directed to something – for example, you are glad about your good company or you are glad to get home. Intentional states such as being glad about someone (or worshipping something) are *purely objectual*, whereas intentional states such as being glad to get somewhere (or believing that something is the case) are *propositional*.

You can distinguish between the *mode* and *content* of intentional experiences. When you entertain the belief that it is raining, believing is the mode and that it is raining is its content. When you hate that it is raining the content stays the same but the mode has changed into an emotional experience.

It is controversial which mental phenomena count as experiences, especially whether there is the experience of the mode on the one hand and the experience of the content on the other hand. Ludwig Wittgenstein, for example, was always skeptical about both of these accounts. He questioned the view that there is an experience of meaning as well as the view that willing, understanding and conviction respectively would be experiences. Although Wittgenstein objected to the idea of the experiential reality of mental acts and contents, he did not fully deny the existence of experiences.

It is also controversial whether experiences are genuine objects (things) or not. One non-object interpretation takes experiences as *occurrences*, “states” as Roderick Chisholm coins them. According to Chisholm

we can define a state (occurrence) as the exemplifying (realization) of properties by something:

For every x , x is F if and only if there is the state x -being- F . (Cf. Chisholm 1989, 162; 1996, 72.)

Thus, experiences are conscious occurrences, which can be defined as realizations of conscious properties. The conceptual chain from “consciousness” to “qualitativeness” looks like the following:

- (1) A property F is *conscious* (a manifest mental property) iff F is an immediately qualitative property.
- (2) A property F is *immediately qualitative* iff F is necessarily such that for every x that is F it is like to be F for x .

If someone is happy there is something it feels like to be happy for her, whereas being a woman and a beetle do not automatically involve that there is anything that it feels like to be a woman and a beetle, respectively. Being happy then is a conscious, a manifest mental property, whereas being a woman etc. is not.

Case I: Wittgenstein: Expressing Experiences as Showing and not Saying

In discussing characteristics of the psychological (understood as *experiences*) Ludwig Wittgenstein deals with themes like “Expressing Experiences *versus* Describing or Asserting Experiences” or “Expressing Experiences as Showing and not Saying”.

Considering psychological verbs Wittgenstein says “that their third person but not their first person is stated on grounds of observation. That observation is observation of behaviour.” (RPP I, Sect. 836)

A slightly different characterization can be found in his “Plan for the treatment of psychological concepts” (RPP II, Sect. 63) where he states:

Psychological verbs characterized by the fact that the third person of the present is to be identified by observation, the first person not.

Sentences in the third person of the present: information. In the first person present, expression. ((Not quite right.))

Wittgenstein says that “with ‘I believe-----’ he expresses his belief in no way better than with the simple assertion” (MS 169, 10), and he even thinks that a person can’t say of herself that she has the belief: “All that hangs together with this, that one can say ‘I believe he believes...’, ‘I believe I believed...’, but not ‘I believe I believe...’.” (RPP II, Sect. 282) Wittgenstein also stresses the point that the speaker’s own relation to her words “is wholly different from other people’s.” (MS 169, 9; PI II, Sect. 192) “I do not relate to them as an observer. I *can* not observe myself as I do someone else, cannot ask myself ‘What is this person likely to do now?’ etc. Therefore the verb ‘He believes’, ‘I believed’ *can* not have the kind of continuation in the first person as the verb ‘to eat’.” (MS 169, 10)

Hence, Wittgenstein stresses the point that there is a different kind of continuation of the verb “believe” in the first person indicative; “I believe” can be seen as an expression of my own belief-state, but not as an expression of a kind of belief about my belief. (Cf. MS 169, 11f.; PI II, 191f.)

Expressing mental states by words is not reporting them, but it is a move in a language-game and as such intended although not by a meta-mental or meta-linguistic reflection. The expression “I believe it is raining” shows that I believe that it is raining, although it is not said by these words that I believe that it is raining; what I say is only that it is raining. The verbal expression is not a natural expression like a tremble or a semi-action/reaction as a cry is; it is a non-natural verbal expression.

Though Wittgenstein concedes that “[d]escribing my state of mind (of fear, say) is something I do in a particular context. (Just as it takes a particular context to make a certain action into an experiment.)” (PI II, 188), sometimes (more exactly: in a particular context, in certain circumstances) I express my experiences, and sometimes I tell someone my experiences. Moreover, Wittgenstein admits that he cannot always give a clear answer whether the utterance “I am afraid” is a cry of fear or a reflection on one’s present state. (PI II, 187) Wittgenstein brings up a further reason for this complication: “A cry is not a description. But there are transitions. And the words ‘I am afraid’ may approximate more, or less, to being a cry. They may come quite close to this and also be far removed from it.” (PI II, 189)

Wittgenstein remarks on experiences are confronted with the following problem: On the one hand, Wittgenstein states that a person can't say of herself that she is in a particular inner state (of believing, for example), and, on the other hand, he seems to state that a person may describe her inner states. Be that as it may, I think Wittgenstein could accept the following thesis about mental properties (experiences):

Being-*F* is an experiential property iff Being-*F* is necessarily such that for every subject *s*, if *s* is *F* and *s* expresses verbally to be *F*, *s* does this without inference from other beliefs and from observation of her own words and behavior.

Case II: Meinong's Self-Presentation of Experiences

Alexius Meinong's so-called *self-presentation* [*Selbstpräsentation*] of experiences can be added as a further mark of consciousness, of the manifest mental. According to Meinong, experiences, i.e. conscious mental occurrences, are able to present themselves to a self, to a subject.

Usually, the objects of experiences are not constituted by their experiences: they are something mind independent and not immanent to consciousness. When you think that it is raining, for example, you have a mental representation, a kind of sign of the current rain (so-called "other-presentation" [*Fremdpräsentation*]). In contrast to this, it may happen that you think about your belief that it is raining, because you realize that in this situation your belief about rain is misplaced (as you should listen to your partner's speech), and you feel a bit embarrassed about it. In order to present your belief about rain as an object of your embarrassment (an inner reflective experience), you do not need a further, separate representation to which the rain-belief corresponds as an object. The rain-belief has the capacity to present itself to your mind. In general, the reference to one's own experiences does not require the intervention of an additional representation. That your mental experiences present themselves to you means you can refer to your instantaneous experiences without the intermediary of a further representation of them. You are able to reflect upon your momentary conviction without needing a kind of mental symbol of your belief. In thinking about the rain your mind is in some way *turned outwards*, whereas in directing your attention to your experiences, for instance, to

your manifest belief about rain, your mind becomes *turned inwards*. (Cf. Meinong 1906, §11, §13; 1910, §20, §43; 1917, §1; Marek 2009, Sect. 3.2.)

In having the manifest conviction that it is raining the subject is not directed to her belief but only to the rain. The conscious belief about something does not require that the subject already has a consciousness about her consciousness. According to this interpretation of Meinong the following can be said:

Consciousness is *not* necessarily such that if a subject *s* has a conscious property *P*, *s* is also conscious of its* having the property *P*.

By the way, what is negated by this principle is a thesis of self-consciousness in a twofold manner: First, *s* is conscious of itself in a direct (de se) manner – therefore, the third person pronoun is used with a Castañeda asterisk as a sign of a “quasi-indicator”, i.e. an emphatic reflexive expressing the reference of the subject to itself qua itself. Secondly, *s* is conscious of the conscious state it is in.

As far as I can see, Meinong does not interpret self-presentation as such a manifest self-consciousness of one’s conscious states. Meinong’s conception of self-presentation has rather a touch of potentiality or dispositionality.

SP1 Being *F* is a self-presenting property for a subject *s* =Df Being *F* is necessarily such that, if *s* is *F*, and if *s* thinks (in some way) about its* being *F*, then *s* does not need any particular, separate representation of its* being *F*.

SP2 Being *F* is self-presented to a subject *s* =Df (1) Being *F* is a self-presenting property for a subject *s*, (2) *s* is *F*, and (3) *s* thinks about its* being *F*.

SP3 Conscious properties are necessarily self-presenting properties. [See Marek 2003, 169; 2009, Sect. 3.2]

In connection with Meinong’s conception of self-presentation a short note on his philosophy of language should be added:

When someone believes that it is raining, the person may utter “It is raining”. In uttering these words she expresses and, in a way, means her belief that it is raining, but she does not thereby express a belief about her belief nor does she thereby say that she believes that it is raining. In having the belief that it is raining the person does not yet reflect on this belief by a

further “meta-belief”. Nevertheless, expressing beliefs by uttering sentences containing only the believed content is not a simple natural expression like tears for sorrow; it is a kind of a non-natural, intended expression. In uttering “It is raining” the person intends to express her belief-experience, but this intention should not be reconstructed as a conscious mental meta-experience like “I intend to express my belief that it is raining by uttering the words ‘it is raining’”. (Cf. Meinong 1910, §4.)

However, the person may explicitly refer to her experience when she turns inwards by a reflective thought. For example, she may have an emotion about her belief that it is raining, and she may express this by uttering “I find it embarrassing to believe that it is raining”.

Meinong, I think, accepts the possibility that the utterance “I believe it is raining” is not an expression of a meta-belief, but just an explicit expression of the belief that it is raining. In a similar way, uttering “I find it embarrassing to believe that it is raining” is not a report about my embarrassment; rather it is an expression of the emotional state I am in.

It depends on the special (also inner) circumstances whether utterances like “I believe”, “I am afraid”, “I am glad” can be interpreted as utterances of a kind of meta-belief about the speakers experiences of belief, fear and gladness, respectively, or just as intended expressions of belief, fear and gladness, respectively.

Case III Moore’s Paradox

Something like “It is raining, but I don’t believe it” is an (Wittgensteinian) example of the so-called Moore’s Paradox. Although the two asserted states of affairs (*it is raining* and *I do not believe it is raining*) may both obtain, the whole assertion sounds “perfectly absurd”, said G. E. Moore (1942, 543).

That you believe that it is raining is not analytically implied by (does not follow from) the fact that it is raining, and the fact that you say it is raining does not analytically imply that you believe that it is raining. In introducing the distinction between *saying* (or asserting) and *implying* by saying, Moore presents an explanation of the apparently paradoxical situation and, therefore, a solution to the paradox. In asserting “It is raining” you imply (in this special Moorean sense) that you believe this, although

you do not assert that you do. Moore's view is that in asserting that p the speaker implies that she believes that p , and the absurdity consists in the contradiction between what is implied and what is asserted. The nature of this kind of implication seems to be founded on knowledge by experience: "In the first case, that you do imply this proposition about your present attitude, although it is not implied by (i.e., does not follow from) *what* you assert, simply arises from the fact, which we all learn by experience, that in the immense majority of cases a man who makes such an assertion as this does believe or know what he asserts: lying, though common enough, is vastly exceptional." (Moore 1942, 542f.)

It is worth noticing that Moore takes the utterance "I do not believe ..." for an assertion and argues that you imply a proposition about your belief when you assert "It is raining".

Wittgenstein's answer is different: He suggests that there are a lot of scenarios where these words can be uttered. In certain circumstances – quite the usual ones – the utterance leads to the paradox. The explanation of the paradox is different to Moore's suggested solution in the following way: Wittgenstein denies that "I believe" or "I do not believe" is – in the usual context – an assertion of the speakers own mental state, because it is only the *expression* of the speakers belief and failing to believe, respectively.

According to this interpretation, Wittgenstein thinks that "It is raining" is a saying about the rain and *a showing (expressing) of the belief with this content*, whereas "I do not believe it" is *a showing (expressing) of the failing to believe this* (and not a saying about the failing to believe it).

Wittgenstein takes the utterance "I do not believe ..." for an *expressivum* and, consequently, he sees an inconsistency between the expressing of the belief and the expressing of the failing to believe this. Interpreted according to a pragmatic language-theory the hearer gets shown two incoherent expressive utterances: on the one hand the speaker expresses her belief that it is raining, and on the other hand the speaker expresses her failing to believe that it is raining. Moore's paradox is not a paradox of the logic of propositions [Logik des Satzes], it is a paradox of the logic of assertions [Logik der Behauptung], Wittgenstein says:

„Das Mooresche Paradox legt eine falsche Deutung der Behauptung eines Satzes nahe. Man ist versucht zu fragen: Gibt es also eine Logik der Behauptung

außer der Logik des Satzes selbst? Hier ist es, glaube ich, nützlich, sich an den Begriff des Sprachspiels zu halten. //nützlich, den Begriff des Sprachspiels festzuhalten.// (Ich schreibe manchmal wie ein alter Professor)“ (MS 132, 326) [Moore’s Paradox suggests a false interpretation of the assertion of a sentence. One is tempted to ask: Is there a logic of assertion besides the logic of proposition itself? It is useful, I think, to abide by the concept of the language-game. //useful to stick to the concept of the language-game.// (Sometimes I write like an old professor.)]

Logical structure, deducibility, and consistency cannot be reduced solely to propositions. Not just propositions but also assertions, questions, imperatives, wishes and even feelings are accessible to logic. In this sense, the distinction between showing and saying also helps us to understand how value judgments work according to emotivism. Emotivists claim that value judgments can be interpreted as expressions of a complex of beliefs and – in the final analysis – of (collective) emotions. As there is not only a logic of propositions, the emotivists’ claim does not preclude that value judgments can figure in valid arguments.

Post Scriptum

The following joke shows that there are situations that are not completely paradoxical, only a little absurd perhaps: “The son of a rich American Jewish lawyer starts studying at Trinity College. One day the son says to his father that he now knows exactly what “trinity” means, “it is the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as three persons”. This makes his father – a convinced atheist – furious, so that he replies in an angry voice: “There is only God our Father, but I do not believe in him.”

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