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SYMPOSIUM

Overview of *Transparency and Reflection*

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Abstract
I give a brief overview of my book, *Transparency and Reflection* (Oxford 2024), to introduce the author-meets-critics symposium to follow.

Keywords: mind; self-self-consciousness; self-knowledge; rationality; reflection; Immanuel Kant; Jean-Paul Sartre

I am most grateful to Pirachula Chulanon and David Hunter for organizing this symposium on my book, *Transparency and Reflection* (Boyle, 2024), and also to my three commentators, Dorit Bar-On, David Barnett, and Claudi Brink, whom I will thank properly in my replies below. Dorit, David, and Claudi each give an account of part of my book, and I will give my own account of some main ideas in the first part of my replies. What, then, should I say here to introduce the symposium as a whole?

If I say my book is about self-knowledge, that will be true but also misleading inasmuch as, in contemporary philosophical discussion, the topic of self-knowledge tends to be conceived as a special problem in epistemology, whereas the ambition of my book is to bring out that it is something more than this. Since my commentators focus on particular ideas and arguments, it may be useful for me to say something here about the broader ambitions of the book as a whole.[1]

When I say that self-knowledge is commonly treated as a special topic in epistemology, I mean that it is treated by many philosophers as the application of a general problematic about knowledge to a special domain (cf. epistemology of mathematics, causation, and testimony). The general problem of knowledge is supposed to be to explain what it is for a belief to be based in the right way on a corresponding fact; different domains raise different puzzles about the nature of this basing relation. In the case of self-knowledge, the puzzle arises from the fact that we seem to be able to know certain facts about our present mental states in an immediate and nonobservational way; the problem is to explain how this is possible. The philosophical topic of self-knowledge is commonly defined in this way both by philosophers who accept that we possess a sphere of privileged self-knowledge and also by skeptics who deny that our knowledge of our own minds is epistemically privileged.

My book was inspired by a different view—characteristic of Kant among other figures in the Rationalist tradition—that sees self-knowledge, not primarily as a special body of knowledge we happen to have about our own minds, but as the articulation of an awareness that we all necessarily possess simply in virtue of having rational minds at all, a kind of byproduct of an implicit

[1]I offer a fuller overview of the book in Boyle, 2023.

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self-awareness that makes us capable of thinking about any topic whatsoever. I think of this idea as connected with another thought that has always attracted me, namely, that there is a kind of knowledge that all of us necessarily have available to us—a sphere of things we all already tacit know and merely have to bring to clarity through reflection. As I read Kant, he thinks of our philosophical understanding of our own cognitive powers and also of central topics in metaphysics as achieved through a reflective articulation of this necessary self-awareness. I hoped in my book to show a path from a modest, epistemological formulation of the problem of self-knowledge to an appreciation of this wider significance of the topic.

That was my ambition, but the book I ended up writing also reflects a shift in my thinking about how to approach this topic. My original inspiration came from Kant's idea that the crux of self-awareness consists in the capacity to "accompany one's representations with *I think*," and that this "I think" expresses, not so much a representation of a particular object, as the form of cognition in general. But I've come to think that Kant's focus on explicit self-ascriptions of thought gives a one-sided picture of self-awareness, one that focuses on the *reflective* expression of this awareness and neglects a more basic kind of self-awareness that is pre-reflective. So, my book has ended up being a synthesis of a Kantian view of the significance of human self-awareness with a set of Sartrean ideas about how to conceive of self-awareness, the upshot of which is that our self-awareness is expressed, not primarily in certain self-ascriptive thoughts, but in the structure of human consciousness in general.

The resulting inquiry leads me to consider many topics: the nature of first person thought, the analysis of bodily awareness, our capacity to know the reasons for our own thoughts and actions, the possibility of doing psychology from an armchair, and the importance of self-knowledge in a flourishing human life. I cannot hope to summarize all these discussions here, but I hope that this symposium may encourage people to consult the book, and I hope the book itself may convince even people who dispute the details of my analysis that there is a rich vein of material for exploration here, one that links the topic of self-knowledge as it is standardly conceived with topics about the general nature of rational mindedness.

Matthew Boyle is an Emerson and Grace Wineland Pugh Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago. He works on topics in the philosophy of mind and moral psychology, especially self-knowledge and the nature of rationality. He also writes on topics in the history of philosophy, with a particular focus on the work of Immanuel Kant. He is presently writing a book on other minds and intersubjective consciousness.

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