

SHOEMAKER, SELF-BLINDNESS, MOORE-PARADOXICAL UTTERANCES, AND THE BROAD PERCEPTUAL MODEL OF INTROSPECTION

Omar Fakhri

University of California, Berkeley

I

What is self-blindness? Shoemaker states:

In blindsight the person is blind to facts about his own mental condition of which he would be aware if he were normal. What the considerations I have mentioned suggest is that it is at least conceptually possible that such blindness should be much more widespread—that there could be people who are blind to a wide variety of the mental facts to which normal people have introspective access. (226)

Normal blindness is the inability to visually perceive things. Self-blindness is the inability to introspectively perceive one's beliefs. That is, if someone is self-blind, then she does not have first-person access to her mental states. There is an important analogy between normal blindness and self-blindness for Shoemaker. Normal blindness does not affect a person's rational status and the same applies to self-blindness. A self-blind person is just as rational as a blind person.

Shoemaker thinks that the broad perceptual model implies self-blindness because of the *independence condition* (226). The independence condition states “the existence of these states and events is independent of their being known in this way, and even there existing the mechanisms that make such knowledge possible” (226-7). In other words, first-order beliefs are independent of second-order beliefs. That is, one can exist without the other and vice versa. The independence condition is a result of the analogy between the broad perceptual model of introspection and perception. For example, when I look at a tree, this perceptual experience causes the belief that I see a tree. The same applies to beliefs since those who hold to the broad perceptual model think that introspection works just like perception. So, on this broad perceptual view, introspec-

tive beliefs (or awareness) are *caused* by mental states, and this causal relationship is contingent. This is important because it implies that something can go wrong in the causal chain. For this reason, the broad perceptual model of introspection implies self-blindness.

Now, on to Moore-paradoxical utterances. What exactly are Moore-paradoxical utterances? Examples of Moore-paradoxical utterances usually have the following structure: “P, but I do not believe P.”¹ For instance, “It is raining, but I do not believe it is raining,” or “There is a tree, but I do not believe there is a tree.” The reason these utterances are paradoxical is because it seems that if you are *sincerely* uttering, “It is raining,” it implies that you *believe* it is raining. In other words, it seems that your utterance, “It is raining, but I do not believe it is raining” implies “I believe it is raining, but I do not believe it is raining.” This contradiction coupled with the sincerity claim explains why it is a paradox. Why would anyone sincerely utter a contradiction? On Shoemaker’s account, since beliefs are self-intimating, it would be impossible for a rational agent to sincerely utter a Moore-paradoxical utterance. (More on this later).²

At this point, one can begin to see how Shoemaker’s argument against the broad perceptual model will play out. In short, Shoemaker argues that we can reduce the proposition “self-blindness is possible” to absurdity. He uses the impossibility of a rational agent to sincerely assert a Moore-paradoxical utterance to show this. His argument can be stated as follows:³

- (P1) Self-blindness is possible.
- (P2) Self-blind creatures have only a perceptual disorder (i.e., they are rational).
- (P3) A person’s behavior is our best evidence for their beliefs.
- (P4) A self-blind person’s behavior should be the same as a normal individual’s.
- (P5) Self-blind people *can* assert Moore-paradoxical utterances.
- (P6) Self-blind people *cannot* assert Moore-paradoxical utterances.
- (C) Therefore, self-blindness is impossible.⁴

This argument is a *reductio ad absurdum*. That is, if we assume (P1) for the sake of the argument, then we will end up with a contradiction—namely, the conjunction of (P5) and (P6). Since (P1) implies a contradiction, (P1) cannot be true. And if the broad perceptual model implies (P1) and (P1) cannot be true, then it follows that the broad perceptual model cannot be true.

What are the merits of the premises of Shoemaker’s argument? As I have explained earlier, (P1) is supported by the independence condition that is implied by the broad perceptual model. (P2) is buttressed from the analogy that is made between normal perception and introspection. The idea, here, is that since introspection is very similar to perception, then it is plausible to assume that a self-blind person can be just as rational as a normal blind person. (P3) is not really argued for by Shoemaker. It is assumed. However, it seems plausible in that we usually attribute certain beliefs to persons because of their behavior.

(P4) is supported by (P2). Since a self-blind person is just as rational as a normal person, we should expect her to act similarly. (P5) seems possible because a self-blind person does not have access to her mental states. So, if a self-blind person S has the

belief that not-P, S will not have access to not-P. Hence, S can sincerely assert “P, but I do not believe P” since she does not have access to her belief not-P. It is almost as if S is asserting “P, but *John* does not believe P.” The odd part appears when we consider (P6). Since S is rational and acts like a normal person, S will, for example, pick up an umbrella when it is raining; she will remove her hand quickly if it touches a hot stove, and so on. But, from (P3) we can conclude that S believes that it is raining. Also, if S is rational, according to (P2), then we should conclude that S cannot assert a contradiction sincerely. Therefore, self-blindness is impossible. So much the worse for the broad perceptual model of introspection.

II

In this section, I propose to take a second look at each premise. It seems there are lots of problems with some of the main premises of the argument: (P2), (P4), (P5), and (P6). After exposing these problems, I conclude by showing that Shoemaker’s *constitutive* account of beliefs also implies the possibility of self-blindness. If so, then even if my objections are not successful, Shoemaker’s argument will not only be a problem for the broad perceptual model, but also a problem for his own theory.

I will begin with (P2). According to this premise, a self-blind person is just as rational as a normal person. The reason for this is because self-blindness is not a cognitive disorder. Just like a blind person can be just as rational as a normal person, a self-blind person also can be just as rational as a normal person. First, it seems that an advocate of the broad perceptual model can hold to the analogy made from perception to introspection, and disagree that self-blindness is not a cognitive disorder. The reason for this is because self-blindness does seem like a cognitive disorder. For one, a self-blind person does not have access to her mental states. Better put, a self-blind person does not have access to her *cognitive* states. To say that this is not a problem is similar to saying that a blind person does not have a *perceptual* defect. Also, it seems that if a person is self-blind, she can have all sorts of contradictory beliefs since a self-blind person cannot, so to speak, *scan* through her beliefs in order to get rid of the incompatible ones. Scanning and rearranging some of one’s beliefs require at least some sort of introspective access. This condition, then, seems to be a cognitive defect. Surely, a person that cannot scan and rearrange her irrational beliefs has some sort of cognitive defect. Hence, it is not at all clear why a self-blind person does not have a cognitive defect.

(P4) also seems implausible. Recall, advocates of the broad perceptual model want to make an analogy between perception and introspection. They claim that introspection is similar to perception. If so, then why would the advocate of the broad perceptual model conclude that a self-blind person will behave similarly to a normal person? To see the problem, just consider a blind person. A blind person does not behave similarly to a normal person. A blind person does not behave in a particular way if there is a note in front of her that says “your life is in danger.” By contrast, a normal person will behave in a certain way if there is a note like that in front of her. There are other countless examples where a blind person does not behave like a normal person. Likewise, since the analogy is made between a blind person and a self-blind person, then

one would expect that a self-blind person will not behave the same way that a normal person would. For instance, a self-blind person will likely be confused as to why she is picking up an umbrella when she does not have access to her belief that it is raining.

The problem I see with (P5) is that it is not compatible with (P2). That is, if a self-blind person can assert a Moore-paradoxical utterance, then it would follow that she is not rational. This is the case because a person sincerely asserting a Moore-paradoxical utterance implies that she believes a contradiction. Being in such a state does not seem to be a rational state. And what is worse is that this person cannot figure out that she believes in a contradiction since she has no introspective access to her beliefs. So if (P5) is true, then (P2) is false and vice versa. But in order for Shoemaker's argument to be successful, he needs both premises to be true. Hence, his argument cannot be successful.

In her article, "Shoemaker, Self-Blindness and Moore's Paradox," Amy Kind argues that (P6) is false because a person can be aware of her beliefs and desires through third person access and not through self-acquaintance (i.e., first person access). That is, a self-blind person can know that she believes P from the actions that she is performing. So for example, a self-blind person can know that she believes that it is raining from her actions of picking up the umbrella and putting on her coat. This knowledge would be similar to our knowledge of other persons. And knowing this means that she will not assert a Moore-paradoxical utterance. Thus, Shoemaker's argument is unsuccessful because he has not shown that self-blindness is impossible. Kind's argument can be summarized as follows:

- (P1*) Self-blindness requires one to lack self-acquaintance and not self-knowledge.
- (P2*) Moore's argument assumes that self-blindness requires one to lack self-knowledge.
- (C*) Therefore, Moore's argument is unsuccessful.

By "self-acquaintance," Kind means self-knowledge through special access to one's mental states. By "special," Kind means "private." Self-knowledge on the other hand, includes self-acquaintance and knowledge of oneself from a third person perspective. That is knowledge of oneself that is similar to knowledge of other persons. So Kind points out that in order for Shoemaker to legitimately make the claim that a self-blind person cannot make a Moore-paradoxical utterance, he must assume that a self-blind person lacks both self-acquaintance and self-knowledge. However, this claim is false since Shoemaker's own description of self-blindness only entails the lack of self-acquaintance and not the lack of self-knowledge.

So far, I have attempted to point out some problems with the main premises of Shoemaker's argument (or at least my exposition of it). But let us suppose that my objections are not as conclusive as I claim them to be. The question now is: does the conclusion follow from the premises? As I have stated earlier, in a *reductio* one assumes a premise and then shows that this premise entails a contradiction. And because of this contradiction, a premise must be rejected. In other words, if P, then Q and not-Q; therefore, not-P. The question that is lurking in the background with a *reduc-*

tio is which premise should we reject? That is, which premise in the argument is P? Shoemaker's answer is that we should reject premise one. But is that necessary? I do not think so. Why should we reject (P1) instead of (P2), for example—or (P3), (P4), (P5), or (P6)? Or maybe we should reject the conjunction of two of the premises in the argument. A successful *reductio* reduces a premise to absurdity by using other premises that are intuitive, self-evident, or non-controversial. By doing this, the premise that one must reject becomes clear. But it seems that Shoemaker's other premises are controversial. Hence, we are within our epistemic rights to perhaps reject a different premise of the argument rather than (P1) or perhaps reject a conjunction of two premises.

I conclude with the following problem. Does Shoemaker's constitutive account of beliefs imply self-blindness? Shoemaker, of course, would say "no" because if his view implies self-blindness, then he falls prey to his own arguments against the broad perceptual model. As I have stated earlier, Shoemaker thinks that beliefs have a special feature: they can make themselves known to you. That is, they are self-intimating.⁵ Another interesting feature of Shoemaker's account is that he thinks that a first-order belief is constituted by a second-order belief. For example, part of my second-order belief that "I believe that it is raining outside" is my first order belief that "it is raining outside." Now, I am not sure what it means for a belief to be *part of* another belief since when we usually talk about things being a part of other things, we are talking about physical, tangible objects. But let us put that aside.

Additionally, this constitutive nature of beliefs is what makes self-blindness impossible for his account. Since my first-order belief is part of my second-order belief, I cannot be self-blind because there is no contingent causal chain that can be interrupted, unlike the broad perceptual model. I disagree. It seems that there *could* be a causal chain between the first-order belief and the second order belief even in a constitutive account. Let me explain what I mean. Suppose that *b* is the belief that "It is raining outside," and *Bb* is the belief that "I believe that it is raining outside." Notice, that *b* is part of *Bb* (hence the notations). Thus, *b* is a first-order belief and *Bb* is a second-order belief, and the first-order belief is constituted by the second-order belief. With this in mind, it seems possible that we can get the following occurring: *b* causing *Bb*. Here, we have a constitutive account of beliefs, but we also have a causal relationship between first-order beliefs and second-order beliefs. The important question here is: *when* does a first-order belief become part of a second-order belief? It seems that when a first-order belief makes itself known to you, it becomes part of a second-order belief. But why not think that this process of becoming known to you is causal just like the broad perceptual model claims that it is? That is I have the belief *b* and at the moment it makes itself known to me, a causal chain occurs, and then all of a sudden I have *Bb*. Moreover, this causal chain takes place so quickly, it seems phenomenologically instant. I see no reason to dispute this. So if this is even possible, then it seems that Shoemaker's constitutive account can also be causal and contingent. Hence, just like the broad perceptual model, there could be an interruption in Shoemaker's causal chain, which means that self-blindness is possible. So I say, so much the worse for Shoemaker's argument

NOTES

1. Heal (“Moore’s Paradox”) thinks that there are two kinds of Moore-paradoxical utterances: (1) “I believe that p but not p,” and (2) “I don’t believe that p but p.” For the purposes of this paper, I will not be concerned with this distinction.
2. See Shoemaker 74–96.
3. My formulation of Shoemaker’s argument is similar to Kind’s.
4. I realize that this formal argument lacks truth-functional connectives. I left them out to put more emphasis on the content of the premises as opposed to the validity of the argument.
5. See section VI, lecture II in Shoemaker.

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