

**Quassim Cassam.** *Self-Knowledge for Humans*. Oxford University Press 2015. 272 pp. \$50.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199657575).

Quassim Cassam takes up three main tasks in his book on self-knowledge. The first is to provide us with grounds for rejecting ‘Rationalism’ about self-knowledge. The second is to defend his own position of inferentialism. And the third is to argue in support of a kind of self-knowledge, ‘substantial self-knowledge’, that is often neglected by philosophers.

In making a case against Rationalism, Cassam distinguishes between *homo philosophicus* and *homo sapiens*. Whereas *homo philosophicus* is an idealized rational agent, *homo sapiens* is an imperfectly rational, actual human being. We should be mindful of this distinction because, despite what some philosophers might tell us, real human beings are subject to various well-known cognitive failings and shortcomings (ix). When developing an account of self-knowledge, it would be a mistake to assume that we are model epistemic citizens, like *homo philosophicus*.

Cassam believes that Rationalism is guilty of doing just this; it is built around an idealized rational agent, or *homo philosophicus*. Rationalism about self-knowledge, ‘says that you can know whether you do believe a given proposition P by reflecting on whether you ought rationally to believe that P.... The same goes for desires, hopes, fears, and other attitudes. In each case, knowing what your attitude ought rationally to be puts you in a position to know what your attitude is’ (ix). Much of the book is aimed at discrediting Rationalism in its various forms. But at times one wonders whether anyone actually defends the version of Rationalism that Cassam attacks. I would surmise that nearly all philosophers are familiar with the empirical studies (conducted by Daniel Kahneman, Richard Nisbett, Lee Ross, and Timothy Wilson) upon which Cassam bases his argument. Would anyone deny that existence of what Cassam calls ‘the Disparity’, or ‘the respects in which humans are unlike *homo philosophicus*’ (x)?

While outlining the theoretical commitments of Rationalism, Cassam examines the Transparency Method (or TM), a means of acquiring self-knowledge popularized by Richard Moran. According to TM, we can answer an outward-directed question by answering the corresponding inward-directed question. That is, if we want to know whether or not we believe that P (an inward-directed question) we should ask ourselves whether or not it is the case that P (an outward-directed question) (3). In Moran’s phraseology, we can say that the former question is *transparent* to the latter question (3). And thus, I can determine whether or not I believe that there will be a third world war (an inward-directed question) by asking whether or not there will be a third world war (an outward-directed question). Cassam later considers a revised version of this method, developed by David Finkelstein, that works for attitudes other than belief: ‘The question of whether I believe that P is, for me, transparent to the question of what I ought rationally to believe—i.e., to the question of whether the reasons require me to believe that P. I can answer the former question by answering the latter’ (4). Cassam prefers this version of TM because of its greater generality.

Cassam argues that the Disparity provides us with grounds for rejecting TM. As we have seen, this is because we do not always believe what it is rational for us to believe. Thus, you cannot ‘determine whether you believe that P by determining whether you ought rationally to believe that P’ (5). But it is not clear that the existence of the Disparity is as great a threat to TM as Cassam takes it to be; for it would seem that any of the cognitive errors to which we (*qua homo sapiens*) are susceptible would affect our answers to both inward and outward-directed questions. Consider

Kahneman's BAT AND BALL example: 'a bat and ball cost \$1.10. The bat costs one dollar more than the ball. How much does the ball cost? The intuitive but wrong answer is 10 cents. The right answer is 5 cents' (15). Now when we believe the intuitive but false answer it will also seem to us that that intuitive but false answer is true, or that we have good reason to believe it. If this is correct, then the inward-directed question is nevertheless transparent to the outward-directed question. We should expect our answers to *both* questions to be vulnerable to the various cognitive limitations and deficiencies of *homo sapiens*. The Disparity, or this instance of it, does not provide us with clear grounds for rejecting TM.

A greater threat to TM is the case of belief-recalcitrance. In cases of belief-recalcitrance, a person holds a belief even though she realizes that it has been discredited. Cassam's own example involves a woman, Karen, who takes an aptitude test and is told that she 'has an aptitude for science and music, but not for history or philosophy' (22). On the basis of these results, Karen believes that she has an aptitude for science and music, but not for history or philosophy. However, when she is later informed that she was given the wrong results, she fails to revise her beliefs accordingly. She continues to believe that she has an aptitude for science and music, but not for history or philosophy, even though she *recognizes* that her sole source of evidence in support of this belief has been discredited (22). TM seems to fail in this case because Karen's inward-directed question is not transparent to her outward-directed question. She believes that she has an aptitude for science and music, but not for history or philosophy, even though she recognizes that she has no reason to believe this.

Cassam claims that such cases are possible because beliefs are like habits or dispositions and can become unresponsive to a person's judgments (23). Thus, it is possible for a person to continue to hold a belief even after she recognizes that its sole source of evidence has been discredited. According to Cassam, such cases are possible and provide us with grounds for rejecting TM. It is important to note here that cases of belief-recalcitrance seem to threaten Cassam's preferred formulation of TM but not the formulation put forward by Moran. Given Moran's formulation, the answer to Karen's inward-directed question *is* transparent to the outward-directed question; that is, she can figure out what she believes about her aptitude for science, music, history, and philosophy by directing her attention upon herself as part of the world. This is because Moran's version of TM (as presented by Cassam, at least), unlike Finkelstein's, does not require that you believe whatever you have reason to believe.

Even when we consider the case of Karen from the perspective of Cassam's preferred formulation (i.e., Finkelstein's), matters are far from obvious. What, if anything, do cases of belief-recalcitrance reveal about TM? In the first place, we may wonder whether such cases are possible, or best understood, as Cassam describes them. Perhaps, in such cases, the person in question really does hold that there is good reason, or at least some reason, to hold the belief in question. She may take her belief to be based upon some kind of inarticulable hunch, intuition, or other source of evidence. And even if Cassam is correct in thinking that TM fails in the rare case of belief recalcitrance, it may otherwise hold as a general rule.

Cassam believes that his own position, inferentialism, avoids these and other difficulties. The position is not entirely new and draws heavily from others, such as Peter Carruthers and Krista Lawlor. The basic idea here is that "knowledge of our beliefs, desires, hopes, and other 'intentional' states is first and foremost a form of inferential knowledge" (137). Cassam is right that much, but probably not all, self-knowledge is based upon some form of inference.

The last two chapters of the book deal with the value of substantial self-knowledge, or knowledge about one's values, emotions, abilities, and sources of happiness (10). In explaining why self-knowledge matters, Cassam claims that we can take either a high or low road approach. High road approaches understand the importance of self-knowledge in terms of abstract ideals, like authenticity or unity. In contrast, low road approaches explain the value of self-knowledge in practical or pragmatic terms by showing how it contributes to well-being (212). Cassam rejects high road approaches because they are difficult to defend and promote a depth that is largely illusory (213). Instead, he prefers a low road approach that demystifies self-knowledge while still giving us everything that we need (213). According to the approach that Cassam favors, self-knowledge is valuable because it contributes to one's 'overall happiness or well-being' (223).

Cassam makes a convincing case in support of the value of substantial self-knowledge. But, he may be mistaken in thinking that philosophers have largely neglected this issue. In considering the ethics of self-deception, for example, philosophers have written extensively on the value of self-knowledge. After all, it is difficult to evaluate self-deception, or other forms of self-ignorance, without saying something about the value of self-knowledge. Still, substantial self-knowledge does not always get the attention that it deserves. Cassam's book makes a welcome, if not wholly original, contribution to our philosophical thinking on the topic.

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