

On Being Known

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Indeed the wish to be known seems to be selfish, and its motive a desire to receive and not to confer some benefit, whereas to wish to know a person is for the sake of conferring benefit and bestowing affection. For this reason we praise those who remain constant in affection towards the dead; for they know, but are not known.

—Aristotle

1. Humans desire to be known. One central expression of that desire is friendship, a relationship between people that is partly constituted by their knowing, and so being known by, one another. The desire seems also to sponsor therapeutic analogues of friendship, for example in psychoanalysis. And it plausibly figures—perhaps in a distorted form—in explaining why some people strive for honour or celebrity.

The desire to be known might be a basic component of our natural endowment, or it might be explained by more basic components of that endowment. In what follows, I shall explore the idea that the desire to be known by *others* can be explained by the more basic desire to know *oneself*. The idea to be explored is that the benefits we receive by being known by others include an enhanced capacity to know ourselves. Other people can help sustain our capacities for self-knowledge. Since self-knowledge is a benefit to oneself and not to those who know us, the idea fits Aristotle's claim that the desire to be known is selfish.

My aim in this exploratory discussion is to delineate some of the boundaries of the space within which it might be possible for those who know us to help us to know ourselves. To that end, I'll consider two proposals according to which our capacity to know ourselves can be heavily dependent on the support of others who know us, one due to Sigmund Freud and the other derived from Aristotle. I'll argue that neither of the extreme proposals should be accepted: the first, because the gaps in self-knowledge that Freud's view posits would tend to make us opaque

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to others; the second, because, even on the assumption that others could have knowledge about us that we lacked, the forms of self-ignorance posited by the Aristotelian view posits would render us unable to share their knowledge. However, it's worth noting that even if the idea of acquiring self-knowledge from others were defensible, the desire to know oneself is itself a desire to be known, albeit by oneself. So even if we were to accept that our desire to be known by others is explained by our desire for self-knowledge, it would leave open that the desire to be known is basic.

The idea to be explored, then, involves a combination of two claims: first, that we can be ignorant about our own minds, either through taking ourselves to be a way that we are not or through failing to take ourselves to be a way that we are; second, that being known by others can figure in helping us to shed some of our ignorance. On initial inspection, the idea is liable to seem plausible. For it is plausible that we are in fact ignorant of many facts about our own minds. And it is plausible in other cases that we can come to know things from other people on the basis of their telling us the things that they know. Furthermore, it is plausible that other people can know facts about our minds. So, insofar as the idea of acquiring self-knowledge from others brings together those three ideas, it will seem to inherit their individual plausibility.

The idea that other people might inform us about our own minds is more plausible with respect to some cases than others. For instance, some people will balk at the idea that one might discover from another that one is in pain. But that reaction may be explained by appeal to the comparative implausibility of one's being ignorant about whether one is in pain. Alternatively, with respect to cases about which we find it more plausible that we may lack insight, we are liable to be more open to the idea of coming to know from others. As Anthony Kenny remarks:

The really important questions about oneself, about what kind of person one fundamentally is, are not questions which can be settled by introspection. 'Do I really love her?' 'Am I the kind of person that would betray a friend to death to save my life?' 'Will I regret, in five years time, that I changed my job in mid-life?' 'Am I getting more and more vain as I grow older?' These, and countless other questions of the same kind, are questions which receive their definitive answer not in private colloquy with oneself in the imagination, but in the testing conditions of life in the real and public world. A close friend or spouse may well be able to conjecture in advance with greater perspicacity than I the answers they will eventually receive. (Kenny 1989: 95–6.)

And recent psychological research has uncovered an array of cases in which people are no better placed to know about, for example, their own characters, motivations, or feelings than others with whom they interact. (For a useful recent survey, see Wilson 2002.) There is some plausibility, then, to the idea that we might, on occasion, come to know facts about our own minds on the basis of others' testimony. Pulling in the other direction, however, is the idea that some forms of ignorance about one's own mind seem to be quite unlike cases of ignorance about the external world. Certain sorts of insight into one's own mind seem correlative with well-functioning reason, so that ignorance in those respects

can bespeak a lack of psychic health or optimal functioning. The idea that the possession of some forms of autonomous self-knowledge is a requirement of well-functioning reason is the source of a countercurrent with three main fronts.

The first front is the idea that in cases in which one's lack of autonomous knowledge evinces poorly functioning reason, it is not obvious that filling the gap in one's knowledge on the basis of another's testimony would suffice to restore psychic health. Rather, what is required is that the knowledge be properly integrated into one's psychological economy. I won't say much more about that front here, although it will figure in the background to my discussion. But it is a commonplace of reflection on psychoanalysis that merely knowing the features of one's mind that it uncovers does not suffice to reinstate health; rather, analysis succeeds only when the patient brings that knowledge back into the psychic fold. (For useful discussion, see Moran 2001.)

The second front is the idea that the type of poor functioning evidenced by certain forms of self-blindness affect not only one's own ability to know oneself, but also other people's abilities to know one. The idea here is that being knowable by others, and so being known by them, can depend upon well-functioning reason in something like the same way as does one's possession of insight into one's own mind. Most straightforwardly, that might be because other people know about one's mind partly on the basis of what one says, and because one way in which what one says reveals aspects of one's mind is by reflecting what one knows about one's mind. Less straightforwardly, it might be because ordinary ways of knowing another's mind rely on the other's possession of properly functioning reason, and properly functioning reason is partly constituted by insight. I shall explore the second front in section 2, via a discussion of some claims made by Sigmund Freud. I'll argue that some of Freud's stronger claims about self-blindness are in tension with his optimism about the possibility of our being known by others.

The third front is the idea that certain forms of insight into one's own mind might figure essentially in one's ability to acquire knowledge from others. Thus, even if absence of insight were consistent with one's being knowable by others, its absence might nonetheless preclude one from exploiting the knowledge that those others possess. I shall explore the third front more fully in sections 3 and 4, via a discussion of an idea that John Cooper finds in Aristotle's discussion of the functions of friendship. On Cooper's reading, Aristotle argues that one function of friendship is that it can make available to one forms of self-knowledge that would not otherwise be available. (Cooper 1980.) I'll develop Cooper's proposal in a way that makes clear how, in its best form, it depends upon friends knowing, and so being known by one another. I'll argue, however, that the required forms of knowledge would not be available in conditions of radical self-blindness.

In what follows, I attempt to mark out some of the boundaries of the space within which it might be possible for those who know us to help us to know ourselves. For that purpose, I focus on views that prioritize others' knowledge of one's mind over one's autonomous capacities to know one's own mind. These are views that claim that in order to know ourselves we must rely on others who know us because, without their assistance, we would be in one or another way opaque to ourselves. I thus ignore a range of more nuanced views on which others can collaborate with us in helping us to know ourselves, for example by

leading us to realize things about ourselves, our to sharpen our views about ourselves, through judicious questions or suggestions. My hope is that a preliminary exploration of the limits on prioritizing others' knowledge about one over one's autonomous self-knowledge will help to guide more detailed inquiries into the territory that those boundaries mark out.

2. The idea that we can lack insight into our own characters, motivations, thoughts, or activities is sometimes claimed to be a strikingly modern idea. Thus Sigmund Freud writes:

Psychoanalysis regarded everything mental as being in the first place unconscious; the further quality of "consciousness" might also be present, or again it might be absent. This of course provoked a denial from the philosophers, for whom "consciousness" and "mental" were identical, and who protested that they could not conceive of such an absurdity as the "unconscious mental." There was no help for it, however, and this idiosyncrasy of the philosophers could only be disregarded with a shrug. Experience (gained from pathological material, of which the philosophers were ignorant) of the frequency and power of impulses of which one knew nothing directly, and whose existence had to be inferred like some fact about the external world, left no alternative open. It could be pointed out, incidentally, that this was only treating one's own mental life as one had always treated other people's. One did not hesitate to ascribe mental processes to other people, although one had no immediate consciousness of them and could only infer them from their words and actions. But what held good for other people must be applicable to oneself. (Freud, 1924: 31–2.)

Part of Freud's thought here is that it is an innovation of psychoanalytic theory, driven by reflection on evidence made available only through distinctively psychoanalytic inquiry, to hold that some aspects of our minds can be unconscious. Freud claims that the very idea of unconscious mentality met with resistance from the philosophers. (As will emerge below, precedents for versions of that idea can in fact be found in the work of some of the earliest philosophers.) However, he suggests, resistance is futile. For we ordinarily allow that other people can know what is going on in our minds, and their doing so is independent of immediate consciousness of what is going on in our minds. Since others can know our minds in the absence of immediate consciousness, they can know aspects of our minds with respect to which we lack such consciousness. In that sense, others can know us independently of whether we can know ourselves. And the fact that they can know us in that way gives rise to the possibility that they might help us to come to know those aspects of ourselves about which we presently lack consciousness, by telling us about those aspects or training us to recognize them. But their helping us in that way is inessential to the status as mental of what they can discern about us. The possibility that others can know our minds without immediate consciousness demonstrates that unconscious mentality is possible.

Freud is right that we ordinarily take it that we can be in a position to ascribe mental processes to other people. More generally, we ordinarily take it that we are

sometimes in a position securely to determine facts about other people's characters, emotions, motivations, thoughts, and activities. We can come to know, or securely to surmise, for example, that Eliza is capable of bravery, that Flo is motivated by her need for company, that Kim knows where George lives, and that George is currently playing chess. Freud makes two claims about our epistemological position with respect to other people, a negative claim and a positive claim. And he seems to take it that both claims are obviously correct. The negative claim is that our position is not owed to what he calls "immediate consciousness". The positive claim is that our position is dependent upon inference from what we know of their words and actions.

One response to Freud's negative claim would be that we do sometimes have immediate consciousness of some aspects of other people's minds. For we take ourselves to be immediately consciousness of other aspects of our environment, via our sensory experience of those aspects. And our awareness of what others think or feel often strikes us as similarly immediate, and as impinging similarly on our consciousness. So, it seems that if Freud intends to deny that we are ever in that sense immediately conscious of what other people think or feel, then it is not obvious that we should go along with that denial.

For related reasons, we might equally be chary of accepting Freud's positive claim. For although our take on what other people think and feel is plausibly dependent upon our awareness of what they do and say, it is far from obvious that the dependence is uniformly inferential. That is, it is far from clear that we ordinarily begin trying to figure out what someone thinks or wants on the basis of bare knowledge about what they do and say—that is, on the basis knowledge that is untainted by views about the reasons why they are doing what they are doing. And it is not obvious that we ordinarily exploit knowledge of principles governing the connections between those behavioural facts and psychological facts in order to acquire inferential knowledge about what people think, feel, or want. Rather, our knowledge of what people think, feel, or want often appears to us to be immediate, albeit in a way that seems to depend upon our awareness of what they do and say. So, there is a natural way of understanding what Freud says about our views about other people's minds according to which what he says isn't obviously correct.

However, there is a way of understanding Freud's claims on which they are more plausible. It seems that with respect to at least some of our own experiences or standing mental states we have a sort of immediate insight: we can simply know that we are chilly, or that we believe that it is cold, where our simply knowing those things is a matter of there being no good answer to the question how we know those things. Brian O'Shaughnessy presents the idea in the following way:

Very occasionally we discover what is here and now occurring in our own minds through inference and appeal to experience. For example, we might take seriously the suggestion of a friend that our present motivation is other than we might have supposed. But before all else and for most of our waking lives we are absolutely immediately aware of a great slice of the present contents of our own minds. That is, we know of a great many such items 'just like that' or no-how. (O'Shaughnessy 2000: 105. See also 102–199; Roessler 2013.)

If we understand Freud's claims about "immediate consciousness" as claims about that form of insight, then his negative claim seems quite plausible: we do lack that form of insight with respect to other people's minds. Moreover, we can then read his claim about the role of inference in knowing about other people's minds as a misstatement of a less committal claim. The less committal claim would be one to the effect that we lack insight with respect to other people's minds precisely because there is an answer to the question how we know things about their minds—namely, by way of our awareness of what they do and say.

It would be perfectly consistent for Freud to appeal to the idea of insight in the way just proposed while denying that we have insight with respect to any aspects of our own minds. However, what he says about the extent of "immediate consciousness" doesn't entail that denial. Rather, Freud explicitly denies only that any aspect of a person's mind is necessarily such that they will possess insight with respect to it. And that denial is consistent with allowing that we in fact possess insight with respect to all aspects of our own minds. Moreover, Freud's claim against the philosophers would be upheld if he were able to defend an even weaker claim, to the effect that it is possible for someone to lack insight with respect to some aspects of their minds. And it would be consistent to defend that claim while at the same time allowing that there are some aspects of mind that are necessarily available to insight. Furthermore, we might think the weaker view is more reasonable than either of the stronger views, since there seem to be aspects of mind—the feeling of pain, for example—about which it would be hard to deny that some form of insight is essential.

Let's construe Freud as making only the weaker claim, that there are aspects of mind with respect to which it is possible to lack insight. Despite the purported animadversions of the philosophers, that claim seems plausible. Even with respect to central cases in which we often take ourselves to possess insight—what we believe, or know, or how we are feeling—it would be reasonable to hold that the availability of insight is a sort of norm of proper functioning, and so is dependent on psychic health. For example, we might be willing to allow that insight can lapse with tiredness, drunkenness, and other forms of psychic disruption. And we might be willing to allow that forms of forgetfulness, repression, or self-deception can also undermine our capacity for insight. (For discussion of the idea of self-knowledge as a norm of proper psychic functioning, see Moran 2001; O'Shaughnessy 2000: 102–199; Shoemaker 1996.)

Suppose that we were willing to allow that a subject's insight can wane, depending as it does on the vagaries of their psychic health. We might in that case be drawn to the idea that someone other than the subject might be better placed than the subject to discern the contents of the subject's mind. At the very least, we might be drawn to the idea that, lacking insight, the subject would be confined to knowing their own minds in ways that were equally available to others. (Importantly, however, that wouldn't follow just from the claim that we lack insight. For we might lack insight with respect to an aspect of mind while possessing insight into manifestations of that aspect, and so might have access to ways of knowing about the aspect that depend on insight and, so, are not available in the same way to others.) And just as others can be ignorant about our minds through their failing to make use of the ways of knowing that are available to

them, we might also fail to make use of those ways and so be ignorant about that with respect to which we lack insight. Thus, someone else might know things about our minds that we don't know, and might be in a position to help us to make up the shortfall by telling us the things they know.

However, even if we were willing to accept that insight can wane, and connectedly that others may be as well-placed as we are to discern some of our thoughts or feelings, the type of grounds that Freud offers for allowing that would need careful handling. For Freud appeals to the fact that we can securely attribute mental states, episodes and processes to other people even though *we* lack insight with respect to those mental states, episodes, and processes. But it doesn't follow that we can do so in a way that doesn't depend on *the subject of attribution* possessing insight into those mental states and episodes. It may be, for example, that the ways in which we normally exploit what other people do and say in order to discern aspects of their minds is dependent on their psychic health. Thus, it may be that insofar as a loss of psychic health can make subjects somewhat opaque to themselves, it can serve also to make them opaque to others. So, it doesn't follow from the fact that we can make secure psychological attributions despite *our* lacking insight into the objects of those attributions that our power to do so is independent of insight. And neither does it follow, therefore, that we can in that way make sense of the attributed states, episodes, and processes being in place independently of insight. (See O'Shaughnessy 2001: 102–199; Roessler 2013, ms.)

If we are going to follow Freud, then, we will have to do so on slightly different grounds than the ones that he offers here. One way of proceeding would be to attempt to provide grounds for thinking that our ordinary ways of discerning aspects of other people's minds are appropriately independent of their possessing insight with respect to those aspects. Alternatively, we might try to provide grounds for thinking that non-ordinary ways are available to us for discerning aspects of the minds of those who lack insight. Perhaps, for example, psychoanalytic theories can provide for extensions to our ordinary ways of discerning aspects of other people's minds in such a way that those extensions can be operated successfully with respect to aspects of mind about which their possessor's lack insight. (For discussion of the latter idea, see Hopkins 1991. For general discussion and defence of Freud's appeal to unconscious mentality, see Gardner 1991.) In the remainder of this section, I'll consider a version of the first sort of proposal and argue that it can provide only limited support to the idea of our acquiring self-knowledge from others.

The proposal to be considered appeals to the idea that we are capable of discerning mentality on behalf of non-human animals and infants who, it is plausible to suppose, wholly lack insight. If that type of psychology were preserved intact as a sort of psychic substratum amongst those who in addition possess insight, then we might naturally expect to be able to discern it in the same way there. (Freud 1923 suggests such a conception of the id, as an unconscious substratum of adult psychology.)

O'Shaughnessy comments that this type of view shows

a tendency to *split* the mind. And this is what we should expect from theories which found intellectual and executive function upon a *developmentally prior*

instinctual base. For this is a view which implies that the latter might in principle exist in the complete absence of the former.... Since [Freud's theory posits] the existence of mental forces which can operate independently of knowledge and intellect, they allow for primitive mental phenomena which of their nature lie outside the scope of immediate first-person awareness or 'insight'.... The clear Cartesian waters of the mind seem irremediably to be muddied in [this doctrine] which [seeks] to assimilate instinct into the theory of mind. In my view, the fault in [this theory] lay not in the project of assimilation, but in the extremity of the variety of developmentalism through which it was accomplished. [Its] basic fault was a neglect of the unity ('holism') of the mind. (O'Shaughnessy 2000: 170–72.)

O'Shaughnessy's focus is on Freud's account of the id as a form of psychological instinct. But his central worry about that account generalizes so as to apply to the wider appeal to the psychologies of non-human animals and human infant that we are currently considering. His central thought from that broader perspective is that when a developmentally prior layer of instinct, or primitive psychology, comes to be embedded into—or integrated with—the type of psychology normally possessed by adult humans, its nature changes as a result of that embedding. The rational unity (or 'holism') of the mind means that within a psychology involving insight, those aspects that correspond with the psychology of the pre-insight developmental phase will correspond only imperfectly: their natures, and, crucially, the ways in which they are manifested in behaviour, will be changed fundamentally by their integrated involvement in a more sophisticated psychic economy.

For present purposes, the most pressing concern here is about manifestation. The proposal we are considering is that the commonalities between animal and infant psychology and the aspects of an adult human's psychology about which they lack insight mean that our ability to discern the psychologies of animals or infants can be transferred wholesale to the adult case. From that perspective, the concern raised by O'Shaughnessy can be put as follows. Adult humans expressions of psychology are normally—that is, when the adult's psychology is well functioning—a function both of first order psychological elements that correspond very roughly with elements of animal and infant psychology *and* higher order psychological elements of the sort that are delivered by insight. So, even in cases in which the higher order elements are absent, or are present but inadequately integrated with the first order elements, the ways in which the first order elements are manifested will bear the marks of the larger system. Let's consider a way in which the embedding of first order elements in a richer system can muddy their expression in behaviour.

Richard Moran describes a case involving such a form of self-blindness in the following passage:

The person who feels anger at the dead parent for having abandoned her, or who feels betrayed or deprived of something by another child, may only know of the attitude through the eliciting and interpreting of evidence of various kinds. She might become thoroughly convinced, both from the constructions of the analyst, as well as her own appreciation of the evidence, that this attitude must indeed be attributed to her. And yet, all the same, when she reflects on the world-directed question itself, whether she has indeed been betrayed by this person, she may find

that the answer is no, or can't be settled one way or the other.... We might say that the analysand can *report* on such a belief, but she does not *express* it, since although she will describe herself as feeling betrayed she will not in her present state affirm the judgement that this person has in fact betrayed her. (Moran 2001: 85.)

Moran's analysand seems to lack insight with respect to a repressed belief to the effect that she was betrayed. Moreover, her lack of insight seems to leave open for her the possibility of deliberating on the question whether she was in fact betrayed and, on that basis, arriving at the judgement that she was not.

Matthew Soteriou comments insightfully on the passage from Moran—specifically, on the difficulties that this sort of case presents to someone wishing to discern the details of an individual's psychology. Soteriou argues that in arriving at the judgement that she was not betrayed, the analysand will take herself to have come to know that she was not betrayed. He continues:

If a subject has a repressed belief that not-*p* [e.g., that she was betrayed], does it follow from this that it cannot be true of the subject that she really believes that *p* [e.g., that she was not betrayed]? This may not be a straightforward matter to determine. If the subject really does believe that she knows that *p*, then one might think that it follows from this that she believes that *p*, given that knowledge that *p* entails *p* and the subject knows this; in which case one might think that the subject has both the belief that *p* and the repressed belief that not-*p*. (Soteriou 2013: 355.)

The difficulty here is that we really have four options for attributing attitudes to the analysand, and none of the options seems unequivocally to be mandated or precluded by the behavioural evidence. We might hold that the analysand really believes that she wasn't betrayed and doesn't really believe that she was betrayed. We might hold that the analysand really believes that she was betrayed, and so doesn't really take herself to know that she wasn't betrayed (or that she takes herself to know that, whilst failing to follow through on what her knowing entails). We might hold that the analysand harbours the repressed belief that she was betrayed and the conscious belief that she was not betrayed. Or we might hold that the analysand doesn't really hold either belief, since her attitudes are too unstable for either attribution to take firm root. Lacking insight, such a subject is more difficult to understand than would be someone whose possession of insight bound their behavior to a more unequivocal expression of a consistent set of attitudes. One's opacity to oneself can lead also to one's being opaque to others.

We've considered some ways in which an absence of insight might make someone hard to know. It is less obvious than Freud suggested in the passage quoted above that our ordinary ways of discerning the contours of other people's psychologies are independent of their possession of insight into their attitudes. Thus, at least some forms of self-blindness are apt to make one somewhat opaque also to other people. And insofar as other people cannot know us, they are not in a position to inform us about ourselves and in that way to furnish us with self-knowledge. In the following sections, we'll consider a slightly different proposal, focused on the potential of others to provide us with knowledge about our virtues and vices. We'll see that even if this type of proposal makes space for others to

know us, we will be unable to exploit their advantage unless we also autonomously possess knowledge about ourselves of broadly the same kind.

3. Friendship, for Aristotle, involves “mutual reciprocity of affection and purpose” (*EE*: VII. ii. 1236b.). Friends “must have goodwill to each other, wish good things to each other...and not be unaware of it.” (*NE*: VIII. 2. 1156a.) An important question for Aristotle is whether—and if so, why—having friends should be thought to be a component of human happiness. The obstacle to a simple affirmative answer is that happiness seems to involve self-sufficiency, while the idea that one’s happiness would be incomplete without friends seems to bespeak a lack of self-sufficiency.

Aristotle foreshadows one component of his way past the obstacle when he first mentions self-sufficiency in *Nicomachean Ethics*:

We are applying the term ‘self-sufficient’ not to a person on his own, living a solitary life, but to a person living alongside his parents, children, wife, and friends and fellow-citizens generally, since a human being is by nature a social being. (*NE*: I. 7. 1097b.)

For Aristotle, one’s relationships with one’s parents, children, partner, friends, and fellow-citizens are all instances of one’s friendships (though not necessarily instances of the most perfect form, friendships of character). So, it would be consistent to hold that a person is self-sufficient, even if their attaining their ends depends in part on others. However, that isn’t yet to explain why or how human happiness depends on having friends. When Aristotle turns to explaining that, he appeals to a connection between having friends and having self-knowledge.

In *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle writes the following:

...‘friend’ really denotes, in the language of the proverb, ‘another Hercules’—another self....To perceive and to know a friend, therefore, is necessarily in a manner to perceive and in a manner to know oneself. Consequently to share even vulgar pleasures and ordinary life with a friend is naturally pleasant (for it always involves our simultaneously perceiving the friend), but more so to share the more divine pleasures... (*EE*: VII. xii. 1245a.)

Similarly, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, he writes:

As we said at the beginning, happiness is a kind of activity, and it is obvious that an activity comes into being and is not there for someone, like a possession. If being happy consists in living and engaging in activity, and the activity of the good person is good and pleasant in itself, as we said at the beginning; and if what is our own is pleasant; and if we are better able to contemplate our neighbours than ourselves, and their actions than our own; and if the good person finds pleasure in the actions of good people who are his friends (since they have both the qualities that are pleasant by nature); then the blessed person will need friends like this, since he rationally chooses to contemplate actions that are good and his own, and the actions of a good person who is his friend are like this. (*NE*: IX. 9. 1169b–1170a.)

One possible reading of these passages is presented in *Magna Moralia* (plausibly composed by an Aristotelian now known as Pseudo-Aristotle rather than by Aristotle). The relevant passage runs as follows:

Now supposing a man looks upon his friend and marks what he is and what is his character and quality; the friend—if we figure a friend of the most intimate sort—will seem to be a kind of second self, as in the common saying “This is my second Heracles.” Since, then, it is both a most difficult thing, as some of the sages have said, to attain a knowledge of oneself, and also a most pleasant (for to know oneself is pleasant)—now we are not able to see what we are from ourselves (and that we cannot do so is plain from the way in which we blame others without being aware that we do the same things ourselves; and this is the effect of favour or passion, and there are many of us who are blinded by these things so that we judge not aright); as then when we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking in the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at our friend. For the friend is, as we assert, a second self. If, then, it is pleasant to know oneself, and it is not possible to know this without having someone else for a friend, the self-sufficing man will require friendship in order to know himself. [MM: 1213a.]

In the passages from *Eudemian Ethics* and *Magna Moralia*, we are presented with the idea that one’s friend is “another self”. In the passage from *Nicomachean Ethics*, the correlative claim is that one’s friend’s virtuous actions are somehow like one’s own virtuous actions. The three passages agree that, because of the relationship between oneself and one’s friend, and between one’s own actions and one’s friend’s, it would be possible to know oneself, and one’s own actions, on the basis of knowing one’s friend and one’s friend’s actions. Finally, the passages from *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Magna Moralia* suggest that it would be impossible to know one’s character and one’s own actions autonomously. (Both suggest that it would be merely more difficult to know one’s character and one’s actions autonomously. But the argumentative purposes of the passages seem to require the impossibility claim.) So, it is possible to know one’s own character and actions on the basis of knowing one’s friend’s character and one’s friend’s actions. And it is not possible to know one’s character and one’s actions autonomously. Assuming, then, that those options exhaust the field, it is possible to know one’s and actions only on the basis knowing one’s friend’s character and one’s friend’s actions. So, insofar as knowing one’s own character and actions is a requirement on one’s being happy, it would follow that knowing one’s friend’s character and actions is a requirement on one’s being happy.

In order to develop the arguments that are presented in the three passages one must, therefore, address the following three questions. First, what are the grounds for thinking that self-knowledge of the sort that figures in the argument—roughly, knowledge of one’s own intellectual and moral character and one’s actions—cannot be had autonomously? Second, what does it mean to claim that a friend is another self? Third, how can knowledge of another self provide the basis for the required sort of self-knowledge? In addressing these questions, I will draw on an important proposal made, on Aristotle’s behalf, by John Cooper. (Cooper, 1981.) Cooper’s interpretation of Aristotle’s account of the value of

friendship is controversial. My central interest is in the proposal *per se*, rather than its attribution to Aristotle. (For useful discussion see Hitz 2011; Kosman 2004.)

Cooper attempts to address the first question in the following passage:

Notoriously, people tend to notice faults in others that they overlook in themselves; and they are equally inclined to attribute to themselves nonexistent virtues.... These threats to one's objectivity must be reckoned with by everyone, the person who in fact possesses all the good qualities of character and intellect and no bad ones no less than other people. To be sure, the qualities in himself he thinks virtuous are so, and he has no faults; but how is he to be sure that he is not deceiving himself in thinking these things, as he must be if he is to *know* what he is like? (Cooper, 1980: 321.)

Cooper's thought here is that it is a very general human fault, not only to have a tendency to both under attribute vices to themselves and over attribute virtues, but also to be unable autonomously to notice and correct that pattern of errors. Moreover, the fault must be such as to rule out the possibility of autonomous knowledge even amongst those who make no such errors. Perhaps, for example, the tendency to error means that even those with accurate views about themselves will be insufficiently reliable for those views to amount to knowledge. (See also Wilson 2002.) Alternatively—as suggested by Cooper's reference to subjects' not being sure that they are not deceiving themselves—even subjects that are in fact reliable, may lack reasonable confidence in their own reliability, and for that reason may fail to be in a position to know their character. In line with Cooper's proposal, Aristotle himself observes that we may lack confidence in our self-attributions of virtue, and so may seek confirmation from others:

Those...who desire honour from good people familiar with them are seeking to have their own opinion of themselves confirmed; they enjoy honour, then, because they are confident of their own goodness on the strength of the judgement of those who say they are good. (*NE*: VIII. 8. 1159a.)

If Aristotle is right about that, then perhaps our lack of confidence reflects our cognizance of the sorts of tendencies to which Cooper appeals. And perhaps it is our inability to attain reasonable confidence in our reliability that explains our failure autonomously to know.

What about the second question? What makes a friend 'another self'? Cooper writes:

At least in friendships of the best sort, where the parties love one another for their characters and not merely because they enjoy or profit from one another's company, intimacy (it is alleged) bespeaks affinity: my friend is...a second me, myself all over again. Now no doubt the sense of kinship among friends...can be exaggerated. Some people are certainly drawn together partly by the presence of character-traits in the one which the other lacks. Even in such cases, however, it seems reasonable to think that there must be a strong underlying similarity of character and views and that this similarity, intuitively felt by each in the other, forms an important part of the bond between them. (Cooper, 1980: 321–322.)

So, on this view, a second self would be someone with whom one shares ‘a strong underlying similarity of character and views’. And one’s intuitive sensitivity to that underlying affinity would figure in the instigation and preservation of one’s friendship with such a person. Crucially, the sensitivity must be intuitive in at least the following sense: it cannot depend on a comparison of what one knows autonomously to be one’s own character and views with what one knows of one’s friend’s character and views, for the answer to the first question foreclosed on the required form of autonomous self-knowledge. On this view, it seems that someone’s being a second self would explain, rather than being explained by, one’s friendship with them. Thus, the view would contrast with one on which one’s affinity with one’s friend was explained by the friendship and, so, on the basis of each friend taking over the other’s purposes as their own. (I’ll return to the contrasting view below.)

Suppose, then, that one’s friend were, in that sense, a second self. How would knowledge about them and their activities help sustain knowledge about oneself and one’s own activities and, thus, figure in an answer to the third question? Cooper writes:

[K]nowing intuitively that he and his friend are alike in character, such a person could, by studying his friend’s character, come to know his own. Here the presumption is that even an intimate friend remains distinct enough to be studied objectively; yet because one intuitively knows oneself to be fundamentally the same in character as he is, one obtains through him an objective view of oneself. In the [*Magna Moralia*’s] image, one recognizes the quality of one’s own character and one’s own life by seeing it reflected, as in a mirror, in one’s friend. (Cooper, 1980: 322.)

Cooper’s proposal, on Aristotle’s behalf, is that a combination of one’s intuitive sensitivity to one’s affinity with one’s friend and one’s knowledge about one’s friend’s character and actions can sustain one’s coming to know about one’s own character and actions. By assumption, one’s own character and actions are relevantly similar to one’s friend’s character and actions. So, if one’s views about one’s friend’s character and actions are accurate, and one takes the same views about one’s own character and actions, then one’s views about oneself will be accurate. Moreover, if one’s intuitive sensitivity to one’s affinity with one’s friend is reliable, and one’s calibration of one’s views about oneself with one’s views about one’s friend is controlled by that sensitivity, then that plausibly will ensure the reliable co-accuracy of one’s views about one’s own character and actions and one’s views about one’s friend’s character and actions. Finally, if one has knowledge of one’s friend’s character and actions, then one’s views about one’s friend’s character and actions will be reliable. So, assuming that one’s intuitive sensitivity to affinity is reliable, and assuming that one has knowledge of one’s friend’s character and actions, it’s plausible that one’s views about oneself obtained via the proposed route will also be reliable. (For more recent discussion of empirical issues surrounding similar proposals, see Wilson 2002: 93–202.)

4. Cooper raises two worries about his proposal:

First, one might doubt whether, if, as seems true, people tend to be biased in favour of themselves and blind to their own faults, they are any less so where those with whom they are intimate are concerned. And second, one might feel uneasy about the weight apparently being laid on the effectiveness and reliability of one's intuitive sense of kinship with another person. (Cooper, 1980: 322.)

Those concerns are both reasonable. And there may be additional grounds for worrying about our capacities to know our friend's characters, given the assumption that they are self-blind. In line with the earlier discussion of Freud, it may be that in cases in which we can know about others characters and activities that is only because we are able to rely on our subjects possessing knowledge about their own characters and actions. For example, our ability to know what someone is doing might depend on their knowing what they are doing. And our ability to know someone's character might also be dependent on their knowing things about themselves—if not their knowing their own character, perhaps their knowing the motivations and considerations that bear on the specific natures of their activities, and so figure in determining facts about the character from which those activities issue.

Furthermore, there is a third worry that Cooper does not mention. The success of Cooper's proposal depends on the views about oneself that are outputted by the friend-involving procedure amounting to knowledge. But what Cooper's proposal delivers, in the first instance, is only that those views will be reliably accurate. In order to reach the conclusion that the views will amount to knowledge, we would have to appeal to a principle to the effect that it is sufficient for a view to amount to knowledge that it is (in the way delivered by Cooper's procedure) reliably accurate. Now one might have worries about the principle that reliability suffices for knowledge. But leaving that aside, it seems that the output of Cooper's procedure is unlikely to be much more reliable than the intuitive sensitivity to affinity on which it depends. So, it is plausible that insofar as the output of that procedure amounts to knowledge, so will be views formed on the basis of the intuitive sensitivity to affinity. The worry, then, is that Cooper's procedure will only deliver knowledge about oneself insofar as it rests on prior knowledge of one's affinity with one's friend. And it's hard to see how one's views about one's affinity with one's friend could amount to knowledge if those views were not dependent either on knowledgeable views about oneself or on sensitivities to one's character and activities that were apt to give rise to knowledgeable views about oneself. (One might conjecture that it is the tension at this point in his thinking that leads Cooper to slip from his initial talk of our intuitive *feeling* of affinity to his appeal in the most recently quoted passage to our intuitive *knowledge* of affinity.)

A natural response to this difficulty—suggested by Cooper's reference to subjects' not being sure that they are not deceiving themselves—would be to argue that mere reliability does not suffice for knowledge. It seems that Cooper's argumentative strategy anyway requires this. For even if people are in general unreliable in their self-attributions of virtue and vice, there is no obvious reason to think that there are no autonomously reliable self-attributors, or that autonomously reliable self-attribution is not possible. And yet the proposal that

Cooper develops on Aristotle's behalf seems to require the strong impossibility claim, so it seems that the argument relies upon something over and above brute reliability being unavailable autonomously.

It is plausible that, amongst reflective subjects, mere reliability won't, in general, suffice for knowledge. That is, it is plausible that if subjects are to know on the basis of operations of a reliable faculty, they must in addition have, or be entitled to, reflective confidence in the reliable operations of that faculty. At least, the absence of an entitlement to reflective confidence is liable, amongst the reflective, to induce a significant instability in their cognition. For if they reflect upon their first order cognitive commitments, they will seemingly be forced to accept second order commitments to the effect that their first order commitments are correct. So, if they also recognize that they lack an entitlement to those second order commitments—that is, that they have no grounds for confidence in the correctness of their first order commitments—that will impose rational pressure on them to weaken their first order commitments. Hence, amongst the reflective, rationally stable knowledge will plausibly require reasonable confidence in the reliability of the faculties on which their views depend. If that is right, then the mere reliability of the intuitive feeling of affinity need not suffice for views formed on its basis to amount to knowledge. In order for the intuitive feeling to amount to knowledge, its reliability would have to be supplemented by reflective confidence in its reliability. If there were no reason to impose that requirement on the intuitive feeling of affinity, then the third worry about Cooper's proposal would be assuaged. (For discussion of reflective commitments, see Foley 2001.)

The central difficulty with the response is that it relies upon the imposition of a general requirement on stable reflective knowledge while at the same time failing to apply the requirement in full generality. For, insofar as the requirement is general, it must apply to the views about oneself that are outputted by Cooper's procedure. Thus, if one's views about oneself are to amount to knowledge, then one must be entitled to reflective confidence in the reliability of those views. But the reliability of those views depends upon the reliability of the intuitive feeling of affinity. So reflective confidence in the reliability of the views seems to depend upon reflective confidence in the reliability of the intuitive feeling of affinity. Thus, insofar as reflective confidence plus reliability suffices for knowledge, the intuitive feeling of affinity will itself give rise to knowledge, and we are mired once more in a version of the third worry.

At this stage, one might consider refinements of Cooper's proposal in line with the idea that one's friend's capacity to support one's knowledge of oneself is due to the fact that one is known by one's friend.

One natural refinement would make appeal to the way in which one's friend will make one's purposes their own and, thus, will collaborate with one in the achievement of one's ends. Thus, Aristotle writes:

For a man is thought to be a friend who wishes for somebody things that are good, not on his own account but for the other's sake. (*EE*: VII. vi. 1240a.)

Rather than appeal to an intuitive feeling of affinity, one might appeal instead to that one's sensitivity to the fact that one's friend knows one's purposes and

reflects those purposes in their activities. This supports a different conception of the way in which a friend is another self, and their activities are—in a sense—one's own:

What is possible is what can be accomplished by our own efforts; what can be brought about through our friends is in a sense accomplished by our own efforts, in that the first principle is in us. (*NE*: III. 1112b.)

On this proposal, one needn't be aware of specific affinities between oneself and one's friend. Rather, one need only be aware of the general fact that one's friend's activities are governed by their responsiveness to one's own ends. On that basis, one could come to know about one's own character and action on the basis of observing one's friends attempts to implement one's ends. (Hitz 2011 and Kosman 2004 both emphasize the role of collaborative activity in Aristotle's conception of friendship.)

A second refinement of Cooper's proposal also makes appeal to one's friend's knowledge of one's character and actions. Cooper's proposal is based, in part, on Pseudo-Aristotle's comparison of one's friend, as a second self, with a mirror. (*MM* 1213a.) Cooper reads the comparison as suggesting that one's friend is like one's reflection, sufficiently similar to one that knowing about one's friend can provide a way of knowing about oneself. However, an alternative reading would be one according to which one's friend is like a mirror simply in being a source of information about one. The refined proposal, then, would be one according to which one's friend is in a position, unlike oneself, to know things about one's character and actions and, moreover, is able to speak knowledgably about one's character and actions so as to inform one about them. Just as one is able to acquire other bits of knowledge from one's friend's testimony, one is able to acquire knowledge from what they tell one about one's character and actions. Since the refined proposal bypasses the problematic appeal to one's intuitive feeling of affinity with one's friend, it can be used in order to finesse the third worry. In place of the problematic sense of one's affinity with others, the refined proposal appeals only to a capacity to acquire knowledge from others' testimony. Plausibly, that capacity requires a certain amount of sensitivity to one's friend's moral and intellectual character. But it is plausible that the requirements on knowing one's friend for that purpose are less demanding than the requirements imposed by Cooper's proposal. Insofar as one's friend knows one, and one is able to know enough about one's friend to acquire knowledge by accepting what they say, it is plausible that one's friend can be in a position to transmit their knowledge to one, and so can put one in a position to know about oneself. (We might seek to connect the two components of the refined proposal by appeal to the view that one project with respect to which one might seek the collaboration of friends is the project of knowing oneself.)

According to the refined proposal, then, being known by one's friend is a necessary condition for knowing about one's own character and actions. Being known by others is important to one because it is only by being known that one is able to know oneself. The refined proposal is able somewhat to mitigate the three central difficulties with Cooper's proposal: first, it requires less than Cooper's

proposal by way of intuitive knowledge about one's friend; second, it makes a lesser appeal to the intuitive feeling of affinity with one's friend; and third, because it makes a lesser appeal to that intuitive feeling, it avoids the worry that the intuitive feeling must be apt to sustain autonomous self-knowledge.

However, serious difficulties remain. As with the earlier difficulties, they derive from the dependence of the proposal as a whole on a very general skepticism about our capacities to know our own characters and actions.

The first difficulty concerns especially the second refinement. That refinement appeals to the fact that we can ordinarily acquire knowledge from other people's testimony. It's plausible that the fact that we are ordinarily able to acquire knowledge from other people's testimony is due, in part, to the fact that views formed on the basis of that testimony are appropriately reliable. The reliability of views formed in that way seem to depend, in turn, on our reliably accepting what our interlocutor says only when it is reliable. And that depends on a combination of factors. In particular, it depends on the reliability of what our interlocutor says together with our capacity reliably not to accept unreliable things that our interlocutor says. The first difficulty, then, concerns the role of the interlocutor's knowledge of their own reliability in underwriting ordinary cases of testimonial knowledge transmission. For on the one hand, it is natural to think that the overall reliability of what an interlocutor says will depend, in part, on their reliability in giving utterance only to views of theirs that are themselves reliable. And on the other, it is natural to think that our reliability in detecting our interlocutor's occasional slips will also be dependent upon their large-scale reliability in giving voice only to their more reliable views. (That would be the case if, for example, we were in general more reliable at detecting insincerity than at detecting brute error.)

If that is right, then the ordinary transmission of knowledge via testimony will depend, in part, on interlocutors' reliability in giving expression only to their more reliable views. And their meeting that condition seems to depend, in turn, on their reliably sorting their views into those that are more reliable and those that are less reliable. But we are working on the assumption that people are in general unreliable, or unconfident, in assessing their own reliability: they are liable to over attribute reliability and under attribute unreliability. So, there is a significant danger that skepticism about interlocutors' self-assessments will translate into skepticism about their capacity to transmit their knowledge to other people. And in that case, they will not be able to inform us about our own characters. (See Williams 2002: 123–148.)

The second problem with the refined proposal is more general, and decisive. The problem is that the version of the third worry based upon the requirement for reflective confidence generalizes in a way that makes it difficult to finesse by appeal to the refined proposal. The third worry relied on the claim that if the intuitive feeling of affinity gives rise to knowledge, then it will potentially give rise to autonomous self-knowledge of precisely the kind that was supposed to be ruled out by the first stage in Cooper's proposal. We are currently considering means of finessing that difficulty, by replacing Cooper's appeal to an intuitive feeling of affinity with sensitivity to others' sharing our ends and a capacity to acquire knowledge from their testimony. Still, it is a non-negotiable requirement on both

proposals that someone's views about their friend's character and actions can amount to knowledge. Thus, it is a requirement of the present form of the proposal, not only that those views are formed reliably, but also that the person holding those views is entitled to reflective confidence in their reliability.

Suppose, then, that one is so entitled, and one forms views about the reliability of one's views about one's friend. The problem now arises because views about the reliability of one's views about one's friends are subject to the same requirement. If those views are to be reflectively stable, then one must be entitled to reasonable confidence in their reliability. However, the views in question involve forms of self-attribution of precisely the same type that were supposed to have been made problematic at the first stage of Cooper's proposal. If the first stage of Cooper's proposal was successful, we have reason to think that one has no autonomous entitlement to reflective confidence in the reliability of one's views about one's own reliability. For one's views about one's own reliability are subject to the vagaries of self-deception: one is liable, and knows that one is liable, to over-attribute reliability and under-attribute unreliability. Hence, because one's views about one's own reliability are reflectively unstable, one's views about one's friend's character will also be reflectively unstable.

General skeptical worries about one's views about one's own character, of the sort that Cooper exploits at the first stage of his proposal, are apt to generalize via reflective requirements on rationally stable knowledge. Reason requires that we can reasonably rely upon at least some of our judgements concerning our own reliability. As Nietzsche put an analogous point, 'He who despises himself at least esteems the despiser within himself.' (Nietzsche 1886: Fourth Article, §78.) Hence, such skeptical worries about the possibility of autonomous self-knowledge cannot be addressed simply by shifting attention from one's views about oneself to one's views about other people (or about anything else). Such general skeptical worries about our capacities to know ourselves cannot easily be exploited in order to provide grounds for the idea that we might acquire self-knowledge from others.

The argument against the refined proposal leaves open that other people, including one's friends, might play more circumscribed roles in supporting one's knowledge about oneself. For one thing, the argument leaves intact Aristotle's idea that others might confirm one's views about one's own character, assuming that one's views were anyway well-grounded. So, although our friends would not figure essentially in our knowing ourselves, they might nonetheless help stabilize our autonomous self-knowledge. For another, the argument leaves open that others might help shore up one's self-knowledge in more local ways, for example by pointing out specific ways in which one is more, or less, reliable than one would otherwise have thought. However, in exploring more local ways in which others might figure in supporting our views about ourselves, it is important to be cognizant of the global limits imposed by the role of autonomous self-knowledge in sustaining our capacities so to be supported.

5. I have considered various ways in which failures of insight can lead to difficulties also at the interpersonal level. Such difficulties in knowing oneself are not to be fixed simply by appeal to others knowledge about one, for that would

demand a type of interpersonal integration that can be lost through loss of intrapersonal integration. (On this topic, see also Stump 2010: 129–150; Williams 2002: 172–205.) Thus, the urge for this purpose to prioritize interpersonal relations over intrapersonal relations is misplaced. The desire to be known by others may be selfish, as Aristotle suggests, but the benefits that it confers seem not to derive entirely from the knower. (I think that this is something that Aristotle recognized, both in connecting friendship with others and friendship with oneself (*NE*: IX. 4, 8.), and in his emphasis on the virtue of integrity *NE*: IV. 7. On the latter, see especially Curzer 2012: 195–219.)

A superior view of the connections between knowing oneself, knowing others, and being known by others would be, I think, a view that grants more equal priority to the three forms of knowledge. I conclude by commending reflection, from that perspective, on the following passage that Rousseau excluded from his autobiographical *Confessions*:

No-one knows me except I myself. I see that people who live most intimately with me do not know me, and that they attribute most of my actions, for good or ill, to motives quite different from those that have produced them. (From Starobinski 1971: 218, cited in Williams 2002: 174–5.)

Rousseau bemoans a mismatch between his own view of himself, and the views about himself that he attributes to others. But is the mismatch due to Rousseau’s intimates’ ignorance or to Rousseau’s? Or is it due, rather, to both at once?

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