

**Dissertation Abstract:  
Knowledge and the First-Person Perspective**

Epistemologists have been making a mistake about the relation between knowledge and the first-person perspective. An influential version of internalism says that knowledge requires the ability to access some kind of reason or justification in support of one's beliefs. Many epistemologists take this to require adopting a higher-order perspective on the epistemic status of one's own beliefs. On the other hand, a common version of externalism denies any such requirement on knowledge. Some who advocate this view, such as Hilary Kornblith, go so far as to claim that externalists need not concern themselves at all with the first-person view. While internalism and externalism differ sharply on the issue of whether or not a first-person perspective is required for knowledge, one thing they share is the assumption that having a first-person perspective on one's beliefs involves adopting a higher-order perspective about one's own self. I defend an account of the first-person perspective that rejects this assumption. We cannot properly understand the first-person perspective by taking it to be a perspective on oneself. Rather, the unique view that a subject can and often does have of her own beliefs is the consequence of a particular kind of consciousness at the level of one's first-order thoughts.

Support for my view comes from considering the relation between first-person reference and first-person awareness. The first-person perspective is sometimes characterized as requiring the use of a particular sort of self-reference, such as "I"-reference, in contrast to referring to oneself under a third-personal description (such as "the next person in line" or "the customer who is making a mess"). While "I"-reference is philosophically interesting in its own right, it is not a suitable guide to understanding the kind of awareness that is unique to the first-person perspective. Richard Moran has already identified one way in which "I"-reference and first-person awareness come apart: it is possible to self-ascribe an attitude while being aware of it only via some third-personal method such as observation. I argue that two features he identifies as necessary for an attitude to be within one's first-person perspective —1) that one is able to occupy a deliberative stance toward an attitude, and 2) that one is able to avow an attitude—are also sufficient for that attitude to be within a person's first-person perspective. Crucially, both these conditions can be met by an attitude that is considered and/or expressed merely as a first-order thought. It is possible to deliberate about whether or not  $p$  is the case, and to then conclude that  $p$  without ever thinking the self-referential thought "I believe that  $p$ ." In these circumstances, one's belief that  $p$ , while not a second-order thought, is still within one's first-person perspective.

While a non-self-referential account of the first-person perspective can be defended independently of the epistemological concerns with which this inquiry began, one benefit of adopting it is that it reorients our understanding of the relevance of the first-person perspective to knowledge. For example, since Kornblith's arguments are aimed at a self-referential conception of the first-person perspective, his critique of the epistemological significance of the first-person perspective turns out to be misguided. Furthermore, since my account identifies the first-person perspective as the perspective of the deliberative agent, addressing the question of the epistemological significance of the first-person perspective now involves addressing the relevance of our deliberative agency to our theories of knowledge. To that end, I explore how my account reframes some traditional internalist critiques of externalism, as well as how it illuminates a limit for the view that the tension between internalism and externalism can be dissipated by distinguishing among various epistemological projects or aims.