

2018.12.11

KBNS Self-knowledge

Attending: Giovanni, Paul, Indrek, Eduardo, Jonathan, Carrie, Sonia, Xintong, Alan, Fiona, Giacomo

Presenting: Alan

Reading: Peter and Alan's notes on Davidson 'First Person Authority'

Giovanni: Concerning the nature of symmetry, one suggestion is that there is going to be a presumption in both the first-person and third-person cases that one gets it right, although in both cases we should assume correctness, there is one kind of error that is precluded in the first-person case but not in the third-person case.

There is an alternative suggestion, namely, the presumption is not a general claim. In the first-person case, the speaker makes an utterance *p*, has a weight in deciding whether it is true that the speaker believes that *p*, but for the hearer, there isn't such a weight. First-person ascription creates a presumption third-person ascription doesn't create. The presumption constitutes strong evidence in the first-person case.

Paul: Is the second-suggestion the same as Byrne's interpretation that the utterance is a special evidence?

Alan: If someone says that 'I believe *p*', that is a strong evidence that he believes that *p*. Insincerity is not an issue here.

Giovanni: Maybe we should say that though it is true, in both cases the utterance creates a presumption in favour of the truth of the beliefs ascribed, they are presumptions of different sort.

Alan: I think the presumption is a general one, grounded in interpretation, that speakers are not in general mistaken either by what they think or what they mean by the sentences they utter. In the absence of defeaters one is entitled to take what one says at face value. The general theory can bear on particular cases. Davidson tries to get away from a picture that, in the particular cases, we make adjustment to suit the case. The Gricean project by contrast is different in the sense that it focuses on interpretation in particular cases.

Crispin: What connects liability to error and evidential superiority? These seem to be two different thoughts. There is no connection between getting things right and immunity to certain type of error, because the latter is no guarantee to getting the truth.

Alan: Davidson's self-ascription does not base on evidence.

Giovanni: To explain the general presumption, what we have seems to be a conditional result: if the speaker knows that herself holds true of certain sentence, there is a strong presumption that the speaker knows what herself believes, compared to the hearer.

I don't know how we can thereby derive an unconditional presumption, which is the original target of our explanation. Is that something one shouldn't worry about?

Alan: Both speakers and hearers are suitably sensitive to the basic transition, they both have an understanding of the relationship. Think of it as exhibiting a reason-giving relation. It is a general statement. It can be a tacit understanding and it will be manifested in a communication that doesn't get on smoothly.

Giovanni: Even if I help myself with the notion of sensitivity, it remains an open possibility that *S* doesn't utter a true sentence. It doesn't explain generality.

Crispin: How to understand the sensitivity?

Alan: take modus ponens: if *p* then *q*, *p*, therefore *q*. A person can show sensitivity to the validity of that inference in a variety of ways. One way would be by making such an inference, another way might be in giving up the belief that *p* on realizing that not-*q*. Given

the practical nature of inferential knowledge there is surely going to be way to spell out sensitivity,

Crispin: We want to get to the presumption that B3 holds. But making the first-person authority depends on the authority of the sentence you accept is the wrong start.

Giovanni: I share the puzzlement of starting with sentences. The reason we are given by Davidson for trying out an account of that shape is that any other account would have to posit some special ways of knowing that will threaten mental concepts of ambiguity risk (?).

Crispin: I don't find that motivation compelling either. We don't think we have different moral concepts because we find different moral principles acceptable.

Alan: I don't think any such verificationism is attached to thinking that it could be part of speaker's understanding of meaning that the relation captured by the basic transition holds.

Giovanni: We are invited by Peter to think of Davidson's proposal not as an account of the only way of knowing one's belief—Davidson's proposal still contains a duality of knowing, because there can still be different ways of knowing what one means. The appeal of his proposal is to offer one a way to break out of the circle of epistemic explanation and try to explain the privileged access from outside.

Crispin: Although I'm sympathetic to proposals with that character, the source of authority on one's belief cannot be grounded on the sensitivity to which sentence one accepts.

Carrie: What are we left with this account that could do some interesting theoretical heavy-lifting, if it is not playing a grounding, justificatory or explanatory role?

Allan: on the face of it Davidson's account is more germane to understand communication than first-person authority.

Jonathan: I'm sympathetic to Carruthers' line of thinking. I'm not convinced that in the speaker case, I know what I mean is independent from feeling what I'm saying or hearing what I'm saying. Even in the third personal case, I think positing that kind of basic transition could be an over-simplification. There is an interesting literature about cognitive penetration which shows that various factors could dispose one to hear the sounds in certain way. Things can be similarly complex in the first-personal case.

Fiona: We often make speech-act and convince ourselves that p when it is not the case that p. How general is the asymmetry?

Alan: Self-deception is possible. For example, Anna Karenina deceived herself that she was not in love with Vronsky and only later on to realize that Vronsky was the interest of her life. Self-deception is not ruled out by Davidson's account.

Indrek: In the third-person cases, to what extent is the hearer rely on contextual cues to interpret what the speaker means?

Alan: Davidson doesn't distinguish what is said and what is meant. But it is well-known that hearing an utterance wouldn't get you what S means.

Giovanni: What's the connection between Davidson's proposal and Shoemaker's constitutive account? On Shoemaker's account, self-blindness is impossible. Is Davidson doing something similar? Is it the case that for Davidson, nothing more is required than it is a belief of a rational subject for there to be an asymmetry?