

# KBNS Network Workshop 3

## The A Priori and Self-Knowledge

22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019, Stirling Court Hotel, University of Stirling

The project's third Network Workshop will be held on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> and Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2019 at the Stirling Court Hotel, a conference centre on the University Campus.

The Workshop is open to all, and there is no registration fee.

### Draft Programme

#### Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May

- 10.00 – 11.30 **Josh Thurow** (UT San Antonio): A Skeptical Problem for A Priori Moral Realist Knowledge Through Understanding
- 11.30 – 11.45 Coffee
- 11.45 – 1.15 **Anna-Maria A. Eder** (Cologne): Evidence in a Faulty World
- 1.15 – 2.15 Lunch
- 2.15 – 3.45 **Patrick Greenough** (St. Andrews): Self-Knowledge and Meta-Scepticism
- 3.45 – 4.00 Coffee
- 4.00 – 5.30 **Rob Rupert** (Boulder): Self-knowledge as a subpersonal phenomenon; or, subpersonal knowledge of subpersonal selves
- 6.30 – 8.30 Workshop Dinner: Stirling Court Hotel

#### Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> May

- 10.00 – 11.30 **Eli Alshanetsky** (Stanford): Making Our Thoughts Clear: An Epistemic Theory of Clarity in Thought and Language
- 11.30 – 11.45 Coffee
- 11.45 – 1.15 **Bill Child** (Oxford): First-Person Authority and the Univocality of Mental Terms
- 1.15 – 2.15 Lunch
- 2.15 – 3.45 **Sophie Keeling** (Edinburgh): Inference and Transparency: A *Two Explanations* Account of Self-Knowledge
- 3.45 – 4.00 Coffee
- 4.00 – 5.30 **Alan Millar** (Stirling): Recognitional Abilities and Knowing What One Perceives

MAIN FUNDER



## ABSTRACTS DAY 1

**Josh Thurow** (UT San Antonio): “A Skeptical Problem for A Priori Moral Realist Knowledge Through Understanding”

Several philosophers recently have defended the idea that we humans can know many objectively true substantive moral propositions a priori through understanding. Many of them have a common explanation for how we can have such knowledge: there are various fixed points that amount to conceptual truths about morality and full understanding of concepts like 'morally right' and 'morally wrong' require that we accept many of the fixed points. I argue that this explanation fails to explain how we can have a priori moral realist knowledge through understanding because there are other normative concepts—concepts of shmorality full understanding of which requires one to accept normative propositions that conflict with ones we would accept—and there is no way for understanding to distinguish which propositions are true: the ones involving the concepts of morality or the ones involving the concepts of shmorality

**Anna-Maria A. Eder** (Cologne): “Evidence in a Faulty World”

Epistemic rationality is often investigated by theorizing about (epistemically) ideal agents. As I shall show, the standard conception of ideal agents threatens to lead theorizing about them into troubles.

In my talk, I present the Puzzle of Ideal Agents that arises from a standard evidentialist position when one considers our present body of evidence and assumes that ideal agents are not only logically omniscient but also have a kind of self-knowledge about their own doxastic states. The puzzle makes it clear that it is problematic to theorize about ideal agents. As a consequence, I propose to investigate (epistemic) rationality by avoiding invoking ideal agents. I present an alternative approach that takes into account that rationality is normative. I rephrase the puzzle in terms of ought. This allows me to show that one has to revise the standard evidentialist position and that the assumption that logical omniscience is an ideal is problematic. Finally, I review my results and argue that with the alternative approach one is in a better position to resolve the Puzzle of Ideal Agents and to investigate rationality and its principles

**Patrick Greenough** (St. Andrews): “Self-Knowledge and Meta-Scepticism”

The McKinsey debate concerning the alleged incompatibility between certain kinds of self-knowledge and certain kinds of semantic externalism died out some years ago. Some would say: good riddance. But did we ever have a proper post mortem? In this talk I argue that Compatibilism/Incompatibilism issues are much more widespread than the McKinsey debate suggests. These issues are problems for everybody - as certain forms of Meta-Scepticism show. (These forms of scepticism purport to show that second-order knowledge is impossible.) Properly addressing Meta-Scepticism shows us what we all should have said (but didn't) about the McKinsey argument.

**Rob Rupert** (Boulder): “Self-knowledge as a subpersonal phenomenon; or, subpersonal knowledge of subpersonal selves”

In this talk, I ask how best to understand the possibility of self-knowledge in the absence of a distinctively personal level to which we might have nonscientific access (e.g. by introspection, conceptual analysis, or the deliverances of *a priori* insight). I begin by distinguishing between the self as the entire cognitive system and the self as *represented* by states or structures appearing within the cognitive system. The primary question to be addressed on this occasion concerns the latter; it is about the capacity of some subpersonal processes to track the activities of others. So as to sharpen the challenge, I review a sampling of empirical results that seem to support skepticism about self-knowledge. Then, I attempt to meet the challenge with a positive proposal. I argue that the human cognitive architecture is likely to comprise many distinct self-representational structures each of which exhibits some degree of flexibility and each of which serves a different purpose in the cognitive system. Consideration of these various purposes, in relation to the demands made on states of self-knowledge, helps to explain the contours of our limited, but nonnegligible, capacity for self-knowledge. I contend that an especially important form of self-knowledge consists in an accurate meta-representational state produced by a mechanism that contributes to the updating and refinement of the very self-representation that the state of self-knowledge in question accurately represents.

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## ABSTRACTS DAY 2

**Eli Alshanetsky** (Stanford): “Making Our Thoughts Clear: An Epistemic Theory of Clarity in Thought and Language”

The aspiration to make our thoughts clear has characterized much of philosophy, from Socrates to the linguistic turn. While few philosophers today would regard Socratic definition and translation into an ideally perspicuous formal language as standards of clarity worth aspiring to, a more modest standard remains epitomized in the recurrent call for students to express themselves clearly, using “plain” and “simple” words. The aim of the paper is to offer an epistemic theory of this modest kind of clarity—one that explicates the clarity of a thought (and of a formulation) in terms of the availability of a specific type of knowledge. I will begin by describing some paradigmatic cases in which we make our thoughts clear and then raise a puzzle about these cases. After considering some responses to the puzzle, I will suggest a solution and show how it motivates the epistemic theory of clarity that I will advocate. I will conclude by briefly discussing two broader questions that this theory helps answer and with a keyhole view into the larger project it opens up.

**Bill Child** (Oxford): “First-Person Authority and the Univocality of Mental Terms”

Wittgenstein asks: ‘Is a state that I recognize on the basis of someone’s utterances really the same as the state he does not recognize this way?’ (*Last Writings on Philosophy of Psychology*, 8-9). Donald Davidson raises the same question: ‘If the mental states of others are known only through their behavioural and other outward manifestations, while this is not true of our own mental states, why should we think our own mental states are anything like those of others?’ (‘Three Varieties of Knowledge’, 207). And he criticizes Wittgensteinian accounts of our mental terms and concepts for failing to address the question. I argue, first, that Davidson’s own account of the asymmetry between first-person and third-person ascriptions of mental predicates itself fails to explain all that he seems to demand. Then I argue that, contrary to what many interpreters would suggest, the question whether mental terms are univocal in their first-person and third-person uses is legitimate and non-trivial from a Wittgensteinian point of view. It is to be answered by achieving a reflective understanding of our practice of ascribing mental properties to ourselves and others – rather than by reference to supposedly more basic metaphysical facts about the sameness or difference of the properties our terms pick out. I explain and defend this approach.

**Sophie Keeling** (Edinburgh): “Inference and Transparency: A *Two Explanations* Account of Self-Knowledge”

*Prima facie*, our knowledge of our mental states significantly differs from others’ knowledge of them. This is in some sense correct but fails to provide the whole picture. This paper introduces and defends a *two explanations* account of self-knowledge: that subjects’ capacity for self-knowledge can and should be explained in two ways. Self-knowledge fundamentally differs from other-knowledge, but only at the personal level. This is the level at which we can talk of the subject *herself*. But the same subpersonal mechanisms underpin self- and other-knowledge alike. In this respect, self-knowledge resembles perception: both are in some way ‘inferential’ at the subpersonal level of explanation but non-inferential at the personal level.

**Alan Millar** (Stirling): “Recognitional Abilities and Knowing What One Perceives”

The discussion proceeds within a broadly knowledge-first perspective in which the justification for belief that perception can make available is provided by perceptual knowledge, the latter being explicated in terms of perceptual-recognitional abilities. The ability to recognize *Fs* as *Fs* visually is conceived as being able to tell, so come to know, of *Fs* that they are *Fs* from the way they look. This provides the background to a conception of our knowledge as to what we perceive, for instance, see, on which such knowledge is gained by looking outwards and exercising an ability to tell of things we see that we see them. Such abilities consist in being able correctly to apply suitable relational concepts first-personally. For instance, the concept expressed by ‘... see(s) ...’ is applicable first-personally to, respectively, oneself and a thing one sees, in immediate response to that thing’s visually appearing some way to one. Differences are highlighted between such abilities and abilities to recognize things that are of some kind as being of that kind judging by the way they look.

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