

AK minutes, 01.10.19

Present: Peter, Xintong, Giovanni, Giacomo, Crispin, Sonia, Philip, Paul, Asgeir, Jonathan, Indrek

Part I: Finn on the Adoption Problem, continued

Presenter: Xintong

Giovanni wonders about the modus-ponens rule (MP)—it is a rule governing conditionals that is itself a conditional. It governs the material conditional, but it is not itself a material conditional. It has an imperative in the consequent. Where does that leave us with self-governance? **Giacomo** responds that there is still a transition from something to something else. **Peter** adds that ‘if’ has a stronger modal force, but it also gives us a material conditional. The thought behind the idea that all rules require a conditional is this: following a rule requires 1) recognizing a case and 2) what to do *in* that case. **Crispin** wonders whether we can still get the conclusion about the specific rules UI (universal instantiation) and MP, when we accept that there is a uniform feature of two rules which could be formulated in different ways. He also expresses the worry that the problem that the adoption problem was meant to pose to Quine is no longer obvious. **Peter:** If you proceed because you accept the validity of so proceeding, then if the explanation is that you are now the way you were because you weren’t that way before, then there is a problem. **Asgeir** wonders whether this is similar to what happens when we teach in a logic class. To this, **Peter** responds that in a logic class we do rely on something like the student’s ability of reasoning according to MP, but not their ability to infer according to it in the system that we teach them. We encourage them to adopt a particular implementation of MP.

Crispin: One thought is that to grasp the logical concept one must already grasp some of the inferential rules associated with it. This would be an understanding-assent link (subject to Williamson’s criticism), but still there seems to be something to this idea. If it is true, it calls into question the coherence of the Harry-case that Padró introduces. Even the remotest sympathy with inferentialism will cause problems for the case. **Peter** adds that the Harry-case is one that involves understanding of ‘all ravens are black’ without any understanding that these white ravens bare on the truth of the proposition.

Crispin suggests that the thesis ought to be: you cannot adopt a rule that is a conservative extension of the concepts you already possess. The conservative extension is something that you can get by just reflecting on the concepts. But Quine’s view is that you should be able to accept a new rule that could be tested. **Peter** asks for clarification. If the transition is to be a rational one, then if you are to carry it out you mustn’t chuck everything at once. But it wasn’t part of the Neurath’s boat point that you chuck away everything at once. The response to Neurath should be: some things I couldn’t do—they have the general form: what if I were to do this, what would happen then?

Crispin notes that the parallel between the adoption problem and Boghossian’s point seems to be absent. Boghossian’s point concerns justification, the adoption problem concerns basicness. Given the adoption problem, you need MP to adopt MP. Given Boghossian’s point, MP must be appealed to in justifying MP-inference. They seem to be entirely different points.

Part II: Devitt on the Adoption Problem

Presenter: Asgeir

Giovanni asks if it is fair to distinguish between two versions of the adoption problem in the way Devitt does. Both versions were meant to characterize parts of what Kripke meant.

Carrie comments the distinction between adopting a principle and adopting a rule. One is associated with coming to believe something. But why? Is it that to adopt a principle one must acquire a belief e.g. that the principle is sound? **Asger** says he took the distinction to be similar to that between an inference rule and an axiom. **Carrie** responds that failure to be governed by the axiom is also a possibility. **Peter**

suggests a parallel with the amoralist case. **Carrie** points out that, if you are interested in the rationality of adoption, it should have something to do with having the beliefs govern your actions.

Xintong asks if rule adoption implies successful theory adoption. If they are asking about *rational* adoption, it seems to imply some theory. [??? *didn't catch*] **Crispin** responds that 'rational' is meant in the sense of action in response to the content of the rule given.

Carrie notes that there ought to be room for knowing how, in rule adoption, there must be some know-how that is not a propositional belief. In response, **Crispin** wonders if this distinction is what Devitt is groping for. There is no route through the program to the behavior, only a causal route. **Carrie** responds: suppose you have an account of know-how that does not involve propositional knowledge. The account allows for the possibility that my practice is not governed by know-how because something always gets in the way, but that I still have know-how. **Jonathan** asks why it must be non-propositional. Non-propositional theories tend to assimilate know-how to skill, which makes it much closer to the exercise. **Carrie** responds that there is still a possibility of a gap. It seems that Devitt needs something that is genuine knowledge-how. **Sonia** suggests a potential example: a person learning a foreign language may know how to formulate sentences, but the linguistic behavior is just not governed by this know-how. **Carrie** agrees that this would be an example of this. **Peter** suggests a general thought: there are two extreme cases: being built out of logic-gates and being an informed reasoner. But this distinction misses out any notion of practical knowledge that we actually have that falls in between the two extremes.

Asgeir notes that Devitt's gear-changing example does not seem to be possible by propositional knowledge alone. Devitt later notes that you need practice. He seems to make a big deal about the difference. **Crispin** wonders if inference is now thought of as a skill. **Asgeir** suggests that it is. The distinction between embodied rules—implicit learning—and explicit learning—requires adopting a rule just by having knowledge of the rule. This is how Devitt cashes out the term 'rational'. Getting a practice from hearing a rule. **Peter** notes a point that Crispin raised earlier: I come to believe that reasoning in a certain way is sound, then I reason that way, and all the stuff about implicit and explicit reasoning brings it about that I get the ability. Forget all that. Finn says that I learn the rule, and *thus* I infer for the first time. All this cultururation and slow adjustment of wetware that Devitt talks about seems to be beside the point. **Crispin** adds to it that the prima facie reason for rejecting the idea that there is empirical revision of logic is just the argument Finn gives.

Peter summarizes the real problem: How can our acceptance that a reasoning is sound lead us to reason in that way. Devitt is surely right that there is no mystery about it that psychology couldn't explain about how this reasoning comes about. Getting trained in natural deduction has nothing to do with the adoption problem. I must be rationally sensitive to the inferential import of the statement. **Giovanni** notes that Devitt puts aside cases where we get a logic by getting hit on the head as boring. But how is Devitt's own view eventually any different? We get a base logic by natural selection. It is like getting hit on the head.

Crispin notes that, in the Harry-case, Harry doesn't get the instructions as one gets the instruction in the gear-changing case. getting trained in natural deduction has nothing to do with the adoption problem. I must be rationally sensitive to the inferential import of the statement.

Asgeir takes Devitt's summary of his own point: if we are clever enough to agree with the theory, then we are clever enough to train ourselves to do it. But isn't this just the adoption problem? **Others agree.**