

KBNS Self-Knowledge Seminar 10/9/19

Attending: Paul, Giovanni, Giacomo, Xintong, Peter, Indrek, Carrie, Jonathan, Crispin, Josh, Alan, Sonia

Presenting: Josh Thorpe

Topic: External World Scepticism and Self Scepticism

Peter asked about the aim of the paper. What's the implication of there being a self scepticism parallel to the external world scepticism? **Josh:** It would undermine the epistemic security of self-knowledge, if it can be shown that the very existence of 'I' is threatened by the sceptic argument. **Crispin:** the claim about the special status of self-ascriptions is a comparative claim. Self-ascriptions need not be immune to sceptical doubt. **Josh:** there are many ways to understand what epistemic security amounts to. One is the claim that it is not possible to make a certain kind of mistake regarding some self-ascriptions. What I said in this paper would contradict that kind of claim.

Giovanni: Is it just the existential component of the self-ascription that is threatened by the sceptic argument? Or is the qualitative component of the self-ascription also threatened by the sceptic argument? **Josh:** The direct consequence of the sceptic argument is the rejection of the existential claim. But I would like to explore the idea, in another paper, that once you lose the right to say 'I am in pain', you've also lost the right to claim that 'there is pain'.

Giovanni asked whether the immunity to scepticism requires the *recognition* of my belief that I am thinking also to be immune to sceptic doubt. Once the recognition is brought into the picture, wouldn't the recognition itself be open to sceptic doubt? Is it plausible to think that the recognition that my belief is immune to sceptic doubt can also be immune to sceptic doubt? **Josh:** The idea is that this belief that 'I am thinking' just has to be true once I recognize that, because it has that special feature. **Peter:** Then it is important to get the diagnose of that special feature right.

Crispin: Can you specify the non-sequitur of the cogito, without appealing to first-person perspective? **Josh:** I know that the logical structure of the thought that 'I am thinking' is existentially committed. But I can be mistaken about the circumstances in which I have that thought.

Regarding Josh's definition of thought as a process whereby a particular content is expressed, **Carrie** asked whether the process of writing down a sentence on the white board counts as a thought. Or should the location of the process be restricted to the mind/brain.

Josh: writing down a sentence wouldn't be an instance of a thought. Perhaps I should just call a thought an expression of a particular content. **Jonathan:** if the clause is meant to be a necessary, not a sufficient condition for thought, then Carrie's case wouldn't be a counterexample. **Josh:** the idea is that there can be a process whereby a meaning content is expressed without that process being attached to a thinker. **Giovanni:** Perhaps you don't need a particular gloss on what is a thought/thinking. All you need is to come up with a scenario where there isn't an agent involved in the process of thinking.

Crispin: the token/type distinction is relevant here. When we consider a token of a thought, it looks much closer to the running case, namely, there cannot be thinking without a thinker. The content expressed might be meaningful as a type, but meaningless as a token (if it were not attached to a thinker).

Carrie: what about natural meaning? For instance, the fact that there are 10 rings means that this tree is 10 years old. There is token-meaning but no-type meaning. Do you want to include cases like this as expressions of thoughts? **Josh:** a thought is more than just information-carrying.

Jonathan did not see the force of the second worry concerning the cogency of the closure argument because one can easily get around it by phrasing (LC2) using a negation.

Crispin: the conclusion of the closure argument cannot be known. If closure holds, then if you know the premises, you know the conclusion. (there cannot be a closure principle without being applied to a subject) But since the conclusion can't be known, it is a case of closure failure. How can this paradox be generated if it itself depends on closure?

Peter: why is LC1 true? The Lichtenberg scenario doesn't say anything about me. **Josh:** the Lichtenberg scenario should be described as a scenario where there is only thought and that thought does not belong to *any* thinker.

Peter: Williams' condition that a thought must be attached to a thinker is not sufficient to account for the separateness of thought. Even a single person entertaining that p, and that q at the same time, the person may not be thinking p&q as a whole. The unity of thought is more than just a single consciousness. Also, the conjunction and the doubting examples seem to point towards different directions. The former is about the condition under which an inference (p&q from p, q) may be secured whereas the latter is about the condition under which two thoughts are inconsistent. **Crispin:** we cannot make sense of inference, inconsistency or other notions of rationality without a thinker. **Josh:** rationality requires the possibility of there being a thinker. It is just that, in this particular case, when there is the thought 'I am thinking', you don't know you are a thinker.