

KBNS Self-Knowledge Seminar 1/10/19

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

Presenting: Giovanni

Topic: “Recent work on first-person thought”

On the initial characterization of first-person thought:

Giovanni: It is not obvious that the initial characterization of first-person thought should be the linguistic one. There are cases where one uses first-person pronoun but without expressing a de se thought. For instance, when one plays a video game one might think ‘I am entering the castle’ by perceiving a figure entering the castle in the game. Perhaps the most neutral way is to provide a list of examples of first-person thought.

Jonathan agreed and added an example of reporting other ppl’s attitudes of oneself: ‘Giacomo thinks I wrote a nice paper’. This is not a first-person thought. It is explicitly thinking about Giacomo’s thought of me.

Carrie: The use of plural ‘we’ might be another example. It is often used to refer to the second-person without expressing any first-person thought.

Paul disagreed and thought the linguistic characterization is a good starting-point to theorize first-person thought. Of course further conditions may be added to modify the initial linguistic characterization.

Peter raised three questions:

1. Why are examples more neutral?
2. Is Giovanni’s suggestion a rejection of the semantic approach (investigating the metaphysics of the self from the semantics of first-person thought)?
3. Why are those examples of thinking from outside aren’t first-person thought? The source of information might be from the outside, the bearing of that information to have on that thought may be from the inside.

Crispin: perhaps there is only one uniformed species of thought involving the use of ‘I’. What makes these cases differ is the epistemology: the grounds on basis of which they are formed differ. So the question is how to differentiate first-person thought, by semantics or by epistemology?

On Cappelen and Dever ‘s argument against the pervasiveness of first-person thought in action explanation:

Giovanni: the example by C&D is purported to show that there can be intentional action without de se thought by showing that intention-formation need not involve any reference to oneself. But that may not be what we need to refute pervasiveness.

Crispin: Will they have anything to say when they are asked about what they did?

Giovanni: Retrospectively they can provide an account, but the formation of intention is without de se thought.

Alan doubted whether can one act intentionally without knowing what they are doing. An example: you are led down to the corridor by an intention of getting some paper clips from office, but you stopped in the middle of the hallway and wondered why you are going down the corridor. This kind of example seems to show that to sustain an intentional action (going down the corridor to your office) requires knowing your intention. Once the intention is lost, the action terminates too. The action can only be done by way of carrying out the intention. De se thought seems to be constitutive of intentional action.

Crispin: The explanation of one’s action has to involve self-directed thought.

Peter: Formation of intention cannot be the complete story for explaining action: beliefs and desires. It is also unclear what they mean by intention. Is it a commitment to bring it about that p, or is it a desire?

On Ninan's example:

Crispin: The thought here is that two beliefs are different if they issue different actions. But in the example the different actions can be explained by the two people having different desires: one has the desire that 'I want you not to be eaten', another has the desire that 'I want to escape'.

Xintong: They also have different judgments about what to do: one has the belief that 'you should run away' and another has the belief that 'I should run away'.

Peter: we should expect similar ideas to apply for 'now' and 'here' cases.