

KBNS Final Project Conference The A Priori and Self-Knowledge

9th-11th December 2019, Stirling Court Hotel, University of Stirling

Monday 9th December

Chaired by

- 12.45 – 1.45 Lunch
- 1.45 – 3.15 **Magdalena Balcerak-Jackson (Miami): 'Self-Knowledge by Imagination'** José Mestre
- 3.15 – 3.30 Coffee
- 3.30 – 5.00 **Giacomo Melis (Stirling): 'Two frameworks for debating the a priori'** Paul Conlan
- 5.00 – 5.15 Coffee
- 5.15 – 6.45 **Giovanni Merlo (Stirling): 'Self-knowledge and the Paradox of Belief Revision'** Jann Paul
- 7.30 – Dinner (Stirling Court Hotel)

Tuesday 10th December

- 9.30 – 11.00 **Dorothea Debus (Konstanz): 'Shaping Our Mental Lives: On Self-Knowledge and Mental Self-Regulation'** Giacomo Melis
- 11.00 – 11.15 Coffee
- 11.15 – 12.45 **Dorit Bar-on (Connecticut): 'No-'How' Privileged Self-Knowledge'** Philip Ebert
- 12.45 – 1.45 Lunch
- 1.45 – 3.15 **John Campbell (Berkeley): 'Knowledge of Singular Causation in the Mind'** Indrek Lobus
- 3.20 – 4.50 **Miriam Schoenfield (MIT): 'Deferring to Doubt'** Xintong Wei
- 4.50 – 5.05 Coffee
- 5.05 – 6.35 **Chris Peacocke (Columbia): 'Factive Norms: Their Nature, Source, and Significance'** Sònia Roca-Royes
- 7.30 – Conference Dinner (Stirling Court Hotel)

Wednesday 11th December

- ~~9.30 – 11.00~~ Slot Cancelled
- 11.00 – 11.15 Coffee
- 11.15 – 12.45 **Matthew Boyle (Chicago): 'Armchair Psychology Defended'** Alisa Mandrigin
- 12.45 – 1.45 Lunch
- 1.45 – 3.15 **Alex Byrne (MIT): 'Knowing What I am Doing'** Colin Johnston
- 3.20 – 4.50 **Crispin Wright (NYU/Stirling): 'Kripke, Quine and the "Adoption Problem"'** Moritz Baron
(Joint work with Paul Boghossian)
- Court Room, Cottrell Building**
- 5.00 – 5.30 Public Lecture Reception (following the KBNS Conference)
- 5.30 – 7.30 **Public Lecture: Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa: 'Skepticism, Rape Culture, and Oppression'** Giovanni Merlo

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ABSTRACTS DAY 1

Magdalena Balcerak-Jackson (Miami): 'Self-Knowledge by Imagination'

Imagination stands in a close relationship to the self. One of the ways in which imagination is often distinguished from other hypothetical attitudes such as supposition is that it is more self-involving. But what exactly does this mean? And does it entail that imagination is a special source of knowledge about our self? In this paper, I will clarify in which sense(s) imagination is self-involving and what this entails for the kind of justification it can provide. This will require me to clear up what I take to be popular misconceptions about the imagination: 1. That imaginings are always in some sense about ourselves. 2. That there is no distinctive kind of self-knowledge imagination provides, besides the kind of self-knowledge, that we also have of other conscious mental states, such as perceptual experiences.

Giacomo Melis (Stirling): 'Two frameworks for debating the a priori'

There are at least two theoretical frameworks to discuss the nature and role of a priori warrants. The first sees apriority as primarily a (putative) property of propositions or relations between propositions, and the second conceives of it as a primarily a (putative) property of doxastic moves or potential doxastic moves. I outline the two frameworks, and assess their prospects of allowing for a stable characterization of a priori warrants that might also vindicate their (alleged) significant epistemic role.

Giovanni Merlo (Stirling): 'Self-knowledge and the Paradox of Belief Revision'

To qualify as a fully rational agent, one must be able rationally to revise one's beliefs in the light of new evidence. This requires not only that one revises one's beliefs in the right way, but also that one appreciates the reasons that motivate the revision. However, the very fact that one believes something appears to pose an obstacle to the possibility of appreciating reasons of that sort – for, insofar as one believes that p , any evidence that not- p will strike one as misleading evidence. Call this the Paradox of Belief Revision. This paper introduces the Paradox of Belief Revision, compares it with Kripke's Dogmatism Paradox, and suggests that we may be able to see a way out of the former if we assume that rational agents are systematically aware of their own beliefs as beliefs they have.

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ABSTRACTS DAY 2

Dorothea Debus (Konstanz): 'Shaping Our Mental Lives: On Self-Knowledge and Mental Self-Regulation'

The present paper departs from the observation that subjects sometimes can and do engage in mental self-regulation, that is, that subjects sometimes can be, and are, actively involved in their own mental lives in a goal-directed way. This ability of mental self-regulation is not only of philosophical interest in its own right, but it also seems to play an important role for our ability to gain a certain kind of self-knowledge, namely, our ability to gain knowledge about our own mental lives. Indeed, as I hope to show in the present paper, we have reason to hold that a subject's ability to gain knowledge about her own mental life on the one hand, and her ability to engage in mental self-regulation on the other, are abilities which are in some important ways mutually interdependent.

Dorit Bar-on: 'No-'How' Privileged Self-Knowledge'

Ordinarily, if someone produces a nonreflective, 'unstudied' self-attribution of a present state of mind – an *avowal* – we do not presume that there must be some kind of evidence, observation, or other 'cognitive work' that the person could cite as the epistemic basis for her avowal. We take the self-beliefs proclaimed in avowals to be entirely spontaneous and *base-less* (as I shall put it). Correlatively, it seems out of place to expect the person to have reasons for the belief that she is in the relevant state, much less to expect her to know *how* she knows the self-attribution to be true. I will refer to this as the *no-'how'* character of so-called basic self-knowledge. And yet we tend to regard a person's avowals as both *distinctively secure* and *likelier* to manifest *knowledge* than other contingent attributions (including attributions of mental states to/by others and even nonevidential self-attributions of bodily states). Basic self-knowledge thus has a *first-person privileged* character.

Taken at face value, this combination of substantiveness, no-'how', and first-person privilege is puzzling: how can substantive knowledge of contingent matters of facts be at once epistemically base-less and substantive? And what makes such knowledge distinctively first-personal? It seems that we must either give up on base-lessness or accept that basic mental self-beliefs cannot amount to substantive (let alone privileged) factual knowledge concerning one's present states of mind. I am here interested in views that avoid this dilemma by denying an epistemological presupposition on which it rests. After rejecting a well-known reliabilist introspectionist approach to reconciling base-lessness with substantiveness, I turn to an increasingly popular *constitutivist* approach. I argue that leading constitutivist views fail properly to accommodate a certain *doxastic* (as opposed to justificatory) aspect of base-less self-knowledge, for reasons I explain. I then use my proposed diagnosis to motivate the alternative *neo-expressivist* approach I favor. On this approach, what paradigmatically manifest basic self-knowledge – namely, avowals – are acts in which we give direct voice (out loud or silently) to the very states of mind that we attribute to ourselves in avowing. At the same time, avowals also serve to articulate a person's spontaneous and base-less mental self-judgments, and this captures their doxastic dimension better than alternative accounts.

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John Campbell (Berkeley): 'Knowledge of Singular Causation in the Mind'

Miriam Schoenfield: 'Deferring to Doubt'

Sometimes empirical information leads us to reduce confidence in our beliefs through a straightforward process well-modeled by conditionalization. Other times it leads to reduction of confidence by eliciting doubt concerning a priori commitments of ours - in particular commitments about how to evaluate our evidence. This paper is about about doubt of the latter sort. On my account of doubt, doubting is a process in which we examine how things look from a perspective in which certain commitments are set aside. Sometimes we care about what that perspective recommends and, as a result, we abandon the belief we've been doubting. Other times we don't: we recognize that a perspective in which a certain commitment is set aside recommends abandoning it, but we go on maintaining it anyway. Why is this? In this paper, I'll consider and then reject some proposals concerning when to defer to the perspective of doubt. I'll argue that ultimately the question of whether to defer to doubt on any given occasion can't be answered through rational deliberation aimed at truth or accuracy. If I'm right, this means that a certain challenge facing defeatist views about higher order evidence cannot be met: namely, providing a motivation for abandoning belief in cases of higher order evidence, but not becoming a global skeptic.

Chris Peacocke: 'Factive Norms: Their Nature, Source, and Significance'

Factive norms for judgement are norms that mention a certain kind of factive state. I argue for the existence of factive norms and for their explanatory power. They exist in the perceptual domain; in the domain of self-ascription of action; and also in logical and modal domains. They can explain the existence of internalist norms for rational judgement. Their source lies in the very nature of intentional content and of judgement. They have an objectivity that contrasts sharply with the status that evaluativism accords to epistemic norms. I conclude with an account of the ontology of concepts and their corresponding norms aimed at justifying acceptance of these otherwise problematic entities.

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Matthew Boyle (Chicago): ‘Armchair Psychology Defended’

Armchair psychology, once a favorite pastime of philosophers, has come to have a bad name. To suppose that we can study our minds from an armchair is to suppose that we can comprehend our own cognitive capacities, not by observing human behavior, performing controlled experiments, or scanning our brains, but simply by drawing on some kind of introspective awareness. The idea that philosophers can study the mind in this way has a distinguished history, but today it is an object of widespread skepticism. I discuss several grounds for such skepticism and I show — with special reference to our capacities for perception and voluntary action — that we possess a kind of awareness of certain of our own cognitive activities that makes a kind of armchair psychology possible. The paper is thus a defense of armchair psychology in the widely assailed sense.

Alex Byrne: ‘Knowing What I am Doing’

I may be doing something, say pumping poison into the water supply, without knowing that this is what I am doing. But when I am intentionally pumping poison I do know that I am pumping poison, at least typically. Anscombe famously claimed that this is knowledge “without observation”; whether or not she’s right about that, it is unclear how such knowledge is acquired. The paper attempts to explain how one knows what one is doing.

Crispin Wright (NYU / Stirling): ‘Kripke, Quine and the “Adoption Problem”’

(Joint work with Paul Boghossian)

The idea that there is an ‘adoption problem’ for certain basic principles of logic was originally proposed by Saul Kripke in seminars in Princeton in the mid-1970s, although Kripke himself published nothing on the topic. Kripke’s discussion was aimed at making trouble for Quine’s view that logic is just part, albeit a ‘web-central’ part, of empirical theory, that having a logic is accepting a set of logical beliefs, and that logic is freely adoptable and empirically revisable. He contended that Quine’s view depended on a confused conception of the relation between logical practice, on the one hand, and the acceptance of statements of logical laws, on the other. His idea seems to have been that, if the relation between these two notions were understood aright, the temptation to think that logical inferential practice might be rationally modified under pressure from empirical discoveries would disappear.

Recently, there has been an upsurge of interest in this ‘adoption problem’ inspired by Romina Padro’s doctoral dissertation and papers by Alan Berger, Suki Finn and (unpublished) Corine Besson and Michael Devitt.

I’ll first offer a rough statement of the putative problem—the Original Adoption Problem (OAP)—on an interpretation of it gleaned from these contributions, and argue that it depends upon resistible assumptions. I’ll then propose a different, farther reaching version of an adoption problem, arguing that, for a significant class of basic logical principles, there is indeed a difficulty in seeing how they might be ‘freely adopted,’ thereby vindicating a substantial part of Kripke’s original claim. I’ll conclude with an argument that logic is not, globally, rationally empirically revisable.

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KBNS Public Lecture

Court Room, Cottrell Building

Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa: 'Skepticism, Rape Culture, and Oppression'

Questions about knowledge are very practical questions. When you know something, that makes a big difference in how you should respond to it. Abstract philosophical arguments about knowledge, like those involving radical skeptical scenarios, sometimes obscure this important connection. In this talk, I'll draw parallels between classical skeptical arguments — like the "brain in a vat" hypothesis, or the worry that you might just be dreaming all of your current experiences — and more conspicuously practical and political skeptical arguments — like the argument that you shouldn't act on a rape victim's complaint without independent corroboration. Skepticism, I'll suggest, is often used as a powerful tool against proactive steps towards reform.

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