

KBNS Self-knowledge 7TH May, 2019

Attendance: Giovanni, Jonathan, Carrie, Alan, Giacomo, Crispin, Xintong, Jose, Sonia

Presenting: Giovanni

Reading: self-knowledge and belief revision

1. On Burge (1996)

Alan: There are two ways to read (iii) ‘critical reasoning requires thinking about one’s thoughts’. One is thinking about some mental state of yours and the other is thinking about some content of your thought. I assume that we are concerned with the first-reading. There can be two different kinds of reflective involvements in believing something: (1) thinking about p. You may wonder whether it is true etc. And (2) thinking about the content p as the thing I think about. (1) does not necessarily involve (2), an idea introduced in Pettit’s ‘common mind’.

Carrie: So thinking about a content involves a second-order component. It is neither thinking of the content nor thinking of the attitude, but something in between.

Crispin: in thinking about a content, I don’t think about my thoughts, but I’m thinking about *these thoughts*.

Giovanni: There are many ways to interpret what reasons mean in this argument. If reasons are just contents, then thinking of reasons is not the same as thinking of one’s own thoughts.

Crispin: If we add some ownership to the reasoning, then the conclusion looks trivial. The premise presupposes the issue. The notion of critical reasoning is doing no work in the argument.

Giovanni: What we need is a notion of reflective reasoning and it does not seem controversial.

Alan: We may grant the point Crispin just made—we can allow blind, poorly accessible reasoning. Perhaps the notion of critical reasoning is too general.

Giovanni: Suppose that there is also pre-reflective/unconscious reasoning going on; it remains an interesting question, if we focus on conscious reasoning, why does it require thinking about one’s own thought,

Crispin: Think of reappraisal as one instance of reasoning. Of course it requires thinking about your own thought as the notion of reflection is built in.

Giovanni: It seems to me reappraisal does not imply it since I could just change my attitudes without thinking about them.

Giacomo: Reappraisal would involve taking a stance of the good standing of your reasons, which might or might not be content of your belief.

Giovanni: suppose that I form a belief that Smith committed the murder on the basis of the fingerprint found at the scene. I’m not thinking about belief. One can reason about contents without mentioning belief.

Giacomo: In the case of suspension, one must have a notion of belief. Suppose you believe that p. Suppose that in light of the new evidence, there is equal evidence for and against that p. Rational revision requires you to suspend your belief that p. Suspension is the kind of attitude you can have only if you understand that you have a belief that p.

Crispin: withholding is a positive doxastic stance; in this case critical reasoning requires withholding, which in turn requires one to think about one’s thought as belief.

Giovanni: This strikes me as a different argument from Burge’s. Could there be a notion of withholding that is less demanding?

Crispin: You may fail to come to a view, which is weaker than withholding. But that is not a case of critical thinking.

2. On Gallois (1996)

Jonathan: I do not think (i) is true. The ability to distinguish how things are and how things appear is available to everyone.

Giovanni: Only if you have self-knowledge you are able to distinguishing between thinking about p as a fact and as something you believe. Two different modes of thinking about p.

Crispin: What does lack of self-knowledge imply? Lack of some concepts?

Giovanni: It is lacking something more than the concept of belief and knowing the belief one has. You may have the concept of belief, you may believe that p, you may know that there is certain belief that I have it, but you fail to believe what you believe is what you believe. It is the lack of second-order belief.

Jonathan: why weaken self-knowledge to belief?

Carrie: there is no mention of knowledge in Burge either. Even if we grant everything, we don't get knowledge, but ability to think certain kind of thought.

Gio: Burge has a separate argument that thinking about one's thoughts has to be knowable thinking.

Jonathan: Take Lewis's de se paper. One can be omniscient yet lacking the ability to identify which world possible world one is in. I may lack self-knowledge, but I can be omniscient about what the world is like. I can distinguish belief and reality. I know which beliefs are true, but don't know which beliefs I know.

3. On shoemaker (1988)

Carrie: desire and belief are functional states. The 'everything' in (ii) cannot be a fully generalized quantifier.

Crispin: why is rational being the starting point of the argument? Ordinary, not fully rational agents should also be able to have self-knowledge.

4. on the paradox of belief revision

Crispin: the basis on which you believe that p is not robust with respect to the new evidence. New evidence undermines your existing evidence.

Giovanni: The question is how the defeater is registered. How it is allowed to come in your rational process.

Crispin: If I take it to be a fact that p, then new evidence must be misleading. But I can ask myself what ground I have for p.

Alan: We need to consider a subject who has been stripped of reflective capacity and then see whether the subject could rationally revise his belief.

Jonathan: Consider the knowledge version of this puzzle. I know that there is cup in front of me. Now suppose that the cup is removed. I stop believing that there is cup in front of me. I change my attitude because there is a causal story to tell. It doesn't involve higher-order attitude.

Giovanni: this externalist solution fails to be satisfactory from one's point of view.

Sonia: do you distinguish between degree of belief and outright belief?

Giovanni: appealing to degree of belief can be a solution to the paradox, namely, we never take any issue to be settled.