

Section 2

Self-Knowledge and Rationality

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Abstract:

The symposium aims to investigate the complex relation between self-knowledge - that is, knowledge of our own mental states – and rationality. Topics will include: the challenge posed to self-knowledge and to rationality by empirical findings in cognitive psychology, self-deception and thought insertion, and the bearing of Moore's paradox to our understanding of beliefs, rationality and self-knowledge.

Titles and Abstracts of the talks

1.

Cristina Borgoni: Self-knowledge in “Moorean” states of mind

A relevant class of dissonance cases involves contradictory beliefs: the individual sincerely and with conviction assents to a given proposition while a conflicting belief remains in her psychology and guides great part of her overall responses. If the individual comes to know about her own psychology, she is in a position to assert (or believe) a justified Moorean proposition, or so I argue. In this talk, I explore the type of self-knowledge involved in such cases and whether it is undermined by the irrationality underlying the individual's dissonance. I argue that the individual has third-personal as well as some limited first-personal resources to discover her irrational state of mind. I defend the view that the individual's self-knowledge is preserved despite her irrationality. The individual is irrational in being dissonant but not in asserting (or believing) a Moorean proposition, which is warranted in the examined cases.

2.

Annalisa Coliva: “Disagreeing with myself”

In this paper, I explore the idea of intrapersonal disagreement. I investigate two different phenomena. The first one is whether one can disagree with oneself when one recognizes one's own previously unconscious mental dispositions, which run contrary to one's overt commitments. Assuming that one can be in disagreement with oneself in this sense, I explore whether it is enough for the disagreement to come to surface, to make one revise one's previous state of mind. I claim that it is not and that this kind of “belief-revision” is very different from the one we carry out when we recognize an incompatibility between our overt commitments. I then point out the deep consequences of this fact for the idea that commitments are intrinsically normative mental states.

The second phenomenon I draw attention to is the possibility of retracting one's past self-ascriptions of psychological properties, particularly of one's propositional attitudes as commitments. I claim that retraction is possible in these cases and that one can genuinely say

(or judge, at t_2) “I was wrong, I was (wasn’t) ψ at t_0 ” (where ψ ranges over psychological properties), after having judged the opposite at t_1 . Assuming that genuine retraction is possible in these cases, I draw out the consequences of this datum for some contemporary accounts of self-knowledge, which claim that (each) past psychological self-ascription is either constitutive of one’s own past state of mind, or else non-discursively justified only if correct. This will in turn speak in favor of a realist conception of mental states and of memory.

3.

Anne Meylan Massin: From delusion to self-deception. The variety of irrationality

There are, at least, two crucial intuitive differences between clinical delusions —like the belief of your friend Amy that Donald Trump is in love with her— and ordinary self-deception —like your husband’s belief that your daughter did not steal from his purse. The first intuitive difference is that Amy’s belief is more irrational than your husband’s. The second is that Amy’s cannot be held responsible for her irrational belief while your husband might be. The purpose of my presentation is to make sense of what differentiates delusion and self-deception even though they both qualify as irrational. This might require, I shall try to show, giving up Mele’s influential deflationary conception of self-deception and reintroducing an “intentional element” back into the picture.

4.

Patrizia Pedrini: Self-knowledge and irrationality

A long thrown-around debate in philosophy of self-knowledge has emphasized a close connection between self-knowing capacities (typically first-personal capacities, but not only) exhibited by a subject and her status as a rational being. This is a general idea which has been defended under various significantly different accounts:

- the “Reasons Account” (cf. Peacock 1999, Paul 2012, McHugh 2012, and their critics, such as Coliva 2008, Pitt 2004, Bayne and Montague 2011);
- the “Transparency Account” (discussed by Evans 1983, Dretske 1994, Fernandez 2003, 2013, Byrne 2005, 2011, Shall and Velleman 2005, Gertler 2011, Boyle 2011);
- the “Rationalist Account” (mainly debated by Gallois 1996, Shoemaker 1994);
- the “Agentalist Account” (cf. Burge 1996, Moran 2001, Bilgrami 2006, Boyle 2009, Coliva 2012a, Reed 2010, Lawlor 2009).

After offering a brief survey of what seems to be common to all of these accounts, I will review three main issues: 1) the overarching epistemological question of whether the connection between self-knowledge and rationality should be described as either inferential or non-inferential; 2) the methodologically live possibility of including both inferentialist and non-inferentialist kinds of self-knowledge in a complete account of it, given the apparent complexities of human psychology; 3) the analysis of tricky cases of seemingly non-inferentialist failure of self-knowledge whose irrationality is not imputable to any inferentialist error of the part of the subject.