

Perspectives on First-Person Thought



Mannheim, May 16–18, 2019

Room EO 150

Programme

Thursday, May 16

- 10.00** Coffee and Reception
- 10.15–10.30** Welcome and Introduction
- 10.30–11.35** **José Luis Bermúdez:** The First Person and the Second Person: Shareability and Symmetry
- 11.45–12.50** **Eunike Wetzel:** Self-Reports in Psychology: Accuracy, Response Biases, and Predictive Validity
- 13.00** Optional Lunch
- 14.45–15.50** **Manuel García-Carpintero:** Token-Reflexive Self-Concepts
- 16.00–17.05** **Ursula Renz:** Socratic Self-Knowledge and the Concept of the Human Self: From Phenomenology to Metaphysics
- 17.15–18.20** **Katharina Kraus:** Where (and how) Expressivism Can Meet Constitutivism

Friday, May 17

- 09.00** Coffee and Reception
- 09.15–10.20** **Daniel Gutzmann:** It's a Fucking State of Mind! On Expressives, Speech, and Thought
- 10.30–11.35** **Mitchell Green:** Avowals and Expositives: Where Showing Meets Saying
- 11.45–12.50** **Tim Henning:** The Essential Parenthetical
- 13.00** Optional Lunch
- 14.45–15.50** **Wolfgang Freitag:** Expressivism, *Ab Se* Content, and Moorean Paradoxes
- 16.00–17.05** **Nadja-Mira Yolcu:** Is There Expressive Denegation?
- 17.15–18.20** **Gianfranco Soldati:** Transparency of Desire
- 19.00** Conference Dinner

Saturday, May 18

- 09.00** Coffee and Reception
- 09.15–10.20** **Maik Niemeck:** Facing Up to De Se Skepticism
- 10.30–11.35** **Max Kölbel:** Pants on Fire and Knickers in a Twist
- 11.45–12.50** **Marc Andree Weber:** Workshop Summary and Discussion
- 13.00** End of Workshop and Optional Lunch

Abstracts

José Luis Bermúdez: The First Person and the Second Person: Shareability and Symmetry

According to Frege, the sense of the first person pronoun ‘I’ is necessarily private and for that reason unshareable. Variants of the unshareability view have been proposed by Evans, Peacocke, and others. In contrast, I argue for a strong version of the shareability of the sense of ‘I’ emerging from what I term the Symmetry Constraint. According to the Symmetry Constraint, it must be possible for tokens of ‘I’ to have the same sense as tokens of ‘you’ (and other personal pronouns) in appropriate contexts. This paper defends the Symmetry Constraint with linguistic arguments (from the nature of speech reports); logical arguments (from the nature of denial); and epistemological arguments (from the nature of testimony). I draw out the implications of the Symmetry Constraint for different ways of applying the type-token distinction to the sense of ‘I’.

Eunike Wetzel: Self-Reports in Psychology: Accuracy, Response Biases, and Predictive Validity

When trying to assess people’s personality, interests, or motivations, psychologists often apply self-report questionnaires. In these questionnaires, participants rate themselves with respect to a number of statements expressing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are indicative of the construct of interest. For example, when assessing how extraverted a person is, she might be asked to rate her degree of agreement to the statement ‘I enjoy talking to strangers.’

This talk will address three questions about self-reports in psychology: First, how accurate are self-reports? For example, if we compare self-ratings on extraversion with ratings by a friend or one’s partner, how similar are they? Second, which factors might reduce the accuracy of self-reports? Here, response biases such as systematic differences in using the response scale will be discussed. Third, do self-reports predict relevant life outcomes? For example, do people who are more conscientious according to their selfreport live longer than people who are less conscientious? In my talk, I will introduce the relevant concepts for each of these topics and give an overview over empirical findings from psychological research.

Manuel García-Carpintero: Token-Reflexive Self-Concepts

I’ll present the central aspects of a view on the nature of the self concept that I have defended in recent work, elaborating on previous proposals by Perry and Peacocke. It is a ‘two-tiered’ view, assuming self-knowledge by acquaintance with one’s own conscious states, and a token-reflexive rule of reference for the self-notion.

Ursula Renz: Socratic Self-Knowledge and the Concept of the Human Self: From Phenomenology to Metaphysics

The paper examines the widespread intuition – present both in the history of philosophy and in common-sense psychology – that self-knowledge is meaningful, in an existentialist sense, and that it leads to, or may lead to, wisdom. (In the introduction to *Self-Knowledge. A History*, I associated this intuition with the label ‘Socratic Self-Knowledge’.) The paper takes a short episode from a novel as its point of departure, using it to specify a few characteristics of Socratic Self-Knowledge, before setting out some conceptual requirements. It

concludes with a short discussion of the metaphysics of the self as comprised in the notion of Socratic Self-Knowledge, arguing, in particular, against a minimalist account of human selfhood/the human self.

Katharina Kraus: Where (and how) Expressivism Can Meet Constitutivism

Both expressivism and constitutivism seem to offer promising explanations of first-personal present tense self-ascriptions, including in particular the self-ascription of propositional attitudes ('I ϕ that p', whereby ' ϕ ' denotes a propositional attitude, such as belief or desire) and the self-ascription of sensations ('I ψ ', whereby ' ψ ' denotes a sensory state, such as pain or emotions). Expressivism considers the utterance of such a self-ascriptive statement as an explicit expressive act, by which the corresponding mental state is merely expressed, without necessarily asserting that one has this state. By contrast, constitutivism understands such self-ascriptions as the by-products (or even as constitutive aspects) of the relevant mental states, which – like those states – result from exercising one's mental agency. Proponents of expressivism often explicitly reject constitutivism as too cognitively demanding and unnecessarily normatively loaded. In turn, representatives of constitutivism often object to expressivism that the latter is metaphysically too thin, lacking an account of consciousness and mental agency.

In this paper, I will argue that a certain variant of constitutivism is not only compatible with, but in fact crucially complements a certain variant of expressivism. To this effect, I will first review both theories with regard to their respective advantages and disadvantages. Then I will show that we can develop a variant of constitutivism that shares core assumptions with a relevant variant of expressivism. Finally, I will propose a combined theory of first-personal self-ascription, combining aspects of both constitutivism and expressivism. Moreover, I suggest that such a combined theory has a Kantian provenance.

Daniel Gutzmann: It's a Fucking State of Mind! On Expressives, Speech, and Thought

Since Kaplan's (1999) infamous paper on the meaning of 'ouch' and 'oops', expressive utterances are thought of encoding special semantic content (Potts 2007) which is different from ordinary truth-conditional content and is best viewed as being use-conditional in nature. Instead of asking under which conditions an utterance of, say, 'ouch' is true (which does not make sense to begin with), it is better to think of them as being 'use-conditional' in nature and ask, under which conditions an utterance of 'ouch' is felicitously uttered. The upshot of Kaplans paper is that, once we think of expressives in the use-conditional content, we can model them in a way that is pretty much in parallel to how propositions are usually treated. Moreover, we can compare the information contained in expressive utterances with those encoded by their descriptive equivalents (Gutzmann 2015).

This way of treating, however, makes it impossible to distinguish between what may be called descriptive and expressive thoughts, because they would have the same of content and the 'mode of expression' (as Kaplan called it) will be lost when it comes to talk. This talks explores what it means to have expressive thoughts and how they differ from descriptive ones and whether the theory of expressive should be modified and what this all means for the difference between thought ad speech.

Mitchell Green: Avowals and Expositives: Where Showing Meets Saying

Avowals of attitude such as 'I believe that...' and expositives such as 'I claim that...' are often used to show the force, epistemic status, or other conversationally relevant feature

of the complement clause they embed. A tempting but untenable explanation of this fact would construe such complement clauses as being semantically transparent. The alternative pursued here starts with concepts from the evolutionary biology of communication, defines a notion of a *verbal signal*, and uses it to explain how in the relevant uses, speakers can both say that something is the case (e.g., that I claim that q), and show it to be so (that I am putting forth q in a certain way). The notion of showing invoked here is elucidated with the evo-bio notions of *index* and *handicap*, and helps us to make sense of communicatively rich phenomena in our own species without reliance on the psychologically demanding notion of speaker meaning.

Tim Henning: The Essential Parenthetical

This talk explores the questions: What is involved in an agent's perspective on his or her actions and reasons? And how can we capture this perspective in language? Many authors have argued that an agent's perspective is irreducibly *de se*, and that therefore it must be represented by means of indexicals. I do not take issue with these claims, but I argue that they fall short of capturing what is really distinctive about an agent's perspective. I describe a phenomenon I call ownership of reasons, and I argue that *de se* contents and indexicals do not suffice to represent an agent's reasons as owned. I then propose an account of the representation of reasons ownership. To specify reasons as owned by the agent, we need to invoke a multidimensional semantics, which separates at-issue and not-at-issue dimensions of semantic content. And to exploit these dimensions explicitly, our language needs to use parenthetical remarks and clauses.

Wolfgang Freitag: Expressivism, *Ab Se* Content, and Moorean Paradoxes

I claim that self-ascriptions of mental states are not self-reports, but expressions of these mental states: with 'I believe that p ' and 'I wish that p ' the speaker expresses rather than describes that she believes and wishes, respectively. Accordingly, the first-person pronoun in the matrix clause ('I believe', 'I wish') does not refer to part of the mental state content, but refers to the subject expressing the respective mental state and thus to what I call '*ab se*' content. I suggest that the notion of *ab se* content accounts for Wittgenstein's subject use of 'I' and helps to resolve Moorean Paradoxes.

Nadja-Mira Yolcu: Is There Expressive Denegation?

According to psychological expressivism, avowals – first-person present tense self-ascriptions of mental states (e.g. 'I hope that it is raining') – are typically explicit expressive acts. In uttering an avowal of the form 'I ψ that p/o ', the speaker expresses her *mental state* ψ that p/o instead of reporting on her mental state (descriptivism), thereby expressing her *belief* that she ψ s that p/o .

Self-ascriptions of mental states can be negated. *Disavowals*, such as 'I don't believe that it is raining' and 'I don't love you', are often used in combination with avowals as in 'I don't want to be anybody's prisoner. I want to be a Queen' (Alice, in L. Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*). Nevertheless, disavowals are rarely discussed. Here, I will make the case for what I call *expressive denegation*: I claim that if psychological expressivism gives a correct analysis of avowals, then in uttering a disavowal, a speaker typically *expresses*, in some sense, the *absence* of the mental state named. I will also consider the main objection to expressive denegation: While it seems easy to make sense of expressing a mental state, it is difficult to make sense of expressing the *absence* of a mental state. In response to this

problem, I propose that in uttering a disavowal of the form ‘I don’t ψ that p/o ’ a speaker expresses the proposition *that she does not ψ [that p/o]*.

Gianfranco Soldati: Transparency of Desire

Transparency accounts of self-knowledge are well known in their application to cognitive states, mainly beliefs and judgements. They are supposed to have serious problems when it comes to other kinds of mental states or experiences. The situation is even worse for accounts of transparency that rely on the rational sensitivity of beliefs. In this paper I intend to address the problems related to the application of transparency accounts to desire. In order to see how transparency applies to desire we need to understand the way desire is sensitive to reason. I shall argue that the central point is that desires provide reasons about the evaluative facts in a non-deliberative way.

Maik Niemeck: Facing Up to De Se Skepticism

A widely held view understands first-person thought as an irreducible and special element of human cognition. The cases presented in support for this assumption typically emphasize its role for action. That is why many philosophers conclude that action requires appropriate first-person thoughts. Recently this line of thought has been questioned by so-called *De Se Sceptics*. They argue that the proposed connection between action and first-person thought is not as tight as presumed and that therefore first-person thought should not be regarded as something especially outstanding. Cappelen & Dever (2013), for instance, claim that their *Action Inventory Model* (AIM) is able to account for all actions without an appeal to any agent-related thoughts.

In this talk, I will attempt to refute De Se Skepticism. My response will be threefold. At first, I will suggest to weaken claims about the relation between first-person thought and action. Then I will present cases the AIM of Cappelen & Dever (2013) is not able to account for and argue with an inference to the best explanation that we should adopt a model for action that appeals to first-personal representations about the available actions rather than to the action inventory itself. In the final part, I will explore a novel idea proposed by Textor (2018) according to which the first person is a thick concept that contains in addition to a descriptive component an evaluative one. In doing so, I will outline how this proposal might help to defeat De Se Skepticism.

Max Kölbel: Pants on Fire and Knickers in a Twist

Perspectival Contents of one sort or another have been motivated by three different types of considerations. They have been said to be required for doing justice to *de se* or ineliminably indexical mental states—the *de se*-motivation. They have been employed to describe the meaning of sentences that can express propositions containing so called ‘unarticulated constituents’—the unspecificity motivation. Finally, they have been used by relativists to account for the mental or linguistic contents of thought or language on matters of taste and other arguably non-objective matters—the relativistic motivation. Combining all three types of motivation would seem to yield greater motivation for employing perspectival contents. However, the *de se*-motivation seems to rule out the other two, and vice versa. I shall show how this potentially destructive problem can be defused.