**How to be a pluralist about self-knowledge**

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1. **Introduction**

What does it mean to be a pluralist about self-knowledge? Since this view and its name have not been appropriated before, there is still considerable room for maneuver. In this paper, I am going to present my own preferred way of characterizing this position. Before delving into that, let me briefly connect pluralism about self-knowledge, as I understand it, with epistemic pluralism in general.

My own version of pluralism about self-knowledge is characterized by adherence to the idea that there is an asymmetry between what may be called first-personal and third-personal self-knowledge. In both cases, we do have true judgements of the form “I am F”, where *F* ranges over psychological predicates. Yet, while in the third-personal case these self-ascription do enjoy an epistemic support, in the first-personal one, they actually don’t. Yet, we can still call them instances of self-*knowledge*, once we are hospitable to the idea that that very term may be used to refer to different states or properties of a subject. Finally, it is part of my brand of pluralism that, when the relevant true psychological self-ascriptions enjoy an epistemic support, and thus qualify as instances of third-personal self-knowledge, the methods by means of which such a support is obtained are many and diverse.

Hence, pluralism about self-knowledge, as I conceive of it, entails both pluralism of states and of methods. That is to say, it is not the case that in all instances of self-knowledge subjects are in the same epistemic situation – that is, roughly, the situation of having a true and justified belief about their own mental states. Nor is it the case that when they actually do have a true and justified belief about their own mental states, the way they have acquired that justification goes through the same kind of method.

An important aspect of the kind of pluralism I will be presenting in the following is its meta-philosophical import. For, by embracing it, several disputes about *the* (allegedly) correct account of self-knowledge will dissolve. In particular, as we will see, various so-far competing accounts will be reconciled with one another by showing how each of them offers a suitable account of at least some instances of self-knowledge, or of at least some of the ways in which third-personal self-knowledge can be achieved.

That, however, does not mean that, once epistemic pluralism about self-knowledge is embraced, anything goes. Pluralism about self-knowledge, as I conceive of it, does not entail relativism. Hence, I am not committed to the view that several allegedly competing accounts of self-knowledge would in fact all be on a par, the choice between them being only based on pragmatic factors. As we shall see, there is still considerable room for philosophical dispute regarding the correct account of some, appropriately specified, specimens of self-knowledge. Indeed, the kind of pluralism about self-knowledge I will be presenting is intimately connected to first-order epistemological views, which I have developed and defended elsewhere. [[1]](#footnote-1)Hence it actually depends on taking a firm stance on certain first-order epistemological issues.

1. **Pluralism about self-knowledge: an outline**

The main claim at the heart of pluralism about self-knowledge, as I conceive of it, is an *existential* one. Namely, that there is an *asymmetry* between first- and third-personal cases of self-knowledge. Examples of the former kind of self-knowledge are one’s immediate judgement “I am in pain” issued after having just banged one’s knee against a table, or “I intend to take my son out for lunch tomorrow”, after weighing various reasons, such as the fact that your son seems to need some quality time just with you and that the first available option would be lunch tomorrow.

A classic example of the latter kind of self-knowledge is the one described by Jane Austen, in her novel *Emma*, when the protagonist realizes her love for her long-lasting friend Mr. Knightley.

Emma’s eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like hers, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress. She touched – she admitted – she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much the worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley than with Mr. Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet’s having some hope of return? It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no-one but herself.

Other examples may be one’s realization of not being brave, or of being intimidating, or of being biased, based on various epistemic methods we will review in the following.

Roughly, examples of first-personal self-knowledge are immediate manifestations of one’s *on-going* sensations, intentions (and further commissive propositional attitudes), but also basic emotions – like “I’m scared of that dog”, based on one’s on-going fear at the sight of an aggressively-looking barking dog –, on-going perceptions – “I’m seeing a dog” –, passing thoughts – “I’m thinking of my mother” –, sudden recollections – “I remember where I left my keys yesterday” – and *cogito*-like thoughts – “I’m hereby thinking that it’s sunny today”.

Examples of third-personal self-knowledge, in contrast, are characteristically self-ascriptions of *dispositional* psychological properties, like being in love, or jealous, being brave or intimidating or biased. The ways in which they are arrived at closely resemble the methods we usually employ to make knowledgeable judgements regarding *other* people’s mental states – whence the label “third-personal self-knowledge”. For just as we need to make inferences to the best explanation in order to attribute psychological properties to other people, based on the observation of their verbal and non-verbal behavior, so it seems that (at least in many cases, as we shall see) we arrive at those *self*-directed ascriptions by applying the same kind of method.

A corollary of this main existential claim is a *meta-epistemological* one. Namely, that a complete account of self-knowledge needs to address *both* first- *and* third-personal cases. I also couple this meta-epistemological claim with an *axiological* one. Not only are both kinds of self-knowledge in need of explanation, but, in my view, they are equally philosophically interesting and existentially important. That is to say, while different philosophers have favored one kind of self-knowledge over the other and have defended their take by downplaying the existential significance or the philosophical interest of the kind of self-knowledge their theories did not account for, I think both kinds of self-knowledge are existentially significant and philosophically interesting. That is, they are both extremely valuable to our lives and trying to philosophically account for either of them will raise equally interesting epistemological issues.

A more idiosyncratic aspect of my brand of pluralism regarding self-knowledge is that while third-personal self-knowledge is, for me, the result of an epistemic achievement, which takes a subject from first-order mental states to true and justified beliefs about them, I hold that first-personal self-knowledge is not the result of any epistemic achievement. Rather, what goes by the name of “first-personal self-knowledge” is, in my view, just a *conceptual truth*, which can be variously redeemed. This entails that, properly speaking, there is no such thing as an epistemology of first-personal self-knowledge. Yet, for reasons we will see, it is not necessarily a misnomer to call that kind of self-*knowledge* thus.

Moreover, I hold that third-personal self-knowledge does not come about just through inference to the best explanation, based on the observation of one’s verbal and non-verbal behavior. In fact, third-personal self-knowledge can be achieved through a variety of epistemic methods, which, so far, have received little attention by the philosophical community that has been working at the interface between philosophy of mind and epistemology. It is my conviction that a closer look at such a variety of methods will repay the effort and will bring out several *epistemically* interesting aspects of third-personal self-knowledge.

Finally, I also hold that the ways in which we can actually redeem the conceptual truth first-personal self-knowledge consists in are subtly different depending on the kind of mental state at issue. It is my conviction that paying attention to these subtleties will reveal important differences and will make the overall approach to first-personal self-knowledge, generally known as “constitutivism”, more plausible. Let us now look at each of these main claims in more detail.

1. **The asymmetry between first- and third-personal self-knowledge I: against deniers**

Instances of first-personal self-knowledge are characterized by the following features. First, they are *groundless*. That is to say, the relevant psychological self-ascriptions are neither based on the observation of one’s occurrent mental state, nor on inference to the best explanation based on the observation of one’s overt behavior (or on any other epistemic method). This does not mean that the relevant mental state plays no role in the relevant self-ascriptions. It simply means that the role of the first-order mental state is not that of offering an epistemic support, or some kind of independent reason for its self-ascription.[[2]](#footnote-2) Secondly, instances of first-personal self-knowledge are characterized by transparency: if one is conceptually competent, cognitively well-functioning, attentive, alert and sincere, if one has a given mental state M, one will so judge. Thirdly, instances of first-personal self-knowledge are characterized by authority. That is to say, if one is conceptually competent, cognitively well-functioning, attentive, alert and sincere, if one judges to have a given mental state M, one does have it.

To exemplify, when I judge “I’m in pain”, while feeling pain at my knee after having just banged it against a table, I do not do so by observing my mental state, by recognizing it as the kind of mental state it is and by judging that I myself instantiate it. Nor do I so judge by observing my moaning or even saying out loud “Ouch” or “It hurts” and inferring that I am in pain. Rather, the judgement is of a piece with the occurrence of that mental state. Indeed, it is (part of) its very manifestation. For we often avow our immediate sensations. The avowal voices or manifests the relevant mental state. Yet it is made through a sentence of English and it expresses a proposition which has truth-conditions, which in the relevant cases are *manifested* as obtaining, and not just *said* to obtain.[[3]](#footnote-3) Conversely, if I so judge, while satisfying the conditions listed above, I am in pain.

Similarly, when I judge “I intend to take my son for lunch tomorrow”, I do not do so by observing my intention, by recognizing it for what it is and by forming that judgement. Nor do I arrive at that judgement by observing my overt behavior, or my saying out loud “I’ll take my son out for lunch tomorrow”. The very self-ascription is of a piece with the occurrence of the intention, it is part of its manifestation and, as we shall see, it can actually bring it about, at least in some cases. Conversely, if I make the relevant self-ascription, under the previously mentioned conditions, that entails that I do have that intention.

By contrast, instances of third-personal self-knowledge do not exemplify any of these features. They are never groundless, because they are always based on inference to the best explanation or on other epistemic methods we shall review in the following. Nor are they ever transparent or authoritative. For it is not enough to be possessed of the relevant concepts, be cognitively well-functioning, attentive, alert and sincere (while satisfying also other conditions we will review in section 6), to judge that one has the relevant mental state. Indeed, for various reasons, one can satisfy all these conditions and remain “blind” to oneself. Conversely, one’s judging to have a given mental state, while also satisfying the relevant conditions, does not guarantee that one’s judgement be correct. One could, after all, have gone astray in the application of the various epistemic methods we normally employ in order to make these self-ascriptions.

The asymmetry between first- and third-personal self-knowledge has been denied by several philosophers. Behaviorists have denied the existence of genuinely first-personal self-knowledge. In their view, all psychological self-ascriptions are instances of third-personal self-knowledge, reached through inference to the best explanation starting with the observation of one’s own behavior.[[4]](#footnote-4) Contemporary deniers of the asymmetry have taken findings in cognitive psychology to show that we are very often mistaken about our own mental states, and blind to their occurrence. Consider the following case, discussed by Eric Schwitzgebel (2008, p. 252):

My wife mentions that I seem to be angry about being stuck with the dishes again (despite the fact that doing the dishes makes me happy?). I deny it. I reflect; I sincerely attempt to discover whether I’m angry—I don’t just reflexively defend myself but try to be the good self-psychologist my wife would like me to be—and still I don’t see it. I don’t think I’m angry. But I’m wrong, of course, as I usually am in such situations: My wife reads my face better than I introspect. Maybe I’m not quite boiling inside, but there’s plenty of angry phenomenology to be discovered if I knew better how to look. Or do you think that every time we’re wrong about our emotions, those emotions must be nonconscious, dispositional, not genuinely felt? Or felt and perfectly apprehended phenomenologically but somehow nonetheless mislabeled? Can’t I also err more directly? Surely my “no anger” judgment is colored by a particular self-conception and emotional involvement. To that extent, it’s less than ideal as a test of my claim that, even in the most favorable circumstances of quiet reflection, we are prone to err about our experience. However, as long as we focus on judgments about emotional phenomenology, such distortive factors will probably be in play. If that’s enough consistently to undermine the reliability of our judgments, that rather better supports my thesis than defeats it, I think. Infallible judges of our emotional experience? I’m baffled. How could anyone believe that? Do you believe that? What am I missing?

Now, it is clearly preposterous to hold that we know we are in pain, while feeling it, because we observe our overt behavior and infer to its likely psychological cause. Yet, the case proposed by Schwitzgebel is subtler. Still, I think we can easily accommodate it. For there are cases of “cold” anger. That is, cases in which there is no feeling of anger while one’s behavior clearly manifests it. What that shows is that a lot of emotions have both a phenomenological component to them as well as a dispositional one.[[5]](#footnote-5) Yet, sometimes the former might not be present, while the latter is. No wonder, then, that with respect to the dispositional aspects of our emotions we can be blind or not authoritative. For knowledge of the dispositional aspects of our emotions is just another case of third-personal self-knowledge.

One might protest that this is a simplistic understanding of the situation. For there could be feelings one would be aware of and yet one could have a hard time figuring out what they are feelings *of*. Again, I do not wish to dispute the possibility of being in such a predicament. Yet, this case would simply show that we could be bad at figuring out what these feelings are *symptoms* of – that is, of what kind of dispositional mental states they are a manifestation of.[[6]](#footnote-6) Imagine for a moment a less perceptive Emma, who, presented with the same inner phenomenology as the one described by Austen, had trouble realizing that it is a symptom of her being in love with Mr. Knightly. This self-blind Emma would manifestly be a poor self-interpreter, who would be incapable of acquiring third-personal self-knowledge. Yet, this does not entail that she would have no first-personal self-knowledge. After all, she could perfectly well judge “I am feeling bad”, after realizing that Harriet might have some hope of return.

More generally, what findings in cognitive psychology show is that a lot of self-knowledge is third-personal, or, equivalently, that the scope of first-personal self-knowledge is more limited than philosophers have traditionally thought. That does not mean, however, that there is no such thing as first-personal self-knowledge altogether.

1. **The asymmetry between first- and third-personal self-knowledge II: against chauvinists**

As mentioned in section 1, a corollary of the claim that there is a genuine asymmetry between first- and third-personal self-knowledge is that a complete account of self-knowledge needs to address *both* first- *and* third-personal cases. To repeat, not only are both kinds of self-knowledge in need of explanation, but, in my view, they are equally philosophically interesting and existentially important. Various philosophers have denied that. For, although they may have acknowledged the existence of the asymmetry between first- and third-personal self-knowledge, they have tended to favor only one side of it. Characteristically, those who are all in favor of third-personal self-knowledge have pointed out that this is the only kind of self-knowledge which is worth obtaining, for it reveals important aspects of our character. Indeed, it is the kind of knowledge people are prepared to pay large amounts of money for, whenever they go for psychoanalytic therapy and counselling.[[7]](#footnote-7) By contrast, first-personal self-knowledge is not that interesting as it just affords knowledge of humdrum truths such as “I am in pain” or “I believe it is sunny today” or “I intend to take my son out for lunch tomorrow”.

Now, I do agree that knowledge of our character is existentially relevant. After all, the *motto* “Know thyself”, inscribed on the front of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, was meant to remind us of that. For it is only by knowing our character and our limitations that we will maximize chances of achieving a sober conception of ourselves and of making sensible life-time decisions. What I do not agree with is inferring that since, existentially, this kind of self-knowledge is much more interesting than humdrum first-personal self-knowledge, it is the only *existentially* interesting one. Obviously, knowing you are in pain right now as you are grabbing a hot pan with your bare hands may spare you a lot of further trouble. Moreover, only by knowing your own intentions and further propositional attitudes will you be able to plan action. Finally, knowledge of your inner feelings, emotions, sensations, etc., will very often provide you with the necessary data to gain third-personal self-knowledge, as Emma’s case made vivid, and we shall presently discuss in more detail. Hence, first-personal self-knowledge is existentially relevant in its own right and actually a fundamental element to gain third-personal self-knowledge in very many cases.

Even less do I find it convincing that just because people are prepared to go to great lengths to get third-personal self-knowledge, that kind of self-knowledge is the only *philosophically* interesting one; or else, the only one on which philosophers should concentrate their future efforts.[[8]](#footnote-8) On the contrary, accounting for first-personal self-knowledge has turned out to be one of the most difficult challenges in philosophy of mind to which virtually all major philosophers in the Western tradition have devoted considerable efforts. Despite their problems, these efforts have often produced interesting philosophical insights along the way, which, as we shall see, can be fruitfully integrated within a pluralistic approach.

That being said, let me hasten to add that I do not agree with those philosophers who have favored first-personal self-knowledge over its third-personal counterpart, precisely on the ground that only the former would pose an interesting philosophical challenge.[[9]](#footnote-9) As we shall see, third-personal self-knowledge is not only existentially relevant, but also *epistemically* significant, once one realizes that the ways in which we can obtain it are many and diverse and such as to connect the topic of self-knowledge with very important issues in epistemology, general and – as surprising as that might be – social.

1. **The common route to denial and chauvinism: monism**

Despite their differences, deniers and chauvinists are united by a common assumption – that is, adherence to *monism*. For they tend to concentrate upon one kind of mental state and offer what seems a (*prima facie*, at least) plausible explanation of how we come to know that kind of mental state. They then try to *generalize* that explanation to (almost) all other mental states, or else to *downplay* the extent and philosophical significance of those mental states whose self-knowledge they cannot account for. The latter is the move that eventually gets all of them into trouble, assuming, for the sake of argument, that their accounts are satisfactory at least when targeted at a specific subset of cases of self-knowledge.

A couple of examples will suffice to make the point vivid. Consider behaviorism or Cassam’s inferentialism. Clearly, inference to the best explanation is the obvious explanation of our knowledge of our Freudian unconscious mental states,[[10]](#footnote-10) or of those mental states, like Emma’s love for Mr. Knightly, which may be revealed to us by paying careful attention to our reactions and behavior. Indeed, it is the obvious candidate explanation for a lot of knowledge we may gain of our deep-seated dispositions. For instance, one may realize one is somewhat biased towards students of a certain gender, or race, or attitude by reflecting on one’s performance to date in grading, or in selecting students from a pool of applicants, etc. But it is not plausibly extended to knowledge of our occurrent sensation of pain, or of our deliberation to take our son out for lunch tomorrow.

Now consider Moran’s deliberative account of self-knowledge, according to which it is only when we deliberate what to believe that we have genuinely first-personal self-knowledge. For, on his account, “I believe that” is merely appended to the content P one has judged to be the case, after weighing reasons for and against it. I take Moran’s is, at least *prima facie*, a plausible explanation of first-personal self-knowledge of (a certain kind of) beliefs.[[11]](#footnote-11) Yet, to hold, as he does, that in all other cases, there is nothing distinctively first-personal, not even when we know our occurrent sensations, or basic emotions, and that all third-personal cases of self-knowledge would reveal some kind of alienation from ourselves, is clearly an overstatement.

It seems to go against the grain to say that when I self-ascribe an occurrent excruciating pain, I am not doing that in a way which is distinctively first-personal just because it is not an instance of the deliberative model Moran is keen to support.[[12]](#footnote-12) Equally, it is implausible to hold that all cases of third-personal self-knowledge would reveal a kind of psychological malfunctioning on our part. Surely not all unconscious mental states and mental dispositions we have are noble (nor despicable for that matter), but they are part of our psychological make-up and indeed determine our personalities and, in some sense, who we are. They are all, by definition, alien to us, in the sense that we are very often unaware of them. But that does not mean that third-personal self-knowledge – which is the only kind of knowledge we can have of them – is indicative of some psychological malfunctioning on our part. Indeed, given the very nature of these mental states, we can only know them by means of third-personal methods. And it would be preposterous to hold that well-functioning human beings could somehow know them in a first-personal way – that is, as a result of a deliberation! I cannot deliberate not to be (dispositionally) jealous of my more successful sister. I can only realize I am so jealous, conclude that there is no basis for such jealousy and try and behave differently in the future, in hope to be able to live up to my newly formed commitment. That is to say, in hope to be able to bring my dispositions in line with my (newly formed) commitments, and, characteristically, the attempt may be thwarted, or successful only to some degree.

Let us take stock. We have seen that both deniers and chauvinists with respect to the asymmetry between first- and third-personal self-knowledge are ultimately united in embracing monism. We have seen that, quite independently of the details of their respective proposals, it is adherence to monism that eventually leads all of them into trouble. This, therefore, paves the way to a liberating proposal: to forsake monism and embrace pluralism with respect to self-knowledge.[[13]](#footnote-13) That move will allow us to offer a comprehensive and hopefully correct account of self-knowledge as a whole. Thus, it will have certain “first-order” benefits. But it will also have “second-order” – or meta-philosophical – payoffs. For it will allow us to throw into sharp relief the eventual merits of various positions, once taken to apply within their proper boundaries. That is, as is often the case, when one opens up to pluralism, several divergent accounts will no longer be seen as in competition with one another, but rather as valuable proposals with respect to a proper subset of phenomena under investigation. To put it yet another way: several *prima facie* competing accounts of self-knowledge can actually be reconciled with one another, once one adopts a pluralistic approach, which allows one to recognize their respective merits, once these accounts are taken to apply only to some, appropriately specified cases of self-knowledge. This does not mean that, once we open up to pluralism, anything goes. There is still considerable room for debate regarding the correct account of a properly specified class of instances of self-knowledge. For example, one may still sensibly debate whether constitutivism or Moran’s deliberative account offer the correct explanation of first-personal self-knowledge of self-ascriptions of belief. However, what one cannot argue for, once pluralism about self-knowledge is embraced, is that, given the numerous failures at self-knowledge cognitive science has made us aware of, both constitutivism and Moran’s deliberative account are clearly off the track. That is, one can acknowledge that they are unsuitable as accounts of our knowledge of our dispositional mental states, but that does not make them *ipso facto* incorrect as accounts of other specimens of self-knowledge.

1. **Third-personal self-knowledge: methodological pluralism**

There are a variety of methods we employ to gain third-personal self-knowledge. Inference to the best explanation is only one of them, even though – to the best of my knowledge – it is the one theorists of self-knowledge mostly focus on. Moreover, although it is often invoked, it is not fully understood either. For it is seldom noticed that the kind of “theory” we use in order to provide an explanation of overt behavior may vary considerably, from one case to the other. It may be a “scientific” one like the Freudian conception of the unconscious, or a folk-psychological one, we may have acquired in a variety of ways. Furthermore, it is rarely remarked that, in self-knowledge and self-knowledge only, the kind of data the theory aims to provide an explanation of are not only instances of overt behavior, but also a lot of inner promptings, like feelings, emotions and so forth.[[14]](#footnote-14) The quote from Jane Austen’s *Emma* we introduced previously helps us see this point. As the reader will recall, Emma infers to her being in love with Mr. Knightley by attending to her own feelings and emotions at the prospect that he might reciprocate another woman’s feelings. What that entails, as we remarked, is that third-personal self-knowledge, when provided by inference to the best explanation, often presupposes first-personal self-knowledge. This, in turn, shows that there is often an asymmetric dependence of third-personal self-knowledge on first-personal self-knowledge.

Another method we may use to obtain third-personal self-knowledge is simulation. Suppose I want to figure out whether I am brave or coward. I can proceed as follows. I could imagine being in a potentially scary situation and attend to how I would react. For instance, I could think of being alone, at night, in a house in the middle of nowhere and hear a creeping sound coming from the basement. I could then immerse myself deeper into the simulated scene and see what kind of reaction I would have. That is, I would attend to my feelings and behavior, while simulating, and conclude that I would be brave (or otherwise). This method too would quite clearly involve first-personal self-knowledge of one’s feelings in the context of the simulation. Moreover, it would involve actively bringing one’s imagination to bear on the task of determining whether one is brave or not. That involves a practical ability – that is, knowing *how* to imagine being in the simulated context – as well as knowing *that* what one is thereby experiencing is indeed one’s own imagination of being in a context thus-and-so. Again, third-personal self-knowledge obtained through simulation presupposes first-personal self-knowledge.

Another possible method to gain third-personal self-knowledge goes via the identification with the character of a novel or a movie. Suppose you read Austen’s *Emma*, and that you too have a close friend like Mr. Knightley. Suppose further that, up to that point, you have thought of that relationship just as friendship. Yet, by reading the novel and immersing yourself in it, you are struck by Emma’s realization of being in love with Mr. Knightley, and that prompts you to engage in similar speculations, which may reveal to you your actual feelings towards your friend (assuming, for the sake of argument, that your feelings are deeper than just friendship). This method seems to resemble simulation (and to involve inference to the best explanation), but certainly its application requires something over and above simulation. Namely, an identification with the character of the novel, in a way in which ordinary simulation does not. That is to say, it requires a projection of oneself into the overall situation depicted and, in particular, a projection of oneself into someone else. Such an identification is usually considered a characteristic trait of empathy, rather than of straightforward simulation. Hence, one way we can gain third-personal self-knowledge goes through empathizing with characters in fictional contexts.[[15]](#footnote-15) Clearly, however, it could also depend on empathizing with real people to the point of realizing that what is true of them, *vis-à-vis* their dispositional psychological properties, may well be true of you. Notice, once again, that once empathy is operative, in the way of a projection of oneself into someone else’s situation, it could also give rise to specific feelings and emotions, which one would then know in a first-personal way. These, in turn, could be used as data to make sense of oneself through inference to the best explanation; or else just be the very objects of one’s first-personal self-knowledge.

It is important to note that, if the above is correct, it allows us to bring several debates to date to bear on the topic of self-knowledge in a radically new way. The long-lasting debate over theory-theory can now be re-interpreted not just (or even so much) as a debate about the acquisition of psychological concepts, in particular of propositional attitudes, with the attendant implausible view that the relevant psychological self-ascriptions would always be inferential,[[16]](#footnote-16) but as showing one way in which we do gain third-personal self-knowledge.[[17]](#footnote-17) Its main competitor, the simulation model,[[18]](#footnote-18) can now be seen as one of the methods we can use to gain third-personal self-knowledge too, rather than just a way of gaining knowledge of other people’s minds, or, implausibly, as a way of gaining first-personal self-knowledge. The two models would not be in opposition to one another, as accounts of third-personal self-knowledge, though. Rather, they can now be seen as complementing each other in a profitable way. Finally, empathy too can now be seen as one further method that allows us to gain third-personal self-knowledge, rather than simply a way of acquiring knowledge of other people’s minds; or else, as just a means of bringing about feelings and emotions in us, which we would then know in a first-personal way.

Another method we may use to gain third-personal self-knowledge is induction. By reflecting on our performance to date, but also on how we have felt in potentially dangerous situations we have experienced in the past, we may come to a conclusion about such dispositional psychological properties like being brave (or cowards). Or again, by reflecting on our performance to date in grading and selecting candidates for a given position, we may realize we are (likely to be) biased (re gender, or race, or whatever have you).[[19]](#footnote-19) Once more, only in one’s own case, can induction be based on data regarding our inner phenomenology. Furthermore, the evidence on which the induction is based can take the form of past psychological self-ascriptions. Thus, once again, we can see how third-personal self-knowledge, while utilizing methods we could apply to gain knowledge of other people’s mental states, is unique in allowing for psychological inputs, which are known in a first-personal way.

Two further methods that, so far, have received no attention, but which are indeed crucial to self-knowledge, are testimony and what I call “hermeneutics”. The former provides us with what might be called *second*-*personal* self-knowledge. Suppose you talk to a person you trust and she tells you that you are intimidating. Trusting that person, having no reason to believe she may be deceiving you or be incompetent with respect to the topic at issue, you may then form a justified and, for the sake of argument, true belief that you are an intimidating person.[[20]](#footnote-20) You would therefore acquire self-knowledge through the interaction with another person and, by relying on her judgement, you would then gain testimonial justification for your psychological self-ascription.

Notice that this method is actually the most objective one may employ, in order to gain self-knowledge. For it constitutively depends on the interaction with others and on taking them to their word. Furthermore, it may (even though it need not) disclose to us psychological dispositional properties, which constitutively depend on the interaction with other people, and that may well lack any inner phenomenology. Consider being intimidating: one is only intimidating because other people feel scared, or threatened, or challenged when dealing with that person. While some people may enjoy realizing that others are so intimated in their presence, being intimidating to them does not have any specific inner phenomenology, or so it would seem.[[21]](#footnote-21) Thus, through testimony, we can actually gain knowledge of some psychological properties of ours we would otherwise be precluded from knowing.

Testimony, furthermore, is at work whenever we acquire self-knowledge through the interaction with a psychoanalyst or a psychiatrist – that is, with an expert. We need to trust their judgement in order to acquire knowledge about our own minds – that is, we must have no reason to think they may want to deceive us, as well as no reason to think they may be incompetent in their profession.

While the clinical context introduces complexities of its own,[[22]](#footnote-22) it is important to stress the role of the interaction with others – mostly family members, partners and friends – as an important source of self-knowledge. I would certainly not consider it the sole or the main value of having close relationships with other human beings, but it is certainly one of the pay-offs of having meaningful interpersonal relations, which can actually help us make better sense of ourselves and give us knowledge and motivation to try to improve our own character, or to lead a better life.

Finally, hermeneutics consists in bringing new concepts to bear onto one’s own behavior and inner promptings, in such a way as to afford a new piece of self-knowledge. As I conceive of it, it can work in two rather different ways. First, it can work abductively, by allowing for re-descriptions of already observed overt behavior and inner promptings. Suppose you acquire a new concept, like *egotistical*. You can then use it to re-conceptualize your already observed behavior and inner promptings. This way, the newly acquired concept can cause a “switch of aspects”. Up to a certain moment, you thought of yourself as just a bit self-centered and now you see yourself as egotistical. These aspects may alternate, as you weigh more one or the other feature of your behavior and inner promptings to date. The alternation would thus give rise to the switch of aspects characteristic of all instances of seeing something as.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Hermeneutics, however, can also work in a different way. That is, by going through the characteristic notes of a concept and by taking oneself to instantiate them. Thus, instead of reasoning like “If you are egotistical, you display such-and-such a behavior; I display such-and-such a behavior; therefore, I am egotistical”, you could reason as follows. “I exemplify trait1, I exemplify trait2…I exemplify traitn. Since traits1-n are the characteristic traits of being egotistical, I am egotistical”.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Be that as it may, the important point is that newly acquired concepts can make a dramatic difference to self-knowledge. For the more concepts we have, the finer-grained distinctions we can make and the better understanding of our psychological dispositional properties we can achieve. Again, I would not consider this the only or the main value of pursuing conceptual competence and sophistication, but it is certainly one of its pay-offs, as it can reveal important aspects of our personalities. Once more, the kind of evidence on which hermeneutics works, in one or the other of the two ways described, may often comprise inner promptings and past psychological self-ascriptions. It therefore heavily relies on first-personal self-knowledge.

This list of methods is not meant to be exhaustive, but it makes clear how diverse our routes to third-personal self-knowledge may be and how likely they are to depend (at least in many cases) on first-personal self-knowledge. Not only are they many and diverse, but, in real-life scenarios, they can combine with one another in several ways, leading to a high degree of methodological complexity. Thus, third-personal self-knowledge ain’t easy!

Yet, it isn’t epistemologically special either. For, first, none of these methods is sure-fired. Secondly, they all involve substantial cognitive and epistemic work on our side. Finally, we may fail to apply these methods and thus end up in states of self-blindness, which in turn can lead to mistaken psychological self-ascriptions.[[25]](#footnote-25) That is, no matter how it is achieved, third-personal self-knowledge is never groundless, transparent or authoritative.

1. **First-personal self-knowledge: property pluralism**

As already hinted at, I embrace a form of constitutivism regarding first-personal self-knowledge. At the heart of all constitutive positions lie the following schematic Constitutive Thesis (CT):

Given C, S is in M iff S judges “I am in M” (where *C* ranges over a set of appropriately specified conditions, *S* is a subject and *M* ranges over an appropriately specified set of mental states).

The important point is that for all constitutive theorists the Constitutive Thesis holds a priori. They do therefore hold that what goes by the name of first-personal self-knowledge is not the result of any epistemic achievement. The overall idea is that it is constitutive of being a subject, who fulfills certain conditions *C*, and who is capable of enjoying the relevant kinds of mental state *M*, that she will judge that she is in *M* if and only if she is.

As I have claimed elsewhere,[[26]](#footnote-26) the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order to be granted first-personal self-knowledge vary considerably regarding the kind of mental states at issue. What remains constant are the C-conditions, which can be generally specified as comprising the possession of the relevant concepts – that is, the first person concept, the relevant psychological concepts,[[27]](#footnote-27) and those concepts needed to specify the intentional content of one’s mental states, when they have one. That immediately excludes animals and infants from the range of suitable subjects for which the Constitutive Thesis is supposed to hold. For either they won’t be able to enjoy at least some relevant class of mental states; or else, while capable of enjoying them, they will not have the resources for making the corresponding self-ascriptions. Hence, they would actually fall out of the range of subjects capable of self-knowledge (no matter whether first- or third-personal). Furthermore, a subject will have to be lucid, attentive and alert. While it may be tricky fully to specify this condition, we can clearly exclude cases in which a subject is under the effect of substances, like drugs and alcohol, on in certain environmental conditions, such as thin air and lack of oxygen, which would alter her reactions and attention, as well as her ability to apply the relevant concepts. Similarly, we can exclude cases in which the subject is under extreme fatigue, or emotional distress, which would inhibit her proper functioning. Finally, we will have to impose a sincerity condition.[[28]](#footnote-28) For in order for one’s self-ascription to be an expression of first-personal self-knowledge – thus enjoying a kind of transparency and authority granted by default – a subject will have to take her share of responsibility and not deliberately misguide people around her.

The idea, then, is that depending on the kind of mental state at issue, the explanation of the Constitutive Thesis will vary and will bring to light features that can be considered to be constitutive of what it is to be a subject capable of enjoying each of these mental states.

So, for instance, when we consider basic sensations, such as purely phenomenal pain, cold, heat, and pleasure, or basic emotions,[[29]](#footnote-29) like fear, or joy, or anger, we can say that it is constitutive of being a subject, who, besides satisfying the above-mentioned C-conditions, is capable of enjoying those sensations and basic emotions,[[30]](#footnote-30) of experiencing them as one’s own,[[31]](#footnote-31) and is rational,[[32]](#footnote-32) that if one enjoys one of these mental states, one will judge that one does and if one so judges one will have them.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Regarding perceptions, the Constitutive Thesis can be redeemed by noticing how it is constitutive of being a subject who satisfies the relevant C-conditions (further specified as excluding cases of massive deception, like in skeptical scenarios), is capable of enjoying them and of experiencing them as one’s own, and who is rational, that one will judge to have them iff one does have them. Notice, moreover, that since it is possible to have unconscious perceptions,[[34]](#footnote-34) a further condition that will have to be imposed is that we are here dealing with perceptions that can enter an explanation of a subject’s outer actions, for which she can legitimately be held responsible.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Finally, with respect to beliefs, desires, intentions and possibly other propositional attitudes, it is important to acknowledge a crucial distinction between these states as dispositions and as commitments.[[36]](#footnote-36) That is, we are here considering propositional attitudes and intentions that are intrinsically normative[[37]](#footnote-37) and dependent on a subject’s conscious deliberation, based on reasons, as to whether P obtains, or would be good to have, or as to whether a given course of action is something to go for. Once such a distinction is taken on board and supplemented with the appropriate account of concepts’ acquisition, such that “I believe’” (or “I want” or “I intend”) are simply taught to replace the expression of P/P would be good to have/Φ is worth pursuing, then there won’t be any epistemic work to be done and transparency and authority will be guaranteed to obtain.[[38]](#footnote-38) Hence, it is constitutive of being a subject capable of propositional attitudes and intentions as commitments that one will judge to have them iff one does.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Three observations are in order. First, this kind of pluralism allows one to incorporate suggestions coming from both the expressivist camp and from fans of the so-called “transparency method”, such as Moran, as useful hints regarding the acquisition and deployment of the relevant psychological concepts, while remaining critical of both the expressivist and the deliberative account as accounts of first-personal self-knowledge.[[40]](#footnote-40) Second, given the expressivist story regarding the acquisition and deployment of the relevant psychological concepts, it is easy to see how, as Sydney Shoemaker has it, the first-order mental state and the corresponding self-ascription “have the same core realization”, while the latter “enables the core-realization of the first-order belief to play a more encompassing role”.[[41]](#footnote-41) For the self-ascription is just an alternative way of expressing the first-order mental state one is in. Finally, precisely in virtue of the role of the self-ascription, in at least some cases the very self-ascription can bring about the first-order mental state. That is not the case with sensations, perceptions and emotions, but it may be the case with the self-ascription of propositional attitudes and intentions as commitments. That is, we sometimes deliberate what to do, and thus form an intention (as a commitment) to Φ, say, by judging “I intend to Φ”. It is only in these latter cases that constitutivism can be seen as endorsing a robust metaphysical attitude with respect to the fact that first-order mental states can be constituted through or by their very self-ascription.[[42]](#footnote-42)

1. **Conclusion**

Where does all this leave us with respect to pluralism in general? A good way of approaching this issue is by considering a kind of criticism often raised against constitutive positions. Namely, that they do not explain what they are supposed to explain. That is, how we can indeed *know* our own mental states, in such a way that the resulting psychological self-ascriptions will have the features traditionally associated with first-personal self-knowledge – i.e. groundlessness, transparency and authority.

Notice, however, that this quite radical objection depends, in its turn, on an implicit assumption. Namely, that if something is called “knowledge”, it must pick out an epistemic property – roughly, the property of being a justified true belief. On this view, the term “knowledge” picks out one (and only one) epistemic kind whose exact nature is for epistemologists (or even for metaphysicians of epistemology) to get clear about.

Indeed, in the grip of monism, if one agreed that first-personal self-knowledge exists, one would be hard pressed to show how an epistemic method could actually guarantee groundlessness, transparency and authority.[[43]](#footnote-43) A good antidote against such a dogmatic position, besides realizing the problems one would incur by trying to abide by it, is to remind ourselves of the fact that the word “knowledge” is actually used in a plurality of ways, where there is no real expectation that it should always pick out, or refer to the same epistemic property. For instance, we say that Jane knows how to play the violin, or that Sally knows Jim, where in both cases the onus is entirely on the monist’s shoulders to show that knowledge-how and knowledge-who (or which) could actually be reduced to knowledge-that. For, at least *prima facie*, it seems quite plausible to say that knowledge-how actually consists in having an ability and that knowledge-who (or which) ultimately consists in being acquainted with the relevant individual in such a way as to be able to single it out from other ones in, for instance, a given perceptual scene. Hence, a monist would be hard pressed to conclusively show that either kind of knowledge is propositional in nature.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Of course, one might acknowledge these differences and yet insist that, in the particular case at hand, we are not really concerned with knowledge-how or knowledge-who (or which). Rather, we are talking about propositions of the form “I am in M” (where M ranges over appropriately specified mental states). Thus, we would need to explain how it is possible for a subject to arrive at such knowledgeable self-ascriptions.

Luckily, there is yet another sense of “knowledge” we may bring to bear on the case at hand. Namely, the one in which we use “I know”, for instance, to signal the fact that a doubt is excluded. Consider the following scenario. A subject says “I have a headache”. An interlocutor challenges her by saying “Really? Are you sure?”, to which the subject may reply by saying “Of course”. And if the impertinent interlocutor insisted “How do you know?”, the subject would be entitled to respond “What do you mean? Of course I know; I have it”. Now, since the latter part of her reply would just be a re-statement of the original judgement, the subject would not really be engaging in the game of providing some kind of epistemic backing for her initial claim. To that end, at the very least one would be required to produce some independent corroborating reason in support of one’s claim “I have a headache”. Just repeating that one does have a headache won’t do.[[45]](#footnote-45) The “I know”, therefore, is meant simply to signal the fact that the question raised by the interlocutor is bordering nonsense. For we take it for granted that if a subject says she has a headache, in what appear to be entirely normal conditions, she has it.

Wittgenstein coined the term “grammatical” for these uses of “I know”.[[46]](#footnote-46) No matter how you call them, the point is that they are not meant to express the obtaining of a specific, possibly peculiar epistemic relation between a subject and a proposition. Rather, they are meant to signal the fact that it is part of a linguistic practice, or even of a certain *Weltbild*, or – more humbly – of a way of organizing experience, that certain things are taken for granted. In a similar fashion, according to constitutivists, as we have seen, it is actually constitutive of being a subject capable of enjoying the relevant mental states, under suitably specified conditions, that one judges to enjoy one of these mental states iff one does have them.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Hence, the contentious, no doubt, yet liberating[[48]](#footnote-48) claim at the heart of constitutive positions is that, when we talk about first-personal self-knowledge, we are talking about certain features we take the relevant psychological self-ascriptions to possess *by default*, in virtue of being made by subjects who satisfy certain specifiable conditions. Still, we are not talking about a very peculiar, as appears to be, epistemic relationship,[[49]](#footnote-49) which obtains between a subject and either the mental states she would be having or, more mildly, a certain proposition describing them.

To conclude: “self-knowledge” is actually an expression that can disguise a plurality of states or properties a subject may be in. When we are confronted with third-personal self-knowledge, it picks out a genuine epistemic relation holding between a subject and a proposition, underwritten by a plurality of methods, as detailed in the previous section. When, in contrast, we are considering first-personal self-knowledge “self-knowledge” does not refer to any special epistemic relation obtaining between a subject and a proposition. Rather, it refers to a set of features the relevant self-ascriptions are granted to have,[[50]](#footnote-50) once certain further conditions obtain.[[51]](#footnote-51) This is not to say that the term “knowledge” in the locution “self-knowledge” is ambiguous, in the same way in which the term “bank” is. Rather, we may say that it is the name of a family resemblance concept. The point of resemblance between the fully epistemic sense and the grammatical one would be to signal a certain kind of standing of the subject and her claim. In the epistemic sense, the subject is flagged as a good source of information regarding P, given her way of having reached the relevant belief.[[52]](#footnote-52) In the non-epistemic sense, the subject is still flagged as a good source of information, because of her fulfillment of other conditions, which allow her authority over her own psychological self-ascriptions.

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1. See Coliva (2016). Due to space limitations, I will often refer the reader to that work for the details of my first-order epistemological views. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is not the place to defend these first-order epistemological claims in detail. I have done so in Coliva (2016, chs. 3, 7-8). In Coliva (2017a, *forthcoming*, see in particular sect. 2), I criticize David Chalmers’ (2003) attempt to vindicate what may be regarded as a Russellian indexical account of how occurrent sensations may justify their self-ascriptions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. I defend this view in Coliva (2016, especially chs. 7-8). See also Bar-On (2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Ryle (1949, ch. 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. I present my “border-line” account of emotions in Coliva (2016, ch. 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See also Gertler (2011, pp. 70-86). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Cassam (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cassam (2014) proposes this kind of conversational reorientation, as it were. For a critique, see Coliva (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Moran (2001), Bilgrami (2006) and in general those philosophers who have solely concentrated on first-personal self-knowledge. The usual route to such an idea is that if one agrees that first-personal self-knowledge is characterized by groundlessness, transparency and authority, self-knowledge has to be underwritten by an entirely *sui generis* kind of epistemology. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. But even that case is often more complex than what philosophers generally make of it. After all, people usually get to know these mental states through psychoanalytic counselling, which involves interaction with a therapist. That in turn entails that they rely on what their therapist tells them, in order to get knowledge of their unconscious. So testimony (and trust in the expert) is actually the base for a lot of knowledge we may gain regarding our unconscious mental states. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. While I think there is much to applaud in Moran’s discussion of first-personal self-knowledge, I am not convinced he actually gives the correct account of it, but that is not relevant for present purposes. For a discussion of the details of Moran’s position, see Coliva (2016, pp. 122-128). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Boyle (2009) glosses Moran as holding the milder view that deliberative first-personal self-knowledge is more fundamental than other possible instances of first-personal self-knowledge, like our first-personal knowledge of our on-going pain or further sensations. Boyle also defends that view, for he thinks the deliberative account is tied to our notion of belief. I do not take issue with that. Still, if that were the motivation, I would argue that self-knowledge of our on-going pain, for instance, is fundamental too, because it is tied to our notion of pain. Indeed, it is constitutive of having that concept that, whenever in pain, and if further suitable conditions obtain, one self-ascribes it and, conversely, that if one does self-ascribe pain, in the relevant conditions, then one has it. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This is just one more instance in which Wittgenstein’s *memento*, in *Philosophical Investigations* (PI, 66), “Don’t think, but look!”, finds an illuminating application. As is well-known, Wittgenstein thought of having *King Lear*’s verse “I’ll teach you differences” as a *motto* for his book. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Apart from Coliva (2016), the only other theorist who makes the point explicitly is Cassam (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This shows one (but by no means the only one!) dimension along which literature (and other artistic forms) can have a cognitive value and can actually teach us something. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Gopnik (1983) and Cassam (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. I take up the issue of how we may acquire the relevant psychological concepts in Coliva (2016, pp. 188-197). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See, in particular, Goldman (1993) and Gordon (1995). For a discussion of its bearing on self-knowledge, see Coliva (2016, pp. 88-95). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The self-ascription of such a bias would clearly involve also inference to the best explanation. For induction, in and of itself, would simply allow one to predict that one will keep behaving as one has done in the past and would not provide an explanation of one’s performance to date. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This account is meant to be neutral with respect to any epistemological account of testimonial knowledge and justification. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. I think it would make little sense to say “I feel intimidating”, whereas one can say “I enjoy being intimidating”. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. As is well known, a patient may actually resist the diagnosis and therefore irrationally distrust the expert’s veracity and/or competence. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. This method can actually be at the origin of some mistaken psychological self-ascriptions, which are usually used to illustrate the phenomenon of self-deception. For if one concept is particularly thick or morally loaded, a subject’s reverting back to a thinner, less morally loaded one, can explain her eventual (mistaken) self-ascription. Indeed, it would also offer an explanation of why self-deception appears to be motivated. However, I do not think such a story can apply to all cases usually presented in the literature to illustrate the phenomenon of self-deception. For a discussion of cases that are better accounted otherwise, see Coliva (2016, pp. 197-200). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Of course, these forms of reasoning will often be implicit. Yet, making them explicit allows us to appreciate their difference at a theoretical level. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Again, this interplay between self-blindness and further psychological self-ascriptions can explain at least some cases usually appealed to in the literature to illustrate the phenomenon of self-deception. For, if you are blind to some of your dispositional mental states, you can actually deny having them, when it would be evident to a third party that you do have them. They would then have good reasons to think that your psychological self-ascription is mistaken. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Coliva (2016, chs. 6-7). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The story we tell about the possession of the relevant psychological concepts is important and it has to be such as to avoid falling back into either the Cartesian or the behaviorist/inferentialist trap. In the first case, subjects would be supposed to have a given mental state in view, attend to it and learn how to name it, or how to single it out in thought. In the latter case, subjects would have to infer from their behavior to its likely psychological cause, by application of a little folk psychological theory they should have already acquired. For a criticism of these views, see Coliva (2016, pp. 52-58, 84-88) and Coliva (2017a forthcoming). The expressivist story, proposed by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* and further developed by Bar-On (2004) is arguably more promising. As to the concept of belief, the ascent routines presented by Evans (1982), Gordon (2007) and Moran (2001) are in fact entirely compatible with the expressivist account, as proposed in Bar-On (2004) and Coliva (2016, pp. 188-197). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Importantly, and *contra* Wright (1989), we don’t have to exclude self-deception. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The main difference between basic sensations and basic emotions has only to do with the fact that emotions often have a relational object, besides an intentional one. I do allow for the possibility of error in the individuation of their relational object. Hence, I take the Constitutive Thesis to apply only to the very individuation of the kind of basic emotion one is undergoing and to its possible intentional content. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Contrary to subjects like the ones affected by congenital insensitivity to pain with anhidrosis (CIPA). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Contrary to subjects who, while feeling pain, would know of it only through inference to the best explanation, based on the observation of their own behavior. These are ‘self-blind’ subjects in Shoemaker’s (1996) sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Contrary to subjects who had the relevant concepts, satisfied the other features of the C-conditions, were capable of experiencing them and of experiencing them as one’s own, and yet were either uncertain about whether they would be having the relevant mental states or made the relevant self-ascriptions and yet behaved in ways which would run totally contrary to them. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. For the details, see Coliva (2016, pp. 222-231). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. As exemplified by cases of blind-sight. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Also called “conscious perceptions” for short. While I have no qualms with calling them thus for simplicity, I think it is important, within a comprehensive constitutivist project, to bring out exactly the kind of ties conscious perceptions have with outer actions. Accordingly, the Constitutive Thesis will be said to hold, with respect to perceptions, only for subjects who can be considered to be rationally responsible for their outer actions. For further discussion of this point, see Coliva (2016, pp. 231-232). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For the details of such a distinction see Coliva (2016, pp. 26-38). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. In Coliva (2015), reprinted in Coliva (2016), I claim that intrinsic normativity is what distinguishes beliefs as commitments from beliefs as dispositions. The idea is that a belief as a commitment is intrinsically normative iff it would be impossible to have it while also knowingly and willingly being open-minded with respect to its content, or while knowingly and willingly assenting to the negation of the latter. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. I have developed the details of this part of the story in Coliva (2016, pp. 188-193). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Usual counter-examples to authority coming from cases of self-deception are therefore handled by saying that they actually manifest a conflict between one’s propositional attitudes as commitments, on which one retains authority, and as dispositions. For the details, see Coliva (2016, pp. 197-200). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. For a criticism of expressivism as a theory of self-knowledge and not as an account of how we acquire and canonically deploy several psychological concepts, see Coliva (2016, Ch. 6). For a criticism of Moran’s deliberative account, see Coliva (2016, pp. 122-128). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Shoemaker (1996, pp. 243-244). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. A similar account holds for self-verifying self-ascriptions too, like “I am hereby thinking that P”. In the case of sensations, basic emotions and perceptions, in contrast, the self-ascription does not bring about the first-order mental state, but it individuates it for what it is. This view is less metaphysically robust than the one I presented for mental states as commitments, but it still stands opposed to those accounts according to which it is the intrinsic quale of the very first-order mental state that individuates it for what it is. Such a nuanced position also makes constitutivism more plausible, as it would not entail that one’s self-ascriptions of sensations, basic emotions and perceptions could ever bring about the corresponding first-order mental state. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. In Coliva (2016, Chs. 4-6) I have examined the prominent epistemic accounts of first-personal self-knowledge and showed how they all fail to account for the constitutive features of first-personal self-knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. As is well known, Stanley and Williamson (2001) have maintained that knowledge-how is a subspecies of knowledge-that. I myself am skeptical of their proposal (see Coliva 2017b, forthcoming). An important treatment of knowledge-which can be found in Evans (1982). In Coliva and Sacchi (2001) the conditions that have to be satisfied to individuate objects in a perceptual scene are explored further. They do depend on perceptual discrimination, which, in turn, does not depend on the possession of the relevant concepts. To the extent that concepts are necessary to grasp a proposition, therefore, knowledge-which cannot be considered a form of propositional knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For the details of this diagnosis, see Coliva (2016, pp. 54-55) and Coliva (2017a, forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. *On Certainty*, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. A historical note: it is often remarked that Wittgenstein’s ideas in *On Certainty* on the role of “I know” in relation to Moore’s truisms were elicited by his conversations with Norman Malcolm in Ithaca in 1949. That is correct as far as it goes. But actually Malcolm was applying Wittgenstein’s views as the latter had developed them, still in opposition to Moore, in the 1930’s, in relation to self-ascriptions of pain. For the details of this historical reconstruction, see Coliva (2010, pp. 29-30). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Liberating because, arguably, none of the extant epistemological theories of first-personal self-knowledge could really vindicate groundlessness, transparency and authority and do so for all psychological self-ascriptions we have reason to consider to be genuine manifestations of that kind of self-knowledge. The most prominent epistemic accounts are examined and criticized in Coliva (2016, chs. 4-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. If the relation was epistemic, it would be peculiar indeed as it would have traits which do not characterize any other kind of empirical knowledge we have – let it be of physical objects in our surroundings or of other people’s mental states. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Namely, groundlessness, transparency and authority. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. It is important to note that also supporters of different accounts of first-personal self-knowledge would end up embracing a pluralism of properties or states. In particular, Burge (1996, 2011), Peacocke (1999, 2003, 2014) and Moran (2001, 2003), with their – albeit different – notion of entitlement would have to say that while in third-personal self-knowledge “knowledge” picks out an epistemic property which depends on having a discursive justification for one’s psychological self-ascription, in first-personal self-knowledge, “knowledge” picks out an epistemic property which does not depend on having such a discursive justification. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. This is entirely in keeping with Edward Craig’s (1990, p. 11) well known claim that “the concept of knowledge is used to flag approved sources of information”. Still the reasons behind such flagging may be entirely different when first- and third-personal self-knowledge are concerned. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)