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Unconceptualized Internal Promptings: Methodological Pluralism and the New Cartography of the Mind

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1 Pluralism about Self-Knowledge and Pluralism about the Mind

Coliva's position stems from the conviction that there should be pluralism about self-knowledge. Coliva seems to be drawn to explore varieties of self-knowledge in virtue of her acknowledgment of a wide variety of mental states, most of which are not properly covered by *monistic accounts of self-knowledge*, that is, accounts that purport to tell us how we know our own mind by applying just one general theory of self-knowledge to all kinds of mental states. The long-leveled objection that no monistic accounts of self-knowledge can apply to all kinds of mental states is taken seriously in this book, and elsewhere in Coliva and Pedersen's work (2017), and the author is now ready to offer us a credible, fully worked-out way out of the threat of any such objection: it is simply the case that different mental states are known by different methods of self-knowledge, so that no single account can be applied across the board. This also offers us a diagnosis of why what we might call the "restricted scope objection" has been raised at all. The reason is our more or less overt bias in favor of *epistemological monism*. Once we open up the conceptual space to consider pluralism in the epistemology of self-knowledge (and supposedly elsewhere), then such bias is naturally dispelled, and we acquire an important meta-philosophical reason for favoring it, namely its advantage in circumventing unnecessary competition among monistic theories.[1] Coliva is thus led to catalog mental states more accurately than philosophers of mind have done before. In addition, this strategy gives her the chance to systematize quite accurately our map of methods of self-knowledge vis-à-vis the ample variety of mental states recognized.

Given this specific advantage of epistemological pluralism as a primary means of further clearing up our cartography of the mental, I believe it may be reasonable to think that once one removes one's prejudice in favor of monism, as Coliva invites us to do, the intellectual move concerned may naturally lead us to explore *further* whether

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[1] See Wright 2013 for some criticisms.

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our inventory of the mind should be even more extensive than Coliva has shown us in this book. This is precisely the line of investigation I think we should pursue, and in the rest of the paper I will argue that Coliva has put us so much on the right track that philosophers of mind should explore the prospects of a progressively more detailed map of the mental — far more detailed than the one Coliva offers in her book. The assumption on which I work here is that there are important methodological reasons to favor pluralism — reasons that might be partly independent of the meta-philosophical considerations given by Coliva, although they are likely to produce conspicuous meta-philosophical consequences, too. They are reasons that have us consider that, in general, it might be a very bad idea to try to adapt the mind to our theories of the mind, especially because this threatens to make us unnecessarily sacrifice important areas of our psychological life, and their interconnections. In a word, this leads us to jettison the very possibility of pervasive, although elusive pieces of human psychology, and our chance to discover and account for them. For well-known reasons, the mind has long been the domain of a widespread application of our "Ockham's Razor". However, it seems that before sticking to such a principle and giving a negative verdict on the existence of mental states that we are not well equipped to grasp or conceptualize, we should at least make some efforts to counterbalance it with what I dub the "Shakespeare Principle". This principle may be taken to state that, when it comes to areas of the mental that we have quite a hard time grasping, the possibility that there might be more things in the mind than are dreamt of by our current philosophy of mind should be taken as a live possibility. If we come up with the evidence that there are pieces of phenomenology and human psychology that are still there in need of our efforts of clarification and connection, and to which tradition has often given insufficiently fine-grained philosophical treatments, we definitely should attempt an exploration of them.

One very crucial case that perfectly suits the purpose of making both the metaphysics of the mind and our epistemic grasp of it more accurate is offered by a quite groundbreaking topic in epistemology and philosophy of mind alike — one that Coliva tackles in her book: the quite pervasive evidence in human psychology of the so-called *internal promptings*.

"Internal prompting" is a felicitous technical phrase Cassam (2014) borrows from Lawlor (2009) to indicate experiential episodes whose phenomenology may not be entirely grasped by the subject. I have already offered an independent discussion of them in Pedrini (Springer, forthcoming-b), to which I refer. Here I try to develop this discussion further. In § 2 I will show why internal promptings may pose a challenge to the constitutivism about first-personal self-knowledge defended by Coliva. In § 3 I will indicate several other domains of the mental that prove to be equally elusive and that, in line with the pluralistic spirit of Coliva's book, need better systematization and refinement as to our understanding of how we know them. This illustration mainly regards, although is not limited to: 1) the phenomenology of non-phenomenal states, such as our standing attitudes; 2) the case of hidden commitments; 3) the case of first-person self-knowledge of dispositions, such as character traits; 4) the case of alienation from one's first-personally known mental states *vis-à-vis* the possible non-alienation from third-personally known mental states.

2 Internal Promptings: A New Frontier for Philosophy of Mind and Epistemology of Self-Knowledge Alike

Giving a clear definition of what internal promptings are is not easy, and this seems in any case to depend directly on their very phenomenological and metaphysical nature. Cassam himself offers no strict definition of them. People who have tried to capture their nature say that they may often appear to be "some kind of inarticulate hunch, intuition" (Kirsch 2015, p.189), the sense that something emotional, or affective, or even judgmental,[2] is going on inside oneself, without its metaphysical basis and phenomenological character being explicitly manifest. Or else, they may feel something like an "incipient desire" (Boyle 2015, p. 344), whose propositional basis and object are not totally revealed. In all, it does not seem incorrect to say that they are somehow elusive *experiential* episodes, of a type that one may find it really hard to discriminate, or identify. However, one thing about them seems to be patent: they present themselves spontaneously, and in a way that many would be inclined to characterize as psychologically direct, immediate, and self-intimating. Their direct, immediate, self-intimating manifestation fits them prima facie to be the perfect candidates for representing mental episodes one precisely knows first-personally, even if it is hard to characterize, conceptualize, or clearly subsume them into fully catalogued major-mental-state categories. Also, they offer themselves as psychological evidence upon which one can perform some third-person interpretative work, and Coliva explains how this can be done, by illustrating many methods for achieving knowledge of them. They include, but are not limited to, inference.

However, on Cassam's view, their spontaneous surfacing does not indicate that our access to them is non-inferential, and thus first-personal. Rather, Cassam thinks that, on closer inspection, they are often known precisely via the third-personal inferential route that he tries to show is more ubiquitous than defenders of first-person self-knowledge have thus far conceded. In this book Coliva (pp. 87–88) has expressed reasonable doubts about the feasibility of such a project. She clearly defends the idea that Cassam really has no inferentialist story about how we access internal promptings and objects that, until he does, there will be no credible inferentialist account of it. In a word, Cassam cannot justifiably claim that his inferentialist theory can really cover self-knowledge of internal promptings as well. Perhaps that does not amount to a charge of *petitio principiis*, as Cassam does not want to explain first-person self-knowledge by presupposing it. He actually wants to say that there is no such thing as first-person self-knowledge, but rather an ubiquitous form of third-person, inferential self-knowledge, which applies even to what we think is genuine non-inferential, first-person self-knowledge.

In Pedrini (Springer, forthcoming-b) I have expressed my agreement with Coliva: there is a clear sense in which Cassam in fact lacks a story about how inferentialism can apply to internal promptings. However, I have also shown that there is a conception of knowledge under which Cassam could justifiably claim that he *does* have such a story, although he neither makes use of it explicitly nor acknowledges its existence. Cassam is right in claiming that it is by inference (possibly to the best explanation) that we can adjudicate the epistemological question regarding *what* internal promptings are.

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[2] I think it is not entirely unrealistic to imagine the possibility of a feeling that "something judgmental" is going on, although this is the topic for another work.

Nonetheless, their initial manifestation in our psychological experience as raw, unconceptualized promptings tells us that the ability we have to notice them, without identifying them, nonetheless amounts to some kind of self-knowledge, which does not seem to be third-personal. In order to secure the task, I have thus distinguished two epistemological conceptions of first-personal self-knowledge: (1) "self-knowledge by discrimination, or by identification", or self-*knowledge**, for brevity; and (2) "self-knowledge without discrimination, or identification", or self-*knowledge***, for brevity. Let us see to what they amount.

Self-*knowledge** is a seemingly quite *robust* epistemological conception of self-knowledge of our own mental states. It assumes that no one can be credited with having genuine knowledge unless they can discriminate between kinds of states, or in any case identify them. On this conception, one can be required to tell a belief from a desire, say, but the "contrastive" aspect of such knowledge need not be as central. For it may well be enough for a subject to be able to identify a certain mental state, without also having any contrastive opposition in view. Of course, given a reasonably acceptable amount of mental holism, possessing the concept of belief, say, may be relationally connected with the ability to distinguish it from other kinds of attitudes. But I think that identification need not necessarily be connected with discrimination. One might imagine a subject who has beliefs only, say, and no other attitudes at all. She could have a raw prompting about there being a certain belief pressing under the surface of her consciousness to become manifest. If she can identify the belief for which the prompting stands, or to which it points, then she can identify it without also discriminating it from anything else. Be that as it may, it is interesting that this is not the only available conception of self-knowledge.

Self-*knowledge*** has different features. In a definitely *less robust* epistemological fashion, one can get to know one's own mental states without discriminating, or even identifying them at all, or not sufficiently. On such a conception, the subject can still be credited with enjoying some kind of *knowledge* in so far as she knows that she has certain experiences, even if they are not conceptually or phenomenologically clear. She is unable to tell what they are, nor can she say what attitude a prompting, or set of promptings, stand for. As a matter of fact, she can simply limit herself to "noticing" them as they become manifest – no more, no less. Such an account has an obviously modest air: although the subject feels "something", she does not grasp what is really going on inside herself. From the point of view of a defender of self-*knowledge**, it seems fair to say that a subject having self-*knowledge*** cannot really be said to *know* her psychological predicament.

Now, Cassam seems to make use of the discriminative, or identificatory, conception of self-knowledge of internal promptings (or self-*knowledge**) when he claims that we acquire self-knowledge of them through a third-personal inferential and largely interpretative operation. If this is correct, then he really does have an inferentialist story about self-knowledge of internal promptings. He has it because what he is really after is an explanation of the self-*knowledge** of internal promptings. If things stand as I think they do, then when Cassam explains inferential self-*knowledge** of internal promptings he is not *also* explaining non-inferential self-*knowledge*** of internal promptings. Thus, technically, he is not presupposing what he is trying to explain. He certainly *relies* on non-inferential self-*knowledge*** of internal promptings when he claims that they provide psychological evidence upon which one can perform inferential,

interpretive work, but his theory is not *also* in the business of clarifying inferential self-*knowledge*** of the evidence as such. So, rather than being charged with a circularity fallacy, he may be charged with a fallacy of equivocation between two different conceptions of self-knowledge that he does not explicitly bring to the fore when he maintains that his inferentialism is all-encompassing.[3]

Disentangling the equivocation between self-*knowledge** and self-*knowledge*** helps us see why non-discriminative, or non-identificatory, self-knowledge of internal promptings is rightly thought by Coliva to be non-inferential. What Coliva might be willing to claim is that access to our promptings, prior to interpretation, can but be a case of self-*knowledge***.

Acknowledging internal promptings accessed via self-knowledge** is important both for a descriptively accurate epistemology of self-knowledge and for the metaphysics of the mind. If mental items to which we cannot "give a name ", and that we cannot subsume under concepts, exist, they are still "something" that happens in our psychology and that we notice. In addition, by accounting for how we get to know that this "something" is there, we allow for the possibility of a variety of knowledge that makes us *know** that there are, however, items that we do not, or cannot *know***.[4]

It may be true that self-knowledge without discrimination, or identification, may be perceived as quite modest, as a kind of self-knowledge, but it has two advantages:

a) respecting the elusive, opaque, phenomenologically inexplicit nature of an important class of internal promptings;

b) explicitly enriching our epistemological inventory of self-knowledge, within which it is important to include varieties of self-knowledge that respect the elusive, opaque, phenomenologically inexplicit nature of an important class of our mental states, which are, nonetheless, known precisely for what they are: opaque, vague, unclear, phenomenologically sub-indicative, and intrinsically elusive.

Now, on the basis of this distinction, one might wonder whether the constitutivist account of authority defended by Coliva in this book and elsewhere may be in need of refinement. I think that the reasoning that follows could be applied to both transparency and authority, but for the sake of concision, I will focus on authority. Coliva proposes the following formulations of the notion of authority (Coliva 2016, pp. 65–66):

"**Authority**$_{weak}$: Given C-conditions (including concepts' possession, cognitive well-functioning, alertness and attentiveness), if one judges to have a mental state M (save for dispositional ones or for the dispositional elements of some mental states), one will usually have it".

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[3] There is a *locus* where Cassam gets close to pointing more clearly towards this distinction, without, however, thematizing it fully. See Cassam 2014, p.168.

[4] Whenever one allows for self-*knowledge***, there always seems to be a certain risk of conflation between first-person *awareness* of one's mental states and first-person self-*knowledge* of one's mental states. I have, ultimately, some sympathy for such a view, but I think more should be done to establish to what extent such a theoretical move might still be deeply wanting. In particular, if we deny that in first-person self-knowledge there is an epistemic relation between a subject and her object of knowledge, something epistemically crucial seems to get lost. Coliva 2016 argues in favor of a view of first-person self-knowledge of some kinds of mental states where any such epistemic relation is lacking, and where the term "knowledge" becomes "more the – 'grammatical', as Wittgenstein would have it – signal of the absence of room for sensible doubts and ignorance" (p. 15).

"**Authority**$_{strong}$: Given C-conditions (including concepts' possession, cognitive well-functioning, alertness and attentiveness), if one judges to have a mental state M (save for dispositional ones or for the dispositional elements of some mental states), one will always have it".

Now, whether one wishes to consider **Authority**$_{weak}$ or **Authority**$_{strong}$, in cases of self-knowledge** concept possession is clearly out of the picture, and thus it cannot be used to redeem authority. Perhaps, even the conditions of proper cognitive functioning, alertness, and attentiveness could be easily put under pressure, as the subjects that have experience of elusive internal promptings may not be helped by their cognitive functions in identifying them, owing to the very nature of such mental items. Equally, alertness and attentiveness may not be of help here, given that the items might not be identifiable as such, independently of how alert and attentive a subject may be.

   Note that in Pedrini (Springer, forthcoming-a) I have made a case for there being internal promptings that are intrinsically elusive and recalcitrant to conceptualization for reasons that are independent of the efforts of the subject experiencing them. That is, they are cases of promptings that are, by their very nature, underdetermined with respect to conceptual schemes, and whose conceptualization may be conditioned by factors that are *extrinsic* to them, such as motivational drives, rational impairments or suspension, ignorance, or else poor or wrong conceptual equipment. They mark an extreme of the spectrum of subjective experience, the other being occupied by fully conceptualized experiences, where no inferential or interpretive work needs to be done in order to have them in the spontaneous conceptualized form in which they present themselves. Discussing the implications of this any further will take me too far from my present purposes, and deserves a separate investigation. Be that as it may, for the time being the important point to stress is that, if one has authority over elusive internal promptings at all, one cannot have it by virtue of being equipped with the right concepts, and proper cognitive functioning, alertness, and attentiveness are simply of no use here.

   How can constitutivists respond to this? My feeling is that this objection should not necessarily cast excessive doubts on the soundness of constitutivism as such. Rather, I think that self-knowledge** can hold out an interesting chance to strengthen constitutivism further. For even if concept possession cannot be used to redeem authority, self-knowledge** indicates that there is a quite basic form of self-intimating experience that a subject first-personally enjoys and has authority over. However, this may come at a price: by allowing for a variety of constitutivism in which we require less stringent conditions for authority than in Coliva's variant, or no clearly specifiable conditions, we are brought directly into the domain of the metaphysics of the experiencing subject as such. This is a topic long investigated by phenomenology. Among the features of an experiencing subject we have the intrinsic capacity for a very basic entertainment of experience, of whatever form. Now, the constitutivists who attach importance to the a priori connection between self-knowledge and rationality, often conveyed by concept possession, and who make use of it to redeem authority, may find it hard to embrace a variety of constitutivism where

being rational qua being concept users cannot be of help. Authority over one's intrinsically elusive internal promptings seems to be a conceptual truth that can only be *assumed*, although *not redeemed properly* via other specifying conditions.[5]

One might then wonder why I suggest that such a variety of constitutivism could in principle be a way to strengthen constitutivism, instead of being a potentially disruptive objection. My conviction stems from a plea to adopt pluralism within constitutivism, too. If one is inclined to accept pluralism within constitutivism, then one should simply restrict the scope of Coliva's constitutivism to mental states to which it applies, namely conceptualized mental states where we have self-knowledge*, while acknowledging that there are different mental states, first-personally held, for which we have self-knowledge**, which we authoritatively entertain, and to which Coliva's constitutivism does not apply, although more basic varieties of constitutivism may perfectly do so.

Before I close this discussion, let me just make it clear that when I talk about *basic* varieties of self-knowledge, I use the term "basic" in a non-foundational sense, although I definitely use it as synonymous with both "simple" and "fundamental". As to the former meaning, I find the term "basic" useful to convey the idea that such varieties are delivered in the absence of specifiable higher-order cognitive conditions, except being a subject of experience, as such, minimally equipped. It emphasizes the fact that self-knowledge** seems to be reached without the assistance of any other higher-level cognitive or conceptual tool. It would require more argument and a willingness to make stronger assumptions to defend consistently the idea that such forms of self-knowledge are the foundational basis upon which the edifice of more elaborated forms of self-knowledge are built.[6] Even if I would not be ready to subscribe to foundationalism, I am definitely inclined to take cases of self-knowledge** as "fundamental" in human psychology. This is not to deny, of course, that cases of self-knowledge* are also "fundamental". When the conditions specified by weak or strong authority hold, human subjects just have self-knowledge** directly, immediately, and authoritatively, as Coliva diagnoses. However, on the perspective I am sketching out, self-knowledge** and self-knowledge* are equally "fundamental", although the latter is conceptually poor, or only vaguely conceptual, if not at times impossible to be grasped conceptually, along the lines described above.

3 Extending Pluralism Further: Additional New Challenges

In a pluralistic spirit, I now briefly review other areas where improvements and more detailed analyses would be much welcomed, for philosophy of mind and epistemology of self-knowledge alike. Limits of space impede any detailed proposals regarding how we should improve our pluralism about the mind and self-knowledge. So I will simply try to enucleate some prima facie reasons why certain areas of philosophical investigation opened up by Coliva's book should be pursued further.

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[5] Reflections from Finkelstein 2003 invite us precisely to consider the possibility of there being a "logical space of the animate life" that includes both what I call self-knowledge* and self-knowledge**.

[6] Even without going back to Descartes, there are interesting attempts in the phenomenological tradition to study such a foundation. See Pedrini forthcoming-b.

3.1 Phenomenology of Non-phenomenal States, Such as Standing Attitudes

Standing attitudes such as stored beliefs that are not occurrent at a given time are generally taken to lack a distinctive phenomenology, that is, they are taken to have features that do not satisfy any clear "felt effect" that a subject may experience while having them. This is why they are often contrasted with sensations, such as pain, or pleasure. It is thus often said that there is nothing interesting, if anything at all, to say about "what it is like" to have them. However, this idea seems to stem from a quite restricted notion of phenomenology, which is nonetheless widely and somewhat a-critically adopted within philosophy of mind and epistemology alike. Intuitively, it makes a lot of quite strongly *felt difference* whether or not I believe, judge, desire, fear, or hope something, whether or not any of those attitudes is occurrent at a given time. Of course, this does not imply that what it is like to believe *non-occurrently* that there is a worldwide economic crisis is identical with what it is like to believe *occurrently* that there is a worldwide economic crisis. On the contrary, when a mental state is occurent, it manifests new properties, either dispositional or relational, or both. But having a non occurrent standing attitude, whatever it is, promises to structure my worldview in a way that makes a quite strongly felt difference in the way I experience the world, or portions of the world. This seems to occur independently of whether or not I am also able to identify the features of such an experience. This brings us back to internal promptings, in certain respects: it might be the case that some of our most elusive promptings are the felt effect of standing attitudes, or are connected to them. I suggest that this possibility should be accounted for and investigated, with a view to widening both our cartography of the mind and the epistemology of self-knowledge.

3.2 Cold Emotions

At the other end of the spectrum there may be cases of mental states that are typically held to be *felt* states, such as emotions, and that may sometimes manifest themselves in a *cold* way. Those cases, discussed by Coliva and Pedersen (2017, pp. 4–5), are quite interesting in themselves, and a further investigation might help us to see that our global psychology is affected by their very existence, the kind of casual power they exert on the subject, the way they frame his or her global psychological predicament, and also what it is like to have them, as it makes a significant, felt difference whether or not one is in a state of cold anger, say.

3.3 Hidden Commitments

It strikes me that the distinction between beliefs as commitments and beliefs as dispositions used by Coliva (2009, 2016) may lead us to overlook a case that is worth pursuing: the case of "hidden commitments". A hidden commitment may be defined as a commitment that is associated with a dormant, non-occurrent standing attitude, and that may either manifest itself as a conscious commitment when the attitude is restored to consciousness, or inform our behavior even if we do not consciously know that we have it. If hidden commitments are a live possibility in human psychology, it might be useful to explore whether we need to provide a richer catalog of both commitments and dispositions. Also, this would tell us that dispositions and commitments might be far

more widely distributed than any sharp distinction between beliefs as disposition and beliefs as commitment may have us think.

3.4 First-Person Self-Knowledge of Dispositions, Such as Character Traits

In the same way in which some commitments may be hidden to us, certain dispositions may be fully open to our self-knowledge. I think that this happens often. Even if there are certainly cases of dispositions, such as certain character traits, that are undisclosed to me, and that I can only know about via a third-person method of self-knowledge, many others seem to be truly apparent to me, and directly and immediately so. An excessive focus on cases of self-ignorance has perhaps tended to make us overlook the multitude of everyday cases in which, instead, character traits are grasped first-personally. I take it that, beyond the case of character traits, this may be in principle true of many other dispositions, and more research on this would be very welcome. There seems to be an entanglement between kinds of states and methods of self-knowledge that promises to deliver a far richer picture of the mind and of self-knowledge than the very rich one already offered by Coliva.

3.5 Alienation from one's First-Personally Known Mental States Vis-à-Vis Non-alienation from Third-Personally Known Mental States

A richer picture might also lead us to explore the relation between alienation and methods of self-knowledge. A subject may well be alienated from his or her own first-personally known mental states, while being perfectly at home with mental states known third-personally, contrary to the verdict given by Moran (2001) that third-person self-knowledge delivers some degree of alienation. It would be important to offer a more precise catalog of why this sometimes happens, why it does not on other occasions, and also how it is that some degree of alienation may intrude on one's first-person self-knowledge. Barring serious pathological conditions, such as thought insertion (cf. Pedrini 2015a, b), I may feel alienated by many emotions that strike me as something I do not really recognize as part of the person I take myself to be, or that I simply am.

3.6 Dependence of Third-Person Self-Knowledge on First-Person Self-Knowledge, and Viceversa

Finally, I take it to be important to stress, as Coliva does, that there is a clear dependence of third-person self-knowledge on first-person self-knowledge: I have to be a subject before getting to know anything else about me third-personally. However, I think a somewhat unexplored topic in epistemology is whether and how what I get to know about myself third-personally may elicit many first-personally held attitudes. Many would not seem to be immediately available to me, were those third-personal discoveries about me not to be made. This calls for an exploration of the possible dependence of first-personal self-knowledge on third-personal self-knowledge.

Those listed above are just a few topics on which a reader may wish to know more in the future. Now that the philosophical way is so well paved by Coliva's pluralism, I am confident that a richer cartography of the mind and of methods of self-knowledge will soon be on philosophers' agenda.

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