

I THINK I THINK, THEREFORE I AM—I THINK*

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Valid arguments—even those with true premises—don't take you very far if you don't know whether the premises are true. The fact that I'm in Heidelberg doesn't give me a reason to believe I'm in Germany unless I know (or at least have reason to believe) I'm in Heidelberg. So why does everyone believe the Cogito—I think, therefore I am—is such a terrific argument? Because, I suppose, everyone thinks he knows the premise is true. Everyone who thinks he thinks thinks he knows he thinks. So everyone thinks his existence—at least his existence as a thinking being—is the conclusion of an irresistible argument.

The Cartesian inference is certainly valid, no doubt about that. And the premise is clearly true—at least it is for everyone who thinks it is true. I'm not questioning either of these claims. I do, however, think it worth pondering the question of whether—and if so, how—one knows that the premise is true. What reason do thinkers have for thinking they think? If you are going to demonstrate, a la Descartes, that you exist, you need a premise you know to be true. Merely thinking you think isn't good enough to generate knowledge you exist anymore than (merely) thinking you are in Heidelberg can generate knowledge that you are in Germany. As my title is intended to suggest, the most it will generate is a belief—perhaps (depending on whether you have any reasons for thinking you think) an

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altogether groundless belief--that you exist. In epistemology you cannot manufacture A+ conclusions from C- premises. Garbage in, garbage out.

I'm not interested, though, in proofs that I (or you) exist. I suspect no one—not even the most fanatical philosopher--has a real problem about his or her own existence. But I am interested in the epistemological status of Descartes' premise—interested, that is, in how we know, or what reason we have for thinking, that we think. I suspect that no one has serious worries about this question either since, as suggested above, everyone who thinks he thinks is already convinced he knows he thinks. This is not, therefore, a burning issue. Nonetheless, despite the absence of active debate about, or even interest in, the topic, I have reached a stage in my thinking about this question in which it is no longer clear to me how we know we think. What reasons we have for believing it. What follows, therefore, is my effort to infect others with my own bewilderment about this problem.

1. Reasons For Thinking You Think.

So let me begin by asking what reason you have for thinking you think? Is it simply the fact that you think? You might also have cancer, but the mere fact that you have cancer doesn't give you a reason, all by itself, to believe you have cancer. If you have a reason to believe you have cancer, you have been talking to doctors. Or you have been made aware of some sign or symptom of the cancer, something that indicates or increases the chances that you have cancer. If this is true of cancer, why isn't it also true of thought? Why should the fact that you think give you a reason to think you think? Just as with any other fact about yourself (e.g., that you are hungry), to have a reason to think you are in this condition you must, it would seem (given the nature of reasons), be aware of something that indicates (or

at least increases the likelihood) that you are in this condition. In the case of hunger, it is pretty clear what this is. You feel hungry. You are aware of something, if not the hunger itself (is that what one feels when one feels hungry?), then something that indicates you are hungry. In the case of thought, what is it? Is it the thought itself? Is it your awareness of your own thoughts that give you a reason to believe you have them?

Those who have cancer (as opposed to the doctors attending them) are seldom if ever visually aware of (i.e., see) the cancer itself. So if the victims, the ones who have the cancer, are to have a reason to believe they have it, they either have to be told they have it, examine (with some degree of expertise) X-rays for themselves, or feel the unmistakable symptoms of the disease. But thoughts (I expect to be told) are completely different. Unlike cancer victims, thinkers needn't rely on the symptoms of thought, the observable results or manifestations of thought. They needn't rely on these outward indicators because they, as the person doing the thinking, are aware of the thoughts themselves—thus giving them the best possible reason for thinking they have them. Other people have to rely on the external indicators, but the thinker doesn't have to. He or she has direct—indeed, privileged—access to his or her own thoughts.

I do not believe this is true. I believe it is half true, and the half that is true encourages one to think the other half is true. Thinkers are aware of their thoughts, yes, and this awareness gives them a unique authority about what they are thinking (this is the half that is true), but that doesn't provide them a reason, much less the best possible reason, for thinking that they have thoughts. That is the false half. As far as I can determine, thinkers have no reason—no reason, that is, to which they have privileged access—for thinking they think. If thinkers have a reason to think they think, it is a reason their family, friends and neighbors have equal access to. In this respect thinking is just like having cancer.

Before I explain why I believe this, a few remarks on the very special kind of thought we are dealing with—the thought that one thinks. Maybe, after all, one doesn't need reasons to qualify this very special thought as knowledge. Maybe reasons are beside the point, extraneous, irrelevant, to knowing you (as opposed to others) think. You know it simply in virtue of believing it. As some of my friends tell me, we know we think, but there is no way we know it. We just know it. So forget about reasons.

2. Self-Verifying Thoughts.

One can think one has cancer and be wrong, but one cannot think one thinks and be wrong. Thinking one thinks is, as philosophers now like to put it (although Descartes expressed it differently), a self-verifying thought. Unlike the thought that one has cancer or a thought about almost any other topic, the thought that one thinks has to be true. If I think I think I have to be right. If you think I think you can be wrong. So my thought is special. Infallible. Yours isn't. That is why I know (in a way my friends and neighbors cannot) that I think. And they know in a way I can't that they think.

The thought that one thinks is self-verifying—no doubt about that--but having this self-verifying thought doesn't provide one with a reason to think one thinks unless one has reasons to think one has this self-verifying thought. Remember, the question is: what reason do you have for thinking you think? It is no answer to say that you can't be wrong in thinking you think. That just leaves the question: what reason do you have for thinking you think you think? We are back to where we started--maybe even (epistemologically speaking) a little behind where we started.

It is important to stress this point. One does not have a reason to think one thinks merely in virtue of having a self-verifying thought that one thinks. One also needs a reason to think one is having this self-verifying thought. But that, of course, is exactly what we are looking for: a reason to think one has thoughts. One can't give as a reason to think one has thoughts the fact that some of one's thoughts--the thought that one has thoughts--has to be true. That would be like giving as a reason for thinking I said something, the fact that saying I said something is self-verifying. So it is, but what reason do I have for thinking I said I said something?

I expect impatient readers to remind me, though, that we are now considering the possibility that having reasons to think you think (or to think you think you think) is beside the point. You don't need them. The fact that this thought (the thought that one thinks) is self-verifying means one knows one thinks merely by believing one thinks whether or not one has reasons for believing one has this self-verifying thought. Beliefs that are perfectly reliable, beliefs that have to be true, qualify as knowledge even if one has absolutely no reason to think one has such beliefs.

If you, the reader, subscribe to this conception of knowledge--a lean (I would say emaciated) version of reliability theory--you may as well stop reading now because nothing I am going to say will convince you, nothing I say is intended to convince you, that you are wrong. I simply assume you are wrong. Or, if you aren't wrong, if it turns out that there are things one knows to be true simply in virtue of the fact that one can't be wrong about them (whether or not one has any reasons to believe them true or any reason to believe one can't be wrong), I hereby declare that I am looking for something quite different, something more

satisfying. I'm asking whether we are reasonable in thinking we think and, if we are, what our reasons are

We do enjoy a special kind of authority about what we think, yes, but that should not be confused with authority about, or knowledge of, the fact that we think it. John Heil (1988) and Tyler Burge (1988) have argued—persuasively to my mind—that with respect to a certain limited class of thoughts (conscious current thoughts), we think whatever we think we think. We enjoy a kind of infallibility. This is so because in thinking that I am thinking P I (thereby) think P. It is something like an exasperated mother saying to her misbehaving son, “I’m telling you, Billy, stop pestering your sister.” Mother can’t really be wrong about what she says to her son. She tells him whatever she says she tells him because in saying what she is telling him to do she (thereby) tells him to do it.¹ Even if the words Mother utters (“Stop pestering your sister”) mean by prior agreement between Mother and Son that he should get ready for bed, Mother is still entirely correct in using the words, “Stop pestering your sister” to say what she is telling her son to do. She is, as she says she is, telling him to get ready for bed. So she can’t be wrong no matter what the words she uses mean. The same is true for thought. There is no room for mistake at the 2nd level no matter what one at the 1st level happens to think or how (in what form or with what “words” in the language of thought) one thinks it.

¹ Katia Saporiti in her comments on this paper in Heidelberg suggested that Mother can’t be wrong for the same reason she can’t be wrong, for example, in saying to Billy, “I promise to give you a cookie if you stop pestering your sister.” These are performative utterances. In using the words, “I’m telling you . . . ,” Mother is not describing herself as telling her son to stop pestering his sister. She is, rather verbally executing the telling. I think this is probably right, but the same might be said of one who thinks to himself: this (P) is what I think. That is a way of thinking that P.

If this is the way thoughts about (currently conscious) thoughts work, then we all enjoy a kind of authority in our thoughts and statements about our currently conscious thoughts. But even if things do work this way, it doesn't help us understand what reasons we have for thinking we have thoughts, much less such infallible thoughts about what we think.² If I think I am thinking that there is water in the glass, then according to this view, that must be what I am thinking. And if I think I am thinking, that too must be what I am thinking. But what tells me, what reason do I have to think, I have these foolproof thoughts about what I am now thinking? The answer is not to be found in the infallible nature of higher-order thoughts about our own thoughts. Mother does not have a reason to think she told her son to do X just because she knows that if what she said to him was "I'm telling you to do X," she certainly did tell him to do X. Infallibility about what you think you are thinking and what you say you are saying does not, by itself, give you a reason to think you are thinking or saying anything at all.

3. Privileged Access.

First, a reminder of just what we are looking for. We are looking for reasons S has for thinking S thinks that are not available to others. We are looking for conditions that S has exclusive, and therefore privileged, access to that indicate or constitute evidence that S thinks. If S is a normal human being, we all have reasons to believe he thinks. He has a Ph.D. in physics, forty-three publications, and he runs rings around us at the bridge table. Of course he thinks—probably better than we do—and there is no shortage of reasons for believing this to be so. S, of course, also has these reasons. Anything we can point to as

² I am not suggesting here that Burge thinks it gives us such reasons. See Burge (1996) for his account of the role of critical thinking in self-knowledge.

accomplishments symptomatic of S's intellectual powers are also available to S. If we have reasons for thinking S thinks—and we clearly do—so does S: the same facts we have.

This is not in question. Of course we, and therefore S, have reasons to think S is a thinking being. What is in question is whether there are any facts that indicate this to be so that S has exclusive or private access to, facts or conditions that S is aware of that we can't be aware of—at least not in the direct and authoritative way that S is. Is there anything S is privy to that others can't be aware of that gives S an epistemic advantage on questions about whether S has thoughts?

Like Descartes, I mean to be pretty inclusive about what is to count as a thought. I focus on current conscious thoughts, and I include as a thought (that P) any attitude having P as its propositional content in which the truth of P is accepted by, but not required for, those having this attitude toward P. So believing and judging as well as thinking (in an everyday sense) that P are ways of thinking that P in my somewhat enlarged sense. Knowing, seeing, and remembering that P--since requiring the truth of P--are not. Neither are wanting, hoping and doubting that P since the truth of P is not thereby accepted. I believe the skeptical point I am trying to make here can be generalized to other mental states (including experiences and feelings), but the effort to make the general case would entangle me in too many troublesome details (for an early attempt to deal with some of these details see Dretske 2003). So I here limit myself to currently conscious thoughts in my slightly enlarged sense of "thought."

4. Thinking Without Knowing You Think.

One way to proceed in a project of this sort is to look at how we learned we think. We all think before we ever discover what thinking is. Before we were able to think we

(and others) think. So at some point in time, during some phase of childhood, we learned that we (and others) think. How did we learn this? Who taught us? Parents? Did we take their word for it? Were we already aware of our own thoughts as we were of the television and dishwasher and merely had to learn (as we did with ordinary household items) what to call them?

Imagine a normal three-year-old, Sarah, who thinks but hasn't yet learned she thinks. That one thinks is something (psychologists tell us³) that one only comes to fully understand around the age of three or four years. Sarah isn't quite there. She thinks Daddy is home. That is what she tells Mommy. That is why she runs to the door to greet him when she hears a car pull in the driveway. What Sarah tells Mommy is (what else?) what she thinks (knows, hears): that her father is home. She does not, however, think she thinks it. She may use the word "think," ("know" or "hear") in describing herself, but if she does, she doesn't yet fully understand that what she is giving expression to is a fact about herself, a subjective condition having a content (what she thinks) that may be false. She will, however soon acquire this knowledge. How and from whom? No doubt from parents, teachers, older siblings and friends. If one doesn't actually teach children this, if they merely absorb it the way children acquire their native language, it is nonetheless from others, or at least with the help of others, that Sarah will learn that what she has been telling them is what she has been thinking, what she believes, what she (sometimes) even knows. It is from (or with the help of) other people (and, perhaps, a few disappointed expectations) that she will learn that she has thoughts that

³ I rely here on Astington 1993, Bartsch and Wellman 1995, Carpendale & Lewis 2006, Flavell, Miller, P. & Miller, S. 1993, Flavell 2003 and Gopnik 1993. I am not really interested in exactly when children acquire a theory of mind, exactly when they acquire the capacity to think they (and others) think. I simply assume it is somewhere around the age of three or four. All that is important for my argument is that children think before they (are able to) think they think. This much seems incontestable.

usually accord with the way things actually are, but that sometimes fail to correspond to the facts. In the process she will learn that her behavior and, of course, the behavior of others can be explained not only by the fact that her father is home (Sarah already understands this), but also by the fact that she thinks he is home—something she will learn that can exist in her, and can explain her rush to the door, without her father actually being home. As Jonathan Bennett (1991: 97) once put it in describing what psychologists have learned about child development, a two-year-old predicts and explains another person's behavior on the basis of what she, the child, thinks is true; a four-year-old does so on the basis of what the other person thinks is true (or at least what the child thinks the other person thinks is true). To reach this level of sophistication one has to understand, as two-year-olds do not, what it means to think something is true. That is why normal two-year-olds do not understand the behavior of someone who chooses this box when she (the child) knows the candy is in that box. A four-year old will understand this: the person chose this box because the person (but maybe not the four-year old) thought (mistakenly) the candy was in this box.

To understand what kind of access we, those of us who think we have thoughts, have to our own thoughts, and thus what kind of reasons we have for thinking we have them, it is instructive to consider the kind of access Sarah, a person who doesn't think she has them (she doesn't think she doesn't have them either), has to her thoughts. I said above that Sarah told her mother that her father was home and rushed to open the door because she thought he was home. It might not have been her father she heard pulling into the driveway, of course, but Sarah thought it was, and the fact that she thought so explains why she behaved that way. If she had thought, instead, that it was the mailman she wouldn't have told her mother that her father was home and she wouldn't have rushed to open the door. Sarah's thoughts and desires

explain her behavior (verbal and otherwise) in the same way our thoughts and desires explain ours. The only difference is that Sarah does not understand that her behavior can be explained by the fact that (whether or not her father is home) she thinks he is home. We do.

If Sarah's behavior is to be explained by what she thinks even when she does not realize she thinks it, and the behavior in question is a deliberate, purposeful act (Sarah has and is prepared to give reasons for what she does, and these reasons are, in part, what she thinks), there is a sense in which Sarah is aware of what she thinks—that her father is home—without being aware (of the fact⁴) that this (that Daddy is home) is what she thinks. Call this form of awareness acquaintance. Sarah is acquainted with what she thinks. Although this word has a troubled philosophical history, I use it in its ordinary sense, the sense in which one can be acquainted with—in fact, good friends with—a philosopher (a concrete object) and not know she is a philosopher. One can also be acquainted with abstract objects. I might, for example, be aware of what was reported on the radio—that it is snowing in Miami—without knowing it was reported on the radio.⁵ This is an epistemically neutral form of awareness: one can be aware of X (e.g., see or hear X) in this way without knowing it is X. One might know it is X, but one needn't. It is in this sense that Sarah is aware of, acquainted with, what she thinks—that her father is home. She is aware (conscious) of what she thinks in a way that doesn't require her to know (or even think) it is something she is thinking in order to be aware of it. If

⁴ It will become increasingly important to distinguish awareness of facts (e.g., that Daddy is home) from awareness of objects—both concrete objects (e.g., Daddy) and (as we shall see) abstract objects (e.g., what Sarah thinks). When there is danger of confusion, I will try to indicate which I mean by a parenthetical “the fact that”.

⁵ I assume here that if you tell me it is snowing in Miami and this (that it is snowing in Miami) is what was reported on the radio, then I am aware of what was reported on the radio without (necessarily) knowing that it was reported on the radio. Note: what was reported on the radio need not be true. So what was reported on the radio need not be a fact. So awareness of what was reported on the radio is not (necessarily) fact-awareness.

Sarah had thought, instead, that it was the mailman she heard outside, she would have been acquainted with (aware of) something quite different. Something different would have been going through her mind— her conscious mind--at the time she spoke to her mother. She would not have said what she did nor would she have rushed to greet her father at the door.

5. Awareness of Propositions.

What is it that Sarah is acquainted with (aware of) when she thinks her father is home? Although we commonly speak of ourselves as being aware of facts that we use to explain the behavior of ourselves and others (I was aware that it was late so I took a shortcut; she looked away when she became aware that I was watching her), there doesn't seem to be any relevant fact that Sarah is aware of that explains her behavior. We cannot say that she is aware (of the fact) that her father is home because her father needn't be home for her to think he is home and to behave (and to give the same reasons for behaving) in exactly the same way. Whatever she is acquainted with when she thinks he is home must, therefore, be (logically) independent of her father's actual whereabouts in the same way her thought that he is home is (logically) independent of his actual whereabouts. So it isn't the fact that her father is home that Sarah is aware of. There may be no such fact. Nor can we say that what Sarah is acquainted with is the fact that she thinks her father is home because although this (unlike her father being home) must be a fact, it is not a fact that Sarah, lacking the concept of thought, is aware of. She is not aware that she thinks this. What, then, is Sarah aware of when she mistakenly thinks her father is home if it isn't: (1) the fact that her father is home, nor (2) the fact that she thinks he is home? It is what philosophers call a proposition—the proposition that her father is home. Propositions are the (abstract) objects of thought. In

thinking that her father is home, Sarah is acquainted with a proposition, the proposition that her father is home. Propositions are the meanings of those declarative sentences we use to express what one thinks. Unlike facts, they can be false. So what Sarah is acquainted with when she mistakenly thinks her father is home is neither the fact that her father is home nor the fact that she thinks her father is home, but the proposition (in this case, false proposition) that he is home.⁶ Given the way we are understanding acquaintance, Sarah can be acquainted with this proposition without knowing it is a proposition.

If acquaintance with propositions sounds strange, like some piece of philosophical hocus pocus, one has to remember that it is merely my way of saying that one can be aware (conscious) of what one thinks in the same way that we (who know we think) are aware of what we think without knowing it is (merely) something one thinks. One way to describe the development of children is to say that what they learn around the age of four is that what they had been taking to be (what philosophers call) a fact about the world (the fact that Daddy is home) is really (what philosophers call) a proposition—an item that (unlike a fact) can be false. Awareness of the proposition that her father is home does not mean, of course, that Sarah cannot (also) be aware of the fact that her father is home, but awareness of the fact requires more than awareness of the proposition (see footnote 6).⁷

⁶ Of course if Sarah's father is home, and his being home is appropriately related (causally and otherwise) with her belief that he is home, we can speak of her as knowing (seeing or hearing that) he is home and, therefore, in this sense, aware (of the fact) that he is home.

⁷ See Feit (2008) for a thorough description of the problems with talking about propositions as the content of thought—especially the problem of de se thoughts (thoughts about oneself). Feit defends a property theory of mental content. I will, for convenience, continue to speak of propositions as the object of thought since (as far as I can see) these metaphysical niceties (the difference between propositions and properties) do not affect the epistemological point I am (and will be) making.

So there is a sense, a perfectly straightforward sense, in which one has a privileged awareness of one's own present conscious thoughts even before one knows one has them, before one knows what they are. Sarah is aware of what she thinks—that her father is home—without knowing she thinks it in the same way you might be aware of what they reported on the radio—that it is snowing in Miami—without realizing it was reported on the radio. In describing Sarah's awareness of what she is thinking as a privileged awareness I do not mean that only she is aware of what she thinks. We, too, can be aware of what she is thinking (that her father is home) by thinking it ourselves. No, her awareness is privileged in the sense that although we can be aware of what she is thinking (the proposition she is aware of), Sarah has to be aware of it. That is what it is for her to think it. It is the fact that she has to be aware of it that makes her an authority on what she thinks despite not knowing she is thinking it. She is an authority on what she thinks in the sense that if we want to find out what Sarah thinks, we have to “consult” her. We cannot, of course, do so by asking Sarah what she thinks. She will not (we are assuming) understand what we are talking about. But there are other ways of getting this information. Given a cooperative child, we can ask Sarah whether her father is home. Or why she is rushing to open the door. The answers will reveal, reliably enough for us to know what she is thinking, what Sarah thinks. If Sarah wasn't aware of what she thinks as she rushes to the door, how could she (not her mother or anyone else) be the authority on why she is running to the door?

This is not to say that Sarah knows what she thinks. She doesn't. She doesn't know she thinks anything at all. But she doesn't have to know what she thinks to be aware of what she thinks. You don't have to know what was reported on the radio—that it is snowing in Miami, for instance--to be aware of (in our non-epistemic sense of being acquainted with)

what was reported on the radio. And if you, but not I, know that everything I say is reported on the radio, I will be the person you will consult, I will be the authority, when you want to know (without listening to the radio) what is being reported on the radio. You will learn what is being reported on the radio from me, a person who doesn't himself know (but is nonetheless aware of) what is being reported on the radio. I will have the kind of authority Sarah has about what she is thinking. This is why Mother can learn what Sarah thinks, and she can learn it from Sarah, despite Sarah not knowing that it (what she tells her Mother) is what she thinks.

6. Propositions as Reasons?

Well, if this is our mode of access to our own thoughts, doesn't this provide us with an answer to the question we've been struggling with—the question of what reason we have for thinking we think? Everyone who thinks has a reason to believe he thinks because he is acquainted with a proposition, the content of his own thought, which indicates the presence of the thought for which it is the content. Since you can't have a thought-content without a thought, awareness of a thought-content is awareness of something that is the surest possible sign of a thought. Even Sarah has a reason to think she thinks. She just has to learn to recognize these reasons as reasons by learning to recognize as propositions, as the contents of thought, the propositions she is (and has been) acquainted with. It is like learning--also at an early age--that what one has been feeling when hungry is called hunger.

Unfortunately, though, thinking is not like hunger. When you are hungry there is (often enough, anyway) something you are aware of, something you feel, that indicates you are hungry. You feel hungry even if you don't know it is hunger you feel. When you think,

though, there is nothing you are aware of, nothing you feel, that indicates you are thinking. What you are aware of when you are thinking is a proposition, and propositions, unlike the things you feel, do not indicate anything. Unlike facts, propositions can be false, and false propositions (unlike the fact that they are false) do not increase the probability that anything else is true. False propositions are a dime a dozen, epistemically worthless. The proposition that pigs have wings, for example, a perfectly respectable proposition—something a person might actually think—has absolutely no probative value. It certainly isn't a reason to think pigs can fly. If it were, we would all have reasons to think that pigs can fly. What would be a reason to think pigs can fly is if it were true that pigs have wings, if it were a fact that pigs have wings. Propositions, though, don't have to be true. They aren't facts. So awareness of what one thinks—the proposition that pigs have wings--doesn't give one a reason to believe that pigs can fly. It doesn't give one a reason to believe anything. It certainly doesn't give a person who thinks pigs have wings and who is thereby aware of this proposition a reason to think that he thinks pigs have wings. If it did, you and I (also aware of this proposition in a different mode) would have a reason to think pigs can fly.

The same is true when what one thinks is that one thinks. What one thinks, in this case, is that one thinks, but, once again, this, the proposition that one thinks, is not a reason to think the proposition is true. It is not a reason to think one thinks. What would be a reason to think one thinks is something that indicated this proposition was true (or that one was thinking it true). But neither of these facts are facts one is acquainted with in thinking or in thinking one thinks.⁸

⁸ If one knows one thinks, then, of course, one is aware (of the fact) that one thinks. But this does not count as a reason to think one thinks since it is merely a restatement of that knowledge (that one thinks) for which we are looking for reasons.

What this means is that there is nothing we are aware of in thinking that indicates we are thinking. We enjoy a necessary and privileged awareness of our own thoughts (our own thought-contents, that is), yes, but what we are aware of is evidentially worthless. Privileged awareness of it makes one an authority on what one thinks, but it does so in the same way it makes Sarah an authority on what she thinks. It doesn't make one an authority on the fact that one is thinking it.

7. Saying and Thinking.

As the discussion of Sarah illustrates, our access to our own thoughts is through their content: what it is we are thinking. That is the aspect of one's thought one is aware of even when one doesn't know what it is one is aware of. This mode of access to our own thoughts gives us awareness of them via an aspect (their content) that not only makes the thought a thought, but also makes it the particular thought it is—the thought, say, that Daddy is home. One would suppose, therefore, that it would surely be awareness of this aspect of the thought as opposed to other aspects of the thought that would reveal most clearly and definitively to those aware of it exactly what it was an aspect of. It doesn't. It reveals absolutely nothing.

It may be useful to compare our mode of awareness of what we think (our thoughts) with our mode of awareness of what we say (our verbal declarations). People think things and they say things, and, often enough, what they say is what they think. Nonetheless, one's access to what a person (including oneself) says is through the act of saying it—an acoustic or observable event of some sort. We hear the person say he has a dental appointment, and then, if we understand the language, we come to know, become aware of, what that person said, the proposition expressed. We go from the saying to what-is-said, from act to content.

We first become aware of the act, then (if we know the language) the content. If we do not know the language, we nonetheless remain aware of (hear) the speech act, the verbal action, while remaining unaware of (failing to learn) what is being said (the proposition expressed). When we are the speaker we (typically) know the language, of course, but awareness of the utterance, the act of saying it, still comes first.⁹ We hear what we said (content) by hearing ourselves say it (act). Sometimes we say things we do not intend (mean) to say: Oops, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say that. If I don't hear myself utter the words, "My, you've gained a lot of weight," (I'm listening to deafening music on my Ipod) I'll never know (for certain) what I said. I couldn't hear myself. Even if I'm certain I would never say such a thing (at least not to her face), others, those who did hear me utter the words, know better than I what I said. They heard me say it. I didn't.

In the case of thought, however, the route of access is reversed. Our point of access to our own thoughts is through the content. We are, like Sarah, first made aware of what we think (that Daddy is home) and then, around the age of four, we become aware of the fact that we are thinking it. There is first awareness of content and then awareness (fact-awareness) of the act. Unlike a person saying, "Daddy is home," a verbal action one can be aware of without being aware of what is being said (the proposition that is being expressed), one can be (and at two years one is) acquainted with what one is thinking (the proposition associated with the act of thought) while having no awareness or understanding of the act of thought itself. The mode of access is completely reversed.

S says that P: S achieves awareness of what he said (content) via awareness of his saying it (an act)

⁹ I here ignore the possibility of becoming aware of the locutionary act in some indirect way (e.g., by reading a simultaneous translation of what I say).

S thinks that P: S achieves awareness of what he thinks (content) directly and only later becomes aware of (the fact that there is) an act--a thinking—that has this content.

If one happened to confuse or conflate these two modes of access to one's own representational efforts (mental in the one case, verbal in the other), or if one merely used saying that P as one's model for thinking that P (e.g., thinking that P is internally saying that P) one might, confusedly, be led to suppose that we are aware of, and come to know about, our own thoughts in something like the way we are aware of, and come to know about, our own verbal declarations. I know what I think (and that I think) in the same way I know what I said (and that I said it): by awareness of the act itself—awareness, that is, of my thinking (internally saying) it. The mode of access is the same: act (saying, thinking) first, next (if we are lucky) content: what is said and thought. I become aware of what I think via awareness of my (act of) thinking it.

This, as I say, is a confusion. Or, if it isn't a confusion, one needs reasons to think it isn't. One needs reasons to believe that our awareness of what we think (and that we think it) is appropriately modeled by our awareness of what we say (and that we said it). I have been arguing it is not. I have been assuming that Sarah, although aware of what she thinks (but not that she thinks it), is not also aware of some internal event or condition—her own act of thinking her father is home. Nor are we. Neither Sarah nor we have an internal sense that makes us aware of our own act of thinking (a mental event) in the way our auditory sense makes us aware of our own act of speaking (an acoustic event). We adults, unlike Sarah, are, of course, aware of certain facts that Sarah is not aware of. We are aware, we know, that we have thoughts, and we are aware that these thoughts have content that (in the case of current

conscious thoughts) we are directly aware of. But we are not aware of our thinking so-and-so in the way we are aware of (i.e., hear) ourselves saying so-and-so.

8. Conclusion.

I am left, then, with the following conclusion: our mode of contact with our own thoughts, a mode of contact (direct awareness of content) that gives us a certain authority about what we think, does not give us a reason to think we are having these thoughts. I am willing to concede that we have reasons—in fact, overwhelming reasons—to think we think, but these reasons are the same reasons our family, friends, and neighbors have for thinking we think. What we don't have is some cache of evidence, some body of fact, to which we have access that promotes our thoughts that we think to a certainty not obtainable by others.

If we hanker after Cartesian certainty, then,

Cogitas: You think, therefore you are
is as good as

Cogito: I think, therefore I am.

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