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In 'The Concept Possession Hypothesis of Self-Consciousness,' Stephane Savanah presents an argument for the claim that concept possession is necessary and sufficient for self-consciousness. It is a rich and interesting paper, with a lot of insight into the relationship between concept possession and self-consciousness. I share many of the motivations and aims expressed by Stephane in the paper. I also focus on arguments to clarify the relationship between self-consciousness and other mental phenomena. I am interested in the relevance of a levels analysis for self-consciousness. I think the concerns about content, especially those concerning conceptual and non-conceptual content, are relevant for deepening our understanding. Also, I find the question of whether non-human animals possess self-consciousness to be a question worth considering.

However, I cannot say what in particular I agree or disagree with until the arguments are made more transparent. My comments and questions should be taken as aiming at clarification. To that end I will raise some methodological questions first, then I will paraphrase Stephane's arguments for his major claim, beginning with the necessary condition claim and proceeding to the sufficient condition claim, and propose challenges to the basic claims in the arguments in the hope that, in the discussion, we can make the central arguments explicit. My comments should be taken as a preface to a discussion that I hope will continue over the next couple of weeks.

Before I begin to unpack the inferences and claims of the arguments for the concept possession hypothesis, I'd like to focus on some methodological issues that the paper raises. It seems to me some might disagree with the project for methodological reasons before the arguments are presented. Stephane says that his intention is to present a framework for the evaluation of empirical research into the nature of self-consciousness.

He says that he will not rely on empirical work to make his case, because basing the concept possession hypothesis on empirical research would inevitably lead to circularity. If I understand this claim correctly, then the argument is: 1) The proposed framework will be used to evaluate empirical research; 2) If a framework for evaluating empirical research were to use empirical research to justify that framework, then that

justification would be circular; 3) Conceptual justifications and empirical justifications are distinct; therefore, 4) the framework requires a conceptual cum *non-empirical* justification.

The circularity claim might be true when considered locally. Since, Stephane's professed aim is to evaluate mirror self-recognition as conclusive evidence for self-consciousness, let's use that as an example. An observation that a monkey recognizes itself in a mirror cannot be used to justify mirror self-recognition as a definition of self-consciousness. You can't just keep pointing to the monkey saying, "Look! Can't you see… He's self-conscious!" But, the circularity claim might be false, when considered globally. For instance, one might think that the operational definition of self-consciousness as mirror self-recognition *as a part of a broader empirical theory* that is successful in describing, explaining and predicting a set of animal behaviors doesn't need anything more than an empirical justification. One might object that a success of the theory is sufficient in this case, and that a conceptual or dialectical argument is not necessary.

This objection seems to keep the claim that conceptual justifications and empirical justifications are distinct, since it privileges the empirical justification as opposed to a dialectical justification, but this distinction might also be questioned. Why should we think that conceptual justifications and empirical justifications for frameworks are distinct? Stephane hints that conceptual justifications would be *a priori* and based in intuitions and empirical justifications would be *a posteriori* and based in empirical data. But, that doesn't really offer a defence of the distinction.

Stephane seems to be concerned with making a purely conceptual claim that I would call a 'constitutive claim.' Stephane makes constitutive claims throughout the paper when he says things like X is constituted by Y, or that X is constitutively linked to Y. And, one might think that arguing for a constitutive claim is different from arguing for an empirical claim, which requires observing correlations between X and Y or requires finding causal links between X and Y. But, I wonder what reasons Stephane has for thinking that the case of concepts and self-consciousness are a special case. Another way to ask this question is, "What is special about the connection between concepts and self-consciousness such that it requires a dialectical argument?"

Now that I've commented and raised some methodological concerns, I'll turn to the arguments. Throughout, I will be assuming along with Stephane that we are concerned with purely dialectical arguments. My goal will be to regiment those arguments for further discussion.

The argument that concept possession is necessary for self-consciousness seems to be the following: (1) self-consciousness is awareness of oneself as a self; (2) being aware of oneself as a self requires a *concept of one's own existence as an intentional agent*; therefore, (3) self-consciousness requires concept possession. The argument that concept possession is sufficient for self-consciousness seems to be the following: (1) the possession of concepts involves abstract thought and inferential reasoning; (2) abstract thought and inferential reasoning of level three organisms is sufficient for intelligence; (3) intelligence is sufficient for self-consciousness; therefore, (4) concept possession is sufficient for self-consciousness.

I have probably oversimplified these arguments by paraphrasing them, but I think I have captured the spirit if not the letter of the arguments. And, if I've missed the spirit of the arguments, then I'd invite Stephane to breathe life into the monsters I've outlined here.

Let's begin with the first premise of the necessary condition argument. Why think that self-consciousness is awareness of oneself as a self? If we suppose that self-consciousness is awareness of oneself as a self, then this raises the issue of what a self is. But, must we turn to the metaphysics of selves in order to have a discussion about the nature of self-consciousness? Consider the following analogy. My oven is a self-cleaning oven. What that means is that my oven cleans itself. But, in order to make sense of the concept of 'self-cleaning,' I don't have to figure out what a SELF is, but instead all I have to do is figure out how 'self-' functions. So, my question is, "Why should we have to discuss the metaphysics of selves in order to discuss self-consciousness?"

But, one might reply that even if we didn't have to talk about selves in order get at the nature of self-consciousness, we still have to make sense of self-consciousness in terms of *consciousness of oneself as oneself*. This would suggest that self-consciousness is a reflexive relation between an individual and itself rather than the non-reflexive relation that holds between the oven and itself. For instance, John Perry uses the classic discussion of the absent-minded professor in the supermarket to discuss what he takes to be essential to self-consciousness. I wonder what Stephane thinks about this classic case.

In the famous example, an absented-minded professor is pushing a shopping cart around a supermarket. He notices that there is a thin trail of sugar on the floor, and says, "That idiot is making a mess." Suddenly, the professor realizes that it is *he himself* that is spilling the sugar, and says, "I am making a mess," and proceeds to clean it up. In the first statement, Perry is in fact referring of himself, but his thought doesn't result in action. According to Perry simply being aware of oneself via a descriptive content is never sufficient for self-consciousness. In the latter

statement, Perry is referring to himself *as himself*. It is this non-descriptive relation, being aware of oneself *as such* or *as oneself*, that is necessary for self-consciousness, according to Perry, and it is this non-descriptive relations that results in the action of cleaning up the mess.

The reason I bring up the Perry case is that Stephane says that he hopes his account of self-consciousness to be existential. But, one might read Perry's example as supporting the idea that a descriptive concept of oneself is too robust, that instead, a more minimal existential account would appeal to the role of I-thoughts in perception, action and emotion. The claim that Perry makes is roughly that the functional role of I-thoughts could not be carried by a concept, because one might fail to know that descriptive content. In Perry's case, self-consciousness is not understood in terms of an awareness of a self, but instead, in terms of awareness of oneself as oneself.

Now, suppose that we accept premise one that self-consciousness requires awareness of a self. The second premise of the argument suggests that the concept of self involves the concept of oneself as an intentional agent. This raises the question that is not clearly answered in the paper, "What is an intentional agent?" Further, we might ask why should we think being aware of oneself as an intentional agent is essential to self-consciousness and the concept of a self? Stephane appeals to a few figures that think so— Bermudez, O'Brien, and others. But, I'm not sure what Stephane's own argument is for this claim, since these figures each provide different arguments for the requirement of agency for self-consciousness.

I will consider Bermudez's and O'Brien's arguments for this claim. To articulate the relationship between self-consciousness and agency, Bermudez focuses on Campbell's discussion of the centrality of awareness of oneself as an agent for the notion of a psychological subject: to be aware of oneself as a psychological subject is to be aware of oneself as an agent. In order to clarify the concept of an intentional agent, Bermudez stresses the relevance of the subject's intentions being successful or unsuccessful. He explains that a subject's intentions are successful if he is capable of skillful bodily movements or is unblocked by obstacles in his environment. According to Bermudez, being aware of oneself as an agent involves "being capable of recognizing and distinguishing these various factors and possibilities" (246). While this tells us what it is to be aware of oneself as an agent, there is nothing here that tells us *why* being aware of oneself as a psychological subject requires being aware of oneself as an agent.

O'Brien's central claim and argument is slightly different from the Bermudez' view. She says that "...our most basic awareness of ourselves is as *performers of actions*, mental and physical" [p3, my emphasis].

O'Brien's basic argument is that when we think and act self-consciously, for instance when we think "I am seeing a sheep" or when we intend "I will herd my sheep," then we are making judgements. What is basic to those judgements is the awareness of oneself as the agent of those judgements. So, self-consciousness has to involve a kind of awareness of oneself as an agent. But, is it conceivable that an agent be self-conscious but without being aware of itself as an agent? Are there forms of self-conscious thought and action however that don't involve a phenomenology of agency?

For instance, I wonder if Stephane thinks we can imagine a psychological subject that is capable of being aware of itself as a perceiver but which is never aware of itself as an agent. Call him 'Gareth.' Gareth possesses perceptual receptivity, meaning he can see, hear, taste, touch, smell, etc. and can think about objects as existing independent of his perception of them. He can think about his perception of the world as being a joint product of his sensibility, location and orientation in the world, on the one hand, and the basically stable way the world is independent of his perception, on the other hand. The question arises, "Is Gareth self-conscious?" Well, he seems to be aware of himself as a perceiver— his sensibility, his location, his orientation. "So, does Gareth have to be aware of himself as an agent in order to be aware of himself as a perceiver?" Please notice that Stephane's argument doesn't raise the issue of whether he needs TO BE AN AGENT, but whether he must be aware of himself as such, which according to Bermudez involves recognizing and distinguishing the various mismatches between his intentions and bodily movements or environmental obstacles.

About the phenomenology of agency we might ask whether it is intelligible that there is an individual that is continually struck by thoughts rather than experiences his thoughts as products of his own mental agency. Suppose Gareth is continuously struck by the thought, "The gate of the pen is open" or "I will close the gate of the pen," must we assume that Gareth is aware of himself as an agent thinking this thought or aware of himself as an agent intending to open the gate, respectively?

Other empirical concerns might be relevant to this premise and I wonder if Stephane thinks that it is legitimate that they are discussed in a purely dialectical inquiry. Some subjects with autism report predominantly non-agentive awareness of themselves and their experiences. Some subjects with schizophrenia report experiences of thought insertion in which thoughts are arising from a source external to the agent of thought. These might provide empirical counter-examples to the claim that self-conscious thought has to involve awareness of agency or a phenomenology of agency. These examples at least raise the

question, "Is it safe to say that our awareness of ourselves must involve awareness of ourselves as agents?"

To consider the last premise of the necessary condition argument, notice that the argument as stated requires the assumption that concept possession means something like the possession of the concept of an agent. But, Stephane doesn't present an argument for why even if we accept premise 1 and 2, why it must be a concept of an agent rather than a non-conceptual awareness of one's agency that is required. So, suppose that Stephane is correct that awareness of a self is required and that awareness of oneself as an intentional agent is required. But, why should we think that awareness of oneself an intentional agent requires a self-concept? For instance, in the Kantian tradition concerning self-consciousness, there have been positions on the requirement of agency for self-consciousness, but the kind of agency that is required in this case is not really conceptual in Stephane's sense. Let me spell this out in more detail.

In the first Critique, Kant says "in attaching 'I' to our thoughts we designate the subject… only transcendentally, without noting in it any quality whatsoever— in fact, without knowing anything of it either by direct awareness or by reasoning" (A355). What Kant calls 'the I-think' is the designation of the subject that is added to the categories to account for self-consciousness. According to Kant, however the I-think, while it is agentive, is nevertheless non-conceptual: "The subject of the categories cannot by THINKING the categories [i.e. applying them to objects] acquire a CONCEPT of itself as an object of the categories. For in order to think them, its pure self-consciousness, which is what was to be explained, must itself be presupposed" [B422]. This doesn't present an argument that self-consciousness involves a non-conceptual awareness of ourselves as agents, but instead just suggests that there is nothing unintelligible in the idea of having a non-conceptual awareness of our agency.

In more recent work on self-consciousness, taking inspiration from this Kantian view and focusing on the unity of consciousness, Susan Hurley (1998: 97) presents an argument for an agentive view of self-consciousness that is non-conceptual. Hurley argues that accepting a conceptual account of self-consciousness presents what she calls a 'just more contents' problem. Suppose self-consciousness or first person contents are introduced in order to provide an account of the unity of experience. If self-consciousness requires a conceptual awareness of agency, then that would mean that one would have to think about one's agency in order to be self-conscious. But, this account would introduce <u>just more contents</u>, because those thoughts themselves would need to be unified with the rest. As she argues, unless we accept a form of non-

conceptual self-consciousness, then "self-consciousness or first-person contents (if they are possible at all) are *just more contents*" to which the problem of unity applies.

For example, if Gareth sees his sheep leave the pen, attempts to close the pen, and has the experience of anger towards the animal, then in order for his experiences to seem or appear to be his own, those experiences would need to be functionally unified by an I-thought. However, if Stephane is right that self-consciousness requires entertaining a conceptual content of one's agency, then those thoughts also have to be functionally unified with the initial contents. What is the alternative? Instead of requiring a conceptual awareness of one's agency, we might follow Kant and posit instead a synthetic activity of bring together one's experiences that doesn't commit to awareness of agency or concepts of one's agency.

Much more could be said here about the argument for the necessary condition. I have only scratched the surface of the argument for Stephane's claim that concept possession is necessary for self-consciousness. I hope we can take up these issues in the discussion.

The second part of the argument for the concept possession hypothesis is that concepts are sufficient for self-consciousness. Stephane approaches his argument for the claim by two routes. One route is through his argument from levels. Another route is through an argument that self-consciousness is necessary for concept possession. I'll begin with the former. The argument from levels that concept possession is sufficient for self-consciousness seems to be the following: (1) the possession of concepts involves abstract thought and inferential reasoning; (2) abstract thought and inferential reasoning of Stephane's level three organisms is sufficient for intelligence; (3) intelligence is sufficient for self-consciousness; therefore, (4) concept possession is sufficient for self-consciousness.

Independent of the argument, the claim that concept possession is sufficient for self-consciousness raises the question of whether there are creatures that possess concepts but which are not capable of self-consciousness. Are such creatures intelligible? Are there any such creatures?

The argument that concept possession is sufficient for self-consciousness depends upon claims made about the nature of concepts. We might ask two questions. First, "Does Stephane present a consistent and coherent account of what concepts are and is this account true?" Second, in order to answer this question, "Is there any consensus in philosophy and psychology about the nature of concepts?" It seems we cannot answer these questions from what Stephane says in the paper.

Stephane discusses three criteria explicitly, and hints at a consensus, but I didn't find a definitive account of what he thinks concepts are.

The first criteria that Stephane presents are that concepts are mental particulars. Apart from a brief discussion of the role of mental representations in perception, I'm not sure how the first criterion plays a role in the arguments presented, so I will put that aside.

Stephane discusses a second criterion, which is Brown's claim that "...the grasping of a single concept requires the grasping of an entire body of concepts" (Brown, 1986), which is a holistic criterion about concepts. As I have laid out the arguments, the holistic criterion plays a role in the argument that self-consciousness is necessary for concept possession, so I will put that aside until later.

However, the third criterion does seem to be important to the levels argument for the claim that concepts are sufficient for self-consciousness. Stephane suggests that the three basic views of concepts— classical, probabilistic, and exemplar *all* acknowledge that "...concepts have the twin functions of categorization *and inference*." This seems to drive the argument that concepts are sufficient for self-consciousness, because abilities for categorization and inference are basic to Stephane's level three organisms.

What are the three levels of organisms that Stephane presents? According to Stephane, there are three distinct levels of intelligence of organisms. At the first level are organisms with no consciousness at all. At the second level are organisms with consciousness, but no self-consciousness. At the third level are organisms with self-consciousness. The argument seems to be that once one becomes a third level creature, then that is sufficient to bestow self-consciousness on that creature. But, what is distinctive about the third level apart from the claim that being human bestows self-consciousness?

According to the account, the first level involves merely stimulus/response reactions that are causally determined by the physical makeup of the organism. The second level requires more, what Stephane calls 'perceptual consciousness.' Perceptual consciousness is a creature being able to perceive its environment. The third level is requires flexibility of behavior, what is characterized as the ability to entertain abstract thoughts, deliberate, solve problems and make inferences. According to Stephane's account, it is at this level, that a creature becomes self-conscious. So, a critical question arises, "Are there creatures with intelligence below level 3 that possess self-consciousness?" If there were such creatures, then a more basic level would be sufficient for self-consciousness. Another question is, "Are there creatures at level 3 that do not possess self-consciousness?" If there were such creatures, then level 3 would not be sufficient.

Of course, the answers to these questions depend upon what we think self-consciousness is. It seems to me that 'self-consciousness' is said in many ways. Sometimes, one means by 'self-consciousness' is a creature's ability to distinguish between itself and the world, which I call 'self-discrimination.' For instance, on this admittedly minimal definition of self-consciousness, then it seems at least conceivable that level 1 organisms are self-conscious. We might address the example of bacteria that Stephane raises. Bacteria seem to operate with a self/not-self distinction, rejecting exogenous DNA, for instance. And lobsters don't eat themselves, so, they seem to be self-conscious in this minimal sense. Now, of course, we can ask, "Is self-discrimination a form of self-consciousness? If so, then are level 1 organisms capable of self-consciousness? I admit that answering positively would stretch our concept of self-consciousness, but why should we think that self-discrimination at this level is not a form of self-consciousness?

Let's consider level 2 organisms. According to Stephane's levels analysis, a creature can be conscious without being self-conscious. I would like to pause to highlight one of the **three discussions** that Stephane presents at the end of the paper, because I think it poses a worry for our understanding of level 2 organisms. According to the levels analysis, being a creature with perceptual consciousness does not require self-consciousness. According to the discussion about an analogy with perception, if a creature is to perceive, then that creature must have self-perception. The analogy with perception is that if a creature is to conceive, then that creature has to have self-conception. My question is, what is the analogy between self-perception and self-conception?

My first worry is that self-perception seems to require a concept of self, according to Stephane's account. This follows from the claim that "anything that is perceived is perceived relative to the self." On other occasions in the paper he takes awareness of the self to entail the possession of a self-concept. So, why doesn't self-perception require a concept of self? Stephane suggests that self-perception is underpinned by non-conceptual content, but that seems to contradict with other claims made in the paper. My second worry is similar to the issue I raised above that tests the bounds of our concept of self-consciousness. The claim made about level 2 organisms is that perceptual consciousness doesn't require self-consciousness. But, Stephane says that perception requires self-perception, following Gareth Evans claims about self-identification. But, I guess I don't see why it is unintelligible that the kind of self-perception that is required for perception is a kind of self-consciousness?

Alternatively, one might challenge the idea that the possession of concepts are sufficient for self-consciousness by pointing out that it is at least intelligible that a creature could possess level 3 intelligence— and in

Stephane's sense would possess concepts— but would not possess self-consciousness. Suppose we take one of the many definitions that Stephane offers for self-consciousness, namely, that self-consciousness involves a subject understanding "what it is to be a self and knows that it is a self, the kind of existential self-awareness that human adults have." According to one developmental model about selves and self-consciousness discussed by Ulric Neisser, this would involve the possession of the concept of a private self. According to this tradition, the private self develops when the infant begins to think about his experiences *as all their own*. At this highest level, his experiences define who he is through a private way of experiencing himself. According to some developmental psychologists in this tradition, the private self is a late stage development, between the years of 4 and 6, and does not develop in everyone, but mainly in introverts or people that tend to engage in introspection. However, the possession of concepts develops long before the development of the private self. So, at least according to this model of the self, it is conceivable that a creature possesses concepts but would not possess self-consciousness in the sense that requires the concept of a private self. So, it is at least intelligible that the possession of concepts is not sufficient.

Stephane also argues for the sufficiency claim by arguing that self-consciousness is necessary for the possession of concepts. This argument isn't expressed in terms of concepts requiring abstract thought or inferential reasoning, or even any claims about levels of intelligence. Instead the argument is based on a claim made about the nature of concepts, namely that concepts are holistic. The relevant sense in which they are holistic— according to Stephane— is that the possession of any concept requires the possession of the self-concept. What is the argument that the self-concept is required for the possession of concepts?

According to this conception there are no concepts that a creature could possess without possessing the self-concept. Although Stephane presents an argument from a particular concept, namely the concept BLADE, the argument must support the conclusion that any concept requires the self-concept, not just that a particular one does. The question arises, "Is there one concept that doesn't require a self-concept?" Suppose we follow Stephane and imagine a concept-bearing creature named 'Homer.' Suppose Homer is perceiving a landscape where the sun is setting. He looks out on the horizon and thinks ORANGE. Now, the question arises, why is a self-concept required in order for Homer to think ORANGE? You might think that for the concept ORANGE to be a concept it has to be sufficiently abstract and has to enter into inferences. For it to be abstract, you might think the possibility that Homer is correct or incorrect in applying the concept ORANGE has to arise. For the

concept ORANGE to enter into inferences, you might think Homer would have to infer COLOR from ORANGE or ORANGE from PUMPKIN. Could Homer make these inferences without possessing a self-concept?

My final comment has to do with Stephane's treatment of Bermudez. First, Stephane says that it is relatively uncontroversial that concept possession is *necessary* for self-consciousness. This seems to point to an obvious difference between Stephane's and Bermudez's accounts of self-consciousness. Bermudez's account of self-consciousness in chapter 9 of *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness* is **a non-conceptual account** of psychological self-awareness, not a conceptual account like Stephane's. Stephane does say that the difference between his account and Bermudez's account is a difference in terminology, not in conception. However, it seems to me that Stephane's and Bermudez's accounts are very different in conception.

I will focus only on one important way that they differ. I will leave other ways for the comments period. One plausible way to interpret the claim that self-consciousness is necessary for the possession of concepts is that the possession of the self-concept COMES BEFORE the possession of any other concept. However, we should consider Bermudez's acquisition constraint in light of this claim. The acquisition constraint is: *if a given cognitive capacity is psychologically real, then there must be an explanation of how it is possible for an individual in the normal course of human development to acquire that cognitive capacity.* The claim that the self-concept is required in order to have any concept seems to go against the acquisition constraint. For after all, how does an individual acquire the cognitive capacity for a self-concept before he comes to possess any other concept?

I have only scratched the surface of the arguments presented in Stephane's paper. I have very much enjoyed reading Stephane's paper and commenting on the paper, and I look forward to discussing the claims and arguments further in the comment period. Thank you.