

# On Always Being Right (About What you're Thinking)

## 1 Introduction

There are a number of strands to the knowledge we have of our own minds; two strands are these: we often know with ease what we are thinking and we often know with ease what it is we believe. This paper concerns the knowledge of what we are thinking; it pursues questions as to what kind of judgement subjects make about their own thoughts, how those judgements are formed and why they constitute knowledge; it also asks how these judgements relate to the judgements subjects make about their own beliefs when they know with ease what they believe.

By choosing these questions as those to pursue, I am already making some assumptions about self-knowledge—I am assuming that knowledge of our own thoughts is continuous with knowledge of other things, in the following sense. When investigating the nature of subjects' knowledge of *X*, one asks about what *judgements* subjects make about *X*, about the truth-conditions of those judgements, about the faculty by which these judgements are made, and about the reliability and so on of that faculty. The assumption I am making about self-knowledge is that it is to be investigated in just the same way—one knows what one's thoughts are by *making knowledgeable judgements* about one's thoughts, and so the way to investigate this kind of self-knowledge is to investigate the nature of these judgements.

Burge calls the judgements that constitute subjects' knowledge of their own thoughts *cogito*-like judgements, and he defends the thesis that *cogito*-like judgements are self-verifying—let's call that thesis *Burge's Thesis*.<sup>1</sup> Burge's Thesis will be at the centre of my investigation of the nature of the knowledgeable judgements subjects make about their own thoughts. I will ask whether there is any account of the nature of these judgements—about their truth-conditions, and about the nature of the process by which these judgements are made—on which Burge's thesis is true. Most of this paper will be spent investigating whether Burge's own views yield an adequate account. I will conclude that they do not, and then end by sketching an account that looks more promising.

## 2 *Cogito*-like judgements

*Cogito*-like judgements are a sub-class of propositional attitude self-ascriptions. A *propositional attitude self-ascription* is a judgement that ascribes a propositional attitude to oneself. Propositional attitudes are typed along two dimensions: attitude and content. So a belief that the world moves and a belief that water is a liquid are tokens of the same attitude-type—the type *belief*—but different content-types. In contrast, a belief that it is not raining and a hope that it is not raining differ along the attitude dimension but are two tokens of the same content-type (or, as I shall say *as shorthand for this*: they share the same content—the content it is raining).<sup>2</sup> When I talk of a *self-ascription* of a propositional attitude, I mean a judgement which ascribes a propositional attitude to oneself, typing along both the attitude and the content dimensions. So the judgement that I believe that water is a liquid is an example of a self-

ascription; on the other hand the judgement that I am thinking is not a propositional attitude ascription as I mean it here, as it does not specify the ascribed thought along both the attitude and content dimensions (it specifies only the attitude dimension—*thinking*).

*Cogito*-like judgements are (present-tense) propositional attitude self-ascriptions that along the attitude-dimension ascribe merely the broad attitude-type *thinking*. *Thinking* is the *most general* determinable on the attitude-dimension; if ‘ $\Phi$ ’ predicates some determinate attitude-type (*believing, desiring, hoping, entertaining-the-thought, doubting, etc.*), and ‘T’ predicates the determinable attitude-type *thinking*, then the following conditional is always true:

$$(1) \quad \Phi(p) \rightarrow T(p).$$

As I am using the term, *propositional attitudes* include both states (such as beliefs) and events (such as judgements), so both *judging* and *believing* are determinates of the determinable *thinking*; both of the following conditionals are true:

$$(2) \quad J(p) \rightarrow T(p);$$

$$(3) \quad B(p) \rightarrow T(p).^3$$

So, then, the general form of the content of a *cogito*-like judgement is I am thinking that  $p$ .

There are advantages to characterising *cogito*-like judgements in this way—as a sub-class of propositional attitude ascriptions. One is the methodological virtue of familiarity of principle: we have well-developed theories of propositional attitudes and propositional attitude ascriptions (and healthy debate between these theories). A second is that this characterisation is neutral about the relation between *cogito*-like judgements and conscious episodes

of thought; given the open nature of the debate about conscious thought, this neutrality is arguably an advantage.

A third advantage is that by choosing a characterisation that relates *cogito*-like judgements to propositional attitude self-ascriptions, the prospects are improved for finding an explanatory connection between the knowledge we have of our thoughts and the knowledge we have of other propositional attitudes (our own and other people's). In particular it nourishes the hope of find a theoretical connection between *cogito*-like judgements and the knowledge we have of our own beliefs.

### 3 The *cogito*

Burge picks the name '*cogito*-like judgements' because he thinks that *cogito*-like judgements resemble Descartes' *cogito* in being self-verifying (1988, 66; 1996, 92). Descartes' *cogito* is the judgement I am thinking; it is self-verifying because in making this judgement, one is thinking (making a judgement is one kind of thinking). One *instantiates the property* of thinking by making this judgement. So we have in the *cogito* a model of how certain judgements can be self-verifying: one way one can make a self-verifying judgement is by predicating a property which one instantiates in the act of making the judgement. Let's call this model *the instantiation model* of self-verifying judgements. So judging that I am thinking fits the instantiation model because in making the judgement one instantiates the property (*thinking*) which one is predicating of oneself (this predication being performed by the content of the judgement: I am thinking).

First-person, present-tense predications of thinking and judging (i.e. judgements with the contents I am thinking and I am judging) fit the instantiation model. So too does the more cautious judgement of Lichtenberg (the judgement with the content there is thinking going on). In judging there is thinking going on, one instantiates the property which one is not predicating of oneself but which one is saying is instantiated in an existential generalization. So in judging there is thinking going on, one is oneself a witness for this existential generalisation. Once again, judging it makes it true. Self-verification by instantiation is not limited to thought and judgement: some speech acts are self-verifying by instantiation too. Saying “I am talking” or saying “There is talking going on” are self-verifying by instantiation: when I say “I am talking”, I instantiate the property of talking, while predicating it of myself.

Tom Stoneham (1998) holds that *all* propositional attitude self-ascriptions are self-verifying (*incorrigible* is his term), but he claims that the *cogito* is different from other self-ascriptions. He claims that the *cogito* is incorrigible because it cannot coherently be doubted (for doubting that one is thinking entails that one is thinking); in contrast, he thinks that *cogito*-like judgements can be coherently doubted and so must be incorrigible for other reasons (which I will not go into here). But Stoneham’s test—the ‘is it coherently doubttable?’ test—is too demanding to capture what is distinctive about how the *cogito* is self-verifying. This test is failed by judgements that are self-verifying and are seemingly self-verifying for the same reason the *cogito* is. Judging I am judging is like the *cogito* (it is self-verifying by instantiation), but it fails Stoneham’s test: doubting I am judging does not entail that I am judging. Likewise saying “I am talking” fits the instantiation model, and is self-verifying; but doubting that I am talking does not

entail that I am talking. So Stoneham finds that the *cogito* unique is because his test is too demanding; it excludes cases which are self-verifying, and are self-verifying for recognisably the same reason as the *cogito*.

#### 4 *Cogito*-like judgements

Now that we have identified how the *cogito* is self-verifying we are in a position to ask whether Burge is right to claim that *cogito*-like judgements are like Descartes' *cogito* in this respect. The *cogito* is self-verifying by instantiation because of its maximal generality along both the attitude and content dimensions. In the *cogito*, no content is specified, so an attitude of any content will satisfy it; likewise the attitude-type ascribed is the *most general* determinable—*thinking*—so an attitude of *any* attitude-type will satisfy it. If a propositional attitude of any attitude-type and any content-type will satisfy the *cogito*, then in particular a judgement of the *cogito* (being a propositional attitude) will; hence the *cogito* is self-verifying.

Are *cogito*-like self-ascriptions self-verifying by instantiation, like the *cogito*? Although they are like the *cogito* in ascribing the most general determinable attitude-type (*thinking*), *cogito*-like judgements are more substantial than the judgement I am thinking in the following respect: unlike I am thinking, *cogito*-like judgements ascribe content. In a *cogito*-like judgement, what one judges is not just I am thinking, but the richer, content-specifying I am thinking that water is a liquid—or more generally I am thinking that *p*. The inclusion of a content-specifying component in *cogito*-like judgements *prima facie* precludes their fitting the instantiation model. On the instantiation model, a person makes

a true judgement when she judges I am thinking because judging is a species of the predicated kind: thinking. Judging and thinking stand to each other as determinate to determinable, so when a person judges that she is thinking she instantiates the property of thinking by instantiating a determinate of *thinking*. But, disanalogously, judging I am thinking that water is a liquid and thinking water is a liquid *prima facie* do not seem to stand as determinate to determinable: judging water is a liquid is a species of thinking water is a liquid, but *prima facie* judging I am thinking that water is a liquid is *not* a species of thinking water is a liquid. In section 6, I will tighten up this *prima facie* case into an argument to the conclusion that *cogito*-like judgements are not self-verifying.

## 5 The Truth-Condition Principle

Before giving the argument that judging I am thinking that water is a liquid is not self-verifying, I will present a thesis which that argument will use as a premise—the *Truth-Condition Principle*.

Consider the two contents:

(4) I am thinking that water is a liquid

(5) water is a liquid

Clearly if I judge (5), then it is true of me that I am thinking that water is a liquid—i.e., if I judge (5), then (4) is true of me. But what about if I judge (6)

(6) H<sub>2</sub>O is a liquid;

is judging (6) an instance of *thinking that water is a liquid*? There is, of course, a long-running debate about how finely everyday propositional attitude ascriptions<sup>4</sup> cut the contents of the ascribed propositional attitudes. Some, with

Russellian inclinations, think they are cut no finer than truth-conditions; others, with more Fregean inclinations, think that the contents of thoughts are more finely distinguished than the grain of truth-conditions. Note that there are potentially *two* issues at stake here: the first is as to what is the correct account of propositional attitudes *themselves*; the second is as to what is the correct account of propositional attitudes *ascriptions*. We can think of the first as asking how finely should *our best theorising* about propositional attitudes cut their contents; and we can think of the second as asking how finely *our everyday thinking* about propositional attitudes cuts their contents. It is the second of these questions which concerns me here. Giving a Fregean answer to the first question does not preclude giving a Russellian answer to the second question; it might be that although the contents of beliefs are fine grained, we do not discriminate this fine grain in our everyday propositional attitude ascriptions. With this possibility in mind, we can assume that Jack's believing (5) and (6) are beliefs which differ in content, yet still have room to ask the question: how finely do *cogito*-like judgements such as (4), and other propositional attitude ascriptions like (7)

(7) Jack believes that water is a liquid,

specify the contents of the thoughts and beliefs they ascribe? The Russellian answer in this debate would be to say that (7) does not discriminate the cases where Jack believes (5) and (6); the Fregean answer says that (7) *does* discriminate (truly describing Jack when he believes (5), and falsely describing him when he believes (6)).

Both sides of this Russellian/Fregean debate agree that sameness of truth-condition is *necessary* for sameness of ascribed content-type; the debate is over whether this is *sufficient*. Sameness of truth-condition is the common

denominator of these opposing views, both parties agreeing that propositional attitude ascriptions specify the contents of propositional attitudes at least to this grain. In the argument which follows, we will agree with this common denominator, endorsing the *Truth-Condition Principle*:

### **The Truth-Condition Principle**

Propositional attitude ascriptions specify the content of the ascribed attitude at least to the grain of sameness of truth-condition.

The argument which follows in the next section uses the Truth-Condition Principle to show that *cogito*-like judgements are not self-verifying. In this way, I show that the Truth-Condition Principle and Burge's Thesis are incompatible claims about *cogito*-like judgements.

## **6 The argument from truth-conditions**

To put the argument clearly, we need one more piece of terminology in place—the idea of a propositional attitude *making true* a propositional attitude ascription. For example, if I judge (7) about Jack, then I judge truly when Jack believes (5), and I judge truly *in virtue of* Jack's believing (5)—we can say Jack's believing (5) *makes* my judgement of (7) *true*. Because Jack believes many things, it might well be false to say that *I judge falsely* when I judge (7) and Jack believes that snow is white (Jack might believe *both* that snow is white *and* that water is a liquid), so it is useful to be able to say the following: Jack's belief that snow is white *does not make true* my judgement that Jack believes that water is a liquid

(even though my judgement may nevertheless be true—made true by another of Jack’s beliefs). We can state Burge’s Thesis in terms of the notion of making true, saying what it is for a *cogito*-like judgement such as (4) to be self-verifying: (4) is self-verifying just if the judging of (4) makes (4) true.

Consider again(4) and (5):

(4) I am thinking that water is a liquid;

(5) water is a liquid.

Here is the argument.

- I (4) and (5) differ in truth-conditions
- II judging (5) makes (4) true
- III (4) satisfies the Truth-Condition Principle
- so IV judging (4) does not make (4) true
- so V judging (4) is not self-verifying

The step from IV to V is just the definition of what it is to be self-verifying; the step to IV from I, II and III is the heart of the argument. Premise III states that a necessary condition on two propositional attitudes’ being capable of making a *cogito*-like judgement true is that they have the same truth-conditions, but (5) and (4) do not share truth-conditions (by I) and judging (5) makes (4) true (by II). So (4) fails a necessary condition on making (4) true—the condition of sharing truth-conditions with (5). Hence (as IV says) (4) does not make (4) true.

If sound, this argument (let’s call it *the argument from truth-conditions*) shows that Burge’s central claim—that *cogito*-like judgements are self-verifying—is false. Is it sound? Premise I is clearly true—it is clear that (4) and (5) have different truth-conditions ((4) is true iff I am thinking a certain thought; (5) is true iff water is a liquid).<sup>5</sup> Premise II is clearly true also. So the controversial

premise is III—that (4) satisfies the Truth-Condition Principle. This is the premise that it seems Burge would not accept—he says a number of things that suggest he does not think that *cogito*-like judgements satisfy the Truth-Condition Principle. In the next section I will examine what Burge says on this matter; later I will argue that it is a mistake to deny that *cogito*-like judgements satisfy the Truth-Condition Principle.

## 7 Burge's account of *cogito*-like judgements

Burge discusses *cogito*-like judgements in two places (1988, 1996). In the first of these, Burge offers a number of claims about *cogito*-like judgements. He says:

One knows one's thought to be what it is simply by thinking it while exercising one second-order, self-ascriptive powers...[This is] simply a matter of thinking the [first-order] thought in the relevant reflexive way. (1988, 72);

and also:

In basic self-knowledge, one simultaneously thinks through a first-order thought (that water is a liquid) and thinks about it as one's own...And by its reflexive, self-referential character, the second-order judgement is logically locked (self-referentially) on to the first-order content which it both contains and takes as its subject-matter. (1988, 75).

Though perhaps suggestive, there is little in these claims that will help Burge resist the argument from truth-conditions.

In his (1996) paper, Burge makes a further claim about the content of the content of *cogito*-like judgements. This claim seems to involve a denial of the thesis that the Truth-Condition Principle applies to *cogito*-like judgements (and so it is here that Burge gains room to resist the argument from truth-conditions). The claim concerns the content of *cogito*-like judgements—in particular it is about *what property* is predicated when one judges in a *cogito*-like self-ascription that one is thinking a content. It is worth quoting the passage at length; he says:

So I begin with some remarks about a judgement that:

(1) I am thinking that there are physical entities.

This judgement is an instance of *cogito*-like thoughts, an elaboration of Descartes' *I am thinking*. Let us construe 'thinking' in (1) minimally—as *engaging in thought, or having a thought*, regardless of whether it is merely entertaining a thought, making a judgement, or whatever. In this sense, one 'thinks' all propositional components of any thought one thinks (including negated ones, antecedents of conditionals, and so on). (1) is the content of my judgement. I accept it as true. To be true, (1) requires only that I am engaging in some thought whose content is that there are physical entities.

We do not rest this judgement on an observation or perception such as was traditionally called 'inner sense'. The judgement is direct, based on nothing else...But once one makes the judgement, or indeed just engages in the thought, one makes it true. The thought is contextually self-verifying. One cannot err if one does not think it, and if one does think it one cannot err. In this sense such thinkings are infallible. (1996, 92).

This passage ends with a clear statement of Burge's Thesis; earlier on, comes the claim that the property of 'thinking' some proposition,  $p$ , (which we ascribe to ourselves in a *cogito*-like self-ascription) is a 'minimal' one. Let's give a name to the property that a propositional attitude has when it is describable as a case of minimally thinking that  $p$ ; let's call the property  $MT(p)$ . There are two ingredients to Burge's claim that the property,  $MT(p)$ , predicated by a *cogito*-like judgement is 'minimal'. First is that  $MT(p)$  is highly general (in the sense of being a determinable with a wide range of permissible determinates) along the *attitude*-dimension: *entertaining, judging...* that  $p$  are all determinates of the determinable  $MT(p)$  (this is just the way we have been using the term 'thinking'). Secondly  $MT(p)$  is highly general along the *content*-dimension: judging *any* truth-functional compound of  $p$  is an instance of  $MT(p)$ . From the quoted passage (and from all Burge says on the matter), it is left unclear whether thinking *non*-truth-functional compounds of  $p$  count as instances of  $MT(p)$ . All we are told is that if  $p$  is a

‘propositional component’ of a thought, then that thought has the property  $MT(p)$ , and there follows a list of examples to illuminate what is meant by ‘propositional component’; that list consists entirely of truth-functional compounds—hence the unclear status of non-truth-functional compounds. We can delay further exploration of this unclarity, and sum up Burge’s claim about the nature of *cogito*-like judgements as:

(MIN) *Cogito*-like judgements predicate the property  $MT(p)$ .

(MIN) implies that *cogito*-like judgements fail to specify content even to the grain of sameness of truth-conditions; hence it implies that the Truth-Condition Principle does not hold for *cogito*-like judgements. The two judgements with the following contents, (8) and (9), differ in truth-condition, but both judgements satisfy the property  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ :

(8) water is a liquid and snow is white

(9) either water is a liquid or sand is dry.

So both in judging (8), and in judging (9), I satisfy  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ , and if (4) really does predicate  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ , then both my judging (8) would make my judging (4) true, and so would my judging (9).

Denying that *cogito*-like judgements are subject to Truth-Condition Principle blocks the argument from truth-conditions (by denying premise III). But *blocking* an argument that shows that *cogito*-like judgements are *not* self-verifying is not yet enough to show that they *are* self-verifying. Even after claiming that a *cogito*-like judgement merely predicates a ‘minimal’ property  $MT(p)$ , Burge must still further defend the claim that, in virtue of predicating such a minimal property, *cogito*-like judgements succeed in being self-verifying by instantiation.

In the next section we will see that showing this still requires some work to achieve. It is clear that if a *cogito*-like judgement predicates merely a very general property such as the property  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ , then a greater range of propositional attitudes can make the *cogito*-like judgement true. Nevertheless, to show that *cogito*-like judgements are self-verifying, one must show not only that the range of propositional attitudes that make it true is broad, one must show that the *cogito*-like judgement *itself* falls within this broad range. Although it is clear that (8) and (9) satisfy  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ , it is less clear—until we are told more about the property  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ —whether (4) itself satisfies  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ .

## 8 Attempting an account of *cogito*-like judgements as self-verifying

We can say in quite general terms what Burge requires for (4) to be self-verifying; he requires both:

- a judgment of (4) *satisfies*  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ ,
- a judgment of (4) *predicates*  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ .

Giving an account of the judgement (4) and the property  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$  such that they stand in both these relations to each other is a tricky exercise.

If (4) itself is to satisfy  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ , then  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$  will need to be more general than just applying to any truth-functional compound of water is a liquid, since the content of (4)—I am thinking that water is a liquid—is not a truth-function of water is a liquid. Let's suppose that *any* compound of water is a liquid, truth-functional or otherwise, satisfies  $MT(\text{water is a liquid})$ ; this supposition does not yet ensure that a judgement of (4) will

satisfy MT(water is a liquid). To ensure this we need to add a thesis about the structure of (4)—we need to claim that (4) is a compound of water is a liquid. Claiming this, though, is tricky to square with the claim that (4) predicates MT(water is a liquid). I'll use an example of an account of how MT(water is a liquid) might be predicated to illustrate why.

A judgement of any of (8), (9), and (10) count as instances of MT(water is a liquid):

- (8) water is a liquid and snow is white;
- (9) either water is a liquid or sand is dry;
- (10) necessarily water is a liquid.

They are all instances of MT(water is a liquid) because in each judgment, the conceptual complex water is a liquid is used (that is: the concepts water and is a liquid are used, combined in the right way). One way, then, that (4) could predicate MT(water is a liquid) is by (4)'s *saying that* one is thinking a content containing the conceptual complex water is a liquid (i.e., (4) is paraphrasable as saying "the conceptual complex water is a liquid is included among the concepts with which I am thinking"). If (4) is to say this, then it needs to contain a term (or terms) that *refers to* the conceptual complex water is a liquid.

One account of how we refer in thought to first-order concepts says that we possess a set of *second-order* concepts, each of which refers to a first-order concept. An obvious notation suggests itself, so we can say that there is a second-order concept water which refers to the first-order concept water; also London refers to London; gold refers to gold; and so on. On this view, the way to understand (4) would be:

- (4S) I am thinking that water is a liquid.<sup>6</sup>

Four concepts<sup>7</sup> are used in (4S), the first-order concepts I and am thinking that, and the second-order concepts water and is a liquid. (4S) is true iff one is thinking with (using) the first-order concepts water and is a liquid—i.e., it predicates MT(water is a liquid) of oneself. But, of course in judging (4S) one is not using these concepts at all (one is using their second-order ‘cousins’), so (4) doesn’t satisfy MT(water is a liquid) and so is not self-verifying. If (*per impossible*) (4S) were one’s *only* thought, then it would be false.

Of course, this second-order concepts view of how we refer to concepts is not the only one,<sup>8</sup> but it serves as an example of how an account of how (4) *predicates* the property MT(water is a liquid) might be in tension with the claim that (4) *instantiates* the property MT(water is a liquid). In the next section I outline an account that escapes this tension, before moving on to say why any account that involves denying that *cogito*-like judgements are governed by the Truth-Condition Principle is a poor account.

## 9 Conceptual Redeployment

Peacocke (1996), in his supportive reply to Burge’s (1996), offers an account of the content of propositional attitude ascriptions and *cogito*-like judgements. On his account, only first-order concepts are used in *cogito*-like judgements such as (4), but these first-order concepts exhibit a certain kind of context-sensitivity that allows them sometimes to refer to first-order conceptual complexes. Peacocke calls his theory the *Redeployment View*, because the central claim (the *Redeployment Claim*) is that the same concepts that one would use in a first-order

propositional attitude are redeployed in propositional attitude ascriptions (1996: 131).

On Peacocke's view, believing any of (8), (9), or (10) are cases of having a first-order propositional attitude using the concept water. On his view, believing the *cogito*-like content (4) is a case of having a second-order propositional attitude (a propositional attitude ascription) in which one is nevertheless still using the *same* first-order concept water. Whereas, when used in (8), (9) or (10), the concept water refers to the stuff water, when used in (4), the reference of the concept shifts; in this propositional attitude ascription context, the concept water refers to *itself*: water.

If one puts together Burge's view that in the *cogito*-like judgement, (4), one is ascribing only MT(water is a liquid)—one is judging only that one has some attitude towards some content containing the conceptual complex water is a liquid—with Peacocke's Redeployment View about how one refers to this conceptual complex, the result that (4) is self-verifying follows easily. (4) is true iff one is thinking a thought using the conceptual complex water is a liquid; but in judging (4) one *is* using this conceptual complex. One is using the concept water (to think about the concept water) and using the concept is a liquid (to think about the concept is a liquid). Hence the act of judging (4) makes (4) true—(4) is self-verifying.

Here, then, we have an account of the nature of the act of making a *cogito*-like judgement and of the content of *cogito*-like judgements—a view on which *cogito*-like judgements are self-verifying. Burge does not offer this account in all its details (we needed to add Peacocke's Redeployment View), but it is an account that fits with the things Burge does say in the passages quoted. In

particular this account fits with Burge's claim (MIN)—that in a *cogito*-like judgement one is only ascribing thought in the sense of minimal thinking; in the next section I will say why endorsing (MIN) is a serious defect of this or any account.

## 10 The importance of the Truth-Condition Principle in folk psychology

There is a large literature on everyday ('commonsense' or 'folk') psychology. It is a commonplace that we possess a sophisticated ability to predict and explain the behaviour of others, and that this ability involves the capacity to ascribe propositional attitudes (most notably beliefs and desires) to others, and to reason with these ascriptions. It is crucial to our ability to reason effectively about others' psychological processes that our belief and desire ascriptions satisfy the Truth-Condition Principle.

Consider the following short piece of psychological reasoning, in which I engage to predict the action of a person, Walter:

(11) Walter wants to fly to Hesperus,

(12) Walter believes that this spaceship flies to Hesperus,

so: (13) Walter will board this ship.<sup>9</sup>

Reasoning such as this is not a *perfect* way to predict Walter's behaviour; he might not board this spaceship despite the accuracy of the propositional attitude ascriptions I deploy as premises: (11) and (12). But such pieces of reasoning are often routes to correct predictions of behaviour, and a good account of how we reason about others' minds should explain how we are often successful. And an account of propositional attitude ascriptions should contribute to this

explanation of our success in understanding others and their actions—by showing how our propositional attitude ascriptions are often detailed and accurate.

If propositional attitude ascriptions (such as the belief ascription which forms premise (12) of this argument) violate the Truth-Condition Principle in the way that Burge's minimal thinking does, then there is *no prospect* of explaining my ability to predict Walter's behaviour by appeal to my performing an inference such as (11)-(13), above. If my belief ascription (12) fails to finely specify the content of Walter's belief in the way that the notion of minimal thinking fails, then my belief ascription (12) will *fail to discriminate* Walter's beliefs when he believes either of the following contents:

(14) This spaceship flies to Hesperus

(15) It isn't the case that this spaceship flies to Hesperus.

But the way that Walter will behave on the basis of believing (14) and the way will behave on the basis of believing (15) are very different (in one he will probably board the spaceship, in the other he probably won't), so if my ascription fails to discriminate Walter's believing (14) and (15), then I should not be able to predict Walter's behaviour very well at all. But I *can* predict Walter's behaviour quite well in such situations, so an account of propositional attitude ascriptions which can contribute to an account of my everyday psychological abilities must rule that my propositional attitude ascriptions meet the Truth-Condition Principle.

On Burge's account of *cogito*-like judgements, they violate the Truth-Condition Principle; the considerations of this section show that any good theory of propositional attitude ascriptions should imply that they generally comply

with Truth-Condition Principle. Perhaps Burge can be untroubled by this tension, saying that the way we think about the contents of *other's* thoughts and beliefs is different from the way we think about the contents of *our own* thoughts: whereas most propositional attitude ascriptions meet the Truth-Condition Principle, *cogito*-like judgements differ in that they all violate the Truth-Condition Principle. In the next section, though, I press further the considerations of this section against this line of defence.

### **11 The importance of the Truth-Condition Principle to critical reasoning**

A second purpose to which we put propositional attitude ascriptions, especially belief ascriptions, is in what Burge has called *critical reasoning* (1996, 98-9). Being a critical reasoner is having the capacity to make knowledgeable judgements about one's own beliefs and the logical and evidential relations between them, and to revise those beliefs and guide one's reasoning in the light of these knowledgeable self-ascriptions. Burge has argued that the role which self-ascriptions play in critical reasoning is a source of the epistemic warrant which belief self-ascriptions enjoy (a form of non-reasons-based warrant he calls *entitlement*), and he offers a transcendental argument from the premise that we are critical reasoners to the conclusion that widespread brute error in our judgements about our own thought contents is impossible (1996, 105-11). I will not evaluate this transcendental argument here; instead I want to point out that Burge's endorsing (MIN) is incompatible with the central role which he gives *cogito*-like judgements in critical reasoning.

Consider the following pair of self-ascriptive judgements, with contents (16) and (17):

(16) I am thinking that this spaceship flies to Hesperus

(17) I believe that this spaceship flies to Hesperus;

(16) is a *cogito*-like judgement; (17) is a belief self-ascription. It is Burge's view that (16) ascribes only minimal thinking, which truly applies to thoughts of any attitude-type and with any content containing the conceptual complex this spaceship flies to Hesperus as a propositional component. Then (16) is made true by my believing (14), and also (16) is made true by my believing (15):

(14) This spaceship flies to Hesperus

(15) It isn't the case that this spaceship flies to Hesperus;

hence (16) fails to discriminate my believing (14) and (15). Let's now suppose first that Burge's view is that *cogito*-like judgements *and other propositional attitude self-ascriptions* ascribe content in the same way (by using the same concepts to specify content *at the same grain*), so that (16) and (17) *both* violate the Truth-Condition Principle. If (17) violates the Truth-Condition Principle in the manner of (16), then it applies truly to thoughts only of the attitude-type *belief*, but still to beliefs with *any* content containing this spaceship flies to Hesperus as a propositional component. So then (17) also fails to discriminate my believing (14) and (15). If (17) fails to discriminate these beliefs, though, then it will be useless in guiding my critical reasoning, since the ways I ought to form and revise beliefs when I believe (14) and when I believe (15) are very different.

*Cogito*-like judgements are, on Burge's account, infallible because they say so little (ascribing only minimal thinking) that it is hard for them to be false; but if this is so, then they cannot guide reasoning the way being a critical reasoner

requires. If *belief* self-ascriptions specify content in the same way as *cogito*-like judgements (and so themselves say so little about the content of one's belief that they fail to discriminate a belief with one content and a belief in its negation), then they cannot guide critical reasoning. Successful critical reasoning requires our belief self-ascriptions to be *both* accurate and detailed; self-ascriptions (such as *cogito*-like judgements) which violate the Truth-Condition Principle achieve the former at the expense of the latter, and so cannot effectively guide critical reasoning. It would be a disaster for our critical reasoning if our belief self-ascriptions failed to meet the Truth-Condition Principle. If Burge is going to claim that some propositional-attitude ascriptions satisfy the Truth-Condition Principle while others (including *cogito*-like judgements) violate it, then he'd better classify belief self-ascriptions and all the judgements involved in critical reasoning as being unlike *cogito*-like judgements (i.e., as satisfying the Truth-Condition Principle).

It seems as if we had better interpret Burge as saying that *cogito*-like judgements are *unique* in violating the Truth-Condition Principle, and that belief self-ascriptions in contrast specify content to a fine grain. If this is Burge's view, though, then his giving us an account of *cogito*-like judgements contributes nothing to showing how we can be successful critical reasoners. In fact taking this line relegates *cogito*-like judgements to the status of mere curiosity. As well as being an odd position for Burge (who seems to regard the capacity to make self-verifying *cogito*-like judgements as central to being a critical reasoner), it would be a shame to rest with this view of *cogito*-like judgements, as it would mean the failure of an ambition we had for an account of *cogito*-like judgements. What we hoped for in an account of *cogito*-like judgements was an account both

that shows whether they are self-verifying (and if they are, why) and that connects the self-knowledge we have through making *cogito*-like judgements with the capacity we have to be accurate in our judgements about the contents of our own beliefs when we engage in critical reasoning. Taking the present line would buy the former at the expense of giving up on the latter. (This would be a sad end for Burge's project: he hopes for an account of our wider self-knowledge, with respect to which *cogito*-like judgements count as *basic self-knowledge* (1988, 66)).<sup>10</sup>

## 12 The Paratactic Account

At the end of the last section I expressed the hope for an account of self-knowledge that builds explanatory connections between the two strands of the knowledge we have of our own minds I mentioned at the start of this paper: our often knowing with ease what we are thinking and our often knowing with ease what it is we believe. The elaboration of Burge's account of *cogito*-like judgements we've explored seemed to end up severing the connections between these strands. I want to conclude by sketching a view of how content is ascribed in *cogito*-like judgements and other propositional attitude ascriptions—a view on which content is ascribed similarly in both kinds of judgement, and on which Burge's Thesis (or something very close to it) is true.

I call this view the *Paratactic Account*, because of its similarity to Davidson's paratactic theory of reported speech. On Davidson's theory, pieces of reported speech such as (18):

(18) "Galileo said that the Earth moves."

really consists of two parts, as shown in (18P):

(18P) “Galileo said that. The Earth moves.”

When one reports speech by uttering (18), one performs two speech acts. One asserts the first half of (18P) and merely mouths (utters without assertoric force) the second half. In mouthing “The Earth moves.”, one produces a token of that sentence in order to target a demonstrative onto it. One then uses that demonstrative to describe what Galileo said when one asserts “Galileo said that.”.

On my Paratactic Account of propositional attitude ascription, *cogito*-like judgements are likewise composite acts, which use a demonstrative concept to specify the content of one’s thought (specifying them to a *fine* grain—at least as fine as sameness of truth-conditions). According to the account, the structure of our familiar *cogito*-like judgement (4) is given by (4P):

(4P) I am thinking that. Water is a liquid.

There are two contents in (4P); they have different truth-conditions, and one takes different attitudes towards them when one makes the *cogito*-like judgement. The second content—Water is a liquid—is merely entertained; it has the truth-conditions of being true iff water is a liquid. The first content—I am thinking that—is judged; it has the truth-conditions of being true iff I am thinking a certain thought. This judgement uses the second-order concept that, which is a demonstrative that specifies the content of the ascribed thought by being aimed at the tokened thought Water is a liquid. This is not the place for me to spell out all the details of the Paratactic Account, and the exact nature of the second-order demonstrative that.<sup>11</sup> Suffice it to say that this demonstrative meets the Truth-Condition Principle—it specifies content finely, truly describing only

thoughts that share truth-conditions with the demonstrated token Water is a liquid.

The composite act of judging the first part of (4P) and entertaining the second part is self-verifying, even though the individual act of judging the first part I am thinking that is not itself alone self-verifying. That the act of judging the first part I am thinking that is not self-verifying is established by the argument from truth-conditions. The truth-conditions of the judgement of I am thinking that are that it is true iff I am thinking a thought with a certain content—where a necessary condition on a thought's having this content is its being true iff water is a liquid. But the judgement I am thinking that is not true iff water is a liquid, so by judging *this*, I am not thinking a thought with the ascribed content. So the argument from truth-conditions prevents this judging (alone) to be a self-verifying act.

But the argument from truth-conditions does not prevent the larger act of both judging the first part of (4P) *and* entertaining the second part from being self-verifying. On the Paratactic Account, the act of making a *cogito*-like judgment, such as that with the content (4P), is a composite act, with two parts: a judgement with content I am thinking that and an entertaining with content water is a liquid. In making the *cogito*-like self-ascription (4P), the second-order concept that is formed demonstratively, by tokening and demonstrating the first-order thought water is a liquid. Hence tokening this first-order thought is a *necessary condition* on using this second-order concept (and hence on making the *cogito*-like judgement). But tokening the thought (in any mode—entertaining, judging, believing,...) is *sufficient* for the truth of the judged component of

(4P)—for the truth of I am thinking that. Hence a necessary condition on the act of judging I am thinking that is a sufficient condition on its truth.

The Paratactic Account can serve as an account of the concepts used to specify content in propositional attitude ascriptions generally. I can make a judgement about Jack's beliefs such as

(7P) Jack believes that. Water is a liquid.

by tokening and demonstrating the thought

(5) water is a liquid.

I can self-ascribe this belief by judging

(19P) I believe that. Water is a liquid.

Notice that the Paratactic Account does not have the (unwelcome) consequence of making (19P) self-verifying; although *thinking* that water is a liquid is necessary for judging (19P), *believing* that water is a liquid is not necessary.

This sketch of the Paratactic Account suffices to illustrate how content is thought about in propositional attitude ascriptions; as I've said, a full elaboration and defence of the Paratactic Account must wait for another occasion. In this paper I have shown how Burge's Thesis ought *not* to be defended (by violating the Truth-Condition Principle) and how it might be well defended (using the Paratactic Account).

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<sup>1</sup> This name is due to Sarah Sawyer (2002).

<sup>2</sup> I will use the convention of underlining to denote contents and their parts—concepts.

<sup>3</sup> It might be that the ordinary way of construing thinking is not as being *the most general* determinable attitude-type (that hence satisfies all instances of (1)), but merely as being a *quite general* determinable (that at least satisfies all instances of (2) and (3)). Nothing that I say hinges on choosing between these options.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, the debate centres not around this question about propositional attitude *ascriptions* (*judgements* about propositional attitudes), but around the corresponding question concerning propositional attitude *reports* (*sentences* about propositional attitudes).

<sup>5</sup> One way to resist the argument from truth-conditions would be to claim that the *cogito*-like judgement (4) has more than one set of truth-conditions. Heal

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(2002) seems to have a view along these lines about belief self-reports (sentences in which one self-ascribes a belief); she compares such reports to performative speech-acts such as acts of promising, stressing the fact that promises have both a truth-condition and a satisfaction-condition (the promise “I promise that I will go to Carlisle” is true iff I promise to go to Carlisle; it is satisfied iff I go to Carlisle).

<sup>6</sup> The ‘S’ in ‘(4S)’ stands for *second-order*. Perhaps a more perspicuous way of putting things would be to say I am thinking with water is a liquid.

<sup>7</sup> It might be that there are more than four concepts used; exactly how one counts concepts does not matter to the point at hand.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Boghossian (1997).

<sup>9</sup> I am representing the piece of reasoning here by listing the sequence of *contents* of the judgments made in the process of reasoning. This example is due to Segal.

<sup>10</sup> One conclusion of Sawyer’s paper is that Burge’s Thesis falls short of being a full account of self-knowledge (and that Burge is aware of this fact). The considerations of this section give us grounds to push Sawyer’s caution even further.

<sup>11</sup> See my ‘The Paratactic Account of Propositional Attitude Ascription’ for an elaboration and defence of the view.