



**HF945-A – SEMINÁRIO DE ORIENTAÇÃO EM HISTÓRIA
DA FILOSOFIA CONTEMPORÂNEA I**

SCEPTICISM AND THE FIRST PERSON

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DESCRIPTION:

Consider the possibility that I am a brain-in-a-vat stimulated by a supercomputer so that the world appears to me as it does, whilst in fact the world contains only my brain in its vat and the supercomputer that stimulates it, all drifting in space. This scenario may seem ridiculous, but, on reflection, it is not obvious that I can have any justification for my belief that it does not obtain. However, once it is admitted that I cannot have justification for this belief the justification of many if not all of my beliefs about the external world seems to be threatened. How, for example, can I have a justified belief that I have hands, that it is currently raining in the UK, or that $E=MC^2$ if I cannot have any justification for thinking that I am not a brain-in-a-vat drifting along in space? The position that I cannot have any justification for many or all of my beliefs about the external world is a form of external world scepticism.

First person thought is typically expressed in English by sentences that have the word “I” in subject position. Beyond this, it is very difficult to say anything clear and uncontroversial about what first person thought is. Nevertheless, there seems to be some relationship between first person thought and scepticism. Several historical responses to scepticism – in particular, those given by Descartes, Putnam, and Davidson – only work when thought through in the first person. Moreover, one might think that it is no accident that the sceptical problem is often put in the first person. Nonetheless, there is very little philosophical writing that explicitly deals with the relationship between scepticism and first person thought.

In this course we will consider the relationship between scepticism and first person thought. By doing so, it is hoped that we can arrive at a better understanding of both.