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Topic number: 3

1. Introduction

Georg Christoph Lichtenberg argued “There is a great deal of difference between *still* believing something and *again* believing something.” This remark sounds quite strange to us; we usually think that there is no difference between these two kinds of belief. For example, you will never distinguish the man who *still* believing Christianity and the man who *again* believing it. Then, what does Lichtenberg mean in his remark? What is the difference between them? This theme stimulates our intellectual curiosity. In this essay, I will investigate the difference between these two kinds of belief, and hopefully, give you a new perspective on the problem of belief.

2. Definition of the two kinds of belief.

To begin with, I will define the meaning of these two kinds of belief for the smooth argument in the following sections. Let’s set the scene. Imagine you are a curious boy, and you are in school, taking a class of science. You are taught that the speed of the falling object doesn’t depend on the weight of the object. Every student (including you) in the classroom believe what the teacher said, but after several days, you suddenly call what the teacher said into question. Does every objects fall independently of its weight? Really? Then, you pick two stones on the street, whose weight is apparently different. And you open the hand and drop these stones, observing the result with curiosity. You will definitely find that the speed of these stones is the same. You will finally believe what the teacher said. After your experiment, you believe what the teacher said **again**, whereas the other students are **still** believing it.

You will get the clear picture of the process of believing again from this example. The content of these two beliefs are exactly the same, but their process is different. Let’s abstract this example, and we will get the definition of “still believing” and “again believing”.

The process of “still believing” is clear: the agent believe what others said literally. On the other hand, the process of “again believing” has several steps: first, the agent

believe what the other said, and second, he call it in question, and finally, he find the justification of the first belief. Therefore, it can be said that the chief difference between “still believing” and “again believing” is whether they have the process of justification.

Then, what is justification? Here we can refer to Plato’s remark “Knowledge is a true belief based on argument”. In this remark, Plato says that for knowledge to be true, it needs justification. You may get the clearer picture of justification imagining the process to get the true knowledge, than imagining the example of belief. For example, suppose you saw yeti in Tibet. You will tell others that you see it, but no one would believe it. Then, how can your belief be knowledge (namely, what kind of justification does it need)? One of the most reliable ways of justification is to take yeti to your country, and to take precise data. In this process of justification, what does the scientist check? It is, nothing but the correspondence to the reality. Thus, justification can be defined as “the process of checking the correspondence to reality”.

With these definitions in mind, let’s go to the next step of this essay.

3. Examination of the possibility of justification

In the previous section, I defined that the difference between “still believing” and “again believing” is whether they have the process of justification (correspondence to the reality). Though I said before that the theme sounds somewhat strange, we have got the clear picture of the difference. But I am a philosopher. It may easy to believe that these two kinds of belief have distinct difference in its own definition, but I call serious doubt upon it, for I doubt the possibility of justification. Does the justification of belief really possible?

To deal with this question in this section, I will classify belief in two parts: rational belief and empirical belief. Rational belief is made by the work of our mind, whereas empirical belief is made based on our experience. For example, when you measure the degree of each angle of triangle and believe that the sum of angle of triangle is 180° , this is an empirical belief. On the other hand, if you prove that the sum of angle of triangle is 180° , it is a rational belief.

Then, I will investigate the possibility of justification of empirical belief. Standing

on the perspective of skepticism, our experience is unreliable. Every experience is experienced by our sense, and both experience and our sense have limit in themselves. As for the example of triangle, it is impossible for us to check that literally in all triangles the belief is true. Moreover, we can't prove that what we see or experience is just an illusion or a dream. We may actually be just a brain, put in a vase and showed the vision with the electrical stimulation (to quote Putnam's "brain in a vat"). Thus, with the limit and unreliability of sense and experience, we can see the limit of justification of empirical belief.

Then, how about the rational belief? To say in advance, I think rational belief is just a reflection of the feature of human thought. Think of the most fundamental belief of rational belief, $1+1=2$. The great achievements of science and mathematics are based on this simple equation. But even this basic belief can be doubted. I have an interesting story of Edison. When he was in elementary school, he couldn't be convinced of this equation $1+1=2$. He finally showed the teacher two clods of clay, and put them together. He says "Here, $1+1=1$ ". And he was finally forced to leave the school. This story tells us the importance of getting out of the common-sense, but it also tells us the possibility of skepticism. Our rational belief is just a reflection of human thought, and that's why small boy could doubt it.

From these examinations of belief, we get a clear statement: it is impossible for us to justify our belief.

4. Re-definition of the difference between two kinds of belief.

In the last section, we get very strong and clear knowledge about the justification of our belief. What does it mean? Looking back the definition that I made in section 2, the impossibility of justification of our knowledge means that there is no difference between two kinds of knowledge which is proposed in the theme. Even after the justification (which we assumed to be the correspondence to the reality, but it is impossible) of belief, the belief is based on another belief of our sense or the validity of the work of our mind. It means we are *still* believing something else even in *again* belief. It seems that this fact means that the remark of Lichtenberg is wrong; there is no difference between *still* believing and *again* believing.

However, I still think that even given the impossibility of justification, there is still difference between them. And this difference will involve the re-definition of *still*

believing and *again* believing.

Look back the examination I did in section 3. We have seen that the justification of belief is dependent on the belief of one's sense and work of mind. Comparing this belief with the definition of *still* believing (refer to section 2), we can find the difference between them. In the *still* believing, we don't have a process to doubt or justify the belief, which is given by others. It is to believe in others. On the other hand, *again* belief involves the belief of oneself. Though these beliefs have in common the characteristics that the exact justification is impossible, there is still a difference of the object of the belief.

Our beliefs are strongly connected to ourselves. Different people may get the same information about the affair in the outer world, but they will hold different beliefs on these information. Thus, even though trying to justify the belief is impossible, we can get knowledge about ourselves through this process. Therefore, I will re-define the *still* belief and *again* belief; the former is the belief of someone else, whereas the latter is belief of oneself.

5. Conclusion

Even though it is impossible to justify the belief and to get the true knowledge is impossible, we still have a way. We can get closer to the truth. Even if the result of the trial is just a belief, it is clear that we can gain belief of ourselves. As Socrates wisely said, to "know yourself" is of great value. And I strongly believe that this is the possibility of humans and *again* believing.