



BRILL  
RODOPI

GRAZER PHILOSOPHISCHE STUDIEN 93 (2016) 243-258

Grazer  
Philosophische  
Studien  
brill.com/gps

## A Defense of Presentist Externalism

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### Abstract

This article presents a defense of “presentist externalism,” that is, the claim that memory contents are fixed by the environment and by the time at which a recollection takes place rather than by those at which the original mental state occurred. Its case is an instance of an argument to the best explanation. The author argues, firstly, that “presentist externalism” is the only version of content externalism that can stand up to both Boghossian’s memory and fallacy arguments. In slow switching cases, inferences containing memory thoughts as premises are unsound or unsafe, but valid. The author contends, secondly, that the externalist must recognize the existence of *wide mis-memories* besides wide forgetting and that only the presentist externalist can account for their existence. The author maintains, finally, that if the validity of an inference requires that all its premises and conclusion be evaluated in the same context, that in which the inference is made, then it is the present context that fixes the content and the concepts of memory rather than the past.

### Keywords

content externalism – externalism about memory – presentist externalism – pastist externalism – slow switching cases

### Introduction

The most serious problem with content externalism (roughly, the idea that contents and their respective mental states supervene on the physical environment in which a subject is embedded) is its compatibility with the commonsensical view that we have immediate access to our current mental states, namely, the view known as privileged self-knowledge. To circumvent this

serious problem, the content-externalists Burge (Burge 1988) and Heil (Heil 1988) present the so-called self-verificationist account of self-knowledge. According to the proposal, introspective cogito-like thoughts, that is, second-order judgments about one's own conscious and current mental states ("I am now thinking that I am writing") are self-verifying in the sense that their contents contain as constituents the very thoughts that they are about. The content of the first-order thought is embedded in the content of the second-order introspective thought, and that is why we have no need to investigate empirically what is going on in the environment to know what we are thinking.

Boghossian presents us with two quite interesting challenges to content externalism (Boghossian 1992, 2008). Based on Burge's idea of slow switching scenarios (Boghossian 1988), he first invites us to consider the traditional externalist account of the switch from Earth to Twin-Earth. At  $t_1$ , S lives on Earth and entertains *water* thoughts. Sometime after  $t_1$ , S is unwittingly switched from Earth to Twin-Earth. According to content externalism, S's word "water" eventually comes to express the Twin-Earthian concept *twater*, instead of the original concept *water*. Thus, if on Earth, S believed that *water* is wet, on Twin-Earth, she comes to believe that *twater* is wet. However, since S is unaware of the switch of environment, the consequent change in her conceptual repertoire goes unnoticed.

Now, under the assumption that S's old *water* concept is replaced by her new *twater* concept (conceptual replacement view), S now lacks the necessary concept to entertain second-order thoughts about her old Earthian *water* thoughts. Not only is she unable to reproduce her thoughts at  $t_1$ , but she also loses her privileged self-knowledge about the same, old Earthian *water* contents. The key point is the following: Since S forgot nothing, Boghossian concludes (Boghossian 2008, 158) that the only explanation for S not knowing that *water* is wet at  $t_2$  on Twin-Earth is that S never *knew* that *water* is wet on Earth in the first place. Boghossian sees his argument as the *reductio ad absurdum* of content externalism. Following Bernecker, let us call Boghossian's argument the *memory argument* (Bernecker 2009, 188).

The second argument tries to persuade us that, in Burge's slow switching scenarios, we lose our natural reasoning ability, because any inference from the past to the present is grappling with a *sui generis* fallacy of equivocation: Our earthly thoughts and memories of what happens on Earth refer to *water*, while our present thoughts refer to *twater*. According to Boghossian, the most insidious aspect of this conclusion is that the ambiguity is not neglected by the reasoner, and that the detection and correction of the irrationality, in point, is not, in principle, accessible *a priori* to him.

We find in the literature at least three different versions of how the content of memory is fixed and determined by S's relations to the environment (Bernecker 2009). According to one version, the content of memory state is fixed, finally, by the original environment in which the subject entertained his original thought. In this way, once the content is fixed and stored in memory, it becomes inert to all possible environmental switches. Following Bernecker, let us call this *pastist externalism* (2009, 168). In contrast, according to the *presentist* version, the content of a memory state is not fixed by the past environment; rather, it is sensible to switches of environment. Thus, the environment in which the subject is now embedded fixes the content of memory states. Finally, according to the *futurist* version, the content of memory supervenes on the past, present, and future environments. Defenders of pastist externalism include, among others, Brown (Brown 2000) and Burge (Burge 1998). In contrast, the exponents of the presentist externalism are Baillie (Baillie 1997, 327) and Tye (Tye 1998, 81). Futurist externalism is defended by Collins (Collins 2006), Jackman (Jackman 1999, 2004, 2005), and, with reservations, Stoneham (Stoneham 2003).

However, a closer look at the recent literature indicates that the defense of pastist externalism is rarely more than a simple assertion. Take, for example, Falvey, who writes, "I find this account implausible. It is hard to believe that the entire contribution made to her conceptual repertoire by all of her time on Earth is simply annulled by the switch" (Falvey 2003, 230). No argument is provided in support of this assertion. Another example is Bernecker, who, having changed his position, argues today against his previous presentism: "This conclusion (presentism) strikes some as implausible, for the ability to remember is commonly taken to depend in the first instance on our mental condition—on factors inside the head—rather than on the physical and social environment we live in" (Bernecker 2009, 8).

To be sure, it is an Orwellian absurdity to assume that the truth-values of *past thoughts* depend on what happens in the present or in the future. Still, there is no absurdity in the presentist assumption that the truth-values of *memory* content of past thoughts depend on what happens in the present and in the future.

The presentist is in a better position. Tye (1998), for example, supports his presentist view by arguing that post-switch water utterances should be interpreted univocally because the concept of water is *deferential*. Tye's argument is based largely on the claim that if the subject, S, is asked after she is switched to clarify what she means by "water," she will point to samples of twater—there being no *water* around. However, for those who insists that "once some content is stored in memory it is not affected by any subsequent environmental changes" (Bernecker 2009, 8), Tye's argument is far from sufficient.

This article presents a defense of “presentist externalism,” that is, the claim that memory contents are fixed by the environment and by the time at which the recollection takes place rather than by those at which the original mental state occurred. My case is an instance of an argument to the best explanation. I maintain, firstly, that “presentist externalism” is the only version of content externalism that can stand up to both Boghossian’s memory and fallacy arguments. In slow switching cases, inferences containing memory thoughts as premises are unsound or unsafe, but valid. Secondly, I argue that the externalist must recognize the existence of *wide mismemories* besides wide forgetting and that only the presentist externalist can account for their existence. Finally, I argue, that if the validity of any inference requires that all its premises and conclusion be evaluated in the same context, that in which the inference is made, then it is the present context that fixes the content and the concepts of memory rather than the past.

### Slow Switching Cases

In approaching this issue, it is instructive to appeal to the so-called *slow switching scenarios* developed by Burge (Burge 1988). Suppose that S is unwittingly switched from Earth to Twin Earth, where she interacts over a considerable length of time with XYZ, calling it “water.” There is an agreement between externalists of all flavors that the switch of environment leads to a switch of thought contents: After S has resettled on Twin Earth for a good while, her word “water” comes to express the concept *twater*. Thus, if S on Earth thought the proposition “*water is wet*,” she now thinks the proposition “*twater is wet*.”

The question is how the slow switching affects S’s ability to recall representations from before the switch. To begin with, slow switching scenarios allow for two further readings. According to the *conceptual replacement view*, the slow switching of S causes her to adopt new concepts and to lose old ones eventually. This is the standard reading of slow switching scenarios. All presentists must embrace the conceptual replacement view for obvious reasons. Proponents of the replacement view are Ludlow (1999, 163–5), Lycan (1996, 129–30), and Tye (1998, 83–4). However, the reverse is not true: Bernecker (2009), even though embracing the conceptual replacement view, is a proponent of the *pastist perspective*. Nevertheless, another reading, the *conceptual addition view*, exists. Proponents of the additional view are Burge (1998, 359), Falvey (2003, 229), Gibbons (1996, 295), Heal (1998, 108), Kobes (1996, 89), and Kraay (2002, 305–7). According to this alternative, the slow switching of S from one environment to another causes her only to enlarge her conceptual repertoire, without

the loss of old concepts. In the literature, we find two versions of this view, what Bernecker calls the *ambiguity view* (water or twater), and the *amalgamation view* (water and twater) (Bernecker 2009, 189).

By far the most suggestive combination of the *conceptual addition view* with the pastist version of externalism is Burge's notion of *preservative memory*. In response to Boghossian, Burge (1998) proposes a new account of memory that is an extension to memory of his inclusive account of self-knowledge in terms of cogito-like thoughts (Burge 1998, 187). As we have seen, the self-verifying model tries to reconcile content externalism with privileged authoritative self-knowledge by arguing that the content of a first-order thought is embedded in the content of entertained second-order cogito-like thoughts. Likewise, Burge now claims that what he calls *preservative memory* also rests on a similar process of inclusion. When the subject undergoing a slow switching scenario has the second-order thought that *water* is wet, the embedded content (that *water is wet*) is identical with the content of the past first-order memory that *water* is wet. We have the same idea because the content of preservative memory is fixed by the embedded content of past thoughts. The preservative memory retrieves the content of past thoughts and experiences automatically, that is, by causal-memory chains to present ones.

However, like Tye (1998), I think that Burge's concept of preservative memory of water thoughts on Earth through causal-memory chains is not compatible with his conception of "water" as a *deferential* concept. First, if you ask Twin-Earth experts to what "water" refers, they will unanimously answer "*twater*" rather than "*water or twater*" (*ambiguity view*) or "*water and twater*" (*amalgamation view*). Moreover, if you ask the Twin-earth community what "water" means, they will provide you with only samples of twater (Tye 1998). Thus, it is suspicious that by deferring to the experts of her own new community, the subject, embedded in her new environment, can preserve any causal-memory chains that link her actual memory to what she thought on Earth. The causal chains connect the content of memories anaphorically to what people in her new environment refer to when they think of the word "water."

### Boghossian's Memory Argument

Now, given the conceptual replacement view, content externalism faces the following problem: Under the assumption that S's old *water* concept is replaced by her new *twater* concept, S now lacks the necessary concept to entertain second-order thoughts about her old Earthian *water* thoughts. She not only is unable to reproduce her thought at  $t_1$ , but she also loses her privileged

*a priori* self-knowledge about the same old Earthian *water* contents. Boghossian's memory argument is the best illustration of the problem.

Following Ludlow (1995, 157), we can reconstruct Boghossian's memory argument in terms of the following premises and conclusion:

- (1) If S forgets nothing, then what S knew at  $t_1$  (for example, that *water* is wet), S still knows at  $T_2$  (that *water* is wet).
- (2) S forgets nothing.
- (3) However, according to content externalism, S cannot know at  $t_2$  that *water* is wet, since she has lost her old concept of *water*.
- (4) Therefore, S never knew at  $t_1$  that *water* is wet.

Boghossian's memory argument, (1) through (4), is meant as a *reductio ad absurdum* of content externalism as a general doctrine. The memory argument purports to show that externalism about memory yields the absurd consequence that a subject can only know the contents of his current thoughts, if environmental conditions do not change in the future. The absurd conclusion is that future events determine whether you can know now. This is in fact an Orwellian view: Wilson never *knew* Oceania was at war against Eastasia because *now* the party claims that Oceania has always been allied with Eastasia.

The memory argument hinges on four key assumptions. The first premise of the argument entails an epistemic theory of memory: Remembering is a kind of knowing. Four requirements are associated with this assumption. The first is what Bernecker calls the *present knowledge condition*: To remember something is to occupy a state of knowing. The second is what he calls the *past knowledge condition*: One can only remember what one previously knew. Together, both requirements ensure that one can only remember what the case was in the past. The third is the *content condition*, which ensures that the content of memory is the same or at least very similar to the content of the original thought. The fourth is the *connection condition*, which excludes relearning from genuine remembering and guarantees that knowledge in remembering is retained knowledge.

Both the antecedent of the conditional (1') as the second premise entails the controversial claim, from the externalist standpoint, that memory failure (forgetting) is nothing more than a loss of information because of some malfunctioning of the brain. However, as Tye remarks, "failure" is an ambiguous term here (Tye 1998). Following Bernecker, let us call this *narrow* forgetting (Bernecker 2009, 198). To be sure, we must assume that in slow switching scenarios there is no loss of information. Nevertheless, under the conceptual

replacement view, slow switching scenarios also cause the forgetting of what was thought in the past; it is also responsible for memory failure. This is what Bernecker calls *wide forgetting*.

The third premise of the argument entails the assumption of the *conceptual replacement view*: The slow switching of S causes her to adopt new concepts and to lose eventually the old ones. In other words, the third premise rules out the *conceptual addition view*, that is, the assumption that S's slow switching causes her only to enlarge her conceptual repertoire by adding new concepts to old ones, rather than replacing the old with new ones.

Finally, the conclusion relies on the key pastist externalist assumption that memory contents are fixed by past rather than present environments. For one thing, if the content of memory is fixed by the present environment, where and when the recollection takes place, rather than by the past environment, where and when the original thought took place, it does not follow from this fact that S now has false post-switch *twater* memories of her after-switch *water* thoughts and that she never *knew* anything about *water*.

Bernecker defends pastist externalism against Boghossian's *reductio* by questioning the epistemic theory of memory and appealing to Tye's wide conception of forgetting. To be sure, I have to agree with Bernecker that remembering is not a form of knowing, if we take into account the fact that knowledge entails justification. Against the *past knowledge condition*, I can remember true propositions which I had absolutely no reason to believe in the past. Likewise, against *present knowledge condition*, I may remember several true propositions which I have absolutely no reasons to believe in the present. Given his rejection of the epistemic theory of memory, Bernecker invites us to rephrase three of the four premises of Boghossian's memory argument, replacing the verb "to know" with the verb "to represent." Nevertheless, to avoid any further misunderstanding, I add to the latter verb the adverb "truly," since memory entails true belief. Thus, the first premise now says:

- (1') If S forgets nothing, then what S truly represented at  $t_1$  S can truly represent at  $t_2$ .

Premise (3) is rephrased in the following terms:

- (3') At  $t_2$ , S cannot truly represent that *water* is wet.

The conclusion (4) should read instead:

- (4') Therefore, at  $t_1$ , S never truly represented that water is wet.

Thus, with these reformulations the memory argument takes the following form:

- (1') If S forgets nothing, then what S truly represented at  $t_1$ , S can truly represent at  $t_2$ .
- (2) S forgets nothing.
- (3') Even though, at  $t_2$ , S cannot truly represent that *water* is wet.
- (4') Therefore, at  $t_1$ , S never truly represented that *water* is wet.

However, with the suggested reformulation, the consequence for the memory argument could not be more devastating. In the words of Bernecker (2009, 197):

Thus the moral of the refined memory argument is that, to have a thought right now, I need to be able to remember it later on. What one is currently thinking is determined by what one will be able to remember about one's present thoughts. What cannot be remembered wasn't thought. Future forgetting undoes the existence of past thoughts.

Since Bernecker rejects the *conceptual addition view*, his only way to avoid Boghossian's conclusion is to appeal to Tye's claim that memory failure is ambiguous (Tye 1998). In Bernecker's language, there are, as we have seen, two kinds of forgetting: what he calls a *narrow* and a *wide* forgetting. Recall, narrow forgetting is a memory failure that locally supervenes on brain conditions, resulting in a loss of information about the past. In contrast, wide forgetting is a memory failure that supervenes on environmental conditions, caused by the unconscious replacement of concepts with new ones. According to Bernecker (2009, 199):

The refined memory argument is incoherent because it rests on a confusion of the two notions of forgetting. Premise (1') presupposes the wide notion of forgetting, whereas premise (2) assumes the narrow notion. There is no single notion of forgetting that renders both premises of the memory argument true. And since the notion of forgetting is the same in premise (1') as in premise (1), this critique applies to the original memory argument.

Ironically, Bernecker accuses Boghossian of the same fallacy of equivocation that is at the core of the latter's second argument. However, before the fallacy of equivocation, Boghossian's memory argument falls into the fallacy of *petitio principii*. In his original argument, Boghossian wants to exclude memory failure, as he says, "by stipulation" (Boghossian 2008, 158). However, the only



case of memory failure he has in mind in *narrow forgetting*. Nonetheless, that is exactly what is in question for content externalists! Thus, premise (1') is true only on the condition that we restrict memory failures to cases of narrow forgetting: if no piece of information is lost, then what S truly represented at  $t_1$ , S can truly represent at  $t_2$ . Thus, if S truly believes that *water* is wet at  $t_1$ , then S can truly continue to believe that *water* is wet at  $t_2$ . In contrast, if we interpret the antecedent of the conditional (1') as a case of wide forgetting, caused by the replacement of old with new concepts in slow switching scenarios, then the consequent of the conditional cannot be true in the light of content externalism. Thus, S believes that *water* is wet at  $t_1$ , but because of wide forgetting, he does not believe the same at  $t_2$  anymore.

Nevertheless, the easiest way of avoiding Boghossian's *reductio* (an instance of an argument to the best explanation) is to assume the presentist externalist view. For one thing, if the contents of memory is fixed by the present environment, where and when the recollection takes place, rather than the past environment, where and when the original thought took place, the fact that S now has false post-switch *twater* memories of her after-switch *water* thoughts does not mean that she never truly thought anything about *water*.

### Boghossian's Fallacy Argument

However, along with his memory argument, Boghossian formulates a second argument against content externalism. This time his idea is not that of a *reductio* of externalism. Now he intends to show that under the assumption of externalism, we are grappling with a fallacy of equivocation *sui generis*: "True premises conspire, through a fallacy of equivocation that [the reasoner] is in principle not in a position to notice, to produce a false conclusion" (Boghossian 1992, 23). Boghossian's argument can be couched as follows:

(1) I want to embrace Pavarotti.

Under the assumption that I am now on Twin-Earth, the utterance of this sentence expresses the proposition:

(P1) (That) I want to embrace Twin-Pavarotti.

However, Boghossian adds, there is no internal indication to the reasoner that she is now thinking about Twin-Pavarotti rather than Pavarotti. Let us suppose now that the reasoner remembers that:

- (2) Pavarotti once swam in Lake Taupo.

Now, under the pastist externalist assumption that memory contents are fixed by the past environment, rather than by present or future environments, the reasoner must be thinking about the earthling Pavarotti (rather than about twin-earthling Pavarotti) and about the earthling Lake Taupo. Now, she thinks the following thought:

- (3) The singer I heard yesterday was Pavarotti.

Given that this fact took place on Twin-Earth, (3) must be about Twin-Pavarotti. Now unaware of the slow switching from Earth to Twin-Earth, he could conclude:

- (4) Therefore, the singer that I heard yesterday once swam in Lake Taupo.

On Boghossian's reading, all the premises are true, even though the inference is clearly invalid, since it incurs a fallacy of equivocation. This fallacy of equivocation is *sui generis*, however, since no ambiguity would have been ignored and the detection and correction of irrationality would not be accessible in principle to the reasoner. Boghossian (1992, 22) then concludes:

In travelers like Peter both the relationship between derivability and validity and the transparency of thought content break down with the result that inferences that look to be “from the inside” valid aren't. And the thesis of the a priority logical abilities is shown thereby to be inconsistent with externalist assumptions.

Thus, if we embrace Bernecker's pastist form of externalism, we must assume that all premises are true, but conclude that the reasoning is invalid because it falls prey to a *sui generis* fallacy of equivocation. It is a direct *reductio* of content externalism, which certainly seriously compromises the doctrine by exposing its incompatibility with logic. The only way out for Bernecker is to give up the standard replacement view and to assume Burge's concept of preservative memory. However, as we have seen, the price to be paid is to abandon the very intuitive view that “water” is a deferential concept.

As I anticipate in the introduction, my case here is an instance of an argument to the best explanation. When we embrace the presentist externalist view rather than the pastist view, the result is quite different. As we have seen, according to presentist externalism, the content of memory is fixed by

the present environment, where and when the recollection takes place, rather than by the past environment, where and when the original thought took place. Thus, on presentist externalism, when the reasoner thinks (2), she refers to Twin-Pavarotti as she does in all other premises. Thus, there is no equivocation between Pavarotti and Twin-Pavarotti in the inference, as Boghossian claims in his criticism. What happens is that (2) turns out to be false: the person who once swam in Lake Taupo was Pavarotti rather than his twin. Thus, we arrive at a conclusion opposite to that of Boghossian: On presentist externalism, the inference is valid, and our logical abilities are not threatened by content externalism, even though the conclusion is obviously unsound. For one thing, premise (2) of the argument is simply false: the person who once swam in Lake Taupo was not Twin-Pavarotti, but rather Pavarotti himself.

Nevertheless, one must ask why (2) turns out to be false. The answer is provided by Bernecker's own insightful account of memory: The *connection condition* is violated. For S to remember at  $t_2$  that p, his representation at  $t_2$  that p must be suitable causally connected to his representation at  $t_1$  that  $p^*$  (Bernecker 2009, 6). In (2) a wide memory failure takes place, because in the slow switching scenario the original concept Pavarotti was replaced by the new concept of Twin-Pavarotti, and the meaning of the so-called intermediary "memory traces or engrams" have changed accordingly. The same unsound conclusion could be achieved, if the reasoner had a narrow memory failure about who swam once in lake Taupo: She was thinking about Pavarotti, when in fact another famous tenor, Plácido Domingo, once swam in Lake Taupo. In this case, the inference is still valid, even though the conclusion is unsound because (2) is false.

According to Bernecker, however, "Presentist and futurist externalism lead to an absurd conception of memory. In this conception, the truth-values of memories are dependent on states of affairs in the present and future rather than on states of affairs in the past" (Bernecker 2009, 172). To be sure, it is an Orwellian absurdity to assume that the truth-values of *past thoughts* depend on what happens in the present or in the future. Still, there is no absurdity in the presentist assumption that the truth-values of the content *memory* of past thoughts depend on what happens in the present and in the future. Even if we assume that the biological function of memory is to take us back to some event in the past, wide and narrow failure of memory happens. Finally, take a simple case of narrow memory failure. For one reason or other, I may forget that Plácido Domingo rather than Pavarotti swam in Lake Taupo. Now, given presentist externalism, the "memory" of a switched subject is unable to play the epistemic role it is supposed to play, namely, to be a reliable source of information about the past. However, this is no absurdity, if we take into account

that memory failure occurs not only because of the loss of information or of some malfunctioning of the brain (narrow forgetting).

### An Independent Argument in Favor of Presentist Externalism

In the literature of the nineties, both Bernecker (1998) and Ludlow (1998) offer the same evolutionary argument in favor of the presentist externalism. Both argue along the following lines. If content memory were fixed at the time of occurrence of the event remembered, and so unaltered, it would not have survival value. The adaptive function of memory is rather to retain and modify information in order to optimize the interaction of the organism with its surroundings. Still, this argument lacks cogency. One can also sustain the opposite, pastist view on the same evolutionary basis. One can claim that the survival of the species crucially depends on the fact that the content of memory is fixed at the time of occurrence of the event remembered. Think about the elephant matriarch remembering where to find H<sub>2</sub>O in the drought season. If, for any reason, the concept and the reference of “water” change in the present or in the future, the herd dies.

Let us assume, following common sense, that memories are mental states with a representational content. In Dretske’s teleosemantics (Dretske 1995), such mental states not only carry information about what has happened in the past; they also acquire the function of supplying such information because of natural selection. Thus, when this function is fulfilled, the content of memory is true; otherwise, it is false. We not only remember and forget things; we correctly remember and misremember events in the past. Thus, besides cases of wide and narrow *forgetting* (Bernecker 2009), we must also recognize here the existence of cases of narrow and wide *mismemories*. We have a case of narrow mismemory when our Pavarotti mistaken for Twin-Pavarotti locally supervenes on our brain conditions. In contrast, we have also cases of wide *mismemory* when our Pavarotti mistaken for Twin-Pavarotti supervenes on the environment rather than on our brain (as happens in the second premise of Boghossian’s fallacy argument).

Now my argument is as follows. We can only account for the possibility of wide mismemory under the assumption that we are misrepresenting Pavarotti by using the new concept of Twin-Pavarotti. However, this means that the content and concepts of our memory are fixed by the environment where the recollection takes place (presentist externalism) rather than by the environment when the original event occurs. As I have said in the introduction, my case is an instance of an argument to the best explanation. It is up to the pastist to deny the possibility of what I am calling wide mismemory here. Nevertheless,

if he admits the possibility of wide forgetting, could he reasonably deny the possibility of a wide mismemory?

Here is another defense of the presentist externalist, based on the widespread idea that the validity of inferences should be evaluated *in the context in which they are made*. According to Kaplan's logic of demonstratives, "to develop a logic of demonstratives, it seems most natural to be able to evaluate several premises and the conclusion all in the same context" (Kaplan 1989, 546).

Thus, let us suppose that I am reasoning at 2 p.m. as follows:

1. If it is raining now, I will remain at home.
2. It is a fact that is raining now.
3. Conclusion, I will remain at home.

Now suppose that at 6 p.m. I leave the house because it stopped raining. The fact that the rain stopped at 6 p.m. changes the semantic value of my utterance 2 from true to the false. However, obviously this does not invalidate my inference. For one thing, in the context in which the inference was made, at 2 p.m., that premise was a true sentence and the conclusion follows from both premises by *modus ponens*. This is why Kaplan makes the important distinction between an *utterance* and a *sentence in-a-context* (Kaplan 1989, 546). In other words, I cannot evaluate the argument in a context different from the original context in which it was made.

Now, let us go back to Boghossian's Pavarotti argument:

- (1) I want to embrace Pavarotti.
- (2) Pavarotti once swam in Lake Taupo.
- (3) The singer I heard yesterday was Pavarotti.
- (4) Therefore, the singer that I heard yesterday once swam in Lake Taupo.

Now, if "it seems most natural to be able to evaluate several premises and the conclusion all in the same context," (Kaplan 1989, 546) we face here two possibilities. The first is that the inference is made on Earth, in which the semantic value of "Pavarotti" is Pavarotti. In this case, there is no fallacy of equivocation, because in all the premises and in the conclusion "Pavarotti" has the same meaning: Pavarotti. The second possibility is that the inference takes place on Twin-Earth where the semantic value of "Pavarotti" is Twin-Pavarotti. Once more, there is no fallacy of equivocation, because in all the premises and in the conclusion "Pavarotti" has the same meaning: Twin-Pavarotti. This second scenario is certainly what Boghossian had in mind because he assumes, for the sake of argument, that in this slow switching case, the semantic value of

“Pavarotti” has changed from Pavarotti to Twin-Pavarotti. On Twin-Earth the inference is valid but unsound.

Nevertheless, beyond reinforcing my previous conclusion that Boghossian’s fallacy argument is unsound, the simple widespread idea that the premises and conclusion have all to be evaluated in the same context provides an independent argument in favor of presentist externalism. If we, as memory externalists, agree that the semantic value of “Pavarotti” changes in the slow switching case from Pavarotti to Twin-Pavarotti, and that the inference in this case is made in the present environment, it follows that it is the present environment, where the recollection takes place, that fixes the semantic value of “Pavarotti”, rather than the past environment. As I have stated in the introduction, my case is an instance of an argument to the best explanation. Thus, if inferences are meant to be evaluated in the context in which they are made, and further, if they contain memory statements as premises whose semantic value changes in slow-switching cases (all parts agree with that), then the best available explanation is that the present environment, where the inference is made, is the one that fixes the semantic value of the concepts.

### Consubstantiating Presentist Externalism by Means of a Homeland Illustration

In his last pastist challenge to presentism, Bernecker asserts: “Doubts concerning the externalist thesis that environmental changes can bring about memory failure don’t have to be taken seriously, because there are neither psychological nor philosophical arguments to substantiate them” (Bernecker 2009, 8). To be sure, there is no such a thing as a slow switching experiment in empirical psychology, where, unaware, the subject is switched from one environment to another. Even so, I want to consubstantiate the presentist externalism based on an empirical example.

For those who think that cases of wide mismemory depend on science fiction scenarios that have been corrupting the minds of those who care about the epistemology of memory, here is a home-switching case example of my own. Throughout my childhood, I sincerely believed, like most of the people of my homeland, that an *ounce* was a natural species of feline, a big yellow cat with black spots that inhabits all of South and Central America. Then one day a big cat appeared near my family country house. I did not see it, but I followed its footsteps into the forest with my dog. Later, I learned that those footsteps were those of a so-called “brown *ounce*” that was captured days later.

Decades later, I made what Boghossian calls “semantic travel” (Boghossian 2008). Nothing like going to bed at home and, while sound asleep, being stealthily taken overnight from Earth to Twin Earth without ever realizing it. I went to college where it is well established that there is no such thing as a natural species called an “ounce.” An *ounce* resembles a jaguar or a puma (cougars in the U.S.), even though these species differ more from each other than human beings from chimpanzees. One day I took my little boy to the local zoo. Pointing to a jaguar, I said, “I remember that at your age I have followed the footprints of that animal over there. The only difference was that it was entirely brown.”

Since I am now embedded in a scientific community that upholds a key distinction between jaguars and cougars, and since I was pointing to a jaguar, I just misrepresented (*misremembered* if you will) the footprints of a puma as the footprints of jaguar, even though I have forgotten nothing in the narrow and wide sense (no information in my brain was lost).

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