

BRYAN FRANCES

ON THE EXPLANATORY DEFICIENCIES
OF LINGUISTIC CONTENT

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In the last quarter century roughly half of the research in the philosophy of mind has been dominated by the thought experiments of Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam, and Tyler Burge. Their intuition pumps have forced a more probing investigation of the connection between ordinary psychological explanation and the nature and attribution of beliefs, desires, and other propositional attitudes. In particular, the thought experiments have generated the anti-individualistic thesis that psychological states such as beliefs and desires are not fixed by the internal constitution of the body: roughly put, a person could have distinct, non-indexical, non-singular, *de dicto* belief types and contents without the slightest relevant difference in her internal physical makeup.¹ However, many philosophers have thought that if this is true then there must be another notion of content, one more closely tied to the vicissitudes of psychological explanation. It is thought that even if some “linguistic” contents of our attitudes, that is, those given by ‘that’-clauses such as the one in ‘believes that aluminum is a light metal’, do not supervene on our physical makeups, nevertheless people who are physical duplicates inside the skin must be psychologically the same when it comes to evaluating their rationality and explaining their actions and attitudes. So if the only difference between me and some physical duplicate of me is that absolutely everything I believe about and desire of ironlight (some commercial material used in my pots and pans), he believes about and desires of twironlight (a distinct type of material used in his pots and pans), and neither of us could distinguish the materials even if our lives depended on it, then in some interesting and philosophically relevant sense our beliefs about our pots and pans pack the same explanatory “punch” despite being of distinct belief types.

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Even though I believe, while my duplicate does not, that the best pots and pans are made of ironlight – so we differ in linguistic belief type – this difference between us is somehow explanatorily irrelevant. After all, the line of reasoning continues, it's a datum that my duplicate and I *conceive* of our cookware in precisely the same way, and in ordinary psychological explanation we are interested in how people conceive of what's around them. Since our beliefs are equivalent for the purposes of ordinary psychological explanation, even if anti-individualists are correct in thinking that our *belief types* and linguistic *contents* are distinct, our beliefs must be of the same *explanatory type* – the property somehow appealed to in ordinary psychological explanation. It isn't enough, according to these theorists, to notice that there is some deep isomorphism between our thoughts; that's true enough, but it seems to leave out the crucial fact that our conceptions are literally the same despite involving distinct linguistic contents. Furthermore, I may erroneously conceive of ironlight as a naturally occurring and plentiful element from the periodic table; since a materials scientist would never have such a gross misconception, we conceive of ironlight quite differently – in spite of our common beliefs that ironlight is great for cookware, is lighter than cast iron, etc. So even though anti-individualists are correct in thinking that my and the material scientists' *belief types* and *contents* are the same, many theorists hold that our beliefs must be of different *explanatory types*, properties reflecting our differences in conceptions. The lesson from these two stories is supposed to be that explanatory types are neither belief types nor the linguistic contents given by 'that'-clauses.

The same result is suggested by a variant of Kripke's puzzle.² In this variation Pierre is a monolingual English speaker who learns of Geoffrey Hellman the philosopher of mathematics through various conversations and articles and comes to know that Hellman lives in Minnesota. Pierre also learns of a pianist named 'Hellman' who lives in Minnesota – but Pierre wrongly thinks that these are distinct Hellmans. Now it seems that the belief content Hellman-lives-in-Minnesota is true of Pierre twice over – once for his conception of Hellman as a philosopher and once for his conception of him as a pianist. After all, he formed a belief with that content twice, under perfectly normal circumstances each time. But it seems transparent

to many theorists that these two belief tokens differ in *some* kind of content-like property. When it comes to explaining his situation, it is thought, it is plain that we should treat him as if he had two beliefs with distinct contents: Pierre takes himself to have beliefs in two states of affairs, where the beliefs are quite different from one another, as though he believed that G. Hellman and H. Hellman live in Minnesota, where G.H. isn't H.H. And when explaining Pierre's actions resulting from one of his two conceptions of Hellman, it is thought that we will be interested in these different contents in order to differentiate the two tokens. So just as in the physical duplicate case it's concluded that the explanatory properties aren't 'that'-clause contents: the latter are *explanatorily deficient*.

This intuitive response to the Burge-Putnam-Kripke thought experiments is usually developed by first acknowledging the truth of anti-individualism, and so admitting that belief types, which are individuated by *linguistic* or 'that'-clause contents, often do not supervene on internal physical constitution. Such non-supervenient contents are sometimes called 'wide'. One then tries to accommodate the above intuitions by insisting that the psychological properties of propositional attitudes appealed to in the ordinary psychological explanation of action are supervenient and, thus, the same in people who are physical twins. Such properties are often called 'narrow contents', explanatory content-like properties of attitudes that supervene on the agent's internal physical makeup and are generally not identical to linguistic contents.³ Many theorists have been attracted to variants of this view. And despite the failure of arguments to either refute anti-individualism or establish narrow content theory, the intuitions that suggest the explanatory deficiencies of linguistic content persist unscathed. Even among anti-individualists there remains a *residual unease* that causes us to feel that we need more than linguistic content to account for ordinary psychological explanation. For example, Brian Loar and others have ably defended the *deficiency thesis* that in commonsense psychological explanation, in which we evaluate rationality and explain each other's actions and attitudes, we use 'that'-clauses to indicate properties of propositional attitudes that are reasonably thought to be narrow.⁴ They claim that for the purposes of such psychological explanations we use 'that'-clauses mainly to reveal narrow content-like properties.⁵ So our

appeal to linguistic contents in ordinary psychological explanation is only secondary, a mere means to reveal narrow properties.

Contrary to many theorists, I don't think that there are, from the standpoint of ordinary psychological explanation, any sound arguments for the explanatory deficiencies of linguistic content or for the existence of narrow content. In fact, I am going to press the radical line that non-supervenient 'that'-clause contents have no explanatory deficiencies whatsoever, the deficiency thesis is completely wrong, and reflections on individualistic-sounding folk psychological explanations (such as those offered above about physical duplicates and Pierre) offer no support for the common idea that there are explanatorily relevant content-like properties other than linguistic contents. So my target includes not just individualists but the majority who think anti-individualists have missed something important about psychological explanation. If my arguments are sound, then not even the Burge-Putnam thought experiments – *which generated the narrow content movement* – provide any rationale for any explanatory content-like property (narrow or not) other than our familiar linguistic one. Nevertheless, narrow content theorists are clearly on to something when they insist that physical duplicates are explanatorily equivalent, and part of my project here is to help vindicate this and related intuitions. Doing so is especially important in light of the influential Burge-Putnam thought experiments; I suspect that attempts to resurrect narrow content theory will continue to be made until it is shown how to satisfy the narrow content intuitions generated by these thought experiments without any appeal to such contents. I believe that one cannot just *rebut* narrow content arguments; one must *explain away* narrow content intuitions, especially those articulated by Loar. Otherwise the unease won't go away.

My arguments are not intended to show that theoretical psychologists must classify propositional attitudes and concepts just as they are sorted according to linguistic content. If sound, my arguments demonstrate the inadequacy of the evidence usually called upon to back up the thesis that in ordinary life we directly or indirectly appeal to content-like properties of attitudes (supervenient or not) other than the ones given by 'that'-clauses. If psychologists come up with narrow notions attached to theoretically fruitful uses of 'concept' and 'content', so be it. With regard to psychology my

comment is first, that these narrow notions would be purely theoretical since we just don't appeal, in any sense, to these notions in ordinary psychological explanation; and second, that evidence for such notions won't be gleaned from the many aspects of ordinary psychological explanation explored here.

I. ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM AND THE DEFICIENCY THESIS

Here I will make do with just one argument for anti-individualism, a modification of Burge's original argument.⁶ My purpose here is not to argue for this position but merely to set the stage for the arguments that follow.

Bert has a large number of common attitudes attributed with content clauses containing 'arthritis' in oblique occurrence. However, his conception of arthritis is not complete (in a sense) since he has no idea whether arthritis is a joint disease that must by definition be caused by calcium deposits. The answer is 'no', but Bert has a normal amount of ignorance about medical matters and so does not know what to think about arthritis and calcium deposits. Now imagine a counterfactual situation in which Bert has the same relevant physical constitution and lives through the very same sequence of internal physical states as he did in the actual history. However, in the counterfactual community 'arthritis' has been defined by the medical community to apply to a smaller class of rheumatoid ailments, including only those joint inflammations caused by calcium deposits. Call this smaller class *tharthritis*. Burge implies that in the actual situation despite his incomplete conception Bert has arthritis belief types. In the counterfactual history Bert doesn't believe that his father had arthritis – just as we, in the actual world, fail to have *de dicto* tharthritis beliefs. In the counterfactual world he has no idea whether tharthritis is a joint disease that must by definition be caused by calcium deposits. He is under no misconception in either world, but his conception (or conceptions) is incomplete. Thus, on Burge's anti-individualistic line someone could counterfactually have distinct *de dicto* propositional attitude types without any relevant internal physical distinction.

Loar agrees with this. Unlike some commentators, I take Loar to hold that the properties of attitudes primarily if indirectly appealed to

in ordinary explanation are narrow and content-like but are *not* belief contents – that is, they are not the properties that individuate belief types. In his 1988b article we learn that “psychological” content

is that content-like aspect of thoughts, of how thoughts conceive things, by reference to which we consider whether combinations of them are rational, whether they motivate a given belief or action, and so on. It is simply a fact that we appeal, however vaguely and incompletely, to certain patterns among the content-like properties of thoughts in explaining others’ thoughts and behavior. And those content-like properties are what we may, without first providing a philosophical theory of what they consist in, dub “psychological content” (127).

The preceding is a *definition* of ‘psychological content’; Loar’s *thesis* is that psychological contents – the patterns of which by definition we somehow appeal to in commonsense psychological explanation – are narrow, not the (sometimes wide) linguistic ones as Burge takes them to be. This is one of the theses I aim to show is wrong: I will argue that psychological contents are *virtually always* the linguistic ones. Several of Loar’s claims in his 1988a article entail Burge’s view that the individuating contents of ordinary belief types are their linguistic ones. For instance, Loar admits that the belief ascription ‘believes that he has arthritis in his thigh’ (used univocally) is true of Bert in the actual but not the counterfactual world; so in the actual world he has the belief that he has arthritis in his thigh but in the other world he does not. Surely this means he has distinct beliefs (types) in the two situations; if in one situation you believe that *P* and in another you don’t, then given that there are no troubling indexical elements involved how could you possibly have the same belief types – including the belief that *P* – in both situations? Also, with respect to the water/twater Twin-Earth case he claims that unlike us our physically identical Twin-Earthians fail to have *de dicto* thoughts (types) about water (1988a, 106). This is a case of a distinction in propositional attitude type in the absence of a relevant internal physical difference – Burge’s central point.⁷

It should be easy to see that the distinction in the linguistic contents of Bert’s arthritis and tharthritis beliefs does not rule out any of several senses in which Bert is psychologically the same across worlds. First, Loar notes that Bert’s *conception* of his ailment is the same across worlds. Or we can say that he is “operating with the same notion” in the two situations. Similarly, in the actual world Bert and his doctor (who of course understands that arthritis is a

disease that need not be caused by calcium deposits) are operating with distinct notions of arthritis. Second, we can also say that Bert's *ways of conceiving* arthritis and tharthritis are identical: despite the cross-world distinction in belief types his way of conceiving arthritis is precisely the same as the way he conceives tharthritis. (Of course this doesn't mean he has the same beliefs.) Since in the two worlds Bert has distinct propositional attitudes about his ailment while his ways of conceiving or conceptions of it are identical, ways of conceiving and conceptions have a life partially independent of attitude types: they can remain the same while attitudes differ.

Loar's central idea is that *when it comes to ordinary psychological explanation these narrow conceptions, ways of conceiving, notions, and concepts are our focus*. The critical element in his position is the deficiency thesis: in judging rationality and revealing motives and reasons for action (or in what I will call *ordinary explanation*), when we *seem* to be after linguistic contents we really are after narrow contents of attitudes.⁸ This has at times been confused with the outrageous claims that 'that'-clauses cannot play a role in explaining behavior and that such clauses are inappropriate vehicles for either describing what is in a person's mind or explaining behavior. Loar defends no such claims; on his view 'that'-clauses are entirely appropriate vehicles for explaining behavior. His claim is that differences in such clauses – hence differences in linguistic contents – do not go hand in hand with differences in the explanatory contents appealed to in ordinary explanation.

It should be observed that by themselves none of these comments on folk psychological usage, all of which motivate the narrow content theorist's position, *prove* anything. For starters, these facts about the sameness of Bert's 'arthritis' conceptions, or about the difference in Bert's actual conception and a doctor's fully accurate conception of arthritis do not – as Loar is well aware – show that in the actual world Bert fails to believe that arthritis is crippling. Neither does the fact that Bert's actual conception of arthritis is incomplete. In a perfectly ordinary sense his conception of arthritis has aspects not included in others' conceptions of arthritis. For example, we might say that both his actual and counterfactual conceptions associated with 'arthritis' involve the description 'might be caused by calcium deposits by definition'. A doctor's conception (in the actual world) would not

involve such a description. Nonetheless, it would be rash to think that such truths vitiate the anti-individualist's conclusions. These mundane truths about conceptions or ways of conceiving apply to most people in most circumstances; they tell against Burge's argument only if they tell against an enormous number of ordinary belief attributions. Furthermore, none of these narrow content intuitions rules out the possibility that Bert's arthritis and tharthritis concepts are distinct or the possibility of his sharing a concept of arthritis with his doctor in the actual world. Our use of 'concept' (or 'conception' or 'notion') is flexible enough that we can correctly say both that he has an 'arthritis' concept in common across worlds and concepts distinct across worlds. A similar point holds for our talk of meaning. So it simply isn't going to cause trouble for anti-individualism, as many philosophers such as Donald Davidson and David Lewis seem to have thought, to make such comments concerning Bert's meanings, concepts, or conceptions.⁹ In order to have grounds to deny the anti-individualist's conclusions one must do much more than make these observations.

More to the point, considered alone the observations don't offer any reason to believe in narrow content or the explanatory deficiencies of linguistic content; surely we must demand stronger arguments. A crucial issue here is whether or not the preceding individualistic-sounding comments on how we use 'way of thinking', 'conception', and 'concept' independently of linguistic contents indicate something *substantive*. This is a contentious *philosophical* thesis which postulates mental properties that play a significant role in cognition but aren't the usual linguistic concepts or contents. Loar and many others seem to think there is such an entailment, but this is a claim that requires argument. In order to vindicate Loar using these and other reflections on our individualistic-sounding use of folk psychological concepts, we would need to establish four subtheses.

- (i) Such manners of speaking indicate the existence of properties that play a significant role in our cognitive lives but aren't the familiar 'that'-clause properties,
- (ii) these mental properties are supervenient,
- (iii) these properties are content-like, and

- (iv) they are somehow appealed to in much ordinary psychological explanation (the deficiency thesis).

I will treat only (i) and (iv) in detail, arguing that they are false. However, (iii) should not be minimized. For example, one should avoid the view that to say that we appeal to the same conception of Bert's in each world *just is* to say that we appeal to the same content. It is true that 'content' is more or less a philosopher's term, not with an extensive and diverse ordinary use. But *contents* – narrow or not – must be properties that have something like logical properties (e.g., disjunctive, entailing such and such, etc.), have conceptual structure, and can be plausibly identified with something very similar to *what is said* on occasions of use – so they are available to be objects of something very similar to attitude modes such as believing, desiring, and doubting. (For example, in Kripke's puzzle we are often told that the explanatory properties of Pierre's London-is-pretty and London-isn't-pretty beliefs are logically consistent; this reflects the belief that the explanatory properties are content-like.) It is hardly clear that conceptions or ways of conceiving, even if narrow and the objects of psychological explanation, satisfy *any* of these requirements. One cannot just gloss talk of conceptions as talk of contents – narrow or otherwise. There may be a road from the former to the latter, but it is not so short.

II. THE DIFFICULTY OF SATISFYING THE DEFICIENCY THESIS

The status of the deficiency thesis is important since it seems to be a crucial premise for the narrow content theorist's concluding that there are narrow contents. Before examining arguments for this thesis I will present the bulk of my reasons for thinking that it is false. As far as I have determined it is never true that in ordinary explanation we appeal to content-like properties that aren't given by ordinary 'that'-clauses. Some relatively elementary considerations make it very doubtful that we either directly or indirectly appeal to narrow contents in ordinary explanation. So I will temporarily *grant*, for the sake of argument, points (i)–(iii) and argue against point (iv) that the narrow contents are somehow appealed to in ordinary psychological explanation.

Suppose that in world W_1 Alf has a perfectly good understanding of what arthritis is; he knows its dictionary definition. He and James are coworkers and James observes him wincing as he does something with his hands. James asks him what is the trouble and he responds by uttering ‘I think I’m developing arthritis in my left hand.’ Alf then calls his doctor and makes an appointment. Joan overhears some of this and later asks James what happened. James replies by uttering ‘He believes he’s developing arthritis in his left hand.’ In situation W_2 Alf thinks arthritis must, by definition, be caused by calcium deposits. But James does not know this and his conversations with Alf and Joan go exactly as before. In situation W_3 James gives the same explanation while ignorant of the fact that Alf thinks arthritis can occur outside the joints; once again the conversations go as before. In each of these three situations Alf is in a community in which ‘arthritis’ picks out arthritis by definition. According to Loar, Alf’s belief that he is developing arthritis in his left hand has three narrow contents in these three situations (1988a, 100).¹⁰ Yet it is clear that in each situation James offers to Joan the same information-content by using the same ‘that’-clause. I fail to see any good sense in which James is appealing to distinct narrow contents in the three situations – even if Alf’s attitudes have such contents. Instead, it is perfectly clear that James is doing the very same thing in each case; he is attributing the same specific belief type to Alf in each situation, nothing else. In fact, James may offer the same bit of information regarding many other people who tell him they think they are developing arthritis (waiving the differences in personal references); James doesn’t appeal to different narrow contents in some cases depending on the details of their conceptions of arthritis. Most often we aren’t privy to the idiosyncrasies of people’s conceptions; so even if their beliefs have distinct narrow contents we don’t appeal to those contents. Suppose Alf and Mary have distinct narrow contents associated with their beliefs regarding arthritis and on separate occasions I offer the same ‘that’-clause explanation of their behaviors. Since I have no idea of the idiosyncrasies of how they conceive of arthritis it is hard to see any sense in which I am appealing, implicitly or otherwise, to different contents in the two cases. I know what the linguistic contents are, and I make explicit appeal to them. But I haven’t the foggiest idea what the narrow

contents are; so any “appeal” to them is going to be so weak as to render the defensible version of the deficiency thesis uninteresting.

Further, not only do we have no idea what the narrow contents are, but in most cases we aren’t even *interested* in the details of people’s conceptions. Consider Alf’s realistic situation again: Joan asks James why Alf called his doctor; James tells her that Alf thinks he’s developing arthritis in his left hand. What would you predict: would Joan have any concern with Alf’s beliefs about the nature of arthritis? Of course not; and neither would James. But these are precisely the factors that are supposed to differentiate narrow contents, the things to which we supposedly appeal. Alf and Mary may *have* distinct narrow contents, but surely this doesn’t offer any reason to think there is any interesting appeal to them. *Perhaps* we could save Loar’s thesis from the first criticism, that we virtually never know people’s narrow contents, if it were true that we were nevertheless interested, in ordinary explanation, in people’s idiosyncratic conceptions (but even this would be too weak an argument). But even a cursory look at various representative explanations shows that we simply don’t have such concerns.

The counterexamples to the deficiency thesis are present even in those rare cases in which one is aware of the details of Alf’s conceptions. Suppose that in each of the situations W_1 , W_2 , and W_3 James is privy to the idiosyncrasies of Alf’s conception of arthritis. In the normal course of events James would utter the same words to Joan in each situation and not attempt to pass on these bits of extraneous information; and the information she would obtain would be the same in each world. In virtually all ordinary circumstances James would be uninterested in passing on such irrelevant details; and Joan would have no interest in hearing them. In some cases in worlds W_2 and W_3 James may, if so inclined, go on to mention to Joan that Alf has a wrongheaded view of what arthritis is. Is James passing on narrow content information here? I don’t think so. First, this is *additional* information conveyed by *‘that’-clause content*: e.g., Alf *thinks that* arthritis can occur outside of joints. Second, James’ initial statement ‘He believes he’s developing arthritis in his left hand’ conveys the same information as in the other situations; it does not *retroactively* take on an additional function of appealing to distinct narrow contents in W_2 and W_3 . Once again James’ initial

explanation ('He believes he's developing . . .') appeals to the same properties in each world even if his beliefs have distinct narrow contents.

These arguments show that in order to be plausible Loar's deficiency thesis cannot be given a strong reading. His claim must be that we *indirectly* appeal to narrow contents even though we *explicitly and directly* appeal to nothing but linguistic contents; after all, Loar admits that the narrow appeal may be "vague" and "incomplete".¹¹ I think this shows that Loar is saddled with a task that he cannot meet. Note first that we are owed – and have not received – an explanation of the nature of this "indirect" appeal; and without such an explanation the thesis has no bite. Consider an analogous case: one might say that in ordinary explanation we indirectly appeal to neurological properties. However, this sense of 'appeal' isn't strong enough to take seriously; it would take all the interest out of the deficiency thesis. I think that Loar intends to defend a substantive thesis, that in ordinary explanation we are really appealing to narrow content-like properties of attitudes even though the linguistic contents are often wide. If we appeal to narrow contents in anything like the purely "theoretical" sense in which we appeal to neurological properties, then the deficiency thesis is too weak for serious consideration. Moreover, since Loar gathers arguments from folk psychological usage, it's very doubtful that he wants to defend anything like this theoretical notion of 'appeal'. Finally, I doubt that anyone would reflectively say that we ever *appeal* – even indirectly – to neurological properties in everyday psychological explanation! So his task is to show that we indirectly appeal to narrow contents but neither in the sense (if there even is one) that we appeal to neurological properties nor in the manner that we appeal to linguistic contents.

III. FOLK PSYCHOLOGICAL USAGE AND THE DEFICIENCY THESIS

Consider the situation in which James' goal is to characterize Alf's and Mary's *conceptions* of arthritis, where they have different conceptions according to Loar. Surely, one might think, in this situation James will appeal to distinct content-like properties that aren't linguistic contents. After all, Alf's and Mary's conceptions differ even though they share many linguistic contents. Consider another

example. Suppose that Nixon never existed but someone who looked somewhat like him rose to the presidency and was forced out, just like in the actual world – call him Twixon. Bert actually believes of Nixon virtually everything he counterfactually believes of Twixon; he conceives of each in the same way. Now, the argument continues, when we are trying to characterize *only* Bert’s way of conceiving the object of his ‘Nixon’ beliefs, then since in some intuitive sense his conception is identical across worlds we must appeal to the same explanatory property in each world, viz. his way of conceiving. Therefore the focus in such psychological explanation is a property (a way of conceiving) that is common across worlds – so it isn’t either of his linguistic contents involving ‘Nixon’ and it might count as a narrow content-like property. In the actual world Ray is interested in knowing Bert’s view of the press’ reaction to Nixon’s death; in the counterfactual world Ray asks him about the press’ reaction to Twixon’s death. Ray is interested in, and Bert expresses, the same view in each world even though we might want to say that Bert’s view is “associated with” distinct beliefs and other attitudes in each world.

I will criticize this argument for the deficiency thesis on two levels: first, I will grant that we are to take this and other individualistic-sounding talk of conceptions and ways of conceiving in an ontologically and philosophically serious manner, thereby granting subthesis (i) from Section I: individualistic-sounding folk psychological usage indicates the existence of properties that play a significant role in our cognitive lives but aren’t the familiar wide ‘that’-clause contents. Second, in Section VI I will argue against this pivotal assumption.

At best the preceding argument about conceptions shows that we appeal to narrow contents when we are characterizing *just* “ways of conceiving” – understood in the sense in which they are identical across worlds in physical duplicates. When does this happen? The answer Loar needs, for his deficiency thesis, is that when revealing motives and reasons for action we are characterizing just ways of conceiving or conceptions or views. However, as was shown above, in most ordinary cases we are not inquiring into someone’s view of *X*. Instead we want to know why someone did what she did or whether someone thinks that *P*, *Q*, and/or *R*. Once again, we are

usually not *interested* in the details of someone's views of the nature of an object. So even if we could defend this watered-down version of the deficiency thesis – in judging one's views or conceptions, when we seem to appeal to linguistic contents we really are appealing to narrow content-like properties – its scope would be fairly small, making it philosophically uninteresting. Even in this scope, though, it seems quite weak. Though in characterizing Bert's view of Nixon/Twixon there may be a good sense in which we are “getting at” the same thing in each world – his presumably narrow (supervenient, non-linguistic content) view of Nixon/Twixon – surely this appeal is accomplished via the attribution of wide linguistic contents. On those occasions in which we are describing someone's view of *X*, we appeal to her belief and other linguistic contents in characterizing her view. We say that Bert *thinks that* the press has been duped by the Nixon revisionists or that he is *convinced that* those who use this occasion to criticize Nixon are out of bounds. Or suppose that someone asks James about Alf's and Mary's conceptions of arthritis. For the moment I will grant that despite their many samenesses in linguistic contents they have distinct conceptions of arthritis, just as Loar would say (although I will argue against this in section VI). But is Loar right in thinking that James appeals to some content-like properties – the differing conceptions, say – that aren't ‘that’-clause contents? Look at what we actually *do*: even in this type of situation *the appeal is to linguistic contents*, e.g., James says that whereas Alf *thinks that* arthritis must be caused by calcium deposits, Mary *knows that* it is defined as inflammation of the joints. So where is the appeal – direct or not – to narrow contents?

IV. LOAR'S DIARY THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Thus far, I have presented arguments for the explanatory sufficiency and power of the appeal to linguistic content; I have also criticized the deficiency thesis. Now I want to rebut Loar's two developed arguments for his view: the diary story and the variant of Kripke's puzzle. In this section I will consider a representative of the former argument.

Suppose that I do not know whether in Bert's linguistic community “arthritis” means arthritis or tharthritis, but that I know all the relevant individualist facts

about Bert. I read in his diary: “I fear I have arthritis, and so today I have made an appointment with a specialist.” It is difficult to accept that we do not fully understand the psychological explanation given here, despite our not being in a position to produce the correct that-clause (1988a, 107; cf. 1987b, 93–94).

Loar intends his example to show that Bert’s arthritis and tharthrititis attitudes have identical explanatory contents, the contents somehow indirectly appealed to in (or perhaps primarily relevant for) ordinary explanation (1988a, 106). I take it that when filled out the argument is the following. Suppose Sue and John read Bert’s diary entry. Sue knows that Bert is writing about arthritis, say. John knows that Bert is writing about either arthritis or tharthrititis, but he doesn’t know which.¹² Loar holds that John, like Sue, “fully understands” the explanation given by the diary entry even though he, unlike Sue, doesn’t know the linguistic content of Bert’s fear. Now it’s plain that although upon reading the diary entry John has an understanding of Bert’s action, he does not *fully* understand the explanation given by the diary entry: the entry ascribes a certain linguistic content to Bert’s fear, and John lacks that information. By implying that Sue and John both “fully understand” the explanation given by the diary Loar may mean that John understands Bert’s action *as well as* Sue does. (I doubt this since there are situations in which Sue’s greater understanding may be more helpful than John’s, but I’ll grant the point here.) In order to support the intended conclusion the subsequent inference needs to be that Sue’s and John’s understandings are sensitive to the *same explanatorily relevant content* supplied by the diary entry.¹³ Presumably, this inference is forced on us once we realize that in some sense their different pieces of understanding (only Sue knows the linguistic content) are explanatorily equivalent: since their understandings have this *equivalence*, Sue and John must have grasped (in some sense) the *same* explanatorily relevant information-content *C* from the diary. The linguistic content information Sue obtained that goes beyond *C* must be explanatorily dispensable (since she could have done without it as John did). And the fact that they grasp *C* would entail that Bert’s fear has *C*. Since John doesn’t know the linguistic content of Bert’s fear, *C* isn’t the arthritis fear’s linguistic content. A parallel argument would show that *C* isn’t the linguistic content of the tharthrititis fear and that both fears have *C*. The first conclusion is that even though Sue knows the linguistic content of Bert’s fear, her understanding is sensitive to some other content *C*,

one that just might be narrow. We then conclude that such properties have a life independent of linguistic content, are reasonably thought to be narrow since they are had by Bert in both histories, and are the relevant properties indirectly appealed to even when it appears we are appealing to linguistic content as the explanatorily relevant property.

I believe Loar is right in thinking that Sue and John have something psychological in common, but there's no reason here to posit narrow contents. What they have in common is that *their different pieces of knowledge or understanding gained via the diary (and their background knowledge) are both sufficient for knowing why Bert did what he did*. What they have in common is that they both obtained a sufficient explanation of Bert's action via the diary and their differing background knowledge. However, this does not mean that their different understandings have some core information-content in common; we have no reason to infer this. Of course, in asking for an explanation of an action we are trying to learn why someone did what she did, but as far as I can see this gives us no reason to think that if you and I both understand why someone did what she did we are sensitive to the same information-content. Take another case: suppose I am correctly told that Jones is pulling weeds because she loves to keep her garden in tiptop shape; you know that she is pulling weeds because she wants to avoid clutter. There is no reason to think we have grasped the same explanatory content here even though we both know perfectly well why she is doing what she is doing. Things do not change even if we are given the same explanation. Again, suppose we are told that Jones needs surgery because she has a patch of skin with disease X; you know what this disease is while I do not. Nevertheless, we both know why Jones is having surgery: you know she has X and I know she has some disease of the skin even though I don't know she has X because I couldn't even pronounce the disease's name right after hearing it. Both pieces of knowledge are sufficient for many purposes despite having distinct contents. In the diary case all we can conclude is that the combinations of the diary entry and either Sue's or John's differing background beliefs satisfy a typical set of explanatory concerns so that Sue and John both know why the action occurred. The moral is that the fact that

Sue and John both know why Bert did what he did gives us no reason to think Sue and John have grasped the same explanatory content.

Thus, I have offered what I take to be a plausible explanation without appeal to narrow content of the intuitions regarding the equivalence of Sue's and John's understanding and the explanatory equivalence of the arthritis and tharthritis explanations and beliefs. So the problem is not that the narrow content argument fails while the intuitions for narrow content theory remain in need of some explanation. On the contrary, there seems to be a reasonable, wholly linguistic content account of the intuitive sameness in the explanatory "punch" offered by the differing arthritis and tharthritis explanations, beliefs, and pieces of knowledge or understanding.

V. FOLK PSYCHOLOGICAL USAGE AND KRIPKE'S PUZZLE

Instead of defending a version of the deficiency thesis with an interesting range of application, we should drop it and investigate further what our individualistic-sounding folk psychological usage really amounts to. Variations of Kripke's puzzle provide good materials for the narrow content theorist here, whether we consider them as a defense of the deficiency thesis or something weaker. Recall the example I briefly mentioned in the introduction. Pierre is a monolingual English speaker who in 1993 learns of Hellman the philosopher of mathematics and comes to know that if Hellman lives in Minneapolis, then Minneapolis is home to a philosopher of mathematics (that is, he knows that if P then Q). Some time later in 1994 he hears about Hellman the pianist, comes to know that Hellman lives in Minneapolis (knows that P), but doesn't learn that the philosopher is the pianist: he thinks there are two Hellmans. Pierre thinks the philosopher lives in St. Paul, not Minneapolis, but he believes that Hellman lives in Minnesota twice over. So he isn't even in a position to rationally believe that Minneapolis is home to a philosopher of mathematics (that is, not in a position to rationally believe that Q) since he strongly believes that Minneapolis and St. Paul are distinct nonoverlapping cities and that there are no other philosophers of mathematics in the area.¹⁴

Some philosophers' evaluation of this thought experiment leads them to conclude that Pierre has two Hellman-lives-in-Minnesota

beliefs that have distinct narrow contents that reflect his two ways of conceiving Hellman. When explaining Pierre's behavior with the 'that'-clause 'that Hellman lives in Minnesota' we appeal to the appropriate narrow content in order to differentiate the two beliefs. But we cannot do this by appealing solely to their common linguistic content. And the reason that Pierre doesn't draw the obvious *modus ponens* inference from his beliefs is that their narrow contents simply don't have that logical relation.

First of all we must note that even if Pierre's belief tokens have narrow contents, it is very doubtful that we generally appeal to such contents when people have multiple conceptions of someone or something – and this robs these contents of their putative role in ordinary explanation. Obviously if I am unaware of Pierre's confusion – the normal case – I won't even be able to appeal to his distinctive narrow contents or conceptions. And even if I am cognizant of his confusion, in many cases I will not attempt to pass on the details of his odd situation since they are irrelevant. This is the same type of reasoning I presented regarding Alf's various conceptions of arthritis: even if there are narrow contents in most cases we will not appeal to them in ordinary explanation. Suppose we overhear a conversation in which Pierre utters 'Did Hellman perform at that party? Oh! I wish I had been there'. I am aware of Pierre's confusion while you are not. You know that earlier on Pierre had said he was glad he wasn't at last night's party for the University of Minnesota's philosophy department because philosophers are excruciatingly dull. Now you ask me what is going on with Pierre: how can he think philosophers are excruciatingly dull and still wish he had seen Hellman perform at the party? Clearly it won't do for me to say that Pierre believes that Hellman is and isn't a philosopher. However, it is hardly obvious that this fact supports the idea that linguistic contents are explanatorily deficient, or what is stronger, that there are narrow contents! My response will go something like this: "Pierre thinks Hellman the philosopher isn't Hellman the pianist! He's seen Hellman play and he's read one of his articles, but he hasn't made the connection." Here I have appealed to the linguistic contents of his beliefs and, perhaps, to the fact that he hasn't put together his two conceptions of Hellman. If you ask for more information, then I would either pass on some of the history of his situation or explain

that Pierre has two conceptions of Hellman. Finally, consider the situation I used to initially characterize Pierre. He knows that if P then Q (if Hellman lives in Minneapolis, then Minneapolis is home to a philosopher of mathematics); and he knows that P . How would we explain Pierre's failure to make the modus ponens inference? Same answer as before: I think we would appeal to his distinct conceptions and history *via his relevant linguistic contents*. Contrary to Loar, Biro, Bilgrami, Patterson, Pereboom, and others, linguistic contents are not only actually appealed to in cases like these, but along with other non-supervenient facts about history and belief acquisition they are perfectly adequate for the job. The conclusion these theorists have drawn from Pierre cases is exactly the *opposite* of what it should be. The Pierre case demonstrates the *strength* of linguistic content, not its commonly supposed weakness: even in these bizarre cases the appeal to linguistic contents and other non-supervenient facts about history and belief acquisition is perfectly sufficient to explain what's going on.

Nonetheless, one might think that all my talk of Pierre's separate conceptions of Hellman shows that there is some kind of content-like property (tied to this notion of conception) that is indirectly relevant to explanation but isn't a kind of linguistic content. I agree that in a perfectly ordinary sense Pierre has two conceptions of Hellman – a pianist one and a philosopher one – formed at different times. However I want to pursue the point that we can account for Pierre's situation sans narrow content. Pierre's two conceptions or views of Hellman are made up of his linguistic propositional attitudes toward Hellman, but not every attitude helps make up each conception. The reason Pierre doesn't put together his belief that if P then Q and his other belief that P to draw the modus ponens inference is that these two beliefs don't form a part of the same conception of Hellman. Pierre has two conceptions of Hellman and these beliefs fail to form a part of the same conception.¹⁵ In contrast, his Hellman-lives-in-Minnesota belief type forms a part of both conceptions; he "believes it twice over". Any Hellman propositional attitude of Pierre's may form a part of one or both of his pianist and philosopher conceptions. Obviously the attitude types he formed before he heard about Hellman as a pianist help constitute the philosopher conception. This will include his beliefs that Hellman is a philosopher and Hellman

lives in Minnesota. The Hellman attitudes he formed upon first hearing about Hellman as a pianist include the beliefs that Hellman is a pianist and Hellman lives in Minnesota. So the latter belief type helps make up both conceptions. What makes Pierre believe “twice over” that Hellman lives in Minnesota is that the belief type falls into two instead of just one of his conceptions.

I have serious doubts about the existence of attitude *tokens*, but if there are such things, then we can say that with regard to the Hellman-lives-in-Minnesota belief type, Pierre has two belief tokens of that type, a pianist token and a philosopher token which were formed at different times. And he has two conceptions of Hellman: his two Hellman-lives-in-Minnesota belief tokens are of identical belief types but form parts of distinct conceptions. The normal situation would be to have two belief tokens of non-identical belief types that form parts of distinct conceptions, such as a belief token about Wittgenstein and one about Russell.¹⁶

But none of this gives us any reason to think there is another kind of content here; the postulation of narrow contents is superfluous. It appears as though Loar thinks that the theorist who eschews narrow content must hold that Pierre has just one content-like property associated with his belief that Hellman lives in Minnesota when it’s obvious there are two – just as if Jasmine had two beliefs with distinct linguistic contents: the beliefs that G. Hellman lives in Minnesota and that H. Hellman lives in Minnesota, where G.H. and H.H. are distinct (1988a, 103). Some of Loar’s commentators have echoed this claim. But this is overstated; the lover of linguistic content can without appealing to narrow contents account for the similarity of Pierre’s situation with Jasmine’s. Jasmine has many beliefs about both Hellmans; what groups them into two conceptions is that Jasmine acts and would insist that they fall into two groups. The same holds for Pierre; that is why his situation is so similar to hers. If you like belief tokens, then we can add that Pierre has two belief tokens corresponding to the *single* content Hellman-lives-in-Minnesota – just as Jasmine has two tokens corresponding to the *two* contents G. Hellman-lives-in-Minnesota and H. Hellman-lives-in-Minnesota. Once again, there doesn’t seem to be any reason for narrow contents.¹⁷

VI. INDIVIDUALISTIC-SOUNDING FOLK PSYCHOLOGICAL USAGE
GOES NOWHERE

I know of no way to tease out a notion of narrow content from the above account of Pierre's situation. In fact, I'm inclined to think that the crucial subthesis (i) is false, i.e., these comments about conceptions do not establish that there are intentional properties that play a significant role in our cognitive lives but aren't the familiar 'that'-clause properties. Thus, even if one *grants* my point that there is no interesting sense in which we *appeal* to anything narrow and intentional, I think that one should also reject the more fundamental idea that there is reason – from ordinary explanation – to think there are explanatory content-like properties other than the linguistic ones. Subthesis (i) is insupportable because much of our talk of conceptions and the like is so diverse, coarse-grained (applying to many people regardless of their differing beliefs), and intimately related to our use of linguistic contents, that it is implausible to think of it as indicating some set of psychological properties (e.g., narrow Loarian ones), other than the familiar linguistic ones. In arguing for this I will simply set aside the notion of a conception developed above in my discussion of Kripke's puzzle.

Remember Alf's differing conceptions of arthritis: in world W_1 he has a conception including the proper definition of 'arthritis'; in W_2 Alf thinks arthritis must, by definition, be caused by calcium deposits; in W_3 he thinks arthritis can occur outside the joints. On Loar's view Alf has differing ways of conceiving arthritis in these three situations, and these ways of conceiving somehow constitute three narrow contents. However, Loar has counted two too many; so his argument never gets off the ground. If asked what he thought of arthritis, what his view or conception was, Alf would I think reply in the *same* way in each situation: he seems to have the same conception, with perhaps some minor and largely explanatorily irrelevant aspects that differ across worlds.

Arthritis is a terrible disease that usually shows up in elderly people's hands and knees. It's just crippling to have such a disease in your hands or knees or wherever. It prevents one from doing all sorts of activities that one usually takes for granted. It can be difficult to type, to write, to dress, to fish, and to climb stairs. I've heard it's worse in high humidity. If I remember right, in order to counteract it you have to. . . .

It is unlikely that Alf would give his definition of arthritis, assuming, what is unlikely, he can formulate one. What if, in worlds W_2 and W_3 in which he has incorrect definitions, we casually mentioned to him that doctors consider arthritis to be, by definition, inflammation of the joints? If he responded as we would think, e.g., “Oh really? How about that; I thought it had something to do with calcium deposits,” and was easily corrected, then I hardly think we would suppose that he had all along been operating with a conception distinct from ours! In each of the three situations Alf has the same conception of arthritis as just about any other person who has little concern or contact with arthritis; he was just mistaken about its technical definition. Alf’s opinion on the nature of arthritis is of no more concern to him than it is to most of us. This seems to show that in an ordinary sense Alf’s conception of arthritis is the same as others’ – independently of the details of his beliefs on its nature. Surely most of us agree with everything suggested in the indented passage above; so in a perfectly ordinary sense Alf shares with us the same conception of arthritis in each world even though in worlds W_2 and W_3 we may differ on its nature. This is meant to show that much of our talk of conceptions indicates that they aren’t individuated by our beliefs about the natures of the things those conceptions are about; it also indicates that they aren’t individuated by anything nearly as fine-grained as Loar’s narrow conceptual roles.

Of course, some psychological aspects of Alf’s view are different in each of the three worlds. However, these differing aspects are *linguistic contents*: e.g., his beliefs regarding arthritis, joints, and calcium deposits. Like the previous point, this helps demonstrate how talk of conceptions is intimately bound up with talk of linguistic contents.

Our intuition that a doctor’s conception of arthritis must be distinct from Bert’s actual conception of it as a disease that can occur outside joints shows only that medical definitions of diseases are important for *medical peoples’* conceptions of those diseases; this has no implications for our talk of most people’s conceptions – people for whom knowledge of such definitions is largely irrelevant. As shown previously, Bert and I have the same ordinary conception of arthritis A_{ord} , even though like the doctor I know the correct definition. Do I have the same conception of arthritis as my doctor, conception A_{doc} ? I’m

inclined to think that there is no fact of the matter here; depending on the context either answer is correct and there is no evidence for two senses of ‘conception’ here – even though we have no hesitation about what to say about their linguistic contents. Given that we don’t know what to say about conceptions in this perfectly ordinary situation, it seems unlikely that reflection on what we would say in such situations is going to give us any evidence for a second notion of content.

In order to show how unreliable our use of ‘conception’, ‘concept’, and the like is going to be for gathering evidence for a second kind of explanatory property, consider a final story. Suppose that in what I will for convenience call the actual world it is not uncommonly thought that bigfoot is a close evolutionary cousin of humans that lives in western Canada. There also is, in the actual world, a *footbig* myth about a creature, not uncommonly thought to live in eastern Canada, who is an evolutionary cousin of humans but different from and larger than bigfoot. In this world Alf has a friend who has read about the two nonexistent species and who has concluded that bigfoot is real but footbig is just a myth. This friend passes this opinion on to Alf, without providing his reasons. Therefore, in this world Alf comes to believe that bigfoot really exists and is a species that is a close evolutionary cousin of humans, and he expresses that belief with the sentence ‘Bigfoot really exists and is a species that is a close evolutionary cousin of humans’. He also comes to think, under the influence of his friend in the actual world, that footbig is really just a myth, and he expresses this belief with ‘Footbig is really just a myth’. Now consider a counterfactual situation that retains both bigfoot and footbig stories, down to the last detail. The only relevant linguistic difference between the two worlds is that in the counterfactual situation bigfoot is called ‘footbig’ and footbig is called ‘bigfoot’: the terms have switched significance. Thus, when someone, such as Alf, utters ‘Bigfoot is real but footbig is just a myth’ in the actual world he or she says that bigfoot is real but footbig is just a myth; but in the counterfactual history when someone utters that sentence he or she says that footbig is real but bigfoot is just a myth. In the counterfactual scenario Alf has a different friend who has come to the conclusion that footbig is real but bigfoot is just a myth – though of course she expresses that opinion with ‘Bigfoot is real but footbig

is just a myth'. In this counterfactual world Alf gets his opinion on the two species from this footbig believer. So in the counterfactual world Alf utters 'Bigfoot is real but footbig is just a myth' – *just as he did in the actual world*. Thus, he actually believes that bigfoot but not footbig is real whereas he counterfactually believes that footbig but not bigfoot is real. Obviously he has distinct belief types and contents across worlds. And there need not be an interesting internal physical difference in Alf across worlds.

What is new about this thought experiment is that the protagonist has beliefs about *both* kinds in each world. It can be argued that many of the criticisms of the traditional thought experiments do not apply to this one, thereby strengthening the anti-individualist's arguments, but that is not my purpose here. Instead I want to compare Alf's actual and counterfactual concepts of the two mythical species. In both situations Alf's community has two concepts: one for bigfoot, call it B_a ('B' for bigfoot, 'a' for the actual world), and one for footbig, F_a . B_a is the concept actually associated with 'bigfoot' and attributed to every individual who believes, e.g., that bigfoot is real. It is one of the *components*, it is often said, of the content of the belief that bigfoot is real – the only component that is in the previous content but not in the content of the belief that Zeus is real. None of this is meant to exclude other uses of 'concept'; it is just to note one very common, even predominant use. In the actual world Alf believes that bigfoot is real – so he employs the bigfoot concept B_a in that belief. In the counterfactual world he employs his community's bigfoot concept B_c in believing that bigfoot is a myth. Obviously the community's concept of bigfoot is unchanged across worlds; the difference in word form hardly changes the concept they have of the mythical species. So $B_a = B_c$; similarly, $F_a = F_c$. Since in coming to counterfactually believe that bigfoot is a myth Alf employs his community's bigfoot concept – which we decided was the same across worlds – his actual and counterfactual bigfoot beliefs employ the same concept B_a , i.e., B_c . According to Loar's view, Alf's actual and counterfactual concepts corresponding to the actual and counterfactual uses of 'bigfoot' are the same – just like how Bert's arthritis and tharthritis concepts are the same. Thus, on his view Alf's actual bigfoot concept B_a is identical to his counterfactual footbig concept F_c – the one employed in his counterfactual belief

that footbig is real. But we already concluded that $B_a = B_c$; thus, $F_c = B_c$, i.e., Alf's counterfactual concept of footbig is the same as his counterfactual concept of bigfoot. But this is ridiculous: if his counterfactual concept of bigfoot is the same as his counterfactual concept of footbig, then how is it that he counterfactually believes that bigfoot but not footbig is a myth? In fact, how could anyone in the counterfactual situation have different bigfoot and footbig beliefs? As before, the lesson from this argument isn't that all the intuitions regarding conceptions forwarded by the narrow content theorists are mistaken; rather, the point is that so much of our *ordinary* talk of concepts is so diverse, coarse-grained, and bound up with our talk of linguistic contents that we can't envisage sifting out a second notion of content, especially one as fine-grained as narrow contents are supposed to be.

VII. CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT

We have seen that there is no reason, at least from the standpoint of ordinary psychological explanation, to think that there is some other kind of thought content that is internal in the required sense.¹⁸ I don't think this result entirely does away with the idea that our bodies determine our mental lives: we still could, I think, defend a thesis to the effect that our bodies determine our mental lives *up to isomorphism*, where the latter notion would of course need quite a bit of spelling out. Intuitively, physical twins have the same *structure* to their thoughts: e.g., whereas Alf actually believes that his arthritis is caused by aluminum deposits injected by bigfoots into his knees while he is sleeping, in the counterfactual situation he believes that his tharthritis is caused by twalum deposits injected by footbigs into his knees while he is sleeping. These thoughts have the same logical form; they differ only in the concepts plugged into the form. Burge thinks that we can successfully run anti-individualistic thought experiments on just about any term, even logical connectives. If so, then it will be very difficult if not impossible to flesh out a notion of logical form common to the thoughts of twins. So the isomorphism route is not as simple as one might initially think. Neither, I think, is there anything interesting that hangs on this issue; so I will ignore it.

It is often difficult to compare the philosophical importance of various philosophical results. Nevertheless, I think the lack of a type of content-like property distinct from the linguistic one treated by the thought experiments is more important than anti-individualism. It is easy to accept but downplay the anti-individualist's arguments, concluding that they treat only a second-rate, superficial, linguistic notion of content that is a poor substitute for the real, inner, mental content that characterizes our mental lives. Whether or not narrow-content theorists have been clever enough to carve out this mental content is one thing; whether or not it exists is another. What I have attempted to show here is that the area one would think would provide the greatest amount of evidence for an alternative mental content – ordinary psychological explanation – just does not deliver the goods, contrary to our expectations. Like many others I was taken by Loar's impressive intuitive considerations in favor of a potentially narrow notion of something akin to linguistic content. But the truth appears to lie elsewhere: the "superficial", linguistic notion of content is *all we have*.¹⁹

NOTES

¹ Putnam 1975; Kripke 1980, 1988; and Burge 1979, 1982a, 1982b, 1986, 1988. Although Burge and Putnam have explicitly accepted this thesis, Kripke has not. By '*de dicto* attitude types' I mean the belief and other propositional attitude types attributed by the normal use of 'that'-clauses in which interchange of coextensive proper names and natural kind terms for instance does not appear to preserve the truth value of the sentences. None of my arguments or theses rests on any construal of these notions.

² Kripke 1988. This variant is inspired by one used in Loar's 1988a.

³ Therefore I will be referring to 'that'-clause content as *linguistic* content. As Loar and I are using the term, 'narrow' means generally distinct from linguistic content (i.e., when the latter is wide, which Loar thinks is generally the case) and strongly supervenient: there are no possible worlds W_1 and W_2 and persons P_1 in W_1 and P_2 in W_2 such that P_1 in W_1 but not P_2 in W_2 has some narrow content even though the bodies of P_1 in W_1 and P_2 in W_2 have all the same internal physical types (that are plausibly thought to be relevant to the determination of the mental by the physical) throughout their lives. "Wide" contents are those that fail to strongly (or weakly, for that matter) supervene. This isn't even close to equivalent to Putnam's original senses of 'narrow' and 'wide': an attitude type T is narrow iff the havings of T logically entail or presuppose the existence of (contingently existing) objects other than the subject who has the attitude (1975, 220). Supervenience is discussed in Jaegwon Kim (1984, 1987).

No one has shown, and I do not believe, that all ‘that’-clause contents are wide. (Loar leans toward this view.) There’s simply no way to begin to judge the extent of the failure of supervenience of ‘that’-clause content unless the modality of the supervenience claim in question is explained. See note 8 for why the scope of the failure of supervenience isn’t relevant for my purposes here.

⁴ Loar (1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b). Already there is an enormous literature on Loar’s arguments, thereby demonstrating their importance; for a sampling see Akeel Bilgrami (1988, 1992), John Biro (1992), Ned Block (1987), Frances Egan (1991), Reinaldo Elugardo (1993), Jerry Fodor (1987), Manuel Garcia-Carpintero (1994), Pierre Jacob (1990), Michael McKinsey (1993, 1994), Joseph Owens (1992), Sarah Patterson (1990), Derk Pereboom (1995), Lynn Rudder Baker (1987), Robert Stalnaker (1990), William Taschek (1995), and Kenneth Taylor (1995).

⁵ Loar isn’t fussy about whether such narrow properties should be counted as contents. He thinks they are content-like since, presumably, they are supposed to be had by propositional attitude tokens, be intimately tied to the obtaining of information about actions, have logical properties like consistency, and be available to be objects of something very similar to attitude modes such as believing, desiring, and doubting. In most of what follows I will avoid this vague issue of what a property must be to count as content-like.

⁶ Part of the modification is inspired by some comments in Donald Davidson’s 1987 paper.

⁷ If contrary to my arguments, Loar does hold that Bert has the same beliefs in the two situations (as several commentators seem to have urged), then as I have shown in the text some of his remarks are inconsistent. This might be no more than an inconsequential slip. However, if it isn’t then this would mean Loar’s view is that belief tokens have both narrow and linguistic contents; that the latter are (often) non-supervenient; that psychological (explanatory) contents are narrow; and that contrary to my interpretation of his position belief types are individuated by psychological – not linguistic – contents. My criticisms of Loar’s arguments apply to this view as well. This would be a much less interesting view since there are many thought experiments, taken from the Burge-Putnam template, that are superior to those offered in the literature and that can establish Burge’s conclusion.

⁸ Here we see why the scope of the anti-individualist’s thesis doesn’t matter: Loar claims that when in ordinary explanation we seem to be appealing to ‘that’-clause contents that are not supervenient (which Loar takes to be generally the case), we are really indirectly appealing to content-like properties that are supervenient and, thus, not given by the ‘that’-clause in question. In fact, Loar leans heavily toward the idea that such properties aren’t given by any ‘that’-clauses.

⁹ Many philosophers have tried, fruitlessly in my judgment, to criticize the thought experiments by these and closely related means, e.g., Donald Davidson (1987), David Lewis (1994), Pierre Jacob (1990), Kent Bach (1988), Michael McKinsey (1993), Reinaldo Elugardo (1993), Takashi Yagisawa (1989), Tim Crane (1991), and Hans-Johann Glock and John Preston (1996).

¹⁰ If they aren’t sufficiently different, the example can be changed appropriately. This qualification is meant to hold for my other examples as well.

¹¹ Thanks to Janet Levin for emphasizing this reading.

¹² Loar implies that John knows only all the relevant individualistic facts about Bert, not that he is talking about either arthritis or tharthritis. But if this is true,

then it's hard to see what John can know from the diary; John's situation is so incredible that it is difficult to draw any lessons from it. Furthermore, this situation would offer no support for the deficiency thesis: even if John could come to understand Bert's action merely by knowing individualistic facts about him, we have no reason to make any conclusions about what we actually appeal to in ordinary explanation. In another diary thought experiment Loar allows John to know "that the diary was written in one of a class of worlds that resemble Earth in the relevant respects" (1988a, 107). This is more to the point and so I adopt a reading of it here.

¹³ Loar's point is not simply that Sue's knowledge of the correct 'that'-clause is dispensable in understanding Bert's behavior – since she could have done without it like John did. In order to serve Loar's purpose in giving the thought experiment, Sue and John must grasp the same explanatorily relevant information-content. See the rest of the argument in the text above.

¹⁴ It is worth noticing that this case refutes the thesis that knowledge is closed under known entailment. Pierre knows that (a) Hellman [the pianist] lives in Minneapolis and if Hellman [the philosopher] lives in Minneapolis, then Minneapolis is home to a philosopher of mathematics (knows that R , and if R then Q), and he knows that (b) the combination of the putative facts that Hellman [the philosopher] lives in Minneapolis and if Hellman [the philosopher] lives in Minneapolis, then Minneapolis is home to a philosopher of mathematics, entails that Minneapolis is home to a philosopher of mathematics (knows that $(R, \text{and if } R \text{ then } Q) \text{ entails } Q$). But he doesn't know that Minneapolis is home to a philosopher of mathematics (fails to know that Q). I discuss this type of counterexample in another manuscript

¹⁵ Two points. First, this would not preclude our correctly saying that Pierre conceives of Hellman in the same way in the two conceptions, provided he believed of Hellman virtually the same things in each conception. (In my story this does not hold.) Second, although I write of belief types "belonging to" or "forming a part of" conceptions, the latter are not sets of attitude types. Unlike sets, a conception's identity does not turn on the identity of the things that belong to it.

¹⁶ This would entail that one can have two tokens at the same time with the same content. Of course they would differ in numerous properties (effects, strengths, times of formation, etc.). I know of no compelling reason to think this odd, provided there are attitude tokens. (Calling them 'tokens' doesn't mean they are individuated by any kind of content.) I have offered a treatment of this topic in another manuscript.

¹⁷ Loar states that Bert's arthritis and tharthritis beliefs have the same "potential for explanatory interaction with other beliefs" (1988a, 106). And he implies that Pierre's Hellman-lives-in-Minnesota belief tokens have distinct explanatory potentials despite their agreement in linguistic content. Sometimes Loar writes as if to suggest that these explanatory potentials are what we are after in ordinary explanation.

We should hold that despite their different ascriptions Bert's [actual] belief that he has arthritis in his ankles and his [counterfactual] belief that he has tharthritis in his ankles have the same [narrow] content, because they have the same potential for explanatory interaction with other beliefs . . . (1988a, 106).

I think it is clear that until we have a precise articulation of what this “potential” is, we have no reason to posit narrow contents; all we have is hand-waving. The same holds for talk of supervenient conceptual roles: Loar believes that narrow contents are, or are correlated with, such roles. I do not see how to construe roles as narrow *and* the focus – direct or not – of ordinary explanation. Further, if our “appeal” to conceptual roles is only as strong as our appeal to neurological properties, then the appeal is too weak to be of any interest. So I will not consider Loar’s remarks on explanatory potentials to constitute an argument for narrow content, even though they are suggestive of one.

¹⁸ There are other considerations that philosophers have used to argue for the existence of narrow content – primarily the causal principles concerning scientific kind individuation offered by Fodor. I have not addressed them because first, they did not strike me as compelling and second, even Fodor is now inclined to think they aren’t very good.

¹⁹ Thanks to Joseph Owens, Janet Levin, Michael Root, John Wallace, and Margaret Frances for their helpful comments.

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Department of Philosophy
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455
U.S.A.