

Pre-proof version. Please refer to:

Australasian Journal of Philosophy

Vol. 76:4 (1998) 523-33

Privileged Access to the World¹

Sarah Sawyer

I cannot resist a methodological reflection. It may happen that one is committed to delivering a paper and that one discovers, at the last minute, and to one's horror, that one's theory has an absurd consequence, a consequence so absurd that if it is pointed out by a critic it will, without further ado, be taken as a refutation of one's position. Now the best thing to do in this deplorable situation is to point out the disastrous consequence oneself, before anyone else can notice it, and to embrace it. (Schiffer, 1987 p.80)

1. The Argument from Privileged Access

There has been a recent and widespread interest in the question: how can semantic externalism account for privileged access to the contents of one's thoughts²? This question gives rise to two problems. The first I take to have been solved. The second is derivative, arising from the

¹ I would like to thank David Papineau for helpful discussions of the material presented in this paper. I would also like to thank Fraser MacBride, Mark Sainsbury, Neil Tennant, and members of the Alan Lacey seminar at King's College London for comments.

² The term "thought" as I use it should not be understood as a Fregean thought. Rather, "thought" should be understood as a synonym for "propositional mental event". Hence, two subjects cannot have the same thought, but can have thoughts with the same content. Similarly, a subject cannot be said to have the same thought at different times, but can have two thoughts with the same content at different times.

solution to the first, and it is this second problem which is the concern of this paper. The first problem is this. According to semantic externalism, a subject's set of possible and actual thoughts is dependent upon, and restricted by, relations that subject bears to her environment. The content of a thought is constituted by an external relation, a relation to either the physical constitution of the subject's environment or the linguistic practices of her community. Given that a subject is unable to distinguish the specific environmental features upon which her thoughts essentially depend from other possible features upon which her counterfactual thoughts might have depended, how can a subject generally know what she thinks? To know *that* she would surely have to have empirical information concerning the environment to which she stands in certain causal relations. This contradicts the claim of privileged access. In addition, someone else could be in at least as good a position as her to know what type of thought she was having; which amounts to a denial of first person authority.³

The solution, widely accepted by proponents of semantic externalism, is to notice that the contents of *all* one's thoughts depend *equally* on environmental factors.⁴ The content of one's second-order

³ I take the claim of privileged access to be the claim that a subject can have non-empirical knowledge of at least some of her propositional mental events, where non-empirical knowledge is simply knowledge gained without recourse to external perception. I take the claim of first person authority to be the claim that a subject's claims to knowledge of her propositional mental events are typically to be accepted.

⁴ See for example Burge (1988), Wright (1991), Shoemaker (1994), Heil (1988). With the exception of Wright, these authors are committed to some form of "containment principle", whereby the content of the first-order attitude is literally contained, or embedded, in the second-order belief. While I am not committed to any such containment principle, I agree that the contents of propositional attitudes of different orders will co-vary in tandem. For my reasons, see section 2 of this paper.

beliefs will be externally determined and will co-vary with externally determined variation in the content of one's first-order propositional mental events. Whatever fixes the content of the first-order thought also fixes in the same way the content of the second-order belief. What thoughts a subject can have depends upon which concepts she possesses. The solution to the first problem, then, trades on the fact that it is the same set of concepts which is available to the subject at all levels of thought.

This solution has since been used *against* the semantic externalist, who is now faced with a further charge of incompatibility. To bring out the alleged incompatibility, we need to invoke a third claim.

(EC) *x* could not have non-empirical knowledge of contingent facts about her environment.⁵

(EC) states a plausible claim about our knowledge of the external world. The entrenched dogma is expressed by Brueckner, who maintains that its negation “embodies a claim which is obviously false on anyone’s view”⁶. This is the claim I will challenge.

The second, derivative problem, then, is this. Semantic externalism provides us with knowledge of the necessary conditions for possession of any given concept. Suppose now that we *do* have privileged access to the contents of our propositional mental events, to the concepts we

⁵ (EC) is clearly a principle which concerns subjects who are relevantly similar to us: that is, subjects whose knowledge of the world generally comes via external perception. It is not a claim which denies the logical possibility of a creature for whom all knowledge is non-empirical knowledge.

⁶ Brueckner (1992) p. 111.

possess. From the conjunction of knowledge of one's concepts and knowledge of the conditions necessary for the acquisition of one's concepts, one can infer to knowledge of substantive empirical facts. Since semantic externalism is a conceptual thesis, combining it with the claim of privileged access has the consequence that we can gain knowledge of contingent facts about the environment just via introspective knowledge and conceptual analysis. This contradicts the plausible third claim embodied in (EC). Therefore, so the argument goes, semantic externalism and privileged access are incompatible. I call this argument against semantic externalism *the Argument from Privileged Access*.

Let me clarify the problem. The Argument from Privileged Access claims that from the conjunction of semantic externalism and privileged access to the content of a thought, a subject can generate specific arguments such as the one below. I will refer to such arguments as *instance arguments*, since they take one from an instance of a thought to a contingent fact about the external world.

- (1) I am thinking a *water*-thought
- (2) If I am thinking a *water*-thought, then I'm in a water-world
- (3) Therefore, I am in a water-world.

It is a necessary condition for a subject's being in a water-world that the following disjunction be true. Either the subject's environment contains

water and water is a natural kind, or the subject is part of a community which has the concept of water, whether or not water is a natural kind.⁷ Being in a water-world does not entail that water exists. Neither does knowledge that one possess a certain concept require knowledge of the *status* of that concept - knowledge of whether or not the concept is a natural kind concept. Such knowledge is, plausibly, empirical knowledge; and the force of the disjunction is to ensure that instance arguments make no appeal to the claim that a subject possesses such knowledge.

Given that introspection yields knowledge of premise (1), and conceptual analysis yields knowledge of premise (2), it would seem that the conclusion (3) can be known on the basis of introspection and conceptual analysis alone. That is, it would seem that a subject could have non-empirical knowledge that she was in a water-world. This contradicts the plausible claim (EC), and is generally assumed to be absurd.⁸

Responses to the argument have thus far taken one of two lines. Proponents of semantic internalism have claimed that the derivation of empirical knowledge from introspection and conceptual analysis

⁷ Instance arguments apply only to those concepts whose application conditions the subject is agnostic. For a comprehensive statement of what I have termed *the Argument from First Person Authority* see Brown (1995), where she elaborates the "McKinsey recipe" given in McKinsey (1991). For the rationale behind the disjunction, see Burge (1979) and (1982).

⁸ I have deliberately avoided use of the term "a priori" in my characterisation of privileged access. See fn. 3. How to characterise a priori knowledge, and whether there be any such, is a complex issue. The knowledge delivered by instance arguments need similarly not be classified as a priori knowledge. Such knowledge as is delivered by instance arguments is, however, non-empirical.

constitutes a reductio of semantic externalism.⁹ Proponents of semantic externalism, accepting that such a derivation *would* constitute a reductio of their position, have expended their time and energy trying to show that no such derivation is possible.¹⁰ I call those who take the first line *incompatibilists*, and those who aim to reconcile semantic externalism with privileged access *compatibilists*.¹¹ In this paper I will briefly mention two of the more interesting compatibilist responses, explaining why each ultimately fails. I will then offer a solution which disagrees with the standard divide of the debate; one which challenges the common assumption behind the debate. My position is that the conjunction of semantic externalism and privileged access does indeed have the consequence that one can come to know contingent truths about one's environment via introspection and conceptual analysis. In this respect I am in accord with the incompatibilists. However, I maintain that this consequence should in fact be *embraced*, and in this respect my position falls squarely within the compatibilist camp. I argue that inferences from introspective knowledge to empirical knowledge are not to be seen as *intrinsically* unacceptable; on the contrary, there is a certain class of such inferences which are legitimate, and the Argument from Privileged Access deals only with those inferences which fall into this class.

My claim is that we should reject neither semantic externalism nor the claim of privileged access. Rather, taking semantic externalism

⁹ See for example McKinsey (1991), and Brown (1995). See also Boghossian (1997).

¹⁰ See for example Tye and McLaughlin (forthcoming 1997).

¹¹ I first came across this terminology in Boghossian (1997).

seriously, we should reject the third claim, that we could not have non-empirical knowledge of contingent facts about our environment. (EC) embodies a dogma which ought to be rejected.

2. Infallible access to one's concepts

I first want to argue for the claim that a subject has infallible knowledge of her concepts. An understanding of this kind of privileged access comes through looking at what is involved in the attribution of a thought to a subject. The correct ascription of a propositional mental event demands possession of just those concepts which feature in the thought ascribed. The possibility of a correct attribution of a thought to another thus depends not only on making the correct inference from what she says and does, but, crucially, on possession of the same concepts.

Susan's twin is unable to attribute to her the belief that water tastes good, because Susan's twin does not possess the concept of water. No matter how good she is at reading the minds of her friends on twin earth, she simply cannot capture what Susan has in mind. If you cannot yourself entertain a particular thought, the possibility of explicitly attributing that thought to someone else remains out of reach.

From a different perspective, philosophers who ponder twin earth cases are said to possess concepts which outrun the concepts of the hypothetical subjects they study. I am hypothetically able to credit both Susan and her twin with their respective thoughts, since it is supposed that I possess both the concept of water and the concept of twater. I have to be careful, however, that the supposed attributions I make keep in step

with the appropriate environmental background of each subject. I could be mistaken in my hypothetical attribution of a thought to Susan simply by forgetting whether she lived on earth or on twin earth. Susan will not make the same mistake with regard to the propositional mental events of her friends, since she is "locked into" their way of thinking.

Now let us look at the attribution of a thought to oneself. I have claimed that the correct attribution of a thought to a subject requires possession by the attributer of the concepts employed by the addressee. When the attributer and the addressee are the same person (at the same time) this is of course guaranteed. There is no possibility that the causal history of the one differs from the causal history of the other. This explains one respect in which the ascription of a thought to oneself is more secure than the ascription of a thought to another. But we can go one stage further. In the ascription of a thought to a subject, the attributer has to *entertain* the thought she wishes to ascribe: and it is this fact that can be invoked as a natural explanation of the asymmetry between the attributions of propositional mental events to our present selves and the attribution of those same propositional mental events to other selves (including our past selves). Wishing to ascribe a thought to herself, a subject thereby does so. I am here assuming that "thinks" satisfies the following condition: any attitude of the form 'S ϕ 's that p' (e.g. S desires that p, S fears that p) entails 'S thinks that p'. The very act of ascription requires the entertaining of the thought one intends to ascribe; so the act of ascription makes that ascription true of one. It is as if one were trying to find out about the contents of one's mind by wondering

whether one were entertaining a given thought, but that as soon as one did so wonder, the thought considered would thereby become one of the thoughts one was entertaining. The question of *whether or not* you are entertaining a given thought is in a sense a mistaken question. The very formulation of such a question determines that the answer must be affirmative. Thoughts about the possession of a concept are self-verifying.

I shall formalise this truth as (PA); the principle of privileged access with respect to concepts.

(PA) For all x , if x thinks she thinks that p , where concept F is an essential component of the thought that p , x has the concept F .¹²

It follows from the privileged access claim that not even a Davidsonian swampman could be mistaken in thinking that he had a given concept. A Davidsonian swampman would be in no position to credit himself with *any* concepts, and *a fortiori* in no position to credit himself with one he did not possess. There is of course an issue about whether it could “feel” to a subject as if she were entertaining thoughts without being able to do so, but not about whether a subject could *think* she had a thought and yet not have it.

I have argued that the reason for one’s authority about the concepts used in thought is to do with the fact that one must entertain a thought in

¹² This formulation ensures that the concept is used, as opposed to referred to. It amounts to the claim that if you think you have a concept then you do.

order to attribute it. I do not claim to have provided a fully adequate account of privileged access; a full analysis of privileged access is not the concern of this paper. Still, the truth expressed by (PA) serves two purposes. First, it shows that whatever problems there may be in providing an account of privileged access, adopting a semantic externalist position brings with it no *additional* problems. Second, the truth of (PA) is sufficient to generate instance arguments, and therefore the Argument from Privileged Access, since (PA) states that we are infallible with respect to the attribution of concepts to our present selves. Full knowledge of one's current conscious psychological state is not required.¹³

3. Compatibilist responses

The purpose of this section is to review a number of ways in which it might be thought that compatibilists could argue against instance arguments. As will become clear, no response along these lines is satisfactory.

A good argument can be thought of as a way of transferring knowledge: deductive inference can yield knowledge of a proposition if it is validly inferred from premises which are themselves known. One compatibilist response, then, is to deny that one has *knowledge* of one's concepts. This would ensure that the conclusion of instance arguments could not be *known*. Could it be that judgements concerning one's

¹³ This means that neither instance arguments nor the Argument from Privileged Access are damaged by noting that one can mistake, for example, one's psychological state of jealousy for one of hatred.

concepts somehow failed to be knowledgeable judgements, even in the face of (PA)? Certainly, more than truth is needed if a judgement is to count as knowledgeable; but (PA) states a *reliable method* by which to arrive at truths about the concept one is currently entertaining. The only remaining possibility of denying that a subject could have knowledge of her concepts appears to be to maintain, along with Wittgenstein, that it *makes no sense* to say of a proposition that it is known, if that proposition is guaranteed to be true. According to Wittgenstein, then, the possibility of error is a necessary condition for a belief to count as knowledge. Thus the account of privileged access given is not, on this view, an account of *knowledge* of one's concepts, since the possibility of error is ruled out.

One further response runs as follows. While it is generally held that arguments provide a means by which to gain knowledge, certain exceptions have been acknowledged. For instance, Nozick's conditional theory of knowledge has the consequence that knowledge is not closed under known entailment.¹⁴ This is supposedly shown by arguments such as the following:

- (1') I am working at my desk
- (2') If I am working at my desk then I am not a brain-in-a-vat
- (3') Therefore, I am not a brain-in-a-vat

¹⁴ See Nozick (1981).

According to the conditional theory, (1') and (2') can be known, but (3') cannot be known as a result of knowing (1') and (2'). The principle of closure under known entailment will fail only in cases where the relevant propositions are assessed relative to different sets of possible worlds. However, it is implausible to maintain that the principle of closure under known entailment fails for instance arguments for *this* reason, since there is little prospect of maintaining that the premises and the conclusion should be assessed relative to different sets of possible worlds.

But the real problem with the responses after Wittgenstein and Nozick is this. Claiming that the conclusion of an instance argument is not *known* does not, I think, allow one to side-step the problem posed by the Argument from Privileged Access. Those worried by the argument will surely take little comfort in the response that one cannot *know* the conclusion of an instance argument, since it is worrying enough that by using such instance arguments we always come to have true beliefs about our environment. Moreover, *we can know that this is so*. The potency of the Argument from Privileged Access does not turn on the acceptance of a particular epistemology - on whether or not we can *know* the conclusions of instance arguments. Having the means to arrive systematically at true beliefs about our environment is surely bad enough.

I see no reason to deny a subject epistemic warrant for the conclusion of an instance argument. If a subject knows that she can systematically come to believe true propositions, what more epistemic

warrant could be needed? The epistemic warrant for holding the belief that I am in a water-world comes from my knowledge that this belief was reasoned to by way of a reliable method. Hence the Argument from Privileged Access stands.

4. Instance arguments reconsidered

Compatibilists have made no headway in responding to the Argument from Privileged Access by criticising instance arguments. The Argument establishes that if semantic externalism is true, and privileged access possible, substantial knowledge of empirical facts can be inferred from introspective knowledge and conceptual analysis. I want to argue that this should be embraced as a natural and acceptable extension of semantic externalism. The claim which ought to be rejected is the claim embodied in (EC).

My vindication of instance arguments will take the following line. First, I will explain why it is that instance arguments deliver truths about one's environment. Second, I will identify a causal feature which is generally lacking in inferences from introspective knowledge to empirical knowledge, the lack of which renders such inferences unacceptable. That is, inferences from introspective knowledge to empirical knowledge are not to be seen as *intrinsically* unacceptable, rather they should be seen as unacceptable only in so far as they lack the necessary causal feature which would, were it present, justify any such inference. Finally, I will show that semantic externalism ensures the presence of this necessary causal feature in instance arguments, and

therefore that the inference from introspective knowledge to empirical knowledge is in these cases acceptable. In this way I will disarm the Argument from Privileged Access.

How is it, then, that instance arguments can without fail deliver truths about the subject's environment? Concept-acquisition, on the semantic externalist view of things, is rather like photography. Photography is a method by which information about the external world can be recorded for future reference. Various complex, physical, causal processes are in play, whereby certain amounts of light reflecting off objects in a given situation interact for a precise amount of time with a piece of photographic paper, thus producing an image of the original scene. The resulting photographs, once developed, can be brought out at any later time, and used as the evidence from which to infer to the existence of a past event or state of affairs in the world. The Argument from Privileged Access relies upon making explicit the similarity between photography and concept-acquisition. According to semantic externalism, one of a unique set of possible causal processes is necessary for the acquisition of any given concept. Causal interaction with the environment imprints concepts, mental photographs, in our minds. These concepts can be thought of as items which are essential to the storing of information about the external world, information which can be used at a future time for the purposes of thought and communication. As a consequence, any mental concept, once acquired, can, just like a photograph, be used as the evidence from which to infer to the past

existence of the state of affairs which led to the individual's possession of the requisite concept.

It could be objected that, while it may not be physically possible, it is certainly logically possible that "phoney photographs" be produced, which depict scenes that do not in fact exist. The crucial claim I am endorsing on behalf of semantic externalism is that there could *never* be an analogous situation in the case of concepts.¹⁵ This is precisely where the analogy breaks down. Instance arguments can be used to yield beliefs about one's environment which are *guaranteed* to be true, whereas there is at least a logical possibility that inferences from photographs to the environment yield false beliefs.¹⁶

Why is the analogy certain to break down? The phoney photograph case depends on there being a possible way of getting just the right amount of light in just the right places on a piece of photographic film, so that the resulting photograph looks exactly the same as it would have done if the state of affairs depicted had in fact caused the image, but where the appropriate causal connection, between actual state of affairs and film, never obtained. This is a possibility. But according to semantic externalism, there is precisely no way to get just the right concept in the mind without the actual causal connections being in place; and herein

¹⁵ It should be remembered that I am throughout this discussion assuming a version of semantic externalism as espoused by Burge. I accept that there may be forms of semantic externalism which are not committed to this specific kind of causal theory of reference.

¹⁶ Clearly the possibility of error is not by itself sufficient to undermine knowledge. Photographs provide a perfectly good route to knowledge about the past. However, that there is a possibility of error leaves one open to the sceptic. The inference from a thought to a fact about the world is, on the other hand, demon-proof.

lies the crux: *causal contact (either to a natural kind or to a linguistic community) is a necessary condition for the acquisition of a concept*. To maintain that one could break the causal link, and yet produce the same effect, is to deny semantic externalism, which is not to win the game, but rather to give it up.

Could one be mistaken in one's thought that one had a certain concept? Putting (PA) contrapositively shows how this thought is misguided.

(PA') For all x , if x does not have the concept F , where concept F is an essential component of the thought that p , x does not think she thinks that p .

There are two further important disanalogies between the inference from a photograph and the inference from a concept. In the former case the inference takes one to a specific fact about the world: that Ralph once went digging for gold, say. In the latter case, however, the relevant inference takes one not to a specific fact, but to an *existential* fact about the world: that either there's gold, or there's a community that thinks about it. This difference can be invoked as an explanation for the crucial difference mentioned above; that photographs concern specific incidents allows for the possibility that there could be phoney photographs. It is precisely because instance arguments take one to an existential fact that the possibility of error is ruled out. The second further difference is this. The main purpose of photographs is arguably to store information about

the past. The main purpose of concepts, on the other hand, is presumably not to store information about the past, but to be used for the purposes of thought and communication. However, that concepts *can* be used for the purposes of thought and communication is precisely because they encode information about the world.

Time to make a qualification explicit. Instance arguments were initially presented as arguments by means of which one could come to know facts about one's current environment. However, it is not facts about one's *current* environment, but rather facts about one's *recently past* environment which can be known. Consider Susan. Suppose she is abducted from earth, and placed on twin-earth. According to semantic externalism, a change in one's concepts is not immediate, but requires the passing of a sufficient length of time, so that appropriate causal interaction with the new environment can be established. For an indefinite period of time, then, Susan may be able to think, for example, about water, and run through various instance arguments. However, Susan would conclude something false if she concluded that she was in a water-world. She would be correct, on the other hand, to conclude from her introspective knowledge and conceptual analysis that *in the near past* she *had been* in a water-world. That is, a subject can be sure, by running through instance arguments, that she used to lie in certain specific causal relations in her near past. This of course means that the sceptical hypothesis that one is currently a brain-in-a-vat remains a logical possibility. The sceptical hypothesis that in the near past one was a brain-in-a-vat, however, is ruled out.

5. A necessary causal connection

I claimed that inferences from introspective knowledge to empirical knowledge were not intrinsically unacceptable, but rather that they were so only in so far as a certain causal feature was lacking. The reason that we resist embracing instance arguments, I maintain, is because we are used to such arguments lacking this causal feature, so that the situation which evolves from the Argument from Privileged Access bears a superficial similarity to a situation which we would be justified in rejecting as impossible.

Consider individualism. According to individualism, no causal contact is needed for the acquisition of a concept; rather, subsequent causal contact is needed to be able to know whether the concept one possesses has reference in the world.¹⁷ On the picture individualism presents, one can imagine a subject equipped with certain concepts prior to exposure to the world. It would certainly make sense to be worried if it turned out that such a subject could correctly, and infallibly, infer from her experience-independent concepts to the nature of her world; it is always possible on the individualist picture that the subject have just those concepts she does have, and yet those concepts pick nothing out in her world. Individualism presents us with a picture of an isolated subject trying to determine what relation she bears to an independent, external

¹⁷ It is of course consistent with individualism that the way we in fact learn concepts is via causal contact with the world. What individualism must maintain, however, is that it is logically possible that a subject have thoughts, and therefore concepts, independently of the way the world is.

world. The main obstacle to accepting the soundness of instance arguments is the fear that they present as a genuine possibility a subject who can know about the environment independently of any causal contact with that environment.

But now consider semantic externalism. Semantic externalism denies the very coherence of the picture described above. There is simply no way a subject could ever have the concepts she does have without either the referents of those concepts, or other people existing.¹⁸ Concepts cannot, as it were, be programmed in by anything other than the actual referents of those concepts or the practices of the linguistic community. Semantic externalism requires that there be causal contact right at the stage of concept-acquisition; and this means that there is already no room for the possibility that one's concepts do not refer.

The widespread resistance to instance arguments assumes a view of the self, and in particular of introspection, which is largely a hangover from Cartesianism. Semantic externalism is precisely the view that an individual cannot be regarded as complete with the concepts of external contingents independently of any prior causal contact with a specific given environment. The self can no longer be regarded as an entity completely separate from her environment. As a result, the apparent clear divide between the mind and the world is eroded. The world we inhabit determines our mental capacities, our ability to think certain thoughts. To suppose that we can look into our minds and see things

¹⁸ Again, this is for any concept about whose application conditions the subject is agnostic. See fn. 7.

which are themselves independent of the environment is the mistake of the individualist. According to semantic externalism, the concepts to which we have privileged access themselves bear the trace of the specific empirical conditions which led to their acquisition.

Of course it would be unacceptable to suppose that a subject could come to know about the external world *just* by looking inside her mind; that is, despite the lack of prior causal contact between that subject and the world. But instance arguments do not allow a subject to argue from world-independent facts to facts about the world, but rather to argue from the way the world is, via the mark the world leaves on her, back out to the way the world must have been to leave such a mark. Without prior causal contact, there is no concept available to introspection.

The claim of privileged access embodied in (PA) guarantees that we have infallible access to the concepts which feature in our propositional mental events; to the concepts we possess at a given time. The concepts themselves are quite clearly dependent on contingent empirical facts, and semantic externalism tells us about the acquisition-conditions of those concepts. So the conjunction of the claim of privileged access with semantic externalism amounts to the claim that we can have direct knowledge both of the concepts we possess at a given time, and of the acquisition-conditions of those concepts. Putting things this way highlights the fact that for a subject to gain empirical knowledge of the world via instance arguments, it is not enough that semantic externalism be true; the subject must have knowledge of semantic externalism. For any truth, however, it is at least possible that it be known; and that a

subject *could* come to know such empirical truths must be accounted for on this basis.

This does not, I think, mean that we have a new crisis in epistemology, or in the philosophy of mind. It certainly does not mean that empirical science becomes a purely *a priori* activity. Certainly, introspection becomes a viable method of acquiring knowledge of our environment; but it must be recognised that introspection will yield knowledge *only* of those empirical facts that the subject could already have come to know via empirical means. Here it is worth reflecting on the function of memory. As I am, at the present moment in time, I can “look inside my mind” and produce various pieces of empirical knowledge: for instance, that the battle of Hastings was fought in 1066. Why are people willing to accept memory as a route to empirical knowledge? Presumably because memory is *recognised* as a way of *retrieving* information which was acquired via empirical means at an earlier time, even if the means by which it was acquired can themselves no longer be remembered.¹⁹ Semantic memory is of this type. I may be unable to recollect when and how I learnt certain of the concepts I possess, but this does nothing to impugn my knowledge of those concepts. Instance arguments similarly yield knowledge of facts which

¹⁹ The memory case bears a close resemblance to the photograph case. First, it is possible to have false memories. Second, the inference from a memory can be an inference to a specific as opposed to a purely existential state of affairs. Of course, this need not be so, as when I infer from my memory of a particular mathematical proof both to a) the token of the proof on the page, and to b) the general state of affairs it establishes, such as that every set has more subsets than members. Third, the main purpose of memories is arguably to store information either about the past, or that one has gained in the past.

at an earlier point in time were acquired empirically. This is not, however, to say that instance arguments do not yield new knowledge. They do. They yield new knowledge in just the same way that deductive arguments generally yield new knowledge: they clarify the consequences of the knowledge we already have.

Introspection and conceptual analysis can together yield knowledge of contingent facts about the external world; but only in so far as those contingent facts are themselves a necessary condition for the very existence of the objects introspected. The Argument from Privileged Access fails to establish its intended conclusion. If you accept a new theory about what a concept is, you should expect a new theory about what knowledge of a concept entails. Semantic externalism and privileged access are compatible: but we can have privileged access to the world.

Sarah Sawyer
Department of Logic & Metaphysics
University of St. Andrews
Fife
KY16 9AL

Bibliography

- Boghossian, P. 1997: "What the Externalist Can Know A Priori",
Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, XCVII, pp. 161-175
- Brown, J. 1995: "The Incompatibility of Anti-Individualism and
Privileged Access", *Analysis* 53, pp. 149-156
- Brueckner, A. 1992: "What an Anti-Individualist Knows A Priori",
Analysis 52, pp. 111-8
- Burge, T. 1979: "Individualism and the Mental", *MidWest Studies in
Philosophy* 4 pp. 73- 121
- Burge, T. 1982: "Other Bodies", in *Thought and Object: Essays on
Intentionality*, ed. A. Woodfield (Oxford: Oxford University
Press), pp. 97-120
- Burge, T. 1988: "Individualism and Self-Knowledge", *The Journal of
Philosophy* 85 pp. 649-663
- Heil, J. 1988: "Privileged Access", *Mind* 97, pp. 232-245
- McKinsey, M. 1991: "Anti-Individualism and Privileged Access",
Analysis 51, pp. 9-16
- McLaughlin, B. P. and Tye, M. 1997: "Is Content-Externalism
Incompatible With Privileged Access?", (forthcoming)
- Nozick, R. 1981: *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Putnam, H. 1975: "The Meaning of 'Meaning' ", in his *Mind, Language
and Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 215-
271
- Schiffer, S. 1987: *Remnants of Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press)

Shoemaker, S. 1994: "Self-Knowledge and 'Inner Sense' ", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54, pp. 249-314

Wittgenstein, L. 1953: *Philosophical Investigations*, (Oxford: Blackwell)

Wright, C. 1991: "On Putnam's Proof that we are not Brains-in-a-Vat", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* XCII, pp. 67-94