

THE SEMANTIC BASIS OF EXTERNALISM

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1. The primary evidence and motivation for externalism in the philosophy of mind is provided by the semantic facts that support direct reference theories of names, indexical pronouns, and natural kind terms. But many externalists have forgotten their semantic roots, or so I shall contend here. I have become convinced of this by a common reaction among externalists to the main argument of my 1991 paper "Anti-Individualism and Privileged Access." In that argument, I concluded that externalism is incompatible with the principle that we can have privileged, non-empirical knowledge of the contents of our own thoughts. The reaction in question amounts to a dismissive denial of one of my argument's main premises. This premise, which I defended at length in the paper, is that an externalist thesis regarding a cognitive property should hold that possession of the property by a person *logically*, or *conceptually*, implies the existence of objects external to that person.

Externalists who defend the compatibility of their view with privileged access by denying this premise of mine usually insist that externalist theses are about a posteriori *metaphysical*, as opposed to logical or conceptual, dependency relations between cognitive properties and external objects.¹ This insistence, I maintain, is a sign of deep confusion. The dependence on external facts, or wideness, of the property expressed by a given cognitive predicate is a function, not of some mysterious a posteriori metaphysical relation that the property (due to its "nature" perhaps) happens to bear to external objects; rather, it is a function of the wide *meaning* of, or the wide semantic contribution made by, a crucial component of the predicate, such as a name, an indexical, or a natural kind term. The fact that a given cognitive predicate expresses a wide property, therefore, is a fact about that predicate's meaning and logical form. When such a predicate is used, we don't just ascribe a property that happens, on independent a posteriori grounds, to bear some dependency relation to external objects. Rather, the

meaning and logical form of the predicate are such that, when we use it, we actually *say*, or *assert*, that the person bears a given mental relation to external things. Any such assertion, of course, will logically, not just metaphysically, imply the bearing of relations to external things.

I'll call the compatibilist's strategy of claiming that externalist theses are about a posteriori metaphysical, as opposed to logical or conceptual, dependency relations, "the metaphysical strategy."² As we shall see, use of this strategy requires one to drive a wedge between what is actually said by use of a wide cognitive predicate, on the one hand, and the kinds of external facts, relation to which makes the property expressed by the predicate a wide property, on the other. But if there is such a wedge, then the wide meanings of the words contained in cognitive predicates cease to have any semantic bearing on the wideness of the properties expressed by the predicates. Thus, the compatibilist's metaphysical strategy effectively removes the semantic basis of externalism, and so takes away whatever reason there was to believe externalism in the first place.³

As a means of exposing the bankruptcy of the metaphysical strategy, I will concentrate on the recent attempt by Brian McLaughlin and Michael Tye (1998) to use this strategy to defend the compatibility of externalism and privileged access against my (1991a) argument. Their discussion is unusually forthright and detailed, and so, I will argue, their use of the metaphysical strategy clearly reveals its inconsistency with externalism's semantic motivation.

2. I will begin with a brief restatement of my original *reductio* argument against compatibilism. I took the principle of privileged access to say that we each necessarily have the capacity to acquire a priori knowledge of the *contents* of our own thoughts:

Privileged Access to Content (PAC)

It is necessarily true that if a person *x* is thinking that *p*, then *x* can in principle know a priori that he himself, or she herself, is thinking that *p*.

Here, by ‘a priori knowledge’ I mean knowledge that can be obtained, as we say, “from the armchair” or “just by thinking”, as opposed to knowledge that is obtained by perceptual observation or empirical investigation. I argued that (PAC) is inconsistent with the following externalist thesis:

Semantic Externalism (SE)

Many *de dicto*-structured predicates of the form ‘is thinking that *p*’ express properties that are wide, in the sense that possession of such a property by an agent logically implies the existence of contingent objects of a certain sort that are external to that agent.⁴

My argument considered an instance of ‘is thinking that *p*’ that contains the natural kind term ‘water’. Suppose it is true that Oscar is thinking that water is wet. Then by (PAC) it follows that

(1) Oscar can know a priori that he is thinking that water is wet.

But given that ‘is thinking that water is wet’ expresses a logically wide property, it also follows that

(2) The proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet logically implies the proposition *E*,

where *E* is some “external proposition” that asserts or implies the existence of objects external to Oscar. *E* might, for instance, be the proposition that water exists. Now the conjunction of (1) and (2) is clearly absurd. If Oscar can know a priori the proposition that he is thinking that water is wet, and this proposition that he knows a priori logically implies *E*, then Oscar could just *deduce* *E* from something he knows a priori, and so he could know *E* itself a priori. But this consequence is just absurd. For by assumption, *E* is a proposition such as the proposition that water exists, a proposition that asserts or implies the existence of contingent objects external to Oscar, and Oscar obviously

cannot know such propositions from the armchair. So if 'is thinking that water is wet' expresses a logically wide property, then contrary to (PAC), no one can know a priori that he or she is thinking that water is wet.⁵ And in general, (PAC) and (SE) are inconsistent.

3. McLaughlin and Tye agree that the general *form* of my argument (or "McKinsey's recipe", as they call it) is correct, but they claim that the form has no correct instances. That is, they claim that there is *no* externalist thesis, and *no* case of a thought that p, such that *both* (i) having a thought that p, on that externalist thesis, logically implies some external proposition E, *and* (ii) a relevant principle of privileged access implies that one can know a priori that one has a thought that p (see p. 291). Thus, in the particular instance of the argument just stated, McLaughlin and Tye would just reject premise (2).

Naturally, I think that McLaughlin and Tye are wrong to claim that my argument has no correct application. For there are in fact some clear examples of externalist theses that obviously refute this claim. One such thesis is discussed at length by McLaughlin and Tye. This is the thesis that some thought contents are singular propositions, propositions that contain concrete individuals as constituents. McLaughlin and Tye agree with this thesis. Moreover, they correctly point out that my argument against compatibilism can be deployed to show that no one can ever have privileged access to the fact that one's thought has a given singular proposition as its content (pp. 291-292). Certainly, I would agree that my argument has this consequence. However, this consequence surely *seems* inconsistent with the sort of principle of privileged access that McLaughlin and Tye themselves endorse, namely (PAC). So here is a case where they themselves seem committed to my argument's applicability.

Yet McLaughlin and Tye go on to insist that no one has ever held that we can have privileged access to the contents of our own thoughts, when these contents are singular propositions (p. 292). The question is, how can they consistently say this, when

they themselves endorse (PAC), and (PAC) certainly seems to imply this very consequence which, they claim, no one has ever held?

Suppose that

(3) Jones is thinking that Cicero is an orator,
 where, we assume, the sentence 'Cicero is an orator' expresses a singular proposition with Cicero as a constituent, so that (3) ascribes to Jones a thought which has this proposition as its content. It is an immediate consequence of the conjunction of (PAC) and (3) that

(4) Jones can know a priori that he is thinking that Cicero is an orator.

But since (3) ascribes to Jones a thought whose content is the singular proposition that Cicero is an orator, and since - as McLaughlin and Tye assert - having such a thought logically requires the existence of Cicero, it surely seems to follow that

(5) The proposition that Jones is thinking that Cicero is an orator logically implies that Cicero exists.

Yet as we've seen, and as McLaughlin and Tye agree, (4) and (5) are straightforwardly inconsistent. So the question is, How can McLaughlin and Tye themselves avoid this inconsistency? After all, they are explicitly committed to (PAC), and they certainly also seem committed to the externalist thesis that entails (5).

It is quite clear that McLaughlin and Tye endorse (PAC), and also that, as a consequence, they would endorse (4). (See p. 299, for instance.) So they must deny (5). Now it is true that they seem to come very close to asserting (5). But actually, what they assert is not (5) but rather

(6) "It is a conceptual truth that having a thought with the singular proposition that Cicero is an orator as its content requires the existence of Cicero" (p. 292).

Apparently, then, McLaughlin and Tye think that they can consistently endorse (4) while denying (5) because they think that they can distinguish the proposition expressed by (3) (i.e., the proposition that Jones is thinking that Cicero is an orator) from the proposition expressed by

(7) Jones has a thought whose content is the proposition that Cicero is an orator. Thus, McLaughlin and Tye seem to be saying, while (7) ascribes a property that logically implies that Cicero exists, so that *this* property is one to which no one has privileged access, (3) by contrast ascribes a *different* property of the form ‘is thinking that p’, and this property, according to (PAC), is one to which we *can* have privileged access.

Now this is a peculiar position for an externalist to take. Externalists generally agree that sentences like (3) containing small-scope proper names ascribe wide cognitive properties. But their *reason* for saying this, of course, is that the names contained in such sentences are directly referential, and thus contribute their referents to the proposition expressed by the whole cognitive ascription. The standard view is that an ascription like (3) says that the agent bears the relation of thinking to the (singular) proposition that Cicero is an orator.⁶ The ascribed cognitive property is wide on this account simply because it is relational with respect to the man Cicero. Thus, on this view, (3) ascribes to Jones and Cicero the relation that any objects x and y bear to each other just in case x bears the relation of thinking to the proposition that y is an orator.

In other words, the standard externalist explanation of *why* a sentence like (3) ascribes a wide property is just that (3) says exactly what (7) does, and thus logically implies that Jones has a thought whose content is a proposition involving the man Cicero. But we’ve just seen that McLaughlin and Tye must *deny* that (3) and (7) say the same thing. Again, they must hold that (3) does *not* say that Jones has a thought whose content is the singular proposition that Cicero is an orator. They never do make clear what, on their view, a sentence like (3) *does* say; but at least it seems clear that on their view, whatever (3) says, it does *not* say that Jones has a thought whose content is the proposition that Cicero is an orator.

But having denied the basic reason why most externalists believe that sentences like (3) ascribe wide cognitive properties, the question arises, why do McLaughlin and Tye themselves believe that such sentences ascribe such properties? The answer seems

oddly inconsistent: they believe that (3) ascribes a wide property because it ascribes a thought whose content is the singular proposition that Cicero is an orator! (See p. 299.) How can we make sense of this? Perhaps as follows. McLaughlin and Tye hold that (3) does not *say* or logically *imply* that Jones has a thought whose content is the proposition that Cicero is an orator. Nevertheless, they seem to think that if Cicero does in fact exist, then (3) ascribes to Jones the having of a thought of a certain type T such that, to have a thought of type T one *must*, as a matter of fact, have a thought whose content is the proposition that Cicero is an orator (p. 299). In short, McLaughlin and Tye first separate the relevant wide content logically from what (3) says or implies, only to later reconnect it in some other way, to preserve the appearance of externalism.

This suggestion raises many difficult questions. What exactly is the type T of thought ascribed by (3)? Why *must* thoughts of type T have the wide content in question? And what is the force of the ‘must’ here? Since it cannot be the logical ‘must’, the modality is apparently that of metaphysical necessity. But how is having a thought of type T supposed to be “metaphysically”, but not logically, related to the proposition that Cicero is an orator, and what is the nature of this mysterious metaphysical connection anyway? I think it is very unlikely that these questions have any cogent answers.

4. At one point in their paper, McLaughlin and Tye suggest that they would endorse a two-factor theory of the thought types ascribed by a cognitive predicate like ‘is thinking that Cicero is an orator’. One factor is the truth-condition, or proposition, expressed by the imbedded sentence; the second factor is a more fine-grained semantic feature, which they call a “mode of presentation” of that proposition (p. 294). But this two-factor idea doesn’t really help to answer any of the questions I’ve raised about their view.

For on the two-factor view, a sentence like (3) (‘Jones is thinking that Cicero is an orator’) will ascribe a type T of thought that either involves both factors, or involves just one of the two. If T involves both the singular proposition that Cicero is an orator and a mode of presentation of that proposition, or T involves just the singular proposition

alone, then it follows that (3) says or logically implies that Jones has a thought whose content is the singular proposition that Cicero is an orator. But of course, McLaughlin and Tye explicitly deny this consequence.

On the other hand, the type T of thought ascribed by (3) might involve just a mode of presentation of the proposition in question. This alternative avoids logical implication of the wide content all right, but now it certainly seems to follow that the cognitive property ascribed by (3) would be a purely *narrow* property, a consequence which of course is also contrary to McLaughlin and Tye's view. After all, one would assume, a mode of presentation of the proposition that Cicero is an orator would be only *contingently* related to that proposition. For instance, the mode of presentation M in question might involve a mode of presentation of Cicero as, say, "the greatest Roman senator during the Republic." In another possible world in which Brutus rather than Cicero satisfies this description, M would pick out the different proposition that Brutus is an orator. So if the type T involves only a mode of presentation like this, then surely, the property of having a thought of type T is narrow.

To avoid this consequence, McLaughlin and Tye would have to insist that the relevant mode of presentation is somehow "metaphysically" but not logically related to the proposition that Cicero is an orator. But again, what is the nature of this mysterious metaphysical connection supposed to be? And how exactly could a mode of presentation of a proposition be metaphysically but not logically connected to that proposition? Again, these questions seem unanswerable. If McLaughlin and Tye were to take this line, they would just be trading inconsistency for irremediable obscurity.

Look at what has happened. In order to avoid my *reductio* argument, McLaughlin and Tye have had to suggest a view on which the wide meanings of the words contained in the 'that'-clause of a cognitive ascription are strictly irrelevant to what ends up being *said* by that ascription, or to what cognitive property is ascribed by that ascription. Thus, on their view, neither the fact that the name 'Cicero' refers to a given man, nor the fact that the imbedded sentence 'Cicero is an orator' expresses a

given singular proposition, at all affects what is said or logically implied by the thought ascription (3). So the wide proposition expressed by the imbedded sentence in (3) plays no semantic role in determining what this thought ascription says; the ascription does not so much as logically imply that the wide proposition in question even exists. But given these claims, to go on to suggest that, nevertheless, this very proposition can be somehow “metaphysically” reconnected to whatever the ascription really *does* say (thus saving the day for externalism), is merely to indulge in nebulous handwaving.

5. Perhaps McLaughlin and Tye would respond by saying that I’ve given an unfair characterization of their view. After all, on their view there is a semantic contribution made by a proper name like ‘Cicero’ in a thought ascription like (3). They call this contribution ‘the concept of Cicero’, and they seem to think that an ascription like (3) characterizes Jones’s thought as involving this concept (p. 299). Similarly, they seem to think that in a thought ascription containing a small-scope natural kind term like (8) Oscar is thinking that water is wet, the word ‘water’ expresses a certain concept, so that as a result (8) characterizes Oscar’s thought in terms of this concept (p. 298).

But in fact, introduction of the “concepts” expressed by the relevant words does nothing to alleviate the obscurity of McLaughlin and Tye’s view. For how is the fact that the words ‘Cicero’ and ‘water’ express certain concepts supposed to have the consequence that the cognitive predicates containing these words express wide properties? Apparently, the concepts in question must be quite special: they must themselves be “wide” in some sense, and must correspond to the wide meanings of the words that express them. But what makes a concept wide? For McLaughlin and Tye, the answer can’t be that the existence of the concept logically or conceptually implies the existence of external objects of some sort. For they insist at several points in their paper that if one’s thought involves the concept of Cicero, or the concept of water, then one can know a priori that one’s thought involves that concept.

So they have to say that the concepts of Cicero and water are somehow “metaphysically” but not logically related to external objects. But now we have the same old obscurity back again. For what could it possibly mean to say that the concept of Cicero, for instance, metaphysically but not logically depends upon the existence of the man Cicero? This requires explanation, first, because in normal cases, the relation between a concept and what it is a concept of, is just a *semantic* relation, and is not any sort of necessary connection, either metaphysical or logical. Take the concept of God, for example. We might reasonably suppose that this is the concept, say, of an all-powerful, all-benevolent being who created the heavens and the earth by intelligent design. Perhaps in some possible worlds, there is such a being, so that in such worlds, the concept of God applies to that being. In other worlds, perhaps, there is no such being, and the concept has no application. So it seems just to be a matter of contingent fact whether or not the concept of God is a concept of any existing thing.

But the concept of Cicero is supposed to be different. It’s supposed to be a concept that’s necessarily connected to the actual man Cicero. How could this be? Here’s one explanation. Perhaps the concept of Cicero is a concept that can only be identified, individuated or defined by reference to the man Cicero himself. Maybe we could say that the actual meaning of the name ‘Cicero’ is completely exhausted by the fact that the name refers to Cicero. Similarly, it might be said that the concept expressed by this word can be specified only by reference to that very man. Then we could say that to be the concept of Cicero just is (by definition) to be the concept of *that man*.

In the case of a natural kind term like ‘water’, there are various ways in which the meaning of the term, and the concept it expresses, might be wide. Perhaps, as in the above hypothesis about the name ‘Cicero’, the meaning of the word ‘water’ is exhausted by the fact that it refers to a certain natural kind W. Then necessarily, for a concept to be the concept of water is for it to be a concept of W. On the other hand, one might (as I do) prefer a view on which it is possible for the concept of water to exist, and hence

possible for one to have the concept, even though there is no such stuff as water and hence no such kind as W. In this case, the meaning of the word 'water' could still be wide, for specification of the meaning might still require direct reference to some other contingent object or objects (besides the kind W). Perhaps, for instance, specification of the meaning requires direct reference to the planet Earth. "To be water," we might say, "is to be liquid that belongs to the same kind as the thirst-quenching stuff found in the streams and lakes of *this planet*." On this idea, notice, the meaning of 'water' as used by our counterparts on Twin Earth would be exactly similar qualitatively to our meaning, but their meaning would still be different, since specification of their meaning would require direct reference to Twin Earth instead of Earth.

I have defended elsewhere a detailed proposal along these lines, a proposal that gives a precise explanation of the way in which the meanings of natural kind terms, and hence the concepts they express, are wide (see McKinsey, 1987, 1991b, and 1994). For our purposes here, though, it doesn't matter exactly which sorts of contingent objects are involved essentially in the meanings of such terms. The important point is that, on the sort of externalist account I've just sketched, the wideness of the meaning of, or the concept expressed by, a word like 'Cicero' or 'water' is a *logical* property of the meaning or concept. Thus on this account, to be the concept of Cicero, given the actual meaning of the word 'Cicero', a concept must be a concept of *a certain man*; to be the concept of water, given the actual meaning of the word 'water', a concept must be a concept involving a certain natural kind, or involving some other contingent object or objects. Notice that, on this externalist account, concepts like that of Cicero and water are of course related metaphysically to external objects; but they are so only because they are, in the first place, *logically* related to those objects. So it follows from this account that no one could possibly know a priori that he or she has the concept of Cicero or the concept of water. For to know these things a priori, one would have to know a priori that one has a concept of a certain man, and that one has a concept involving a certain natural kind, or other contingent object.

Of course, McLaughlin and Tye claim otherwise. They claim that if one has a thought involving the concept of Cicero, or a thought involving the concept of water, then one can easily know a priori that one has these concepts - no problem! But in making this claim, they seem to have forgotten that what we *say* when we say that someone has the concept of Cicero, or that someone has the concept of water, is determined by the actual meanings of the words 'Cicero' and 'water'. Once again, they seem to have forgotten the semantic basis of their own view. But as I've tried to make clear, it will follow from any intelligible externalist account of these meanings that the existence of the relevant concepts *logically* implies the existence of the external objects that individuate those concepts, and so it will also follow that one cannot know a priori that one has such a concept.

McLaughlin and Tye's glib insistence that one can easily know a priori that one has the concept of Cicero or the concept of water strongly suggests that they must be thinking of the properties of having such concepts as *narrow* properties, contrary to their own view. It's difficult to explain why they would be thinking this way. Perhaps they are confusing the wide property of having the concept of Cicero with the narrow property of having the concept expressed by the word 'Cicero', and the wide property of having the concept of water with the narrow property of having the concept expressed by the word 'water'. In any case, by insisting that one can know a priori that one has the concepts in question, they are making it impossible for themselves to give any clear externalist account of what makes the property of having such a concept a wide property. For once again, they are forced to make the obscure claim that, in some inexplicable manner, the concepts in question are "metaphysically", though not logically, related to external objects. Once again, obscurity is the price they must pay for consistency.

6. Why have so many externalists like McLaughlin and Tye uncritically endorsed the obscure idea that the concept or meaning expressed by a natural kind term like 'water'

could be metaphysically but not logically dependent on external objects? Certainly there is no existing semantic account of such terms that implies or even remotely suggests this idea. Of course, concepts and words with given meanings can *refer* to things in the external world; but reference is a contingent semantic relation, not a metaphysical one. And of course some causal theories assert that certain concepts or meanings can only exist or be possessed when an agent bears a certain *causal* relation to given objects or kinds of object; but again, causation is certainly not a metaphysical relation. The only explanation for the idea's popularity that I can see is that many externalists have somehow managed to infer that the concept of water is metaphysically but not logically connected to H₂O, on the basis of the fact that it is metaphysically but not logically necessary that water is H₂O.⁷ But this is a grotesquely bad inference. The proposition that water is H₂O asserts an a posteriori metaphysical connection between *water* and H₂O, not between the *concept* of water and H₂O. Thus nothing whatever about the nature of the relation between the *concept* of water and H₂O follows from the modal status of the proposition that water is H₂O.

Moreover, the fact that it's not a logical truth that water is H₂O hardly shows that the connection between the concept of water and external objects is not that of logical necessity. As we've seen, the Twin Earth case makes it plausible to suppose that the concept or meaning expressed by 'water' can only be specified or individuated by direct reference to something external. Suppose that this something is water itself. Then as we've also seen, it would be a logical or conceptual truth that the concept of water exists only if water does. In this case, the connection between the concept of water and water itself - that is, H₂O - would be a conceptual or logical connection, even though it is not a logical truth either that water is H₂O, or that the concept of water exists only if H₂O does.

Notice that if the existence of the concept of water did logically or conceptually depend upon the existence of water, then since it is metaphysically but not logically necessary that water is H₂O, it would follow that it is metaphysically but not logically

necessary that the concept of water exists only if H₂O does. So it is possible to make sense of the idea that the concept of water is metaphysically but not logically connected to H₂O, provided that we make the prior assumption that the concept of water is logically connected with water in the first place.

But I don't think it's possible to make sense of the idea that a given concept or meaning could be metaphysically related to external objects, in the absence of any logical or conceptual relations that the concept or meaning bears to those objects. Kripke's (1972) suggestion that some propositions, such as the proposition that water is H₂O, are both necessarily true and a posteriori, makes sense because such propositions concern the essential *nature* of some type of substance, where such a nature can only be discovered by empirical investigation. But how could we make similar sense of the proposal that the concept or meaning expressed by a given word could bear such an a posteriori but necessary relation to things in the external world? Surely, the suggestion that some concepts and meanings could have hidden "natures" discoverable only by science (neurophysiology perhaps?), natures that would somehow necessarily connect these concepts and meanings to certain external objects, is quite unintelligible and should not be taken seriously. Surely, the truth is rather that if some concepts or meanings are indeed necessarily connected to external objects, they are so only because *we*, or the conventions of our language, have introduced or defined these concepts or meanings in part on the basis of reference to, or presupposition of, the external objects in question. Again, to make the existence of such necessary connections intelligible, we have to assume that these connections hold as a matter of logical or conceptual necessity.

7. So far we've seen that McLaughlin and Tye's claim that externalist theses are not about logical or conceptual dependency relations, results in a view that, while consistent with privileged access, is largely unintelligible. But it is important to realize that their endorsement of the principle of privileged access (PAC) results in a view that is also

false regarding the semantic facts. In particular, all externalists who, like Burge (1988) and McLaughlin and Tye, defend compatibilism and explicitly endorse (PAC), thereby commit themselves to the *denial* of semantic externalism (SE), which I repeat:

Semantic Externalism (SE)

Many *de dicto*-structured predicates of the form ‘is thinking that p’ express properties that are wide, in the sense that possession of such a property by an agent logically implies the existence of contingent objects of a certain sort that are external to that agent.

For remember, as McLaughlin and Tye themselves agree, (PAC) is inconsistent with any externalist thesis on which having the property of thinking that p *logically* implies the existence of external objects. And (SE) of course asserts that there are many such properties.

Now it is certainly strange to find contemporary defenders of externalism like Burge and McLaughlin and Tye, who are willing to explicitly commit themselves to the denial of semantic externalism. But what is most important is that this denial is just *false*. For (SE) is shown true by many simple cases of *de dicto*-structured predicates of the form ‘is thinking that p’ that contain small-scope proper names and indexicals. Many predicates of this sort do in fact typically express properties that are relational with respect to ordinary objects, and the possession of any such property of course logically implies the existence of the particular object in question.

Consider the case of Dave, a new graduate student who hasn’t yet met Larry, the department’s Chair. Seeing a rumpled middle-aged man in old clothes busily cleaning the seminar room, Dave says ‘That janitor is really hardworking’. Hearing this, I turn to a colleague and say

(9) Dave is thinking that Larry is a janitor.

It seems intuitively obvious that in uttering (9) I would be using the name ‘Larry’ simply to refer to Larry, and to say that Dave is thinking that he is a janitor.

If the name ‘Larry’ had some sort of descriptive meaning in English, then

perhaps it could be used to say something about the way Dave thinks of Larry. I have argued elsewhere (McKinsey 1999) that some ordinary proper names do in fact have descriptive meanings, and that as a result, uses of such names in cognitive contexts are non-relational. However, I also believe, on the basis of Kripke's (1972) famous Gödel-Schmidt case and others like it, that such names are very rare, and that most ordinary names have no descriptive meanings in public languages. In particular, it is clear that my use of 'Larry' in (9) has no descriptive meaning, and so it can function only to introduce its referent into what is said by (9). Hence (9) ascribes a property that is relational with respect to Larry: it says that Dave has an occurrent thought *about* Larry to the effect that he is a janitor.

It is even clearer that cognitive predicates containing small-scope demonstratives and other indexicals express relational properties. Consider

(10) Dave is thinking that *he* (or: *that man*) is a janitor.

Assuming that the occurrence of 'he' (or 'that man') in (10) refers to Larry, (10) like (9) says that Dave is having an occurrent thought about Larry to the effect that he is a janitor. Notice that both (9) and (10) ascribe relational cognitive properties, even though the occurrences of the relevant terms 'Larry' and 'he' (or 'that man') are assumed to fall both grammatically and logically in the scope of 'is thinking that'. Given this assumption, (9) and (10) are both *structurally* (or logically) *de dicto*, but due to the semantic character of the small-scope terms, both sentences turn out to be semantically relational, or *de re*.

Hence many *de dicto*-structured predicates that contain ordinary proper names and indexicals express properties that are logically wide, and thus such predicates show that semantic externalism (SE) is true, contrary to McLaughlin and Tye's view. Such predicates also provide straightforward counterexamples to (PAC), also contrary to their view. For suppose that (9) is true. Then it immediately follows from (PAC) that Dave can know a priori that he is thinking that Larry is a janitor. But this consequence is false. Since what Dave allegedly knows a priori is relational with respect to Larry, Dave could

just deduce from what he knows a priori that Larry exists, and hence he could also know a priori that Larry exists, which is clearly absurd.

8. Since (PAC) is false, it's an incorrect expression of the idea that we have a privileged way of knowing about our own thoughts. I've suggested elsewhere (McKinsey, 1994) that the correct principle would restrict the properties of a thought to which one has privileged access to those fundamental semantic properties that *individuate* the thought, in the following sense:

(IND) A thought that a person x has in a possible world w is *individuated* by a property P just in case in any other possible world w' a person y would have the very same thought if and only if in w' y also has a thought that has P .

Then I'd propose that the correct principle of privileged access is

Privileged Access to Individuating Properties (PAI)

It is necessarily true that if a person's thought is individuated by a given property \square , then that person can in principle come to know a priori that he or she has a thought that has the property \square .

Since, as we've seen, one never has privileged access to one's possession of logically wide properties, (PAI) implies that our thoughts are individuated only by logically *narrow* properties. I will call this principle

Metaphysical Internalism (MI)

It is necessarily true that if a person's thought is individuated by a given property \square , then \square is logically narrow.

I endorse both (PAI) and (MI).

I've also said that I endorse semantic externalism (SE), the thesis that many *de dicto*-structured predicates express logically wide properties. (SE) is of course consistent with both (PAI) and (MI). This is because, being solely a *semantic* thesis, (SE) says merely that many cognitive predicates express logically wide properties; it says nothing about the metaphysical issue of whether or not these wide properties ever *individuate*

our thoughts. Thus, the conjunction of (SE) and (PAI) provides a form of compatibilist view that is clearly consistent, and one that I think is true.

It is worth noting that at one point in their paper, McLaughlin and Tye assert that “the privileged access thesis is concerned with occurrent thoughts typed in as *fine-grained* a way as is necessary for the purposes of *any* rationalizing explanation” (p. 293; their emphasis). I agree with this assertion, and it in fact provides one of the main motivations behind my (1994) proposal of (PAI) as a proper replacement for the false (PAC). In my view, the properties that individuate our thoughts are precisely the properties that semantically characterize those thoughts in a maximally fine-grained way. This suggests that McLaughlin and Tye might themselves be willing to abandon (PAC) in favor of (PAI), as I had proposed (see p. 295). However, they cannot consistently take this line. For as we saw above, they insist that a singular thought such as the thought that Cicero is an orator is individuated (in my sense) by the singular proposition that is the thought’s content (p 299). And, as they also correctly insist, no one can have privileged access to their thought’s having such a content. So McLaughlin and Tye are committed to the denial of (PAI).

Those whose externalism, like mine, is restricted to a semantic thesis like (SE) are free to endorse the idea that we have privileged access to the properties that individuate our thoughts. But it seems to me that most externalists, like McLaughlin and Tye, have also wanted to endorse externalism as a *metaphysical* view about thoughts. These externalists claim that some thoughts are individuated by their wide contents, or by the wide property of having such a content. We might call this view

Metaphysical Externalism (ME)

In some cases, a person is thinking that p, the content that p is logically wide, and the person's thought is individuated by the property of being a thought that has the content that p.

(By a "logically wide" content, I mean an abstract semantic entity, like a singular proposition, whose very existence logically implies the existence of contingent, typically

concrete, objects.)

As we've just seen, however, anyone who endorses (ME) is precluded from endorsing what I take to be the most plausible principle of privileged access, namely (PAI). This in fact is one of the main reasons why I believe that (ME) is false. There are other good reasons as well. Many philosophers, including myself, have pointed out that two persons' thoughts that have the same singular proposition as content could nevertheless be different thoughts.⁸ This is because a thought is not always individuated by its propositional content alone, but also by the agent's *way of thinking* of the content. I have also argued that two persons, in distinct possible worlds, could have the *same* thoughts, even though their thoughts have *different* singular propositions as contents. (See McKinsey, 1994 and 1999.) For these reasons, metaphysical externalism (ME) should be rejected in favor of a view that combines semantic externalism (SE) with metaphysical *internalism* (MI),

9. Why have so many contemporary defenders of externalism come to ignore - and some to even deny - the semantic basis of their view? Perhaps one reason is that it has become common to state both externalism and the arguments for it in wholly non-semantic terms. Consider the Twin Earth argument, for instance. When Putnam (1975) first described the Twin Earth example, he of course used it to make a semantic point, namely, that natural kind terms have wide meanings. But by now it is commonplace to state the moral of the example as if it had no semantic significance whatever. It is said that Oscar, a denizen of Earth, thinks that water is wet. But Toscar, who is Oscar's molecular duplicate on Twin Earth, has no thoughts about water at all. That's because all of the thoughts that Toscar expresses by use of the word 'water' are about a distinct kind of liquid composed of XYZ molecules instead of H₂O. Hence Oscar thinks that water is wet, but his molecular duplicate Toscar does not. Hence the property of having a thought with a given content - say, that water is wet - need not locally supervene upon the intrinsic physical properties of the person who has the thought.

Let's call a property that can thus fail to locally supervene upon a person's intrinsic physical properties, an "S-wide" property. Then the minimal consequence that follows from the above "short version" of the Twin Earth argument is a thesis that we might call

Weak Externalism (WE)

In some cases, the property of having a thought with the content that p is S-wide.

It has become commonplace for externalists to identify their view with this very weak thesis, and thus to identify their opponents (sometimes called "individualists") with those who (insanely) deny this weak thesis.⁹ This is a highly dubious practice. For one thing, I know of no philosopher who has ever actually *denied* (WE), so it seems unlikely that the defender of (WE) really has any opponents at all.

Certainly, it is clear that no defender of internalism *should* deny (WE), since there are paradigm cases of obviously narrow cognitive properties that do not supervene upon intrinsic physical properties. Consider *de se* properties, for instance. The property P that we ascribe to Descartes when we say that Descartes is thinking that he himself is a thinking thing, is surely a *narrow* property if anything is. Yet P is S-wide. For P is the property of having a first-person thought about Descartes to the effect that he is a thinking thing. Notice that only Descartes could possibly have property P. In particular, Descartes' molecular duplicate on Twin Earth could not have P. Hence P is S-wide. Yet surely, P should count as *narrow*: Descartes' having P would logically imply the existence of no object external to him. Moreover, of course, anyone who has P (that is, anyone who is identical with Descartes) can know a priori that he has P, and so has privileged access to his possession of P, as Descartes himself first pointed out.¹⁰

There are many other types of logically narrow properties that are also S-wide. Consider, for instance the *disjunction* of any logically narrow cognitive property N with a cognitive property W that is both logically wide and S-wide. The property N or W is logically narrow, since having it does not logically imply the existence of external

objects (one can have N or W by having N). But this disjunctive property is also S-wide: for by assumption, W is S-wide, and so of two molecular duplicates x and y, x can have W while y does not; but suppose that neither x nor y has N; then x has N or W but y does not. So N or W is logically narrow but S-wide. Note also that in this case, x would not have privileged access to possession of N or W, since x has no privileged access to possession of W.

So S-wide properties are a heterogeneous lot. Some are logically narrow, some are logically wide. Some satisfy a principle of privileged access, and some do not. This means that versions of externalism like (WE) that make use of the notion of S-wideness are of very little philosophical interest. Again, no defender of any interesting form of internalism should want to deny (WE). Moreover, (WE) is logically consistent with the explicit negation of semantic externalism (SE), so that one could consistently accept (WE) while insisting that absolutely every predicate of the form ‘thinks that p’ expresses only a logically narrow property. (WE) is also consistent with metaphysical internalism (MI) as well as with both principles of privileged access (PAC) and (PAI). In fact, (WE) is such a weak thesis that, for every interesting principle concerning the externalism-internalism debate that I’ve so far identified in this paper, (WE) is consistent with both that principle and its negation. That’s why I say that (WE) is philosophically uninteresting: it has no interesting logical implications regarding any traditionally held principles in the philosophy of mind.

But if the minimal consequence (WE) of the Twin Earth thought experiments is so philosophically uninteresting, then why are these thought-experiments themselves so exciting? The answer is obvious. In the Twin Earth case, it is *not* the S-wideness of the property of thinking that water is wet that’s philosophically interesting. Rather, what is interesting is the apparent explanation of *why* this particular property is S-wide. For this explanation, as we saw earlier, would seem to imply that the property in question is S-wide because it is logically relational with respect to contingent, external objects. This in turn implies the truth of semantic externalism (SE) and provides evidence in favor of,

though it does not imply, the truth of metaphysical externalism (ME), both of which are philosophically significant principles.

But notice that to give this kind of explanation, one *must* do semantics. In the Twin Earth case, it is fairly clear how the explanation should go, since as Putnam originally described the case, it provides strong evidence that natural kind terms like ‘water’ have logically wide meanings. Once a clear account of these wide meanings is provided then we can understand the contribution made by a natural kind term to the meaning of a cognitive predicate containing the term such as ‘is thinking that water is wet’, and finally, we can obtain an understanding of what kinds of properties are expressed by such predicates and the precise sense in which these properties are “wide”.

So in order to have any sort of clear and philosophically interesting view, externalists *must* provide clear semantic explanations of the intuitions evoked by the thought-experiments which they use to motivate their stance. Yet as far as I know, no externalist has ever provided any such clear semantic explanation. And in fact, it seems, externalists have more recently stopped doing semantics entirely. Again, why has this happened?

This is only speculation, but it seems to me that most externalists have abandoned semantics out of an intense desire to avoid inconsistency with privileged access. Recall that (PAC) is the principle of privileged access endorsed by such externalists as Burge and McLaughlin and Tye. Also recall that (PAC) is straightforwardly inconsistent with semantic externalism (SE). But if one abandons (SE), then one is precluded from ever being able to give a clear semantic explanation of the wide-ness of any cognitive property. Having abandoned (SE), externalists are then forced to make vague allusions to obscure and unexplained a posteriori metaphysical connections between cognitive properties and external objects, as a way of having a view as to what makes such a property “wide”. Or, as an alternative, externalists sometimes appeal to the notion of S-wideness as a way of stating their view. This has the advantage of providing a fairly clear and intelligible thesis in the form of (WE), but unfortunately, the

thesis is philosophically uninteresting in the absence of any further semantic explanation.

So externalists should give up their devotion to privileged access, at least in the form of (PAC). After all, as we've seen, that principle is straightforwardly false anyway. Then having given up (PAC), externalists can go back to doing good old fashioned clear-headed semantics, and make some progress.

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NOTES

1. See, for instance, Brueckner (1992).
2. As far as I know, the first to propose the metaphysical strategy was Burge (1988).
3. While I think that this is the most fundamental reason why the metaphysical strategy is misconceived, I have elsewhere emphasized another serious problem, namely, that it results

in a version of externalism that is trivial and uninteresting. See McKinsey (1991a), (1991b), (1994a), and (forthcoming).

4. Here and below I mean 'logically implies' in a broad sense that includes conceptual implication. See McKinsey (1991a, p. 14) and (1991b, p. 152).

5. This *reductio* argument depends upon the following closure principle for apriority:

(CLI) Necessarily, for any person *x*, and any propositions *P* and *Q*, if *x* can know a priori that *P*, and *P* logically implies *Q*, then *x* can know a priori that *Q*.

The most common interpretations of my argument don't see it as relying on (CLI), but rather on another very plausible closure principle, namely:

(CAK) Necessarily, for any person *x*, and any propositions *P* and *Q*, if *x* can know a priori that *P*, and *x* can know a priori that if *P* then *Q*, then *x* can know a priori that *Q*.

(See for instance Brown (1995), Gallois and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1996), Boghossian (1997), McLaughlin and Tye (1998), Davies (1998), and Wright (2000).) Although it is possible to give a version of my *reductio* that does appeal to (CAK), the correct restatement would differ from any of the existing versions that use (CAK). The difference is that all the existing versions that use (CAK) also rely on the (in my opinion false) assumption that externalist theses like (2) in the text are themselves knowable a priori. But neither my original (1991a) version that appeals to (CLI), nor my restatement of it that appeals to (CAK) needs to rely on the (false) assumption that externalist theses such as (2) are knowable a priori. For details, see McKinsey (forthcoming).

6. For statements and defenses of the standard view, see for instance McKay (1981), Salmon (1986), and Soames (1987). I myself hold that the standard view is false (see McKinsey, 1986 and 1994). However, I agree with defenders of the standard view that an ascription like (3) ascribes a property that is relational with respect to Cicero. See below, section 7 and see also McKinsey (1999) and (forthcoming).

7. See for instance Breuckner (1992, p. 116). The possibility that the "metaphysical" externalists might be making this inference was suggested to me by Mark Huston.

8. See for instance Perry (1979), Fitch (1985), Loar (1985), Salmon (1986), and McKinsey (1986).

9. See, for instance, Brueckner (1995), p. 147, Gallois and O'Leary-Hawthorne (1996), p. 1, and McLaughlin and Tye (1998), p. 285.

10. See my discussion of the narrowness of *de se* properties in McKinsey (1991b), pp. 146-157.