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**CARTESIAN SCEPTICISM ABOUT
THE EXTERNAL WORLD, SEMANTIC
OR CONTENT EXTERNALISM, AND
THE MIND**

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Summary:

This thesis has three parts. In the first part, the author defends the coherence of Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In particular, the author contends that such scepticism survives attacks from Descartes himself, as well as from W. V. O. Quine, Robert Nozick, Alvin Goldman, and David Armstrong. It follows that Cartesian scepticism remains intact. In the second part of this thesis, the author contends that the semantic or content externalisms of Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge do not refute Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In particular, he argues that Putnam and Burge do not make good their respective externalist cases against scepticism, and that they beg the question against that position. The author concludes that semantic or content externalism is impotent against such scepticism. In the third part of this thesis, the author addresses the mind, and suggests that Descartes, by offering his cogito argument, also offers a theory of thought content, which he then supports with his substance dualism. He suggests that Descartes does not succeed with any of his arguments here, although his theory of thought content is still plausible. To remedy this, the author discusses the versions of narrow meaning or content offered by Jerry Fodor and Colin McGinn, and defends a version of such meaning or content that presupposes that semantic or content externalism is false. The author lastly follows Donald Davidson, and argues for a version anomalous monism, which he contends is a theory that shows how semantic or content internalism might be true.

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Chapter One

George Santayana, in his *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, offers a salient characterization of Cartesian scepticism about the external world. He insists that such 'scepticism is chastity of the intellect, and it is shameful to surrender it too soon to the first comer.'¹ This chastity is appropriate, he says, for the sceptic is only asking us to prove just what we should prove, that we really do possess knowledge (that is, *justified true belief*), or, failing that, to abandon most of our claims to knowledge. Santayana eventually rejects scepticism for pragmatic reasons, opting for a qualified type of faith that the world exists. But even so, he still insists that 'a philosopher today would be ridiculous and negligible who had not strained his dogmas through the utmost rigors of scepticism.'² It is our responsibility, he says, to take such scepticism seriously. Santayana asks us to engage seriously with Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for if we do not, he insists, we may believe things that have little chance of actually being knowledge.

The attitude that Santayana evinces regarding Cartesian scepticism about the external world is appropriate, it seems, for he is only asking us to listen to those who would have us justify our claims to knowledge, and so, not to believe in an unjustified manner. But unlike Santayana, I do not believe that we will be able to reject such scepticism, altogether. This is because philosophical reflection on the nature and extent of human knowledge has led me, as it has led David Hume and Barry Stroud before me, to draw the seemingly inevitable conclusion that we may not know much of what we take ourselves to know. This position

¹ George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, p.68.

² *Ibid.*, p.10.

falls under the general rubric of philosophical scepticism, although Descartes has offered the most systematic and influential version of it. Scepticism, in its Cartesian variety, tends to foster great dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction, I believe, is the product of the negative assessment of our knowledge claims that the sceptic makes. If we suspect that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is true, mere belief is all we are entitled to. This admission that we only can have belief, in turn, undermines our confidence about the world, about our actions in it.

It is this sense of dissatisfaction and insecurity, I suspect, more than anything else that has fueled the perennial interest in Cartesian scepticism about the external world. It seems to me that we are prone to the intuitive conviction that the sceptical verdict *must* be wrong. But that said, however, I hold that we should acknowledge that the multitude of attempts to identify and diagnose the various mistakes of such scepticism have not met with any considerable success. Indeed, if there is any consensus to be gleaned from these many endeavors, it is that they are all unsuccessful. In effect, this is because these endeavors either fail to respect the depth of the sceptical reasoning involved, or because they incur different problems, and so are even less satisfying than Cartesian scepticism about the external world itself. This thesis takes up the discussion of such scepticism, not by offering any definitive new revelations about it, but instead by eliminating a particular set of solutions that do not work. But actually, this is not actually a defence of scepticism about the external world, but rather an elimination of bad solutions to it.

In this thesis, I begin by addressing Descartes, who in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ‘metaphysically’ doubts all his beliefs. In his First Meditation, he attempts to doubt his beliefs in stages. In order he doubts that his senses are veridical, that he can even say what is around him at all, or that he can interpret mathematics correctly. He does this until he has no beliefs left. Descartes also engages with the various objectors to his First Meditation, and although he does not vindicate his use of metaphysical doubt entirely, he wins most of his particular arguments with his objectors. But that said, his doubts still lead to what has become known as the ‘Cartesian Circle,’ and he must respond to this. I argue that although he offers three responses to this charge, each of which contradicts the others, none of them work. Descartes, at the end of his *Meditations*, should have remained a sceptic about the external world. In this part of my thesis, I also address four contemporary responses to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. But as we will see, these responses fare no better against such scepticism about the external world.

In recent years, philosophers have sought to use what is now called semantic or content externalism to answer Cartesian scepticism about the external world. Definitions of externalism vary, but generally, this is the position that semantic or contentful types or tokens can *only* be determined by citing their *necessary* connection to the types or token objects they are about.³ Two questions are paramount here. The first is whether semantic or content externalism is true. I

³ It may seem odd to call this position semantic *or* content externalism. This sort of externalism encompasses both words and thoughts, and so this definition is meant to reflect that. It may also seem odd to mention types *or* tokens words or thoughts. In point of fact semantic or content externalism usually cites types of words or thoughts, but actually token words or thoughts are too should be included.

will argue, contrary to current fashion, that externalism is unsupported. The second question is whether, even if externalism were true, it would provide a successful response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. If I am correct that semantic or content externalism is unsupported, the second question may seem superfluous, but it is not. The second question concerning scepticism can be asked and answered independently of the first. But even if semantic or content externalism is true, it still does not provide a response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

If I am correct about Cartesian scepticism about the external world and semantic or content externalism, this will have implications for the mind. To explore these implications, I return to Descartes and offer an interpretation of his *cogito* argument (his ‘I think, therefore, I am’ argument), which reveals his own theory of meaning or content in terms of ‘conscious seeming.’ In essence, the *cogito* argument leads Descartes to posit his *substance dualism*, the position that mind and brain are separate substances, yet interact causally. But I follow the tradition here and insist that his arguments for substance dualism are seriously flawed, and must be replaced. To do this, I follow Donald Davidson, and argue for a *token* version of the mind and brain identity theory, which he calls ‘anomalous monism.’ I argue that even if only the token identity theory of mind and brain is correct, semantic or content *internalism* is true.⁴ This is the position that semantic or contentful types or tokens are individuated by the intrinsic properties of the person, such that they are *narrow*.⁵

⁴ In point of fact, Davidson himself would disagree with this. In his ‘Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,’ he insists that in the most basic cases, simple perceptual ones, the content of our words or thoughts must be ‘identified with their *causes*,’ (p.318). But if Davidson is correct about his anomalous monism, there is no reason for this latter claim and it even seems to be inconsistent with such monism.

⁵ In this thesis, I define intrinsic properties as follows, although this is tentative. These are the

It is worth mentioning, at this point, what I will *not* argue for here. It must be remembered, throughout, that I will not address *all* forms of scepticism, but only Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In the literature on scepticism, it is often assumed that scepticism about the external world carries with it scepticism about other minds, and about induction. I will not argue for these kinds of scepticism, and assume neutrality concerning them. In the literature on scepticism, it has also been assumed that Cartesian scepticism about the external world leads to scepticism about *reason* itself. I am not arguing for such scepticism, but assume the opposite about it. Thomas Nagel is surely correct when he says that ‘we cannot criticize some of our own claims of reason without *employing* reason at some other point to formulate and support those claims.’⁶ The *only* way the sceptic can even state his case, then, is by assuming that the objectivity of reason holds, at least for him. In this thesis, therefore, I will only address Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

I will also not argue that Cartesian scepticism about the external world should lead to any form of relativism. It may seem that my argument that such scepticism has not yet been surmounted is the first step towards the diverse relativistic positions of Thomas Kuhn, Richard Rorty, or even Jacques Derrida. These relativistic positions have diverse sources, but have in common the claim that a change in context, however that is defined, can issue in virtually any knowledge claim being counted as correct or incorrect. To hold to anything else, such relativists say, is to suppose a false metaphysical picture of the world, propagated by our need to transcend our contextual limitations. By contrast, I hold that Cartesian scepticism

properties that, for any given object, are left over by removing all other objects in space, as well as all other temporal states. The properties that this object has left over after this removal are intrinsic. I intend this definition of intrinsic properties as a mere suggestion, but one that captures the general idea.

⁶ Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word*, p.15.

about the external world entails *only* that we may not have knowledge of the external world but does *not* entail that we cannot distinguish between claims on other grounds. The only limitation here is that these grounds cannot be that one set of claims *really is* knowledge and the other is not.⁷ In what is to follow, I do not intend that Cartesian scepticism about the external world be taken to entail any sort of relativism.

This thesis, although large in scope, must be limited. Unfortunately, because of space considerations, I am forced to ignore certain objections to Cartesian scepticism about the external world, certain versions of semantic or content externalism, and certain theories of mind. In particular, I cannot address the epistemological contextualism of Keith DeRose, as a response to scepticism. By the same token, I cannot address the private language argument of Ludwig Wittgenstein, understood as a different version of semantic or content externalism. I cannot, lastly, address the functionalism of Jerry Fodor as a competitor to the identity theory of mind and brain. These positions *are* all relevant to this thesis, but I cannot address them without lengthening it unduly. But actually, I hold that DeRose does not undermine Cartesian skepticism about the external world, that Wittgenstein does not prove his case with his private language argument, and that Fodor does not offer a substantially different account of the mind from the identity theory. If this is correct, these positions can be safely ignored.

⁷ David Hume, in his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, states that while reason shows that we cannot know anything about the external world, still 'a blind and powerful instinct of nature' controls us (p.137). This instinct allows us to see the 'constancy and coherence' of our beliefs. Hume says that this is not knowledge, but enough like it for all that matters to us in everyday life.

B

In the remainder of this introduction, I will provide a sketch of the argumentative strategy of this thesis as a whole, and preview of the chapters to come. In chapter two, then, I review what Descartes says about scepticism in his First Meditation, where he presents a series of objections to our knowledge claims about the external world. I consider the responses of his contemporaries to his doubt. In this section of this chapter, I consider how Descartes attempts to refute his own scepticism, which leads to his 'Cartesian Circle,' or the problem that he uses proof of God and his 'natural light of reason' each to guarantee the veracity of the other, and does so in a circular fashion. I argue that Descartes does not escape this circle, yielding scepticism yet again. The following schema can be called the *general sceptical argument*:

1. I can know that p only if I can rule out the possibility that q (if I can know that not q).
2. But I cannot rule out the possibility that q.
3. I do *not* know that p.

This general sceptical argument, I believe, depicts the structure of *all* serious arguments for scepticism. In premise 1, then, 'p' is replaced by a sentence about a domain in question (some element of the external world, induction, other minds, moral properties, etc), and 'q' is replaced by a sentence about some possibility of our knowing the facts in that domain (the possibility, say, that we are deceived by an evil demon, that we cannot project into the future, that all those around us are

robots, or that morality is a projection of our emotions). The important premise here is 2, for if we cannot rule out 'q,' if we cannot affirm 'not q,' scepticism about the domain in question follows. The skeptical problem is that it is no easy task to satisfy premise 2, or to rule out the possibility that 'q,' and so to know that 'not q.'

If I am correct about this general sceptical argument, and so about the structure of all such sceptical arguments, this has specific consequences here. This is because knowing this structure places me in a position to show that all arguments for scepticism rest on the same fundamental assumptions. If this is correct, then it becomes important for me to acknowledge and defend these assumptions against objections as much as is possible, for by doing so my argument will be strengthened. I will then be able to claim, with more authority, that any sort of scepticism about the external world is an undefeated position. The following list of five assumptions may not be exhaustive, but these are typically cited in epistemological discussions.

- A. If any subject S has knowledge at all, part of that knowledge is *a priori*. This is knowledge that is derived independently of experience.
- B. If S knows that p, and S knows that p logically entails that not q, S is thereby placed in an *epistemic position* to know that not q.
- C. S knows that p only if S is in an epistemic position to *construct an argument* that p is significantly more likely to be true than q is.

- D. The *only* evidence S has for his beliefs about the external world being true are those arrived at through the *representations* of his mind.⁸
- E. There is no *necessary* connection between the meanings or contents of the words or thoughts S employs and the actual state of his environment.

These five assumptions, I believe, should be familiar to philosophers of an epistemological bent. In essence, in this thesis, I will argue that assumption A is needed to be able to offer any sceptical argument. By contrast, assumption B is crucial to justifying appropriate instances of premise 1 of the general sceptical argument. But also, I hold that assumptions C, D, and E are crucial to justifying any appropriate instances of premise 2 of that argument. In point of fact, these argumentative moves are not controversial, at least in the context of epistemological discussions. But as we will see, if these five assumptions must be adhered to, it will be difficult to object that any sort of scepticism can be definitively refuted.

To begin, assumption A, that we possess *a priori* knowledge, has always been controversial, and is so today. This knowledge is supposed to be determined independently of experience, and is often said to be restricted to truths that are unrevisable.⁹ But regardless of such controversy, I take it to be an obvious ground

⁸ This might sound like John Locke, but is not. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he says that 'the mind, in all its thoughts and reasoning, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which *alone* it does or can contemplate; it is evident, that our knowledge is *only* conversant with them' (p. 442). This assumption says merely that our evidence for our beliefs comes *through* our representations.

⁹ Hilary Putnam, in 'Introduction: Philosophy of Language and the Rest of Philosophy,' says that *a priori* knowledge understood in terms of unrevisable truths is problematic, for 'there are *no* truths that a rational man is forbidden to doubt,' (xvi). Putnam insists that since 'it often happens that in science something that was taken to be an *a priori* truth is given up,' perhaps there is no a

rule here that an argument for scepticism about the external world can be taken seriously only if its premises do not fall within the scope of its conclusion. The worry here is that if the sceptic does not have such knowledge at his disposal, he may *only* be able to offer his argument because of his interactions with the real world, and so be forced to argue in a circle. This is where assumption A, that we possess a priori knowledge or truths that are known to be unrevisable, becomes relevant. If the sceptic can offer his argument, such knowledge should provide him with a foundation in reason with which to prove his case. He can then argue, without arguing in a circle, that we do not have any knowledge of the external world, after all.

It is worth mentioning that, strictly speaking, the sceptic about the external world may *not* require that assumption A be true, may not require a priori knowledge, or knowledge that is independent of experience and so unrevisable, to state his case. If he did require such knowledge, it would be difficult to understand how so many philosophers could have both denied the possibility of it, yet have still been sceptics about the external world all the while. The sceptic may *only* require that his premises, even if they are not known to him a priori, are also not available to him because an external world exists. But assumption A, that we possess a priori knowledge, or knowledge that is independent of experience and so unrevisable, is still useful to the sceptic about the external world. If he possesses such a priori knowledge, it may provide him a foundation in *reason* from which to launch his argument. It may be that such truths of reason are part of his argument, or even that they do not show up in his

priori knowledge.

argument. But regardless of which of these options is the case, if he possesses such truths of reason, it will be easier for him to state his position.

By contrast, assumption B, that knowledge is closed under known logical entailment, has been the focus of much contemporary epistemology. But as I have written it, assumption B is much weaker than the traditional formulations of such closure. The formulation of epistemic closure usually states that ‘if S knows that p, and if S knows that p entails that not q, S also knows that not q.’¹⁰ But this formulation of such closure has been the focal point of much criticism. These criticisms usually turn on the claim that knowing that p and knowing that p entails not q, is *not* enough to know that not q, for not q may yet not be *justified*, because not q may not be *true*, or because whoever may not *believe* that not q.¹¹ But these criticisms need not detain me here, for my task is to give the weakest formulation of epistemic closure that will still work for scepticism about the external world. It follows that, according to my formulation, assumption B only says that ‘by knowing that p, wherein p entails that not q, we are put in an *epistemic position* to know all that follows from p.’ It may be that we do not take advantage of this position, but being in it is closure enough.

If assumption B or epistemic closure is correct, it can be used to justify instances of premise 1 in the general sceptical argument. This is because, according to premise 1 of that argument, I can be justified in believing that p only if I can rule out the possibility that q, where, let us say, ‘p’ is replaced by the sentence ‘I am presently seated in front of my computer, typing away,’ and ‘q’ is

¹⁰ Stephen Hales, in ‘Epistemic Closure Principles,’ formulates closure as $\forall x \forall y (Kx \text{ and } K((x \rightarrow y) \rightarrow Ky))$, or if S knows x and knows that x entails y, then S knows y (p.189). Hales does not consider my formulation, that for $\forall x \forall y, (Kx \text{ and } K((x \rightarrow y) \text{ EP} \rightarrow Ky))$, or if S knows x and knows that x entails y then S is in an *epistemic position* to know y. I define closure in this way to avoid the standard criticisms of it.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.192.

replaced by the sentence 'I am a brain in a vat.' It follows that, according to assumption B, if I really do know that I am presently seated in front of a computer typing away, and I know that my being so situated entails that I am not just a brain, then I *am* in an epistemic position to know that I am not just a brain. But the importance of assumption B, of epistemic closure, is that it can be put in its *contrapositive* form. In other words, if I do *not* know that not q, then I do *not* know that p either. If I do *not* know that I am not a brain in a vat then I do *not* know that I am sitting at my computer typing away, either. The contrapositive form of assumption B, or epistemic closure, shows why premise 1 of the general sceptical argument is important.

In the general sceptical argument, premise 2 says that, unfortunately, I do *not* know that not q is true, or do not know that I am not a brain in a vat. This is where assumptions C, D, and E become relevant. In particular, assumption C cites what *must* occur for me now that I am in an epistemic position to know that any given proposition is true. In particular, to be in such a position, it says, I must be able to *construct an argument* for the likelihood of p, or an argument that I am sitting at my computer, typing away. The question is whether or not I can do such a thing. The worry here is that, since so many have constructed question begging arguments that they too were located where they believed they were, doing what they believed they were doing, it becomes difficult to ascertain how I could know these things now. If I cannot rely on assumption C, or my ability to construct an argument for p, that I am sitting at my computer, typing away, then I do not know this, after all. But if I do not know p, that I am sitting here typing away, then even if I still believe this, I must now do so without argument. It follows that assumption C, the ability to construct such an argument for p, may be paramount

for mounting a challenge to any kind of scepticism, but this condition is difficult to meet.

To drive this point home, assumptions D and E further secure the claim that I cannot meet this condition of constructing an argument for the likelihood of p, one that rules out q. This is because, according to assumption D, the *only* evidence that I have is what Ludwig Wittgenstein says is such folly, the evidence of 'my own case.'¹² This is the evidence provided by my *representation* of the external world, such that I must *infer* it to exist at all. But according to assumption E, none of my beliefs, or their meanings or contents, entails that necessarily any proposition about the external world is true. Trouble arises with the conjunction of assumptions D and E, for they ensure that the evidence I have at my disposal to construct an argument for the likelihood of p is *always* insufficient to overcome scepticism. It follows that I am not in an epistemic position to construct an argument that p, that I am sitting at my computer, typing away, which was supposed to rule out q, that I am a brain in a vat. It seems to follow that the general sceptical argument is correct.

To continue with my chapter summary, in chapter three, I address four contemporary responses to scepticism, each of which attacks the general sceptical

¹² Wittgenstein, his *Philosophical Investigations*, as the product of his *private language argument*, launches an attack on the idea that we could, even possibly, think of ourselves in isolation from others. He says that if we were to begin with our own case, we would then never be able to connect with the world:

If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word pain means then must I not say the same of other people too? Can I generalize the one case so irresponsibly (293).

If I have to imagine someone else's pain on the model of my own, this is none too easy a thing to do: for I have to imagine pain that I do feel on the model of pain I do not feel (303).

It is impossible, Wittgenstein says, to begin with our own case, since that would make it impossible to generalize about how other people feel. This is why, in *Zettel*, he says, we can only understand each other 'in the weave of life,' (568). Descartes, by contrast, holds that we can begin with our own case, and can generalize correctly.

argument by rejecting one of the assumptions A through D. To reject assumption A, is to uphold *naturalized* epistemology, and W. V. O. Quine is the most prominent advocate of this position. He relegates epistemology to a branch of natural science, to his behavioristic version of psychology. Robert Nozick, by contrast, rejects epistemic closure, and so rejects assumption B. But without closure, he insists, we can still know much about the world, merely by knowing the parts of the world that our knowledge *tracks*. Alvin Goldman denies assumption C. He does so, he says, because internalist accounts of knowledge demand too much of us, and so must be mistaken. Goldman argues for *historical reliabilism*, according to which knowledge is the product of belief-forming mechanisms. David Armstrong, lastly, rejects assumption D, and so espouses *direct realism*, according to which we do not represent the world, but are in immediate contact with it. Armstrong insists that we can know about the world because we are already in contact with it.

The rejection of assumption E is a popular philosophical move. In the seventeenth century, Bishop Berkeley attempted to do just this by offering his subjective idealism, rendering the whole world dependent on the mind.¹³ But his idealism has been revamped, in different guises, and in lesser degrees, by philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Richard Rorty.

¹³ Bishop Berkeley, in his *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, denies assumption E, and claims that the external world exists, but does so only *as perceived*. To insist upon more, he says, 'is a contradiction' (p.120). It follows that we must be sceptics, or must redefine reality as being dependent on the mind:

1. Sensible objects are things that we perceive by sense.
2. These objects *just are* our ideas.
3. Ideas cannot exist unperceived.
4. Sensible objects cannot exist unperceived
5. The world is mind-dependent.

But as so many philosophers have noted, Berkeley is incorrect about his premise 2. Sensible objects are not ideas, but rather ideas resemble objects. To counter this objection, Berkeley claims that 'ideas can only resemble ideas' (p.125). But this, plainly, is not true, and so, his subjective idealism is false.

These contemporary positions are often called *linguistic* idealism, although this would surely be an unwelcome title to their adherents. If either the eighteenth or twentieth century versions of idealism were correct, there would be no issue of scepticism about the external world, for the world would then be mind or language dependent, and there would be *necessary* connections between meaning or content, and parts of the world. But such idealisms have never seemed plausible, for two reasons. The first reason is that both kinds of idealism deny that there is an *objective* world at all, and the second reason is that both kinds of idealism deny assumption E.

The importance of semantic or content externalism, here, is that it too denies assumption E, that there are no necessary connections between meaning or content and parts of world, and so defuses the threat of Cartesian scepticism about the external world before it starts. But semantic or content externalism is quite unique, for unlike subjective or linguistic idealism it does *not* make the world depend on the mind, but rather makes the mind depend on the world. By making this move, semantic or content externalists try to show two things. In particular, externalists try to show how assumption E is false, or in what way there *are* necessary connections between meaning or content and parts of the world. But also, externalists try to show that, since the mind depends on the world, this direction of dependency preserves the objectivity of the latter. It seems that, given these two apparent virtues, semantic or content externalism offers a promising strategy for dealing with Cartesian scepticism about the external world. But as we will see, semantic or content externalism may sound promising, but the arguments for it are far from decisive.¹⁴

¹⁴ Colin McGinn, in his *Mental Content*, notes that according to semantic or content externalism

In chapter four, I examine the work of Hilary Putnam. I address his argument in his 'The Meaning of 'Meaning',' wherein he attacks the Fregean theory of meaning in terms of a 'mode of presentation' of an object to a mind, wherein a 'thought is expressed,' as well as any descriptivist heirs to it. Putnam offers an alternative *causal* account of meaning for *natural kind terms*, such as 'water,' 'aluminum,' or 'beech,' etc. He insists that such meanings are environmentally bound, and so, to the extent that this is so, are 'not in the head.' In this section, I follow Eddy Zemach and argue that Putnam does not make good his case for his causal theory of meaning, and so it has little force against any traditional theory of meaning, much less provide an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In this section, though, I will not speak of his semantic *or* content externalism, since he does not do so either. In this early period, Putnam only speaks of natural kind term *meaning*. But plainly, since his conclusion is that meaning is environmentally bound and so not in the head, it still entails semantic or content externalism.¹⁵

In this chapter, I also address what Putnam says in his *Reason, Truth, and History*. In essence, he argues in two stages. In his first stage, he extends his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms, in two directions. He extends it to all words, and also to thought content, and so, he addresses *representation* itself. In his second stage, Putnam argues that if his causal theory of meaning or content is true for all representation, we could not be brains in a vat. It follows that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is false. In this section, I argue that Putnam does not succeed with his causal theory of meaning or content, for

'there is no possibility of experiencing all this unless the world is like that' (p.108.). This sounds promising, he says, but since we are fallible about any individual object, or even kinds of objects, there is *no* necessary connection between our meanings or contents and parts of the world, and so this response is 'is too cheap and easy' (p.115).

¹⁵ Colin McGinn, 'Charity, Interpretation, and Belief,' p.190

his intuitions here are easily questioned. In particular, his characterizations of other theories of representation are inaccurate, and his criticisms of them also apply to his causal theory anyway. In this section, I also insist that even if his theory were correct, he cannot employ it to show we are not brains in a vat without begging the question. In the end, Putnam does not touch the substance of Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

In chapter five, I examine the work of Tyler Burge, and the position he calls 'anti-individualism,' or what has become known as *social* externalism. I address the argument he offers in his 'Individualism and the Mental,' the focus of which are his thought experiments concerning our propositional attitudes expressed by terms such as 'arthritis,' 'brisket,' 'contract,' etc. In this article, Burge says that in one linguistic community, a subject suffers from incomplete understanding of 'arthritis,' and in another such community, his twin does not. He says that since arthritis is taxonomized differently in these communities, we should ascribe different arthritis beliefs to them. Burge also responds to four attempts to reinterpret his actual world subject in his arthritis thought experiment, all of which would indicate that he does not have arthritis beliefs, and so nothing follows. He argues that these reinterpretations misunderstand our practices of belief ascription, and that they suppose implausible accounts of how his subject would react to correction. Burge implies that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is false.

In this chapter, I also examine what Burge says about Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In point of fact, his attitude towards such scepticism is equivocal, to say the least. In 'Individualism and the Mental,' he did not speak of such scepticism at all, although others have credited him with

refuting it. In this chapter, I argue that Burge does not interpret his own arthritis thought experiment correctly, for it seems that his subjects do not have the belief contents he ascribes to them. In this chapter, I also argue that if his social externalism is followed regardless, it leads to counterintuitive results about how we should *count* beliefs and contents. These consequences suggest that social externalism is false, and so cannot be used against scepticism at all. In a recent article, Burge concedes that it will be difficult for his social externalism *not* to beg the question against Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In his 'Cartesian Error and the Objectivity of Perception,' goes so far as to say that since such scepticism does not support individualism, it is not a troubling philosophical position. I argue that Burge does not show that individualism is worse than Cartesian skepticism about the external world.

In chapter six, I move from Cartesian scepticism about the external world, to the mind. To do this, I return to Descartes, who first addresses the mind by offering his *cogito* argument (his 'I think, therefore, I am' argument). But given this argument, he infers that he is essentially a thinking substance. In this chapter, I argue that his cogito argument does not work the way he hopes, for it leads only to the *impersonal* information, or that *something* thinks and exists, and does so essentially. But even so, his cogito argument still allows him to formulate his theory of meaning or content, for he says that these are just how things 'consciously seem' to him, which amounts to a radical form of substance or content *internalism*. Descartes also uses his cogito argument to derive his *substance dualism*, or the position that that mind and brain are separate substances, yet interact causally. In this chapter, I follow the tradition and argue that his arguments for his dualism are unconvincing, for he neither proves the separation of mind and body nor their causal

interaction. Descartes leaves us with a radical version of semantic or content internalism, but a faulty theory of mind.

In this chapter, I address *narrow* meaning or content, or that which supervenes on brain states, is relevant to causal explanations of behavior, and also represents the world in a certain way.¹⁶ In the literature, though, there are three theories of such narrow meaning or content, all of which have their virtues. But actually, these versions of narrow meaning or content all *accept* semantic or content externalist intuitions, that there is a necessary connection between our minds and parts of the world, and so are forced to revise narrow meaning or content out of that.. In this chapter, I argue that any theory of narrow meaning or content should reject such externalist intuitions outright, and when this is done, semantic or content internalism can be seen to be plausible.¹⁷ In this chapter, I also follow Donald Davidson and defend a *token* version of the identity theory of mind and brain, or what he calls 'anomalous monism.' The importance of anomalous monism here is that it explains *how* semantic or content internalism can be true. In other words, anomalous monism provides a theory of mind to substantiate semantic or content internalism.

In chapter seven, I summarize my conclusions. The first conclusion is that Descartes created a form of scepticism about the external world that neither he nor the contemporary philosophers I discuss have overcome. This is not to suggest that these are the only possible responses to such scepticism, or that it will never be overcome, but only that some of the main responses to it do not work. The second

¹⁶ Ned Block, 'What Narrow Content is Not,' p.37.

¹⁷ Tim Crane, in his 'All the Difference in the World,' notes that semantic or contentful states are, in a way, 'neither broad nor narrow,' since 'narrow mindedness, and the notion of narrow meaning or content were only introduced in *response* to the challenge of externalism'(p.21). He says that before the advent of externalism, philosophers thought of semantic or contentful states as narrow ones.

conclusion is that Putnam and Burge, by offering their versions of semantic or content externalism, have done nothing to overcome Cartesian scepticism about the external world. This is because, apart from the specific problems they encounter, they each tacitly appeal to facts about the external world when offering their arguments, and so each begs the question against such scepticism. The third conclusion is that if Cartesian scepticism about the external world has not been overcome, it is likely that mind and its meanings or contents adhere to semantic or content internalist dictates. The best version of narrow meaning or content is one that rejects semantic or content externalism at the outset. Davidson offers the best version of mind with his anomalous monism, although it is difficult to say what the best formulation of that position is.

Chapter Two

2.1

In this chapter, I address what Descartes says in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* concerning scepticism about the external world. The chapter is divided into four sections. In section two, I review what Descartes says in his First Meditation as a starting point. It is crucial to understand the nature of his 'metaphysical doubt' here, for it is so often misunderstood, and because it reveals the power of his sceptical position. Descartes doubts his senses, his obvious beliefs, and his beliefs about math in that order, increasing the scope of his doubts as he goes. In this section, I insist that these three stages of metaphysical doubt embody impressive arguments, and that they exhibit an underlying structure, identified as chapter one as the general sceptical argument. But here, also I review how the objectors to his First Meditation answer him. Descartes is usually correct against these objectors about the particular stages of his doubts, and again about the general objections to them. But Cartesian scepticism about the external world, once raised, is difficult to dislodge.

Descartes offers a solution to his scepticism about the external world, which I examine in section three. In particular, in his Sixth Meditation, he finally says 'I conjecture with *probability* that body exists,' and that 'there is no doubt that in all that nature teaches me there is *some* truth contained.'¹⁸ Descartes finally says that none of the arguments of his First Meditation are correct, after all. This is because, he says, God guarantees that his 'natural light of reason'

¹⁸ Haldane, E. S. and Ross, G. R. T. *The Philosophical Works Volume 1*(hereafter cited as HR 1), p.192.

works properly, and he knows that God exists because his natural light tells him so. Descartes holds that this solution connects him to the world and defeats his scepticism. Unfortunately, this entails his famous Cartesian Circle, where he uses God and his natural light of reason each to guarantee the truth of the other, and does so a circular fashion.¹⁹ In this section, I review three Cartesian responses to this charge of circularity, and argue that none of them work. The arguments of his First Meditation work against his own solution. It follows that Cartesian scepticism emerges as a position that has not yet been refuted. Descartes should have remained a sceptic.

In section four, I argue that, given what has come before Cartesian scepticism about the external world is an undefeated position, insofar as it has not been overcome. Descartes, even in his Sixth Meditation, does not surmount it. In this section, I insist that this argument can be improved upon, issuing in a *master sceptical argument*. This latter argument articulates our intuitions behind scepticism about the external world, and it shows why we should take it seriously. But assuming that this master sceptical argument really does articulate our intuitions about Cartesian scepticism about the external world, this further allows me to delineate some success conditions for *any* response to that scepticism, which I do. There are two main conditions. The first condition is that such a response must not fall within the scope of the sceptical conclusion, or must not be circular, and the second is that any response must be able to diagnose the source of the error that the sceptic commits. In conclusion, I suggest that Cartesian scepticism about the external world remains hard to overcome, since these two conditions maybe impossible to meet.

¹⁹ Haldane, E. S. and Ross, G. R. T. *The Philosophical Works Volume 2*(hereafter cited as HR 2), p.26.

In his First Meditation, Descartes says that he wants a ‘firm and permanent structure in the sciences,’ or a foundation for knowledge. This foundation, he says, is a set of beliefs that are as certain as anything can be, from which he can derive, deductively or inductively, the rest. Descartes says that ‘I detected how many were the false beliefs that I had from my earliest youth that I admitted as true.’²⁰ He has also discovered ‘how doubtful was everything I have constructed on this basis.’²¹ Descartes supposes that our methods of acquiring beliefs are not reliable, and because of that, not good as a guide for constructing a foundation for knowledge. To remedy this, Descartes proposes to doubt all of his beliefs, so as to ‘rid myself of all the opinions I have formerly accepted.’ By doing this, he hopes to find that some of his beliefs are both *indubitable* and *true*, and so worth keeping. In various places, Descartes compares this procedure to the search for a foundation of a house by first demolishing it, to look for what is left.²² He hopes to find indubitable and true beliefs, which will be his foundation for knowledge.

Descartes insists that he cannot doubt his beliefs individually, for two reasons. The first is that to doubt them individually ‘would be an endless undertaking,’ and he is surely correct here.²³ It does not seem that he has any way to count his beliefs, and so they cannot be doubted individually at all. Descartes also insists, as he tells Father Bourdin in his reply to the Seventh Objections, that to doubt his beliefs individually would leave him with ‘no general way to say

²⁰ HR 1, p.144.

²¹ HR 1, p.144.

²² HR 1, p.313.

²³ HR 1, p.145.

which are more probable, which would engender a general uncertainty about them all.’²⁴ Descartes insists that a better method is to begin by rejecting them all. To do this, he says that he must ‘attack those *principles* on which all my former opinions rested,’ and this will justify him in rejecting the whole.²⁵ Descartes does not exactly say what these principles are, but even so, he insists that by rejecting them he hopes that his search for a foundation for knowledge will be easier and less complicated.

But what does Descartes mean by ‘metaphysical doubt, exactly?’ It seems that his usage is quite specific here, yet is often misunderstood. It is not an exaggeration to say that the misinterpretations of what he meant by his doubts account for much of the criticism of them.²⁶ But also, it is important to explain this specific kind of doubt, for it sparks his scepticism about the external world. To begin this explanation, in his reply to the Second Objections, Descartes tells Mersenne that such doubts are ‘purely an intellectual exercise,’ and not something that would affect his actions.²⁷ He cautions Mersenne that:

I should like you to remember that I made a very strict distinction between the practical life and the contemplation of truth. To the extent to which the practical life is involved, so far am I from thinking that assent must be given only to what is clearly seen, but on the contrary, I believe that we need not always expect to find

²⁴ HR 2, p.282.

²⁵ HR 1, p.145.

²⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his ‘What is Cartesian Doubt?’ is an exception. He says that Descartes used two types of doubt, ‘moral’ and ‘metaphysical,’ and used the latter to ground science (p.475). Wolterstorff says that Descartes allows *only* indubitable and incorrigible beliefs to eliminate metaphysical doubt. I follow his account, generally speaking, but insist that doubt eliminators be *indubitable* and *true*.

²⁷ HR 2, p.44.

even probable truths there. Rather, we must often choose out of alternatives about which we are quite ignorant. But where the contemplation of truth is involved, who has ever denied that assent must be refused when the matter is obscure and cannot be perceived with sufficient distinctness? But this latter question is what is at issue here.²⁸

In his letters, Descartes tells the anonymous Hyperaspistes that were he to allow such doubts to affect his actions, he 'would do nothing.'²⁹ Instead, he says, his doubts are merely a method to get at the truth, and that only.³⁰ Descartes is also clear that the *scope* of metaphysical doubt is as wide as possible, as he tells Bourdin that 'anything that might be false' is subject to it.³¹ It follows that the only thing that can eliminate metaphysical doubt will have to be that which is both indubitable and actually true, and so will afterwards be quite difficult to discharge.³²

²⁸ HR 2, p.44.

²⁹ K, p. 111

³⁰ Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method*, insists that 'often enough, in the actions of life, no delay is permissible,' and so, in such cases 'we should follow our most probable beliefs' (p.96). In fact, as he tells Hyperaspistes, were we really to wait for certainty 'we would be regarded as insane,' and rightfully so. Descartes says that were we to wait, we may even be 'responsible for our own death' (p.110).

³¹ HR 2, p.266.

³² Harry Frankfurt famously addresses the question of how Descartes defines truth in his classic work, *Dreams, Deceivers, and Madmen*. He says that Descartes holds a 'coherence theory of truth' (p.170). In the Second Replies, in fact, Descartes does ask 'what does it matter to me if my beliefs are *absolutely speaking* false?' In essence, it seems that Frankfurt uses 1, and infers 2, as conclusion.

1. It does not matter if his beliefs are absolutely speaking false
2. Truth for him is a matter of *coherence* with his other beliefs

But as an accurate interpretation, Frankfurt fails to make his case. Descartes holds neither 1 nor 2. In fact, the only place where Descartes says 1 is in the reply to the Second Objections, and he never asserts 2. Usually, he says that truth is correspondence. In his letters, for instance, he goes out of his way to tell Mersenne that 'truth, in the strict sense, denotes the conformity of thought with its object' (p.65).

But by metaphysically doubting, does Descartes actually *believe* his doubts, such that he holds that all his former opinions are false? In his First Meditation, it may seem that he does believe his doubts, for he says that he will ‘pay no more attention to them than to falsehoods,’ and treats the former ‘as though they are false.’ But by saying this, as he tells Bourdin in his reply to the Seventh Objections, he does *not* mean to imply that he actually believes that they are false. Instead, as he tells Bourdin, his metaphysical doubt merely amounts to a ‘suspension of belief.’³³ Descartes also tells Mersenne that all his metaphysical doubt requires is that he suspend belief ‘temporarily,’ so as to find a foundation for knowledge.³⁴ It follows that when he metaphysically doubts, he merely pretends that his beliefs are false but does not believe it, and does this temporarily. This is a unique attitude, to say the least. But these concessions are important, for as we will see in more detail later, he specifically makes them to avoid many absurd consequences of a too stringent version of his metaphysical doubt.

If we can assume that Descartes can metaphysically doubt all his beliefs about the external world, how does he manage this? This is an important question, for as Pierre Gassendi points out in the Fifth Objections, even though Descartes *says* that he doubts all his beliefs, his doing so is another matter.³⁵ In an important letter to Clerselier, he clarifies how he achieves his metaphysical doubt. Descartes says that his doubt can be performed by a ‘single act of will,’ and so *nothing* more needs to be done except to ‘resolve to affirm or deny none of the matters we have previously affirmed or denied.’³⁶ Descartes admits,

³³ HR 2, p.266.

³⁴ HR 2, p.44.

³⁵ HR 2, p.148.

³⁶ HR 2, p.126.

however, in his First Meditation, that this might be difficult, since ‘insensibly a certain lassitude leads me back to my ordinary life,’ such that his old opinions can easily reappear in his mind, may influence him for the worse, although he may only be dimly aware of this. But he insists that, with practice, his single act of will to metaphysically doubt can hopefully overcome his natural lassitude. If Descartes is correct that he can doubt all his beliefs by a single act of will, he can finally begin searching for his foundation for knowledge.

Descartes proceeds in his First Meditation in the following stages. He insists that much of what he has learned has come through his senses, but unfortunately, ‘it has sometimes been proved to me that these are deceptive.’³⁷ Descartes says that, actually, his senses have deceived him in many ways over the years. This is a problem, he says, for since many of his beliefs have been formed on the basis of his senses, it would be a mere *accident* if any of them were true. Descartes asserts that it would be foolish of him to trust his senses, for it is only rational to ‘not trust entirely any thing by which we have been deceived.’³⁸ He says that the trouble is that, at this point, he has *no* criterion to distinguish true from false sense perceptions, and so cannot judge the *probability* of what they tell him. He does not know the likelihood that any given belief amounts to knowledge, or that it does not. Descartes says that, given this situation, until he finds some such criterion for sense perceptions, he must withhold his assent from them, or doubt them until further notice.

Descartes notes that regardless of his acquiring such a criterion of sensory truth and falsity, his work is not finished. He wants his foundation for knowledge to be both indubitable and true, and his senses are neither. Descartes has one

³⁷ HR 1, p.145.

³⁸ HR 1, p.145.

glimmer of hope, though. This is that even after doubting his senses, he notes that he still assents to many beliefs that are indubitable, and seem true. Descartes says that he cannot bring himself to doubt obvious beliefs such as that 'I am here, seated by the fire, and attired in this dressing gown, having this paper in my hands.'³⁹ He notes that this may seem like a victory, but it is not. This is because, he says, even though such obvious beliefs are indubitable they should not be, for without too much effort he can find a way to show that, indubitable or not, they can still be false. Descartes hopes to show that, even if indubitable, many of his obvious beliefs are not certain, because of their possible falsity. But for his project of finding a foundation for knowledge, the point here is that indubitable yet false beliefs are worthless as parts of such a foundation.

Descartes enters a second stage of doubt, so as to doubt even his obvious sensory beliefs. He says that 'how often has it happened to me that in the night I dreamt that I found myself in this particular place, that I was dressed and seated by the fire, whilst in reality I was lying in bed undressed.'⁴⁰ But Descartes has had, he admits, the same qualitative set of experiences in sleeping as in waking, yet has been mistaken about which state he was in. The trouble is, of course, that given the qualitative similarity of experience between his dreaming and waking states, he now needs a criterion to tell him which state he is in. Just as before, though, he concedes that 'there are no certain indications by which we distinguish sleep from wakefulness.'⁴¹ Descartes knows that as of yet, he has no such criterion. He again decides that he must withhold his assent even from his

³⁹ HR 1, p.146.

⁴⁰ HR 1, p.146.

⁴¹ In his Sixth Meditation, Descartes recapitulates this argument. In that place, he says that 'I have never believed myself to feel anything in waking moments which I cannot also sometimes believe myself to feel in sleep, and as I do not think these things which I think in sleep proceed from objects from outside me, I do not see any reason to hold this of objects which I experience when I am awake' (p.189).

obvious beliefs, for although they may not be proven deceivers, they might be dreams, nonetheless. Descartes resolves to doubt even his obvious beliefs until he really has reason to assent to them, once again.

Descartes, it should be noted, is not saying that his dreams or waking states are proven deceivers, but only that it is *possible* that they are. This mere possibility, he says, makes the relevant point. But assuming that his dreaming argument works, that does not mean that he is finished doubting. His work is not finished. Descartes may doubt whether his obvious beliefs occur while being awake or asleep, but even so, he still assents to many beliefs that seem both indubitable and true.⁴² He notes that, regardless of his actual waking or sleeping states, when he reasons about 'simple mathematical truths,' he cannot doubt them. It is impossible even to imagine that such truths could be otherwise. But even so, Descartes again insists that even though he must find his mathematical beliefs indubitable and true, there is a problem. This is the possibility that, even so, it is possible that he might be wrong about his *interpretation* of his own beliefs. Descartes might reason about mathematics over time, but when he does

⁴² It is important to mention, here, that Descartes makes an important slip that has led some commentators astray. In his dreaming argument, he metaphysically doubts his obvious sensory beliefs, such as the fact that he is sitting by the fire, writing what he is. But then, he goes on to make an admission, concerning exactly what falls within the scope of the argument. Descartes notes that:

Now let us assume that we are asleep and that all the particulars, e.g. that we open our eyes, shake our head, extend our hands, and so on, are but false delusions. Yet at the same time, we must at least confess that the things which are represented to us in sleep are like painted representations which could *only* have been formed as counterparts of something real and true, and that this way those general things at least, i.e. eyes, hands, a head and a whole body, are not imaginary things, but things really existent, (p.146).

But commentators have taken this admission to imply that Descartes did not intend his dreaming argument to apply to types of items, but only to tokens, such that types of items really exist. But if his dreaming argument is correct, he should not have said this. This is because, if his argument is sound, there is no reason for him to admit that *any* of his thoughts have been formed by representing real items, even types.

so, he might continually interpret his own beliefs incorrectly. It may be that even math is not certain for him.

Descartes enters a third stage of doubt to question even these simple notions of mathematics. But here, it is important to note how the *character* of his doubt changes. Descartes is not saying, at this point, that in doubting such mathematical truths, they might actually *be* different than they seem. He insists that only God, whom he defines as 'infinite, independent, omniscient, and omnipotent' can change such mathematical truths, for he established such truths in the first place, and so only he can change them.⁴³ Descartes plainly commits himself here to the view that there are no necessary truths, since God might change *any* of them at will. But disregarding this odd position, he is saying that, in relation to his own doubts, for all he knows, there might be a deceiving God 'who has employed his whole energies in deceiving me,' and so when he reasons about mathematics, he always interprets such truths incorrectly. By saying this, Descartes departs here from his project of merely looking for a foundation for knowledge, and searches for a correct interpretation of it. This is a significant change in his position.

Descartes embarks on an important new direction here, for he wants not only to possess knowledge, but also wants to know that he has *interpreted* it correctly. He wants not just a foundation for knowledge, but to know that he has it. But how might Descartes ever escape the influences of his deceiving God? He insists that, given the mere possibility of such a deceiving God, he needs a criterion that distinguishes between instances when he is deceived and when he is

⁴³ In a letter, Descartes tells Mersenne that 'assuming that God established these truths he could change them as a king changes his laws' (p.11). In another letter, he tells Arnauld that 'God can make it the case that one and two do not make three, only it is incomprehensible to me' (p.236). Descartes holds the extreme position that God not only establishes these eternal truths but can change them at will.

not. But as with his other stages of metaphysical doubt, Descartes has no such criterion.⁴⁴ He again insists that he cannot judge the relative probabilities of whether he is or is not deceived when it comes to his mathematical beliefs, and so never knows if they are accurate. But given these standards, any mere feeling that he has grasped simple mathematical truths correctly will not help. Descartes again concludes that he must withhold his assent even from simple mathematical notions. It follows that he cannot say that he has any knowledge of mathematical truths.

Descartes concludes his First Meditation by saying that ‘there is *nothing* of which I formerly believed,’ concerning the external world ‘which is not permissible to doubt.’⁴⁵ It follows that there is only one attitude to adopt. Descartes says that ‘I shall consider that the heavens, the earth, colors, figures, sound, and all other external things are nothing.’ He applies this to himself, moreover, and proposes that ‘I have no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, nor any senses.’⁴⁶ Descartes provisionally accepts his scepticism about the external world, with the hope of resolving it later. But a little way into his Second Meditation, he recognizes that this is a dizzying prospect, and he does not know what to do. Descartes admits that ‘my mind is filled with so many doubts that it is no longer in my power to forget them. I do not see in what manner I can resolve them.’⁴⁷ But even if he finds it a dizzying prospect and does not know what to do, he knows that if he cannot find a way to resolve his doubts, he may never find his foundation for knowledge, and so may never have any knowledge of the external world, after all.

⁴⁴ HR 1, p.147.

⁴⁵ HR 1, p.147.

⁴⁶ HR 1, p.148.

⁴⁷ HR 1, p.149.

Descartes concludes his metaphysical doubts in his First Meditation. But then, before we consider what his scepticism about the external world in terms of his senses, dream, and deceiving God arguments may achieve, and his own solution to that scepticism in terms of his 'natural light of reason' and God, it will be prudent to consider what the objectors to the *Meditations on First Philosophy* have said about it. These objectors are not particularly disturbed here, for they typically reject his entire method of using metaphysical doubt to reach a foundation for knowledge. These objectors offer two lines of argument. The first line of argument is to question the *particular* facets of each stage of his doubt. The second line of argument is to question the *general* character of his metaphysical doubt. But Descartes, as we will see, is successful most of the time in defending his method of using metaphysical doubt to find a foundation for knowledge against his objectors. In point of fact, though, his argumentative successes here still force him to say in more detail what his position is, which reveals that he does not resolve his scepticism, after all.

To begin, the Sixth Objectors to his First Meditation object that Descartes need not metaphysically doubt all his senses to achieve certainty. In particular, these objectors claim that it is unnecessary for him to metaphysically doubt his senses 'in order to correct past mistakes.'⁴⁸ This is because, these objectors say, knowledge can be ascertained *without* such global doubt. This can occur because if he were to consider not just what any specific sense tells him, but what *all* the senses properly disposed say, he could 'obtain the greatest certainty of which man is capable.'⁴⁹ In other words, when it comes to the senses, they say, certainty is just that the senses tell a *unified* story about how the world is. The Sixth

⁴⁸ HR 2, p.238.

⁴⁹ HR 2, p.238.

Objectors insist that the senses do this because they have a mutual influence on each other, such that 'the errors from any one of them can be corrected by the others or by appealing to the majority.'⁵⁰ The majority of senses, these objectors admit, may be false nonetheless. But then, when it comes to the senses, all man is capable of is reaching a *stable* picture of the world.

If the Sixth Objectors are correct against Descartes here, such that he need not metaphysically doubt all his senses, this still does not answer *how* the sensory correction they speak of actually occurs. These objectors claim that 'the senses *themselves* aid in corrections,' and that the senses provide certainty about the world by providing all the information necessary for any changes. It follows that to be denied such sensory help for the correction of mistakes would be tantamount to halting all correction, and so to having no certainty. This is because, these objectors say, whatever certainty the mind has, is 'first received by the senses.'⁵¹ The Sixth Objectors insist that since the senses themselves aid in correction, the issue of the certainty that they provide does not arise. In other words, the senses correct errors all the time, and so we do have as much certainty from them as is possible to have. In effect, these objectors say that Descartes offers doubts that are unnecessary for certainty, and that he offers a false account of what corrects error and provides certainty.

Descartes does not respond to the Sixth Objectors directly, although it is clear from his response to Bourdin in his reply to the Seventh Objections what he would say. He explains in more detail in what sense he metaphysically doubts all his sensory beliefs. Descartes tells Bourdin that while it is true that his false beliefs do not make any of his true ones any less true, as of yet 'I do not really

⁵⁰ HR 2, p.238.

⁵¹ HR 2, p.239.

know *which* are true.’⁵² He says that this lack of knowledge about which of his sensory beliefs are true is the problem, for it ‘infects the certainty of the *whole*,’ and this overall uncertainty from his senses may well cause him to make even *more* mistakes in attempting to correct errors.⁵³ Descartes tells Bourdin that the problem is that, as of yet, he does not know which of his senses he should doubt, and given this, he cannot just presume that some of his senses are more truthful than others, and so which senses should be used for correcting others. Descartes concludes that since this is so, his metaphysical doubts regarding his senses are necessary, after all.

The Sixth Objectors would dispute this answer, but would do so because they hold that all we can do is to ‘bring in all the senses properly disposed’ to correct error and provide certainty, a procedure that may issue in a unified and stable, albeit false, picture of reality. Descartes insists, however, that the whole point of his metaphysically doubting is to be certain that his understanding of the world is indubitable and *true*, and so he resists any such merely unified, yet maybe false, picture. Descartes also responds to the Sixth Objectors concerning their charge that the senses themselves correct error. He agrees that he needs his senses to correct mistakes, a fact that anyone would admit. But he still objects to the claim that the senses alone perform this task. This cannot be right, he says, for while the senses may provide information for the correction of mistakes, by themselves they do nothing. Descartes claims that the ‘corrections themselves are made by the *understanding*.’⁵⁴ He accuses the Sixth Objectors of giving the senses a role they cannot fulfill.

⁵² HR 2, p.282.

⁵³ HR 2, p.282.

⁵⁴ HR 2, p.253.

But while Descartes answers this objection concerning the role of his senses in correcting error, his response is not entirely satisfactory, albeit for another reason. This is that, even if he is correct about the roles of his senses here, his answer raises another question. If Descartes is right that his understanding itself corrects error, why does he hold that this is reliable? The worry concerns how he really knows that his understanding corrects error and so provides certainty, as opposed to systematically deceiving him in some way. Descartes must answer this question, actually, for if he does not, his confidence in his understanding will be just an article of faith, which is quite contrary to his search for a foundation for knowledge, and his attempt to escape scepticism. But Descartes does not attempt to establish the reliability of his understanding until later, when he offers his arguments that all that in his mind is transparent, and that his natural light of reason and God guarantee such reliability anyway. It follows that as of yet, Descartes must merely assume understanding is reliable as an article of faith.

But what have the objectors to the First Meditation said about the other stages of doubt? In the Third Objections, Thomas Hobbes claims, in effect, that the dreaming argument is *too* effective. Hobbes notes that in his Sixth Meditation, Descartes himself cites a criterion that distinguishes whether he is dreaming or waking. He says that this criterion is just that dreaming states are isolated, but waking ones are associated with his memories. But Hobbes insists that this criterion is inadequate, for he might 'dream the continuous association of memory itself.'⁵⁵ In recent years, G. E. Moore has further claimed that if Descartes did not have a criterion for dreaming and waking, he would 'not even

⁵⁵ HR 2, p.78.

be able to claim that dreams have occurred.’⁵⁶ To combine the points that Hobbes and Moore make here, Descartes needs a criterion of dreaming and waking to escape his own dreaming argument, and he must have one, even to formulate that argument. The worry is that his criterion in terms of associated memory does not seem to be good enough to do these things.

Descartes responds to Hobbes just as he would to Moore, but is not particularly helpful, since he just dismisses their concerns. Descartes insists that if he were actually asleep, he would not be able to connect his beliefs and memories, and he would be able to ‘correct any errors when he awoke.’⁵⁷ But this response seems to miss the entire point. Hobbes and Moore want to know just *how* Descartes can know the difference between dreaming and waking with only a connection between his memories as his guide. Descartes tacitly admits, in his interview with Franz Burman, that this response is inadequate, for he says that he ‘can say nothing about memory’ at all.⁵⁸ He insists, rather, that there is *no* objective check on memory, and because this is so, everyone has to check themselves to see if their memories are reliable. Descartes seems to admit not

⁵⁶ G. E. Moore says this in his ‘Certainty.’ Descartes, he insists, reasons in the following way. He holds that ‘some dreams and waking states are qualitatively indistinguishable’ (p.192). Moore says that this may sound innocuous, but he objects that Descartes cannot really make this claim. The assertion implies that Descartes knows that ‘dreams have occurred’ (p.192). Moore says that Descartes argues:

1. Dreams and waking states, at least for me, often are qualitatively indistinguishable.
2. I know that dreams have occurred.
3. I do not know if I am now dreaming or is awake.

Moore says Descartes uses 1 and infers 2. But if Descartes asserts 2, and *really* is dreaming, ‘it may be that he is only dreaming that dreams have occurred,’ so does not know that 2 is true, after all. But if so, he cannot use 1 and 2 to infer 3 (p.193). Moore is wrong. If Descartes were only dreaming the truth of 1, then one dream did occur, the dream about 1 *itself*. 1 and 2 can both be true, and can be used to infer 3.

⁵⁷ HR 2, p.78.

⁵⁸ In his *Conversation with Burman*, Descartes disavows any objective test of memory. He tells Burman that ‘everyone should *check himself* to see whether he is good at remembering. If he has any doubts he should make use of written notes to help himself’ (p.5). But if Descartes really means this, then he cannot justify his view that memories constitute a criterion of dreaming or waking states.

only that his memory criterion is inadequate to escape his dreaming argument, but also that memory itself is useless as a tool for ascertaining knowledge. This response only makes matters even worse than before, for it seems that he cannot escape his own dreaming argument.

Descartes offers Mersenne more helpful advice, which serves to clarify what he means by his metaphysical doubts. Descartes says that anyone, by using his associated memory criterion, has the ability to be certain of their dreaming or waking state, insofar as they have eliminated their *moral* doubts about it. But he says this is no great feat, and he wants more than to just eliminate moral doubts. Descartes says that only *theists* like him can really know their dreaming or waking states, and ‘only after they know that they have been created by God, who is not a deceiver.’⁵⁹ This is because, he says, apart from their criterion of associated memory, theists *also* have the guarantee of God to tell them which state they are in. Descartes holds that this guarantee eliminates their metaphysical doubts about their dreaming or waking state. He says that he is just such a theist, and so he knows his dreaming or waking state. Descartes makes an appeal for his extra criterion for dreaming and waking in terms of God, in order to eliminate even his metaphysical doubts.

Descartes is plainly suggesting a quite restrictive program here, and one with great risks. This is because he is suggesting that atheists can never remove such metaphysical doubt, and only theists like him can do so. There are two problems here. The first of these is that it is difficult to overlook the arrogance of his response, for even if he is correct that there is such a God who somehow

⁵⁹ Descartes tells Mersenne that God has given us a ‘faculty that tends towards truth’ to have certainty (p.41). But Descartes tells the Sixth Objectors that it is not enough to have this faculty, for ‘only those who *acknowledge* that they have been created by the true God’ really know that they have certainty (p. 245). It follows that even most theists will have no knowledge of the external world.

proscribes atheists and wayward theists from ever eliminating their metaphysical doubts about the external world, it is a further question how he knows that he is a favored theist. He may not be such a favored theist, and so would be unable to eliminate his metaphysical doubts. Descartes also faces the second problem, that even if God exists and is not a deceiver, this fact may still not serve as a criterion with regard to sleeping or waking states. It may be that God does not interfere with our dreaming or waking states. If he did not do so, it may count against his benevolence, but it still may not amount to deception, for he has done nothing to actively deceive either.⁶⁰

But what have the objectors to the First Meditation said about the deceiving God argument? In the Fifth Objections, Gassendi says that Descartes offers an argument that is both insincere and unnecessary. The trouble with his sincerity, it seems, is that, as he admits to Regius, he does ‘not think it *possible* that God might lie.’ If Descartes really believes this, though, it seems that this theistic belief might influence his estimation of his deceiving God argument for the worse. He claims that the concept of God as ‘infinite, independent, omniscient, and omnipotent’ shows that he cannot deceive, for ‘deception proceeds from a defect.’⁶¹ In a letter to Buitendijck, he even says that he ‘*only* uses his deceiving God hypothesis insofar as he wants to gain a foundation for knowledge, and that otherwise, his ‘purposes are pious.’ Descartes even admits that, were he to persist in his doubt, ‘this would be reprehensible.’ But

⁶⁰ In the Third Objections, Hobbes insists that ‘no fault is committed by medical men who deceive sick people or parents to deceive children’ (p.77). If there is any evil in such deception, he says, it resides not in the falsity of what is said, but in bad *intent* of those who practice it. Descartes responds that ‘although we are often deceived, we are not so deceived because of the intention of God’ (p.78).

⁶¹ HR 1, p.171.

obviously, these comments suggest that his hypothesis of a deceiving God is insincere, after all.⁶²

If Descartes has any hope of defending his sincerity with regard to his deceiving God argument, these would be odd points for him to make. In effect, this is because his attitude is officially one of metaphysical doubt, such that he treats his beliefs as though they are false, so as to find his foundation for knowledge, to escape scepticism. In other words, there should be no issue of his privileging any particular beliefs, such as his belief that God cannot lie. Descartes has as of yet no reason to qualify his deceiving God hypothesis so severely, as he seems to. But because he does so Descartes does seem to be insincere in postulating his deceiving God hypothesis, since he does not think it possible that God might lie, and because he apologizes for it to theologians. But actually, when understood correctly, this is not much of an objection to his deceiving God hypothesis, since he promptly exchanges his hypothesis for an evil demon that serves the same purpose for him.⁶³ Descartes does this to dispel any criticism about his sincerity, to ward off those who may be offended, yet be able to make the same point.

In his reply to the Fifth Objections, Descartes informs Gassendi that he appreciates the problem that he might *not* be successful in eliminating the influence of supposedly doubted beliefs in mathematical truths. There are many, he says, who 'verbally admit that prejudices should be avoided,' yet proceed to

⁶² In a letter, Descartes tells Buitendijck that 'if one doubts as a method of acquiring clearer knowledge of the truth, then he does something altogether pious and honorable.' He further concedes that 'nor is there any sin if someone, for the same purpose, temporarily puts out of his mind all knowledge which he can have of God' (p.145). Descartes was not free of theological influence, after all.

⁶³ Descartes admits, in his First Meditation, that many will not like his idea of a deceiving God, and so he says that 'perhaps he does not want me to be deceived, since he is said to be supremely good' (p.147). He exchanges his deceiving God for an *evil demon* who does the same job for him. Descartes postulates that there is 'some evil genius not less powerful than deceitful' that ruins math for him (p.148).

fail completely in avoiding them. The reason this is so, he says, is because such people 'spend no toil and pain on the attempt.'⁶⁴ But now we must believe that Descartes has spent enough toil and pain on *his* merely feigned belief in an evil demon, such that he has doubted his beliefs about mathematical truths. But then, we must also believe that his feigned belief in his evil demon is *enough* for him to doubt his beliefs about math. The trouble here is that since his *only* ground for doubt is his just feigned belief in his evil demon, this is not plausible. Descartes may well believe that he has spent enough toil and pain in metaphysically doubting his mathematical beliefs, but it is difficult to measure this. This impression gets worse, for he does not seem to have any way to measure the success of his doubts.

In the Fifth Objections, Gassendi also says that Descartes does not require his hypothesis of an evil demon in the first place, that it is unnecessary. Gassendi says that his 'imperfect nature' would be sufficient to prove the general case about the misinterpretation of mathematical truths.⁶⁵ Gassendi does not believe that Descartes is so prone to error, but only objects to the evil demon hypothesis, when citing his imperfect nature hypothesis is a simpler way to make the same point about the misinterpretation of his mathematical beliefs. Descartes responds in a letter to Clerselier, by saying that thought experiments are a 'common procedure in philosophy,' so as to reveal things that would 'otherwise be hidden.'⁶⁶ But this reply is misleading, for Descartes actually agrees with Gassendi that his evil demon hypothesis *is* unnecessary, and even says that if he did not know that his evil demon were not the author of his being, the

⁶⁴ HR 2, p.205.

⁶⁵ HR 2, p.136.

⁶⁶ HR 2, p.205.

imperfection in his nature would force him to misinterpret math, and then he would make 'even more mistakes' about it.⁶⁷

But Descartes incurs problems here, and not trivial ones. He cannot so easily claim that his hypothesis of an evil demon really *is* unnecessary for him to metaphysically doubt his mathematical beliefs. This is because Gassendi is correct to say that even if we believe in his reversal here, we would wonder why he brought up his evil demon hypothesis in the first place, and then defended it at such length. But Descartes incurs a deeper problem here. This is that if we are not *already* convinced by his pessimistic assessment about himself, such that without an evil demon, his imperfect nature would render his ability to interpret such truths even less reliable, we would naturally conclude the opposite, that without an evil demon his abilities would be restored, and so he would make few mistakes. Descartes offers no argument for his pessimistic self assessment that his nature is so imperfect and prone to mistakes, and so, until that argument is offered, he *does* require his evil demon hypothesis to doubt his mathematical beliefs, after all.

To his credit, Descartes responds to all of these criticisms of his particular stages of metaphysical doubt in his First Meditation. But actually, his responses can *only* interest those who are also looking for a certain foundation for knowledge. In point of fact, Descartes himself is happy with moral certainty for the purposes of everyday life, and says that 'we should follow our most probable beliefs' here.⁶⁸ But also, he reveals ways to acquire moral certainty that are independent of his doubt, for he admits that the errors of his senses take place against the unified background of belief, that he can identify his waking or

⁶⁷ HR 1, p.148.

⁶⁸ HR 1, p.96.

sleeping states by his memories, and that his evil demon hypothesis is insincere and unnecessary. It follows that, in his First Meditation Descartes addresses only a select audience, those who are also searching for a foundation for knowledge. This is not to say he or anyone ever will find such a foundation, but rather that even if he does find his foundation for knowledge, his actual his audience for this is quite small.

Descartes may not be successful in his First Meditation in showing the need for his metaphysical doubts, but even if not, he has still achieved his goal of rendering *all* of his beliefs about the external world doubtful. He does this, for he shows that the deliverances of his senses, his obvious sensory beliefs, and his interpretation of mathematics may all be prone to error. Descartes has shown how his beliefs may be indubitable, yet false, and this may be all he wanted to do. But actually, the stages of his metaphysical doubts adhere to the general sceptical argument, from chapter one. This is easily seen, for that argument can be modified to fit his doubts.

1. I can be justified in believing *p* only if I can rule out the possibility that *q* (that my senses are deceptive, that I do not know my dreaming or waking state, and that an evil demon makes me misinterpret mathematics).
2. I cannot rule out the possibility that *q*.
3. I do *not* know that *p*

Descartes would understand the general sceptical argument just as his argument says. In premise 1, 'p' can be replaced by a sentence about a domain (the

deliverances of the senses, more obvious sensory beliefs, or mathematical beliefs that need to be interpreted), and 'q' can be replaced by a sentence about some possibility that prevents his being justified in believing facts in that domain (the possibility that our senses deceive us, that we are dreaming, or that an evil demon is active in deceiving us). But Descartes indicates, in premise 2, that he cannot rule out 'q' and so, the rest follows. This entails that he does not know 'p,' after all.

B

Descartes also incurs a separate set of criticisms of his metaphysical doubts in his First Meditation, concerning their *general* character. This is serious, for if his doubts have any general defect that has led him astray, his project of searching for a foundation for knowledge cannot even begin. The first way he has been criticized concerns the *scope* of his doubts. To begin, Bourdin insists that regardless of the stage of doubt, he cannot doubt all his beliefs about the external world. He cannot doubt all of his beliefs, for the doubting of any particular belief entails that he is 'certain of the opposite false belief.' Bourdin says Descartes would then be certain of many false beliefs, and so would not doubt all his beliefs.⁶⁹ This begins, he says, a 'cycle of doubts,' for if he doubted his newly acquired false belief he would become certain of the original belief again. But if Descartes ever stopped doubting, he would still not doubt all his

⁶⁹ HR 2, p.263.

beliefs. It follows that if he continued to doubt or stopped doubting, he would still not doubt all his beliefs.⁷⁰

In this last century, Wittgenstein has offered a famous version of this criticism. Descartes cannot be correct about his metaphysical doubt, he says, for certain beliefs provide the 'inherited background' for such doubt to occur at all. Wittgenstein insists that these beliefs have a 'peculiar logical role,' insofar as they are empirical beliefs, but do not function that way.⁷¹ He says that these beliefs are 'anchored in our questions and answers,' and so hidden that we cannot touch them. These empirical beliefs, with their peculiar logical role, are the background of metaphysical doubt, and so are like 'the hinges on which other beliefs turn.'⁷² Wittgenstein says Descartes is incorrect about the scope of his doubt, because 'if we tried to doubt everything, we would not get so far as doubting anything.'⁷³ But plainly, it is not that he affirms the opposite of what he doubts, and so cannot doubt everything, but rather that, by doubting at all, he must not doubt other beliefs, which stand fast for him. Wittgenstein implies that Descartes cannot metaphysically doubt all of his beliefs.⁷⁴

Descartes could have availed himself of an easy answer to Bourdin and Wittgenstein here, but did not. In particular, he might have responded by

⁷⁰ In the Seventh Objections, Bourdin offers the following argument. He says that 'since it does not seem certain to me that bodies exist, I shall affirm that no bodies exist. Then because that statement, that no bodies exist, is not certain, I shall again affirm that bodies exist. Thus bodies will exist and not exist' (p.265). It follows that he doubts in a cycle, and eventually contradict himself.

⁷¹ Wittgenstein, in *On Certainty*, insists that this picture allows for much variety. In particular, he says that empirical beliefs can change their logical role. Wittgenstein says that the same proposition may at one time be tested by experience, and at another, 'as a rule for testing' (98). He concedes that, because of such changes, there is not a sharp division here between the one and the other.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 341.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷⁴ Donald Davidson has popularized this general argument. In 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics,' he notes that 'we damage the *intelligibility* of our interpretations of others if we judge them to be in broad error' (p.200). Davidson may be correct to say that we need to find others in *agreement* with us, but that does not entail that any of their or our beliefs are actually *true*.

conceding their points, but then by distinguishing between what he actually believes and what he metaphysically doubts, which would have amounted to a *scope* restriction on his doubts. Descartes did not adopt this solution, and for good reason. In particular, he did not answer these philosophers this way, for he hoped to doubt *all* of his beliefs until he reached beliefs that were both indubitable and true. Descartes did not distinguish between his actual beliefs and what he was metaphysically doubting in any way, for he would then be forced to leave some of his beliefs undoubted, all of which he would then have to accept even though they may be indubitable and false.. Descartes did not answer Bourdin and Wittgenstein by making a scope distinction for his doubts, for it would have seriously undermined his project of using metaphysical doubt to discover a foundation for knowledge at all.

Descartes instead responds to Bourdin, and would respond similarly to Wittgenstein, by saying that their criticism misunderstands the character of his metaphysical doubts. His doubts are just an intellectual exercise, a suspension of his beliefs as a temporary measure until he has reason to assent to or reject them, so as to place them in his foundation of knowledge or not. Descartes insists that this implies a possible attitude, because to hold to it, he need only utilize an act of will to bring it about with regard to all of his beliefs. This act of will, he admits, may be difficult to monitor over time, but even so, it is possible.⁷⁵ But since this is the case, he says, his metaphysically doubting his beliefs ‘does *not* commit me to holding the opposite beliefs to be true.’⁷⁶ Descartes claims that Bourdin and Wittgenstein are mistaken, for they misunderstand the character of metaphysical doubt. These philosophers, he says, treat such doubt as though it is moral doubt,

⁷⁵ K, p. 126

⁷⁶ HR 2, p.266.

which it is not. Descartes metaphysically doubts all his beliefs about the external world, after all.

But Descartes cannot really avoid this objection so easily, since it can easily be recast in terms of his metaphysical doubt about the doubt hypotheses *themselves*. In other words, the objection can be recast in terms of his believing the opposite of all that his doubt hypotheses include, or in terms of all these beliefs about the world standing fast for him. If this is correct, he would then be forced to believe that his senses are veridical, that he knows his dreaming or waking state, or that his interpretations of mathematics is correct. But if he really is forced to believe all that his metaphysical doubt hypotheses include, his doubts would be an almost complete failure. It follows that if he could metaphysically doubt anything at that point, all this could then amount to be his believing most of what his doubt hypotheses formerly questioned, and then just putting *specific* sensory, obvious, or mathematical beliefs into suspension, which is not what he wants to do.

But this moves to fast.

But how would Descartes respond to this revised objection, that if he metaphysically doubts his metaphysical doubt hypotheses themselves, he must believe the opposite of what they say, which would imply that he does not doubt much? Descartes had better have an answer here, for this version of the objection implies that if he can doubt his sensory, obvious or mathematical beliefs at all, he will only be able to doubt specific ones. Descartes would repeat his earlier

answer, as applied to his doubt hypotheses themselves. He seems to imply just this, for he says that his doubt hypotheses 'are quite speculative,' and are no more certain than his other doubted beliefs.⁷⁷ This entails, he says, that we can be compelled to doubt 'by arguments that are *themselves* doubtful, only to be afterwards rejected.'⁷⁸ Descartes would say that all of his beliefs, his doubt hypotheses included, are metaphysically doubted in the same way, such that, again, he need not actually believe the opposite. He need only hold all of his beliefs in suspension at once, and in this sense, he metaphysically doubts all his beliefs.

If Descartes is correct here, there is another potential problem with the general character of his metaphysical doubt. Gassendi notes that the question of the *psychological affect* of his doubt is still not settled. There is an important distinction, he says, between what any doubt is about, and its *emotional pull*. The latter is the psychological affect of his doubt. The question of the affect between doubt and belief is important here, although it is rarely addressed in any detail by philosophers. By contrast, this distinction between the affect between doubt and belief has been extensively discussed by psychologists, although the details here cannot be canvassed here. In this last century, C. S. Peirce notes that Descartes must take this distinction between the affect of doubt and belief seriously, for regardless of his achieving his metaphysical doubts there must be enough of a difference in the psychological affect between doubt and belief so that the former can 'stimulate us to action,' or perform the functions of preventing unwarranted

⁷⁷ HR 1, p.148.

⁷⁸ HR 2, p.282.

assent and of removing prejudice.⁷⁹ These functions are important to his foundation for knowledge.

Gassendi objects that, even if Descartes metaphysically doubts all his beliefs, there may not be *enough* of a difference in psychological affect between his doubt and belief for his doubts to prevent unwarranted assent and to remove prejudice. Descartes does not, he says, 'even address whether his doubt is different enough from belief' to prevent unwarranted assent and to remove prejudice.⁸⁰ Peirce also addresses the affect of metaphysical doubt, and says that beliefs 'are not to be dispelled by a maxim,' and so 'complete doubt is mere self-deception.'⁸¹ There is no reason, he insists, to believe that doubt can prevent assent and remove prejudice. Descartes responds to Clerselier that this difference in affect between metaphysical doubt and actual belief is initiated by a 'single act of will,' although he concedes that we must be vigilant about this.⁸² The important question here is whether this single act of will really can initiate such a difference in affect between doubt and belief, such that the doubt can prevent assent and remove prejudice.

In point of fact, Descartes agrees with Gassendi and Peirce about the requirement of a difference in the psychological affect of metaphysical doubt and actual belief, for he castigates others for 'only pretending to doubt', but 'not taking their doubts *seriously*' in reality.⁸³ Descartes holds that his single act of will allows him to be serious about his doubts. But even though he does not say

⁷⁹ Charles Sanders Peirce, 'The Fixation of Belief,' p.123.

⁸⁰ HR 2, p.158.

⁸¹ Charles Sanders Peirce, in 'Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,' continues that 'we cannot begin with complete doubt,' for most of our beliefs are not things that ever occur to us to question (p.87). He notes that merely saying that we doubt anything is not to do so, if this does now show up in our thoughts, 'it is only a doubt in name' but cannot do what doubts are supposed to do (p.88).

⁸² HR 2, p.126.

⁸³ HR 1, p.99.

precisely what taking doubt seriously amounts to, still, it is easy to guess what it must be for his project. Descartes tells Clerselier that his metaphysical doubt is 'firmly impressed on memory,' although he proceeds to not say what this impression is or how it can be achieved.⁸⁴ In his letters, he does say that such a memory impression must be strong enough so that 'the mind *recognizes* it when it needs to.'⁸⁵ Descartes would tell Gassendi and Peirce that his metaphysical doubt is serious because his single act of will is memorized, and because he is conscious that he does so. This entails that his metaphysical doubt amounts to an active force. But if he really intends metaphysical doubt as a conscious active force, that is a substantive claim.

Descartes attempts to justify his account of the psychological affect of his metaphysical doubts, at least to some extent. It is fortunate that he actually offers an account of the appropriate affect of his doubt, since without it his account would be woefully incomplete. But even so, to be useful, his account of such affect still must be coherent and plausible. Descartes tells Clerselier that metaphysical doubt is best achieved by a single act of will that is put into practice by an *impression* on memory.⁸⁶ This impression, he says, renders doubt an active force that is conscious. But there might be a contradiction here, for metaphysical doubt cannot both be a mere memory impression *and* an active force that is conscious. In point of fact, Descartes does not really contradict himself here, for as he says, he intends that impression on memory not as an isolated decision, but as one that *engenders* an active force that is conscious. In other words, by a mere impression on his memory he renders his metaphysical doubt an active force that is conscious over time, and into the future

⁸⁴ HR 2, p.126.

⁸⁵ K, p.234.

⁸⁶ HR 2, p.126.

Descartes insists that impressing his doubt on his memory is *sufficient* to make it an active force that is conscious, which should then prevent assent and remove prejudice. But he recognizes that doubt can fail because of a lack of effort, and it is not easy to know when this has happened.⁸⁷ Descartes admits to Arnauld that merely impressing something on the memory may *not* transform it into an active force that is conscious. He concedes that ‘impressions on memory are often forgotten,’ and in such cases doubt cannot prevent assent or remove prejudice.⁸⁸ Descartes even tells Burman that when it comes to memory, everyone has to ‘check themselves.’ It follows that even if he could impress his metaphysical doubt on his memory as an active force that is conscious, there is still no way for him to know that he has done so.⁸⁹ Descartes does not know if his impression on memory has ever been enough to prevent unwarranted assent and eradicate prejudice. He cannot know if his metaphysical doubt works, and so probably should be more circumspect in his use of it to search for his foundation for knowledge.

⁸⁷ HR 2, p.205.

⁸⁸ In a letter to Arnauld, Descartes admits that ‘it is not sufficient for memory, that there be *traces* in the brain by thoughts. The traces have to be of such a kind that the mind *recognizes* them, and that they are newly impressed.’ To recognize such impressions, he says, the ‘pure intellect is required’ (p.234). But now, we must believe that the intellect can prevent assent and remove prejudice.

⁸⁹ Saul Kripke, in his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, puts this problem, not in terms of memory, but in terms of rule following. He says that all thoughts are rule-governed, and so, must be *interpreted* correctly to have content. Kripke says there is ‘no fact about my past history, in my mind, or in my external behavior,’ that can establish any interpretation (p.13). In particular, he argues that.

1. There is nothing about the individual agent that can establish that his interpretations of his own thoughts are correct.
2. The agent cannot provide any standards of *correctness* for his own thoughts.
3. No thought has any content.

Kripke says that if this argument works, ‘the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air’ (p.21). He goes on to offer his own sceptical solution to this problem, in terms of our adherence to the ‘assertion conditions of our community,’ (p.111). But plainly, this solution will not work, for assertion conditions can be misinterpreted just as easily as anything else, and so provides no stability.

In conclusion, Descartes does not completely succeed in responding to these general objections to his metaphysical doubts. These objections, recall, concerned the scope of his doubts, and their psychological affect. Descartes insisted that the fact that he doubts *all* of his beliefs about the external world does not lead to any infinite regress of doubts, which would, were it true, entail that he does not doubt all of his beliefs about the external world, after all. He also insisted that he need not presuppose any inherited background of beliefs that provide the hinges on which his doubted beliefs turn, so as to doubt in the first place. Descartes carefully defined his metaphysical doubts as a mere intellectual exercise, and one that is temporary, which amounts to his merely suspending judgment about his all beliefs, and he does this to avoid these charges over the scope of his doubt. Descartes is surely correct here, and so, in the meager way that he defines it, he really does metaphysically doubt all of his beliefs about the external world. But plainly, even so, it may not help him find his foundation for knowledge.

Descartes does not fare so well against the problems concerning the psychological affect of his metaphysical doubts. If his doubt is but an intellectual exercise of suspending belief for the purpose of finding a foundation for knowledge, and he does so only temporarily, to escape scepticism, then for the purposes of his project it becomes difficult to understand the *real* difference between the affect of doubt and belief itself. Descartes also claims that he impresses his doubts on his memory, and as such, its affect is an active force that is conscious. But he does not offer any details concerning how to make his impressed memory work, and even if he did succeed in doing that, he concedes that he could not check to see that it does work, and so would not know that he

had succeeded. Descartes offers an inadequate explanation of the psychological affect of his metaphysical doubt, and given this failure, he has not given any reason to think that it can both prevent assent and remove prejudice. It follows that he should not be so confident in his use of his doubts in his search for a foundation of knowledge.

2.3

In his First Meditation, Descartes is not exactly a sceptic about the external world. His stated goal, in that meditation, is to find a foundation for knowledge, or 'a firm and permanent structure in the sciences.'⁹⁰ But since his doubts were motivated, he says, 'for reasons very strong and maturely considered,' he does not now want to dispel them before he has achieved his goal.⁹¹ In the beginning of his Third Meditation, Descartes abandons his doubts when, by simply attending to his nature, he finds that he possesses what he calls his 'natural light of reason,' or his faculty of *knowing*.⁹² He says that his natural light is an *intellectual* instinct, one that forces him to 'recognize truth.'⁹³ The natural light, he insists, is quite powerful, in that it 'never perceives any object that is not true, insofar as it is perceived'⁹⁴ It follows that if he really does possess his natural light of reason, he will be guided by it. Descartes says that 'I cannot doubt what it causes me to believe.'⁹⁵ In essence, he hopes that, since he

⁹⁰ HR 1, p.144.

⁹¹ HR 1, p.145.

⁹² HR 1, p.160.

⁹³ K, p.66.

⁹⁴ HR 1, p.231.

⁹⁵ HR 1, p.160.

possesses such a natural light of reason, it will lead him out of his scepticism about the external world.

In his Third Meditation, Descartes makes ample use of his natural light of reason. He first uses his natural light to prove the existence of God, or a being that is 'infinite, independent, omniscient, and omnipotent'.⁹⁶ But given this collection of characteristics, he also says that God simply cannot deceive, for 'deception always proceeds from a defect.'⁹⁷ Descartes says that God exists, and so has all the tools he needs. In other words, he has both his natural light of reason and God, and so can finally 'conjecture with probability' that bodies exist.⁹⁸ He insists that 'there is no doubt that in all things which nature teaches me there is *some* truth contained.'⁹⁹ Descartes does not say that bodies usually have all the properties they seem to, but only that all such bodies are *extended*. But this is no problem for him, he says, for extension is the essential property of all bodies, and 'all else that may be attributed to body presupposes extension.'¹⁰⁰ In essence, he says that his beliefs about the world do not concern all properties, but instead only address the quantities of the world.¹⁰¹

But how can Descartes use his natural light of reason and proof of God to help him to show that his metaphysical doubts are unfounded, and so, help him escape his former scepticism about the external world? He adheres to the general sceptical argument from chapter one, and addresses premise 2 of that argument, the premise wherein he must rule out q (that his senses deceive, whether he is in a

⁹⁶ HR 1, p.165.

⁹⁷ HR 1, p.171.

⁹⁸ HR 1, p.187.

⁹⁹ HR 1, p.192.

¹⁰⁰ HR 1, p.240.

¹⁰¹ Descartes, in his Second Meditation, famously makes this point about a piece of wax. He says that after metaphysically doubting the wax, 'nothing remains except an extended thing.' He insists that his mind perceives this, 'according to the *elements* found in it' (p.155). In his Sixth Meditation, he says much the same. Descartes says that he perceives 'in the language of *pure mathematics*' (p.191).

dreaming or waking state, and that an evil demon is active). Descartes says that natural light of reason and proof of God have shown him that he can do this, and so he says that can conjecture with probability that he is correct about the external world. It follows that Descartes rules out q of the general sceptical argument as follows:

- A. God exists, and is no deceiver (premise).
- B. I *can* rule out the possibility that q (that my senses deceive, that I do not know if I am dreaming or awake, that an evil demon may be active) in premises 1 and 2 of the general sceptical argument, after all (from A).
- C. I *know* that p (that my senses are veridical, that I know that my obvious beliefs are correct, and that I can interpret math correctly), in premises 1 and 2 of the general sceptical argument, after all (from A and B).

In this argument, Descartes finally says that he knows that p, and says that 'I ought in no wise to doubt the truth of these matters.'¹⁰² He does this by relying on his premise A, that God exists and is not a deceiver. It follows that premise B is true, and so he really does rule out q, that his senses, dreaming or waking state, or any evil demon, may deceive him. If Descartes can rule these out, his conclusion C follows, for he then knows that his senses, obvious beliefs, and mathematical beliefs are veridical, after all. If his argument is correct that is the end of the story, and he can discard his metaphysical doubts, and so his scepticism. But

¹⁰² HR 1, p.199.

although he may be satisfied with this answer, as we will see, it is vulnerable to a set of obvious objections.

In the Fourth Objections, Arnauld notes that Descartes incurs a serious problem here. In particular, his argument is circular, and so proves nothing about his beliefs about the external world. This problem has come to be known as the 'Cartesian Circle,' for he seems to use his natural light to prove that God exists, yet only seems to know that this light works because God says it does. It follows that if Descartes does argue in this circular way, he is back where he started, and has no right to conjecture even with probability that his beliefs are true. But then, it seems that he should, after all, remain a sceptic about the external world. Arnauld says that:

I have uncertainty as to how a circular reasoning is to be avoided in saying: we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive it. The only secure reason we have for believing that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true is the fact that God exists.¹⁰³

In their interview, Burman makes the same charge of circularity.

There is a circle. The author uses axioms to prove the existence of God, even though he is not yet certain about these. I cannot see that there is any way for the author to avoid the charge of arguing

¹⁰³ HR 2, p.92.

in a circle here. It does not seem that he proves anything about the external world.

If Arnauld and Burman are correct, then this Cartesian Circle seems to mandate that Descartes remain a sceptic about the external world. This is an urgent issue here, because he does not want to remain a sceptic. But if because of this circle he cannot escape his own stages of metaphysical doubt, he will have to do so, and would regard this as a failure. Descartes knows that the Cartesian Circle is a serious problem, and so tells Regius that 'all real scientific knowledge depends upon a solution' to it.¹⁰⁴ To remedy this, he proposes three solutions to it, all of which contradict each other. It has been a matter of much epistemological debate as to which of these solutions is best.

It will be revealing to evaluate these three solutions Descartes offers to his Cartesian Circle. His first solution, which is the most obvious, is often called the 'memory solution.' In his reply to the Second Objections, Descartes tells Mersenne that when he speaks of what his natural light of reason shows, he means that, at any given time, it always works 'to deliver truths.' But as he says, he then needs God to guarantee his natural light *over* time.¹⁰⁵ Descartes says that God corrects for his errors, but here he is only 'referring to conclusions as can occur in memory' that may shift over time.¹⁰⁶ In other words, he says, at any given time, his natural light works to deliver only truths, and in all these cases God is not needed as a guarantor, but over time, his memory may fail him, and so

¹⁰⁴ K, p.74.

¹⁰⁵ In his reply to Mersenne, Descartes insists that 'there are some things so evident and simple, that we can never doubt them, and must believe them to be true' (p.42). But then, it seems, these simple truths are true. But if they are, Descartes says that only those with 'knowledge of the true God,' can maintain this sort of knowledge over time,' which gives rise the memory interpretation (p.43).

¹⁰⁶ K, p.81.

later on he may acquire false memories of what his natural light once revealed truly. In this odd situation, God enters *only* to correct his memory of what his natural light once revealed, establishing his contact with the external world once again.¹⁰⁷ Descartes tells Mersenne that he intended this all along, and so there is no circle, after all.

Descartes insists that his memory solution to his Cartesian Circle is effective, and so, there is no problem about reestablishing his contact with the external world. This is because, at any given time, his natural light of reason always works to reveal only truths, then he employs his natural light to prove the existence of God, who thereafter guarantees that his memory has not shifted away from what his natural light made him believe. But how can Descartes use his natural light of reason to prove that God exists, for it seems that here his memory could deceive him too? In his Fifth Meditation, Descartes tries to remedy this lacuna in his argument by saying that his use of his light to prove the existence of God is unique, for here '*no* contrary reason could be brought forward' against him.¹⁰⁸ Descartes tells Burman that the reason no such reason can be brought forward against him is that he 'can keep the entire proof of God in mind at the same time.' In point of fact, he says, 'so long as I am engaged in this, I cannot be deceived.'¹⁰⁹ To dispel any doubt here, he need only run through his entire proof again, keeping it in mind.

¹⁰⁷ Willis Doney, in his 'The Cartesian Circle,' tries to do justice to this solution. Descartes, he says, intended that 'present perceptions were never subject to doubt' (p.305). Doney says that he 'clearly limits his considerations to memory,' such that the only time when he does lose contact with the world is when 'his memory is faulty' (p.309). Doney may be moved by this, but it is a controversial interpretation.

¹⁰⁸ HR 1, p.184.

¹⁰⁹ Descartes, in his *Conversation with Burman*, insists that 'since our thought is able to grasp more than one item in this way, and since thought does not occur instantaneously, we are able to grasp the proof of God's existence *in its entirety*. So long as we are engaged in this we can know that we are not deceived' (p.8). But of course, it is one thing to say this, and another for it to be plausible.

Descartes offers his memory solution to avoid the problem of the Cartesian Circle, but actually, holds to it more doggedly when he is challenged than at any other time. This is understandable, for his memory solution is far removed from his original project of using metaphysical doubt in his search for a foundation for knowledge. If his natural light of reason always worked correctly to reveal truths about the world at any given time, this would make his motive for his metaphysical doubts less important. Descartes would never have lost touch with the world, and would not need to doubt it, and so would not need a foundation of knowledge. Descartes would then only need to use metaphysical doubt to establish a foundation for knowledge over time, which is a very different project.¹¹⁰ He also wants the role of God to be more than the guarantor of memory. Descartes insists that rather, 'the certainty and truth of *all* knowledge depend on knowledge of God alone,' who hopefully guarantees not just memory, but truth itself.¹¹¹

But as Descartes seems to realize, the problem with his memory solution to his Cartesian Circle is not just that it conflicts with his goal of finding a foundation for knowledge, but also that it does not solve the problem. In essence, this is because he insists that his proofs of God are always remembered correctly, and says that he can hold them in his mind at once. But plainly, both of these claims are plainly false, since here too his memories may shift as easily as anywhere else, and he surely cannot always keep these proofs in mind. If this is so, his insistence that his memory is infallible here such that he can keep his God proofs in mind seems to be just an easy way for him to avoid the force of the problem, and so, prove and easy escape from his scepticism about the external

¹¹⁰ HR 2, p.41.

¹¹¹ HR 1, p.185.

world. Descartes cannot make any special exception for his proof of God, and so he cannot be sure that the latter exists to guarantee anything, such as his memories. It follows that his memory solution to his Cartesian Circle cannot work, and so he needs a different way out, so as to finally connect with the external world.

Descartes, it may seem, does not believe this memory solution to the Cartesian Circle in the first place. Harry Frankfurt says that he did not intend it, and so interprets him as proposing a second solution. Descartes, he says, may not be interested in either memory or even truth, he says, but only the '*reliability of reason.*' Frankfurt says that Descartes holds reason to be reliable, in that his best use of it 'undermines his own reasons for metaphysical doubts.'¹¹² But what can be said in favor of this reliability solution to the Cartesian Circle? Descartes does, in point of fact, use reason to undermine his own metaphysical doubts, for many times, he claims that his natural light of reason commands him to believe, and when it does so, he 'spontaneously believes.'¹¹³ In such cases, he says, he cannot metaphysically doubt at all, and here he admits that 'there is simply nothing more to enquire about.'¹¹⁴ Descartes infers that many of his beliefs '*must* be thought to be true whenever they are thought.'¹¹⁵ These concessions seem to indicate that he only cares that his reason is reliable.

But as Frankfurt notes, these admissions are compatible with the deliverances of his natural light of reason being '*absolutely speaking*' *false*.

¹¹² Harry Frankfurt, in *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*, offers this solution. Descartes, he insists, really only cares about whether or not his beliefs are 'consistent with one another' (p.170). He says that his best use of reason will show he 'cannot have a reason to doubt,' not that his beliefs are actually true (p.172). Descartes, then, only wants to undermine his own grounds for having doubts (p.174).

¹¹³ HR 2, p.41.

¹¹⁴ HR 2, p.41.

¹¹⁵ HR 2, p.41.

Descartes supports this interpretation, for he tells Mersenne that he ‘never has the smallest suspicion’ of such possible falsity in his beliefs, and so such falsity is *meaningless* to him.¹¹⁶ This possibility is meaningless, he says, for he still possesses ‘the most perfect conviction that is *possible* to have.’¹¹⁷ Descartes even admits to Mersenne that he has no real access to truth, and so long as he has convictions, it is ‘nothing to him’ if his beliefs are absolutely speaking false.¹¹⁸ Frankfurt says that these admissions are important, and insists that Descartes does not care about truth after all, but only cares that his reason is reliable. It follows that contrary to the usual interpretation he believes that truth *just is* ‘coherence with what he cannot doubt.’¹¹⁹ Descartes is not a philosopher who is concerned with memory and truth. He cares about neither of these, but only about reliability and coherence.

Frankfurt says that this reliability solution to the Cartesian Circle works as follows. Descartes, apart from insisting upon the reliability of his reason and truth as coherence, also claims that, regardless of any such absolute falsity in his beliefs, he can still *use* his natural light of reason to undermine his metaphysical doubts. Descartes does this, he says, insofar as he can still *use* his natural light to prove the existence of God, who can thereafter guarantee that his beliefs are probable. But then, hopefully, these probable beliefs will, in turn, undermine his reasons for doubt. His beliefs will have been shown to be reliable, as far as is possible. Descartes can then reject his metaphysical doubts, after all, for now he

¹¹⁶ HR 2, p.41.

¹¹⁷ HR 2, p.42.

¹¹⁸ HR 2, p.42.

¹¹⁹ Harry Frankfurt, in *Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen*, claims that, contrary to the standard interpretation, Descartes holds that ‘the notions of truth and falsity are *irrelevant to inquiry*. The notion of truth that *is* relevant is a notion of *coherence*’ (p.179). Descartes holds that ‘this certainty is all we need or should demand,’ and so holds much lower standards than is usually thought (p.184).

has no reasons to doubt any more. But Frankfurt concedes that even if this reliability solution to the Cartesian Circle works, it will surely not satisfy everyone, and may well incur another type of circularity.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, he says, it does solve the standard problem of circular reasoning, and that, by itself, is quite an advance.

Descartes does not solve the circularity problem with his reliability solution, but merely *avoids* it by lowering his standards for his project. But actually, he cannot intend this solution, for he says that he does not want a merely reliable picture of the world that may yet be false, but one that is actually true. He says that a merely reliable picture is never good enough, for here uncertainty would affect the whole.¹²¹ Descartes also says that truth itself is not coherence, but is '*correspondence* of thought to its object.'¹²² He goes further, in fact, and insists that 'truth is indivisible, and so the slightest thing added or taken away falsifies it.'¹²³ This is significant, for he says that it implies that 'there is but *one explanation* of reality,' and that is the correct one.¹²⁴ Descartes does not want to lower his standards, does not want his reason to be merely reliable, or to identify truth itself with coherence. It follows that, even after his doubts, he remains a realist about the world. He does not want to avoid the Cartesian Circle, but wants to *solve* it.

It may seem that Descartes simply has no good way out of his Cartesian Circle. If this is so, he should revert to his metaphysical doubts and scepticism

¹²⁰ Frankfurt says that Descartes may reason in a different circle, for 'given that reason leads to the conclusion that reason is reliable because a veracious God exists, might it not also lead to the conclusion that an omnipotent demon exists whose existence makes reason unreliable' (p.185)? Frankfurt says that Descartes cannot take it for granted that this is not the case, and so his argument may not work.

¹²¹ HR 2, p. 282

¹²² K, p.65.

¹²³ K, p.132.

¹²⁴ K, p.79.

about the external world. James van Cleve offers one final solution to his Cartesian Circle. He notes that Descartes proposes a *global* procedure of using his natural light of reason to prove the existence of God, and then using God to guarantee that his natural light works.¹²⁵ But put in this way, his response is circular, and so there is no progress. John Morris also notes that Descartes also replies in a *piecemeal* fashion to his Cartesian Circle, for he says that his natural light reveals specific ‘eternal truths.’ These are truths that are created by God, and can *only* be changed by him.¹²⁶ Descartes says that these truths have their ‘seat in the mind,’ and yet ‘do not provide information about the world.’¹²⁷ In particular, he says that his natural light of reason reveals the *causal* eternal truth that ‘there must be at least as much total reality in the cause as in the effect.’¹²⁸ This causal eternal truth, he says, is equivalent to another such truth, that ‘nothing comes from nothing.’¹²⁹

But here, the point is that Descartes can *use* his causal eternal truths as a solution to his Cartesian Circle. In other words, in many places Descartes suggests that these causal eternal truths are *unlike* all the others. He says that unlike other eternal truths, causal ones do *not* have their ‘seat in the mind’ in which case they would ‘reveal no information about the world.’ Descartes suggests something like this when he tells Mersenne that ‘the admission of these axioms is highly necessary for the reason that we must account for our knowledge of *all* things, both sensuous and not.’¹³⁰ If this is correct, it entails that these causal eternal truths reveal how the world actually *is*. Descartes seems to

¹²⁵ James van Cleve, ‘Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle,’ p.115.

¹²⁶ John Morris, ‘Cartesian Circle,’ p.165.

¹²⁷ HR 1, p.239.

¹²⁸ HR 2, p.35.

¹²⁹ HR 2, p.35.

¹³⁰ HR 2, p.56.

exploit a lucky coincidence here, which is that these causal eternal truths are the *same* truths that he uses to prove that God exists. It follows that Descartes no longer requires that his natural light of reason work globally to prove that God exists, but only that it work piecemeal to do so. If this is correct, it provides him with his solution to his Cartesian Circle.

It seems that Descartes escapes his Cartesian Circle in the following way. He begins with his causal eternal truths that are, he holds, sufficient to prove that God exists, and builds from there. Descartes then relies on God to guarantee that all his *other* beliefs about the external world are probable, and this is where he wants to finish. In other words, he can finally ‘conjecture with probability’ that his beliefs about the world represent it correctly. But given this causal eternal truth response to his Cartesian Circle, it becomes very important to know *how* these truths really do prove the existence of God. Descartes addresses this concern by offering his proof for his existence, or what has become to be known as his trademark argument.

There remains only the question of this idea of God. I did not draw it from the senses, and it never came to me when I did not anticipate it, as the ideas of sensible things are wont to do. Nor has it been produced by me, for I cannot add or subtract anything from it. It thus remains that it must be *innate* in me, just as the idea of myself is also innate in me. So how did I receive this idea of God? To be sure, it must be that God *himself* endowed me with

this idea, so that it would be like the sign of an artist impressed on his work.¹³¹

Descartes is saying, in effect, that his causal eternal truths, that there be 'at least as much reality in cause as in effect' and that 'nothing comes from nothing,' entail that the cause of his God idea be as great as the idea itself. But the only thing, he says, that actually is great enough to be the cause such an idea is God himself, who produced a trademark of himself in his mind, just so he could recognize it later. Descartes says that 'I recognize that it is impossible that I exist, having the idea of God within me, unless he exists.'¹³² He infers that he can escape his Cartesian Circle after all, for his causal eternal truths prove that God exists, who thereafter proves that the world exists. Descartes can finally have contact with the external world.

Descartes incurs two problems with this last solution to his Cartesian Circle. The first problem concerns his trademark argument. He might have constructed his God idea from his sensory deliverances, or made it up himself, but now, just not be able to recall that he has done so.¹³³ If this had happened, he then would not have proved that God exists, and so he cannot rely upon the latter to guarantee that any of his beliefs about the external world are true. Descartes would object, for he tells Arnauld that '*nothing* can exist in the mind of which it is not conscious.'¹³⁴ He further says that 'there is nothing *entirely* in our power

¹³¹ HR 1, p.170.

¹³² HR 1, p.171.

¹³³ In the Third Objections, Hobbes makes this point, for he notes that 'the concept of God is but the combination of various elements learned from experience,' He notes that different religions have different ideas of God, and some have many Gods, for that matter. Hobbes says it is no use to claim nothing can be added or subtracted to the concept, for that only reflects an unwillingness to do so.

¹³⁴ HR 2, p.115.

except our thoughts.’¹³⁵ In other words, he says, he possesses perfect *transparency* of mind. If he really has such transparency, he *already* knows what he acquires from the senses or what he has made up. Descartes insists that because of this, he knows God put his trademark on his mind, such that the latter can guarantee his other beliefs about the external world. But actually, it is unlikely that he really has transparency of mind, and so, cannot make use of God to escape from his Cartesian Circle.

Descartes incurs a second, and more fundamental, problem with this third solution to the Cartesian Circle. This is that, in his Third Meditation, he relies on his causal eternal truths to prove the existence of God. But then, this same being is supposed to create those same causal eternal truths.¹³⁶ This amounts to a new sort of Cartesian Circle, for he cannot say *both* that his causal eternal truths prove the existence of God, yet God creates these same eternal truths. In other words, he assumes that these causal eternal truths and God both *exist* before the other and so can be used in proofs, which makes little sense. Descartes does not even address this new circle and so leaves things here. It follows that, in the end, he does *not* escape his Cartesian Circle after all, but offers three contradictory solutions to it, each of which fails for different reasons. Descartes does not refute his metaphysical doubts, and so he should have remained a sceptic about the external world. It of little consequence that this is not his desired conclusion, but it is what he is committed to, nonetheless.

¹³⁵ K, p.51.

¹³⁶ K, p.14.

Descartes offers his metaphysical doubts in his First Meditation to find ‘a firm and permanent structure in the sciences,’ although he fails to defuse them. But given that he fails to defuse his doubts, given that he does not surmount his Cartesian Circle, it follows that even after his Third Meditation he should have remained a sceptic about the external world. Descartes did not remain a sceptic, although that is not important here. The important point here is that his failures here allow me to indicate in more detail *why* he did not succeed. In particular, his failures allow me to articulate a better version of the general sceptical argument from chapter one, what amounts to a *master sceptical argument*. This argument uses premises 1 and 2 of the general sceptical argument and assumptions C, D, and E from chapter one.

1. I can know that p only if I can rule out the possibility that q.
2. I can know that p only if I am in an *epistemic position* to construct an argument that p is significantly more likely to be true than q is.¹³⁷
3. The *only* evidence I have for propositions about the external world being true are those arrived at through the *representations* in my mind.

¹³⁷ This premise should be understood carefully. It claims that, generally speaking, knowledge is dependent upon our being able to ascertain the objective probability of any given proposition being true. This is accurate so far as it goes, but even so, this premise only outlines a necessary condition of knowledge, not a sufficient one. It is meant to mirror our part in constructing knowledge, our responsibility to reason.

4. There is no *necessary* connection between the meaning of my words or contents of my thoughts, and any actual state of the environment.
5. I am *not* in an epistemic position to construct an argument that q is false (from 3 and 4).
6. I do not know that q is false (from 2 and 5).
7. I do *not* know that p (from 1 and 6)

Descartes, in his answer to his metaphysical doubts and scepticism about the external world, accepts premises 1, 2, 3, and 4 of this master sceptical argument, but addresses premise 2. In particular, he says that given that his natural light of reason and proof of God allow him to satisfy the condition in premise 2, he can know that q is false. If he is correct, he can circumvent the rest of the argument, and just dispute conclusion 7. But Descartes, because he does not defuse his doubts, because of his Cartesian Circle, does not really satisfy the epistemic condition in premise 2, for his natural light of reason and his proof of God do not show anything. It follows that after all his efforts he still should not have abandoned his metaphysical doubts, and should have remained a sceptic about the external world.

But what does this discussion of Descartes suggest about Cartesian skepticism of the external world? This discussion suggests two important *success conditions* for a response to skepticism. These conditions are paramount for this thesis, for they provide a blueprint for overcoming such scepticism. This is not to say that philosophers acknowledge these conditions, but I believe that they are intuitively correct. There are more success conditions for responding to such

scepticism, but I will only cite these two here. The reason for doing this is to be as fair as possible, so as to give any objectors the best chance of surmounting them. But for our purposes, these two conditions should be enough, for as we will see, even they are not easy to satisfy.

1. The response to scepticism about the external world must not cite anything that falls within the scope of the sceptical conclusion. In other words, any such response to scepticism cannot beg the question against it.
2. The response to scepticism about the external world should provide an accurate explanation of sceptical error. To explain sceptical error is desirable because it should help in avoiding such error in the future.¹³⁸

These conditions are not controversial, for they are also conditions for successfully responding to *any* theory. It is clear that any response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world that satisfies these conditions has a chance of overcoming it. Descartes himself did not meet these two conditions, for his solution, in terms of his natural light of reason and his proof of God, begged the question against scepticism. He also does not explain the error that the sceptic commits, for that error is not that he should have recognized that he has no genuine reasons to doubt. This is not the end of the story about Cartesian

¹³⁸ In point of fact, this success condition is optional. This is because one can argue against any given position such as skepticism but do so without ever explaining the errors of that position. But that said meeting this condition is still important here, for by not meeting it we will not know what is really wrong with skepticism about the external world, or how to circumvent its errors in the future.

scepticism about the external world, for most contemporary theories of knowledge also respond to it.

Chapter Three

3.1

In this chapter, I address the work of W. V. O. Quine, Robert Nozick, Alvin Goldman, and David Armstrong, and how these philosophers respond to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. These philosophers each deny one of the sceptical assumptions A through D, cited in chapter one. In section two, I address Quine, who in his 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' criticizes the semantic notion of analyticity and with it the notion of a priori knowledge. He reasons that since no statement is unrevisable, none are a priori, and so assumption A is false. But without such a priori knowledge, traditional epistemology is a failure. Quine advocates *epistemological naturalism* instead, for he hopes to replace epistemology with natural science, with his behavioristic version of psychology. But if he is correct, there is less point in taking Cartesian scepticism about the external world seriously. I argue that Quine does not make his case against analyticity and so a priori knowledge, and neither does he make his case for naturalizing epistemology. Quine does not touch the substance of Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

In section three, I address the work of Robert Nozick, who in his *Philosophical Explanations* denies that epistemic closure holds, or that assumption B is true. He does this by providing a novel analysis of knowledge, which traditionally is defined as justified, true belief. Nozick redefines the justification component of this definition of knowledge in terms of two subjunctive conditionals. But if his analysis of knowledge is successful, epistemic

closure, or assumption B, fails. Nozick concludes that even though Cartesian scepticism about the external world shows that we do not know that we are not deceived, we can still know all that it calls into question. In this section, I argue that Nozick does not succeed with his subjunctive analysis of knowledge, because he clearly begs the question against such scepticism, because his subjunctive conditionals do not really violate epistemic closure, and because his analysis, if taken seriously, suggests a stronger kind of scepticism, one about inference. But given these problems, Nozick does not refute Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

In section four, I address the work of Alvin Goldman, and his denial that an epistemic position is needed to make any claim, or that assumption C is true. In essence, he does this by offering his version of *historical reliabilism*, or the position that our beliefs are justified when they are produced by reliable belief-forming mechanisms, and not otherwise. Goldman says that it does not matter if we know of or can state anything about our epistemic position, and so assumption C is false. In such situations, he says, we still might know what we take ourselves to. In this section, I attempt to show that Goldman does not succeed against Cartesian scepticism, for two reasons. In arguing for his reliabilism, he eventually retracts his criticism of the need for an epistemic position, or assumption C. In the end, he acknowledges that being in an epistemic position *is* needed for having justified beliefs. Goldman also eventually concedes the force of Cartesian scepticism about the external world, and does not challenge it. In the end, he does not challenge such scepticism, but rather argues for a different position altogether.

In section five, I address the work of David Armstrong, and his denial that we must use our representations to access the world, or that assumption D is true. In various works, he argues that we do not represent the world, but are in direct contact with it, by means of our non-inferential beliefs about it. Armstrong claims that these beliefs are 'empirically adequate' for truth. To show how this is, he compares these non-inferential beliefs about the world to the readings of a thermometer, and says that both beliefs and readings are often 'completely reliable.' In this section, I argue that Armstrong does not make his case for direct realism, for there do not seem to be any beliefs that are empirically adequate for truth, or completely reliable. But also, I suggest that even if he were correct that some of our beliefs are empirically adequate or completely reliable, that would still be small proportion of them. Armstrong does not make his case against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for his argument for direct realism is flawed, and if he does make some headway against such skepticism, that does not matter.

In this chapter, although I discuss the epistemological positions of Quine, Nozick, Goldman, and Armstrong, my intentions are still limited. I discuss these philosophers, not to fully explore their positions, but only to argue, as briefly as possible, that they do not succeed in undermining assumptions A through D from chapter one, and so, do not offer successful responses to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. To do this, I argue that although their philosophical positions have much in common, they still address such scepticism differently, for each address one of these assumptions, cited in chapter one. But even this much detail, I suggest, is enough to make my case that none of them succeeds against Cartesian scepticism about the external world. But given the respective

failures of Quine, Nozick, Goldman, and Armstrong, something must be done. Their respective failures suggest that the semantic or content externalism of Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge, which denies assumption E from chapter one, is a different and natural option for combating such scepticism about the external world.

3.2

Descartes acknowledges the importance of a priori knowledge, as do the other rationalists, such as Leibniz and Spinoza. But Immanuel Kant has shaped our contemporary discussions of such knowledge. In particular, his treatment of such knowledge centers around three distinctions. The first distinction is the *semantic* one between analytic and synthetic judgments. Kant says that a judgment is analytic if the predicate, semantically, adds nothing to the concept of the subject. He says that the judgment that 'All bodies are extended' is analytic, since the concept of extension is *contained* in the concept of body. By contrast, Kant says that a judgment is synthetic if something, semantically, is added to the concept of the subject that is not already thought in the predicate. The judgment 'all bodies are heavy' is synthetic, since the predicate adds something to the subject not already contained in it, for to make this judgment, in effect, the subject and predicate must be added together. This is the famous analytic/synthetic distinction, which will loom large in the discussion of a priori knowledge in this discussion, later on.

Kant also cites the *metaphysical* distinction between necessary and contingent propositions, which concerns how the world actually *is*. A proposition

is necessarily true, he says, just in case it could not possibly be false, or to use possible worlds talk, is true in all possible worlds. It is necessarily true, he says, that 'two and two are four,' simply because it cannot be otherwise, or is true in all possible worlds. But given this, he notes that we cannot even imagine what it would be like for two and two to be anything but four. By contrast, Kant notes that a proposition is contingently true, just in case it could be falsified, or is false in at least one possible world. It is a contingent truth that 'all objects are heavy,' since it is possible that this proposition is either true or false, or is true and false in different possible worlds. It is also easy to imagine what it would be like for objects to be light or heavy. But what is distinctive about the contingent/necessary distinction is that it is not about semantics at all, but about metaphysics, which concerns what there is in the world.

The final distinction Kant cites is the epistemological one between a priori and a posteriori knowledge. The standard way of delineating this distinction is by reference to his claim that a priori knowledge is derived 'absolutely independently of experience,' whereas a posteriori knowledge is not. It is a priori knowledge that is important here. But it is one thing to define such knowledge, and another to know how to identify it when it makes its appearance. Kant insists that the two marks of such knowledge are necessity and universality. He supports this as follows:

If we have a proposition that, first of all, in being thought, is thought as necessary, insofar as it must be thought to be true whenever it is thought, there is no need to look to the world to see if it is true, and so it is an a priori judgment. But also, experience

never confers on its judgments true or strict, but only comparative universality, through induction. We can properly only say, therefore, that so far as we have hitherto observed, there is no exception to this or that rule, although there might be. If a judgment is thought with strict universality it is not derived from experience, but is a priori.¹³⁹

In other words Kant insists that a priori knowledge is made up of necessary and universal truths. He took it to be evident that we do know certain truths that are necessary and universal, and so we really do have a priori knowledge. If this is correct, it is a valuable discovery, but even so, it is still not particularly informative. Kant says that this is because, even assuming that we do have a priori knowledge that is necessary and universal, the question of *what* knowledge this can be is still not settled. This is an important question, but is also where the commonplaces end.

It may seem that these Kantian distinctions are linked in a straightforward manner. This is because analytic judgments are true by virtue of their meanings alone, and as such, just are also necessary propositions, since they will then always be true, or will be so in all possible worlds. But if analytic judgments and necessary propositions are the same, it may then seem that they also comprise a priori knowledge, for then the world does not contribute anything to their meaning or truth, and then they should be able to be known independently of experience. It may seem, in other words, that this linkage entails that analytic judgments, necessary propositions, and also a priori knowledge have the same

¹³⁹ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, p.44.

extension, or are true of the same items. But actually Kant is unique here for he does *not* link his three distinctions in this way, but departs from the traditions here. Instead, his revolution in philosophy is that he denies that only analytic judgments are a priori knowledge, and argues that there are synthetic judgments that also amount to a priori knowledge.

Kant defends three claims concerning a priori knowledge. The first claim is that knowledge is a priori, is independent of experience, if and only if it is both necessary and universal. The second claim he defends is that, in point of fact, we can and do have such a priori knowledge. By saying this, though, he merely follows the traditional linkage of his three distinctions, cited above. The third claim Kant makes about a priori knowledge is his revolutionary contribution to the subject. He insists that we also possess *synthetic* a priori knowledge. This knowledge, he says, comprises the truths of mathematics and logic, as well as the causal concepts that ground science, all of which give us knowledge of the formal characteristics of experience and reality. Kant defines and defends a priori knowledge and also extends its domain. It is this extension, though, of the domain of a priori knowledge that has caused all the controversy. But before launching into any criticisms of a priori knowledge, it will be prudent to examine another version of it.

A. J. Ayer, an empiricist, objects to the Kantian treatment of a priori knowledge. The problem, as he sees it, is that 'no general proposition whose validity is subject to the test of actual experience could ever be logically certain.' This is because, he says, 'there still remains the possibility that it will be confuted on some future occasion.'¹⁴⁰ Ayer says that Kant must be wrong when he says that

¹⁴⁰ A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p.72.

the truths of mathematics and logic, as well as causal concepts, can issue in synthetic a priori knowledge. He insists that, rather, math and logic, as well as causal concepts, do not reveal anything about the forms of experience or reality. Ayer still says that there are necessary truths, and these, he says, can be known a priori. But as an empiricist, he admits that this is a difficult position to hold. This is because he must 'either deny that the truths of mathematics and logic are necessary, or must show that such necessary truths are devoid of factual content.'¹⁴¹ Ayer opts for the second option, yet also hopes to show that such empty truths amount to a priori knowledge, nonetheless. He insists that this is worth doing, for a priori knowledge is valuable for many purposes.

Ayer still needs to establish that necessary truths have no factual content, yet are still a priori knowledge. He seeks to ground claims of a priori knowledge on the notion of *analyticity*. To do this, Ayer first insists that 'the principles of mathematics and logic are true universally simply because we never *allow* them to be anything else.'¹⁴² But Ayer insists that we cannot abandon math and logic, without contradicting ourselves, without sinning against the rules which govern the use of language.'¹⁴³ He infers that 'a proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the *definitions* of the symbols it contains.'¹⁴⁴ Ayer concludes that 'analytic propositions are necessary and certain, and the reason why these cannot be confuted in experience is that they do *not* make any assertions about the external world.' These judgments, he says, 'simply record our determination

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.73.

¹⁴² Ibid., p.77.

¹⁴³ But in his 'Introduction' to the second edition of *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Ayer changes his view. He says that 'just as it is a mistake to identify a priori propositions with empirical propositions about language, I now think it is a mistake to say that they are themselves linguistic rules.' This is because, Ayer says, such rules are arbitrary, but 'a priori propositions are necessary,' (p. 17).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.78.

to *use* words in a particular fashion,' and as such are a priori knowledge.¹⁴⁵ He does not put any limits on how these rules of language or how these definitions are created, so long as they lack factual content. Ayer defends a priori knowledge as a matter of definition.

Kant and Ayer offer distinct versions of a priori knowledge. Disregarding their differences for the moment, if either Kant or Ayer is correct, a priori knowledge can be used, after all, to argue for Cartesian scepticism about the external world. But matters are not so simple. In his famous 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism,' W. V. O. Quine has attacked both of these accounts of a priori knowledge. He begins his discussion by noting that the way most philosophers speak of *meaning* is obscure. He notes that even when meaning is not understood as an entity or confused with reference, 'it can itself be abandoned.'¹⁴⁶ To understand meaning, Quine says, it is simpler and better to study 'the synonymy of linguistic forms and the *analyticity* of statements.'¹⁴⁷ But he claims that analyticity itself is far from clear, and is in need of explanation. The trouble is that philosophers cannot just assume that some statements are analytic and others are synthetic. Quine attacks the semantic analytic/synthetic distinction, and if it goes, so will a priori knowledge.

Quine proposes a general condition for any explanation of analyticity, which is that it should 'not rely on any *unexplained notions*.'¹⁴⁸ Paul Grice and Peter Strawson construe Quine as arguing that any such explanation must, at least, 'not incorporate any expression involving the family circle' of similar expressions, yet still must have the 'same general character as those rejected

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.82.

¹⁴⁶ Willard van Orman Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' p.22.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.22.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.23.

expressions.¹⁴⁹ But as these philosophers note, these are not innocuous requirements. It follows that Quine is demanding very high standards of explanation here, since people mark the analytic/synthetic distinction in many ways, all of which 'create a presumption in favor of it.' Grice and Strawson admit that 'it would be rash to maintain that this distinction is not in need of clarification,' but even so, they say that 'it would be *absurd* to maintain that it does not exist at all.'¹⁵⁰ But Quine thinks that he is justified in demanding such high standards, for, as he says, the 'boundary between the analytic and the synthetic simply has not been drawn,' and as a result of that, he insists, the distinction itself is an *illusion*.¹⁵¹

To clarify his attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction, Quine first considers the Kantian position that analytic judgments are true merely by virtue of their *meanings*. He notes that statements concerning these true judgments fall into two classes. The first class, he says, are statements that are merely *logically* true. But Quine notes that these are just tautologies and, because they are such,

¹⁴⁹ Paul Grice and Peter Strawson, 'In Defence of a Dogma,' p.147.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.152.

¹⁵¹ But does Quine really hold the extreme thesis that the analytic/synthetic distinction is an *illusion*? Grice and Strawson say that it is questionable that he does, and represent him as holding that 'the nature of, or the reasons for, the differences between analytic and synthetic statements are totally misunderstood by those who use them'(p.143). Grice and Strawson are too generous here, for he says that:

I have long maintained that this distinction is illusory. There is one step towards such a distinction, however: a sentence that is true by mere meanings of words should be expected, at least if it is simple, to be subscribed by all fluent speakers in the community. Perhaps the notion of analyticity can be dispensed with, in favor of community-wide acceptance of terms. (Quine, 'Epistemology Naturalized,' p.86).

So Quine maintains that the analytic/synthetic distinction is an illusion, after all. He does, at least, replace that distinction, for he insists that analyticity can be thought of in terms of community acceptance. But this acceptance is nothing like the analytic/synthetic distinction of old, for he is saying that community acceptance is all we have, and this latter, obviously, could amount to most anything in practice.

are quite uninformative. He offers the following as an example of this type of reasoning.

1. No unmarried man is married.

Quine insists that the distinctive mark of such logically true statements is that, holding the logical constants fixed, they remain true under *all* reinterpretations. There is no adequate way to understand such statements differently. But Quine says that there is a second class of statements that is more interesting. These statements, while they are intended to mean the same as statements like 1, have a significant difference.

2. No bachelor is married

Quine notes that if Kant were correct that analytic judgments are true by virtue of their meanings, it seems that 1 can be transformed into 2, 'just by replacing synonyms for synonyms.'¹⁵² But as he says, doing so does not help here, for any attempt to clarify analyticity in terms of *synonymy* is insufficient, since synonymy, in turn, 'is in no less need of clarification than analyticity itself.' Quine concludes that Kant cannot use the meaning to ground the analytic/synthetic distinction.¹⁵³

Quine is no less critical of Ayer, although he does not mention him by name. In particular, he objects to the position that analyticity is just the definition of terms. If analyticity is a matter of definition, he says, we must still ask *how*

¹⁵² Willard van Orman Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism,' p.24.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.24.

such terms were defined. Quine says that this does not yield the answer that Ayer wants. He asks 'how do we find out that bachelor is defined as an unmarried man?' Quine inquires if perhaps 'we should appeal to the lexicographer and his formulation as law?' The trouble, he says, is that the lexicographer is an empirical scientist, and relies on 'his prior belief that there is a relation of synonymy between those forms.'¹⁵⁴ Quine implies that by invoking definitions to define analyticity, Ayer too relies upon the notion of synonymy, which is still unexplained. Quine concedes that we can still create analytic definitions, in the sense that 'they are created *for the purpose* of being synonymous,' but insists that this is an exception.¹⁵⁵ By contrast, he says that supposed analytic judgments are not true by definition.

The argumentative strategy Quine employs here should be clear now. He examines different versions of analyticity and finds, not surprisingly, that they all rely on some unexplained notion, in that each version is within the family circle of notions that require an explanation, yet none of the versions indicate what all the members of that circle have in common.¹⁵⁶ But does this entail that there is no clarification of analyticity after all? Quine insists that his argument shows that the analytic/synthetic distinction itself is an illusion, and so there can be no such explanation of analyticity.

Analyticity at first seemed most naturally definable by appeal to meanings. On refinement, the appeal to meanings gave way to an

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.26.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.26.

¹⁵⁶ Quine goes on to test interchangeability, semantic rules, and verifiability to see if they can clarify analyticity. But for some of these terms, the problem is only that they rely on *other* unexplained notions such as modal operators, artificial languages, or practices of confirmation. Quine implies that these notions are not in the family circle of notions, but that they do not clarify analyticity either.

appeal to synonymy or definition. But that, in turn, turned out to be a will-of-the-wisp, and synonymy turned out to be best understood only by dint of a prior appeal to analyticity itself. So we are back at the problem of analyticity.¹⁵⁷

This is not all, he says, for given that the analytic/synthetic distinction is an illusion, judgments themselves are not semantically isolated, but are related holistically.

My present suggestion is that it is nonsense, and the root of much more nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement. Taken collectively, science has a double dependency upon language and experience; but this duality is not traceable into the statements of science taken one by one.¹⁵⁸

Quine says that it follows that 'our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually, but as a *corporate body*.'¹⁵⁹ But since this is so, he says, 'the empirical unit of significance is the whole of science.' Quine says that we have no a priori knowledge, since, without any analytic judgments, 'if we make drastic enough changes elsewhere in the system,' any belief can be judged to be true or false. There can be no such thing as a priori

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.32.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.42.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.42.

knowledge, for now no belief 'is immune from revision.'¹⁶⁰ There is no a priori knowledge, after all.

Quine rejects the analytic/synthetic distinction, and so criticizes a priori knowledge as well. This result grounds his response to the Cartesian sceptic about the external world. He says that with the rejection of these two notions, 'the distinction between traditional epistemology and natural science is itself removed.' Quine notes that given the collapse of this distinction, 'epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of *psychology*.'¹⁶¹ This does not destroy epistemology, he says, but only radically changes it.¹⁶² But Quine insists that this is no great loss, for by 'retaining our present beliefs about nature we can still ask *how* we have arrived at them.' He says that 'science tells us that our only source of information about the external world is through the impact of light rays and molecules upon our sensory surfaces.'¹⁶³ Quine holds that, in contrast to traditional epistemology, naturalized epistemology has the advantage that it will yield practical *results*, and because of that, we should be happy with it. To ask for more, he says, is just asking for skepticism, which now can be avoided.

Quine says that since there is no distinction between traditional epistemology and natural science, Cartesian scepticism about the external world is implausible. This is because, he says, 'the basis of scepticism is an awareness of illusion,' but now, even such awareness no longer precedes science, but is continuous with it. Quine says that 'illusions are illusions *only* relative to a prior acceptance of genuine bodies with which to contrast them,' and so typically

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.43.

¹⁶¹ Willard van Orman Quine, 'Epistemology Naturalized,' p.82.

¹⁶² Ibid., p.83.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.83.

presuppose science.¹⁶⁴ The Cartesian skeptic about the external world, he says, is 'within his rights in assuming science to refute it' although this will not help him.¹⁶⁵ But even so, he insists, the naturalized epistemologist too can make use of science. Quine insists that given this equality of tools between the sceptic and the naturalized epistemologist, the latter will still be more productive. This is easily seen, he says, for unlike the sceptic about the external world, 'the naturalized epistemologist comes out with an account that has a great deal to do with language learning, and with the neurology of perception.'¹⁶⁶ Quine says that these results do not refute Cartesian skepticism about the external world, but create a presumption of its falsity.

But Quine incurs two problems by offering his response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. The first is that he does *not* succeed in showing that the analytic/synthetic distinction is an illusion. Grice and Strawson note that he does not want analyticity to rely on unexplained notions, and this amounts to a desire for a strict definition. But as these philosophers say, just because this notion of analyticity does not meet such high standards, this does not mean that the distinction *itself* is an illusion.¹⁶⁷ Quine even admits that he has some handle on this analyticity, and so says that analytic definitions can be created for special purposes. Grice and Strawson compare his position to a finite type of object fitting into another such type, and claim that his position amounts to saying 'I can understand what it means to fit one thing into another, but I cannot understand what it means to say this in any other case.'¹⁶⁸ This position is incoherent, these philosophers say, for it amounts to his *both* asserting that the

¹⁶⁴ Willard van Orman Quine, 'The Nature of Natural Knowledge,' p.69.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.69.

¹⁶⁶ Willard van Orman Quine, 'Five Milestones of Empiricism,' p.72.

¹⁶⁷ Grice and Strawson, 'In Defence of Dogma,' p.152.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.152.

analytic/synthetic distinction is an illusion, yet adhering to it, even so. It seems that Quine has not made his case against the analytic/synthetic distinction and a priori knowledge, after all.

Quine also cannot use naturalized epistemology to replace Cartesian scepticism about the external world. If he fails in his criticisms of the analytic/synthetic distinction and a priori knowledge, his naturalized epistemology is as of yet unmotivated. He may say that his naturalized epistemology is just better without reason, but then he is just 'changing the subject.'¹⁶⁹ But even if Quine could motivate his naturalized epistemology in some other way that does not entail that he is correct against the sceptic. The adoption of such naturalized epistemology would only affect what the sceptic could *say*, and not the truth of his claims. The sceptic might not be able to enunciate his hypotheses without making assumptions about the natural sciences, but since the sceptic *includes* the sciences in the scope of his sceptical hypotheses, he may be correct nonetheless. Quine does not offer an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for his criticisms of the analytic/synthetic distinction and a priori knowledge do not work, and without them his naturalized epistemology is unmotivated, and even if true, it still does not touch scepticism.

¹⁶⁹ Barry Stroud, in his *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, notes that Quine does *not* answer traditional philosophical problems, but just ignores them (p.221). He insists that naturalized epistemology 'just changes the subject, or recommends a different subject.' Stroud notes that 'this leaves it open that scepticism is the only way to answer traditional philosophical questions' (p.224).

In a series of papers, Fred Dretske develops a 'relative alternatives' account of knowledge that denies epistemic closure, or denies assumption B from chapter one. In particular, he insists that 'there are certain presuppositions that are *operated on* when we operate on any statement.'¹⁷⁰ Those epistemic possibilities that are operated on, he says, are relevant to knowledge, and those that are not are irrelevant. Dretske further says that these presupposed operations are not negotiable, for they are determined by 'possibilities that actually exist in the *objective* situation.'¹⁷¹ The point of this, he says, that his relevant alternatives account of knowledge does *not* assume epistemic closure or assumption B, for by virtue of his account, S can know that p, can know that this knowledge puts him in an epistemic position to know that not q, yet still *not* know that not q. In other words, I can know that I am sitting here typing away, know that puts me in a position to know that I am not a brain in a vat, yet still not know that I am not a brain in a vat. Dretske concludes that since epistemic closure or assumption B fails, we can know most of what Cartesian scepticism about the external world calls into question.

Robert Nozick, in his *Philosophical Explanations*, continues this argument. He develops a theory of knowledge that replaces the traditional account in terms of justified true belief, denies epistemic closure or assumption B, and offers a way to sort out *which* epistemic possibilities are relevant to knowledge, and which are not. But actually, Nozick agrees with the Cartesian sceptic about the external world that 'we do *not* know that we are not living in an

¹⁷⁰ Fred Dretske, 'Epistemic Operators,' p.1014.

¹⁷¹ Fred Dretske, 'The Pragmatic Dimension of Knowledge,' p.63.

identical world where everything is false,' where any given sceptical hypothesis is actual.¹⁷² But given this concession, he says that his goal is modest, for he does *not* hope to convince the sceptic of anything, for that, he thinks, could never be done. Nozick sets himself the modest task of explaining 'how knowledge is *possible*' for those who *already* believe that they possess it.¹⁷³ To this end, he says that knowledge is:

S knows that p, iff

1. p is true
2. S believes that p
3. If p were not true, S would not believe that p
4. If p were true, S would believe that p.¹⁷⁴

By offering this theory of knowledge, Nozick departs from the traditional account of it in terms of justified true belief. He admits that his conditions 1 and 2 follow the traditional account. But Nozick says that what is unique in his account are his conditions 3 and 4, which replace the justification requirement for knowledge, and substitute for it, concerning the untruth or truth of p what we would not or would believe about it. In other words, he says, his conditions 3 and 4 are *subjunctive* conditionals that '*track* the truth.'¹⁷⁵ By his account, I know that I am

¹⁷² Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, p.17.

¹⁷³ Nozick holds, generally speaking, that philosophy should 'not try to *prove* anything,' and so says that 'my goal is not to refute the sceptic, to prove that he is wrong, but to marshal arguments and reasons which must convince him, if he is rational' (p.17). He says that 'the goal is to explain, to understand, how knowledge is possible,' or to discover 'what we find acceptable or plausible' (p.197).

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.173.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.178.

seated at my computer typing away if and only if I am seated and typing, I believe that I am so, if I were not so seated and typing I would not believe that I was, and if I were so seated, I would believe it. Nozick insists that all four of his conditions must be true for knowledge.¹⁷⁶

But what does the theory of knowledge Nozick offers here have to do with Cartesian scepticism about the external world? Nozick offers the following example, to explain what he means. He says that he seems to be in Jerusalem, but just maybe, he is on Alpha Centauri, hooked up to an experience machine.¹⁷⁷ But given the possibility that he may be on Alpha Centauri, he applies his theory of knowledge to see if he can prove he is not. Nozick concedes that he may not know that 'I am not on Alpha Centauri' is true, for it were not true, he would still believe it, and so condition 3 would be false. He may also not know this, for if 'I am not on Alpha Centauri' were true, he might still not believe it, and so condition 4 might be false too. But Nozick says that this result does *not* indicate that his theory of knowledge is itself false, but only that 'I am not on Alpha Centauri' is *not* tracked by us. To reach the Cartesian skepticism about the external world, he says, this observation must be contraposed. Nozick notes that to do this, the sceptic must assume epistemic closure, or assumption B. But according to his theory of knowledge, closure 'is wrong, and not merely in detail.'¹⁷⁸

Nozick realizes that, as it stands, his theory of knowledge will not do.

This is because, he admits, even if we accept his theory of knowledge, his four

¹⁷⁶ In his 'Introduction,' to *Scepticism: a Contemporary Reader*, Keith DeRose notes that for Nozick, if conditions 1 and 2 are true, then 'condition 4 will *always* be met (p.23). He says that condition 4 can do no work. Nozick needs a unique account of subjunctive conditionals. But this, he says, 'would be controversial' (p.23). I am sure DeRose is correct here, but will ignore this complication.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, p.197.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.206.

conditions of knowledge, he has 'not put any limitations on the *methods* by which we arrive at belief.'¹⁷⁹ He wants to do this, he says, because he wants to exclude cases where we believe only because we are duped by circumstances that actually make us change our methods of acquiring beliefs. Nozick postulates that we will often use more than one method, or will use different methods at different times. But given these complications, he says that our method for acquiring beliefs should satisfy his four conditions, unless this is 'outweighed by other methods' for some reason. Nozick says that the best method is that which we would prefer 'in cases of conflict between methods.'¹⁸⁰ This final method, he says, must meet two conditions. He insists that this method must have 'a certain *generality* to play the appropriate role in subjunctive conditionals.'¹⁸¹ But significantly, he says, this method must also 'have a final upshot in *experience*,' and so will be determined from the inside.¹⁸²

Nozick says two very different things by offering his subjunctive conditionals 3 and 4 and his invocation of his method of arriving at belief, and these may conflict. In particular, he says that his subjunctive conditionals are meant to '*track* the truth,' regardless of our awareness of this occurring, or our ability to talk about it. In other words, his conditionals 3 and 4 seem to be motivated by epistemological *externalism*. But Nozick also cites his method of arriving at beliefs, and notes that these 'have a 'final upshot in experience,' or from the inside. This method of arriving at belief seems to adhere to

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.179.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.182.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.232.

¹⁸² Nozick notes that his method includes only 'differences the person would detect, believing it to constitute a difference' (p.232). He concedes that his notion of method seems vacuous, and acknowledges that there may seem to be some sort of gimmick here. Nozick says that 'some further conditions will have to be imposed on the method' although he does say what these might be (p.684).

epistemological *internalism*. The conflict is that an externalist would say that such experience is irrelevant to knowledge, and an internalist would never say that knowledge tracks the truth independently of our awareness of it doing so. In what is to follow, we must assume that there is some way to reconcile his subjunctive conditionals 3 and 4, and his method of arriving at belief. It may be that, in the end there is no way to reconcile these, but this complication must be ignored to move on.

If Nozick is to provide an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world, he needs to do more than *assert* that epistemic closure or assumption B is false. He must also provide an *argument* that there is something wrong with this widespread assumption, and also indicate why his theory of knowledge does not incur counterintuitive consequences in the process. Nozick says that, given his theory of knowledge, if epistemic closure or assumption B were to hold, now it must do so for *each* of his four conditions. He admits that closure or assumption B may hold for his conditions 1 and 2, but insists that it does not for his 3 and 4. He insists that his conditions 3 and 4 are subjunctive conditionals that do not have entailments as such, for not every world where p would be true or false is *also* one in which not q would be true or false. To see this, notice that the closure of his conditions 3 and 4 would issue in something like conditions 5 and 6.

5. If p was not true and S did not believe it, he would not believe the consequences of p, such as not q.
6. If p was true and S did believe p, he would also believe the consequences of p, such as q.

Nozick would say that epistemic closure or assumption B does not hold for his conditions 5 and 6, for 'there is *no* reason to assume' that the closest world where the p of 5 or 6 are true or false is the *same* world where the not q of 5 and 6 are also true or false. Duncan Pritchard puts this simply, and says that 'one can know one proposition relative to one set of possible worlds, know the entailment to a second proposition, yet fail to know the second proposition relative to a *different* set of possible worlds.'¹⁸³ It follows that subjunctive conditionals like 5 and 6 do not have epistemic entailments as such, but do so 'only in *close* possible worlds.' Nozick concludes that 'any general account of knowledge that includes as a necessary condition subjunctive conditionals will have the consequence that knowledge is not closed under logical entailment.'¹⁸⁴ It follows that epistemic closure or assumption B cannot be used by the Cartesian skeptic about the external world

Nozick attempts to argue against Cartesian scepticism about the external world as follows. To return to his example, he says he *can* know that he is sitting in Jerusalem. This knowledge, moreover, seems to put him in an epistemic position to know that he is his not on Alpha Centauri, in an experience machine. Nozick says that, even so, he does *not* know that he is not in this machine, after all. It follows that epistemic closure or assumption B fails. By saying this, Nozick concedes that the Cartesian sceptic about the external world is correct that he cannot know that he is not on Alpha Centauri, in an experience machine. But even so, he says that in his present situation he *does* know that he is in Jerusalem, sitting down. There is no threat from scepticism, he says, for he can only be on Alpha Centauri in an experience machine in worlds that are 'too far out' to be

¹⁸³ Duncan Pritchard, 'Recent Work on Radical Scepticism,' p.222.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, p.207.

relevant.¹⁸⁵ The content of his Jerusalem belief and his methods for acquiring it conspire to make this Alpha Centauri possibility so outlandish that it cannot really matter. Nozick says that Cartesian scepticism about the external world does not threaten our knowledge.

Nozick does not present an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for two reasons. The first reason is that he begs the question against such scepticism. In particular, he claims that given his theory of knowledge, epistemic closure and assumption B fails, for we can know that p, know that p entails that not q, yet not be in an epistemic position to know that not q. Nozick says that the sceptic cannot reason that since we do not know that not q, we do not know p either. Michael Williams responds that it is a mystery how Nozick could *know* that these not q worlds are so far out so as to be irrelevant. He notes that 'unless we *already* know that the actual world is not a sceptical world, we do not know what worlds to examine.'¹⁸⁶ Williams says that since this is so Nozick does not really establish that epistemic closure or assumption B does fail either. In particular, he says that this only appears to fail because he 'raises the standards whenever sceptical counter possibilities make an appearance.'¹⁸⁷ The Cartesian sceptic about the external world can make use of epistemic closure or assumption B, after all.¹⁸⁸

Nozick also fails against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for a second reason. Laurence Bonjour notes that he only makes matters worse, for he is committed to another kind of scepticism. In particular, his denial of epistemic closure or assumption B for subjunctive conditionals leads to a stronger

¹⁸⁵ Too far out, reference.

¹⁸⁶ Michael Williams, 'Nozick on Knowledge and Scepticism,' p.142.

¹⁸⁷ Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*, p. 334.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.343.

kind of scepticism about *inference*. Bonjour notes that if we could not assume closure generally, 'much of our reasoning would be hampered.'¹⁸⁹ He notes that typically we reason that if p were not or were true, we would not or would believe not q. But if Nozick is correct that subjunctive conditionals do not sustain closure or assumption B, we should *not* reason in this way, since the p of either would give us no confidence about their apparently entailed not q. Bonjour says that if this is correct, there would then be 'little point in having knowledge at all.'¹⁹⁰ Jonathan Vogel suggests that, given this stronger kind of scepticism, this theory of knowledge 'should be given up.'¹⁹¹ Nozick does not, in the end, offer an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world, since his subjunctive conditionals beg the question against it, and because his position leads to scepticism about inference.

3.4

Alvin Goldman tries to defuse Cartesian scepticism about the external world by denying that we need be in any epistemic position to construct an argument that p, by denying assumption C from chapter one. He says that often we cannot know that we are justified, nor can we state anything about it, yet we *do* know. Goldman says that his theory does not guarantee knowledge, but 'protects the *possibility* of knowledge.'¹⁹² He defends *historical reliabilism*, or

¹⁸⁹ Laurence Bonjour, 'Nozick, Externalism, and Scepticism,' p.308.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.310.

¹⁹¹ Jonathan Vogel, in his 'Tracking, Closure, and Inductive Knowledge,' says that Nozick 'secures the failure of the closure principle, freedom from scepticism, at the cost of a stronger kind of scepticism about inference' (p.205). But Vogel notes that since this stronger kind of scepticism results solely from his subjunctive analysis of knowledge, 'the tracking requirement ought to be given up' (p.208).

¹⁹² Alvin Goldman, in his 'Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge,' says that 'since I assume that radical or unusual alternatives are not ordinarily entertained I may appear to side with the

the position that a belief is justified just in case it was formed by a 'reliable belief forming cognitive process.'¹⁹³ Goldman asks what a theory of justified belief is. He answers that it is a set of principles that tells us when S is justified in believing that p at time t. But he insists that any successful theory of justified belief must meet the following two restrictions.

- A. An adequate account of justified belief must not contain any *epistemic* terms in its premises.
- B. An adequate account of justified belief must be couched in terms that are suitably *deep* and *revelatory*.¹⁹⁴

But why does Goldman hold that conditions A and B are important to justified belief? He says that condition A is just the requirement that if we are to give a substantive account of justified belief, we cannot assume before doing so that we already have such an account. To do this, he says, would be 'to engage in circular reasoning,' and so would be useless here. Goldman admits that condition B is vague, but he wants a theory that 'clarifies the underlying source of justificational status.' He says that the latter is important, for by considering such theories at all 'we want to know *why* belief is justified.'¹⁹⁵ But given these conditions, he discusses four Cartesian theories of justified belief and, not surprisingly, finds them all wanting.

opponents of scepticism. But my official analysis is neutral' (p.778). He concedes that his position 'may leave the door open to scepticism,' yet claims to only show that 'knowledge is possible' (p.790).

¹⁹³ Alvin Goldman, 'What is a Justified Belief,' p.105.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p.106.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.107.

Goldman says that these four Cartesian theories of justified belief violate either one or both of his conditions for any successful theory, or are obviously incorrect on independent grounds. It will be useful to discuss his objections to these accounts of justified belief, since, given his two conditions, not only must these positions violate one or both of his two conditions and not be obviously incorrect, but also, his *own* theory must itself satisfy them and not be incorrect. Goldman knows this is important here, for he intends to defuse Cartesian scepticism about the external world by denying that we need be in an epistemic position to construct an argument, or that assumption C is true. He can do this only if his own version of reliabilism does not suffer the same fate. These four Cartesian theories are:

1. If S believes p at t, and p is indubitable for S at t, then his belief in p at t is justified
2. If S believes p at t, and p is actually self-evident for S at t, then his belief in p at t is justified
3. If S finds p to be a self-presenting proposition, such that p is true for him at t, and he believes p, his belief in p at t is justified
4. If S finds p to be an incorrigible proposition, such that he believes p at t, and p is true, his belief in p at t is justified.

To begin, Goldman says that theory 1 can only be understood if we understand what 'indubitable' means in it. But as he says, there are two senses in which a belief may be said to be indubitable. In the first sense, indubitability entails that S



believes that p in that he has 'no *grounds* for doubting it.' But Goldman says that since 'grounds' is itself an epistemic term, theory 1 violates condition A and must be discarded. In the second sense, he says, indubitability entails only that S believes that p because he is 'psychologically incapable of doubting' it. Goldman says that this does not violate A, but is obviously incorrect. Just because we cannot bring ourselves to doubt any given belief that does not make it justified. He says that, as a theory of justified belief, theory 1 either violates A, or is obviously incorrect.

To evaluate theory 2, Goldman says that we need to understand what 'self-evident' means, for it admits of two readings. The first reading of self-evidence is that when S believes p, p is 'directly justified.' But he says, since being directly justified is an epistemic notion, this reading violates condition A, and so must be discarded. The second reading of self-evidence is that when S believes that p, it is 'impossible to understand without believing it.' Goldman asks what we can mean by impossible here? Impossibility, he insists, can be either *human* or *logical*. But concerning human impossibility, he says that if S believes that p just because it is humanly impossible not to, this inherits the problems of the second reading of indubitability. But concerning logical impossibility, he says that if S believes that p because it is logically impossible for him not to, this 'can at best confer justificational status on relatively *few* beliefs.'¹⁹⁶ It follows that, as a theory of justified belief, 2 must be discarded because it violates condition A, or is woefully incomplete.

To evaluate theory 3, Goldman says, we need to understand what 'self-presenting' means in it. He cites Roderick Chisholm, who defines a self-

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.109.

presenting proposition as 'P is true. Necessarily, if p is true, and p is evident, S believes p.'¹⁹⁷ Goldman asks what 'necessarily' means here? He notes that we must now decide between *nomological* or *logical* necessity. Nomological necessity here is that there can be a relationship between S having a brain state and his belief that p. But Goldman says that 'we can imagine circumstances in which a person is in this brain state and believes, but his belief is not justified.'¹⁹⁸ Goldman admits, concerning logical necessity, that there are a few true propositions that we must believe. But he says, just because S must believe p, that does not imply that he is justified in doing so. Goldman does not indicate why this is, but only asks 'why logical truth equals justification,' and expects the response that the two are not equal.¹⁹⁹ It follows that, as a theory of justified belief, 3 may adhere to condition A, but still takes logical truth for justification, and he implies that these are not the same.

Goldman lastly examines theory 4, which says that incorrigible propositions issue in justified belief. He says that propositions are incorrigible if 'necessarily, for any S and any t, if S believes p at t, then p is true at t.'²⁰⁰ Goldman notes that again, the evaluation of 4 turns on the force of 'necessarily,' on *nomological* or *logical* necessity. But the nomological necessity in theory 4 is subject to the same problems that theory 3 has, for again the brain and belief connection 'may be wholly fortuitous.'²⁰¹ Goldman then turns to the logical necessity in theory 4, for it says that when S believes that p, p is true. He says that theory 4 is that some propositions have such logical necessity, but that does not imply that we are justified in believing them. Goldman notes that S may

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.109.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.110.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.110.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.111.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p.112.

believe p because of 'utterly confused reasoning,' or he may 'not recognize that his belief implies its truth.'²⁰² It follows that, as a theory of justified belief, 4 may adhere to condition A, but just takes true belief for justification, and these are not always the same.²⁰³

Goldman says that the trouble with these Cartesian theories of justified belief is that each is an 'attempt to confer the status of justified belief without restriction on *why* the belief is held, i.e. on what *causally instantiates* the belief or *causally sustains* it.'²⁰⁴ He insists that this is a fatal flaw for any theory of justified belief. Goldman offers his own reliabilist view of justified belief, to answer this causal question. Goldman says that a belief is justified if it was produced by a 'justification conferring, belief forming process.'²⁰⁵ These processes, he says, are *functional* operations or procedures, such that for each there is 'a mapping from certain states into other states.'²⁰⁶ Goldman notes that there are various kinds of these processes, and so their inputs and outputs will vary, but they must all be *reliable*. He proceeds to say what it means for such a process to be reliable. Goldman says that a belief forming process is reliable, in that it has a '*tendency* to produce beliefs that are true rather than false.'²⁰⁷ But as of yet, this characterization is vague.

Goldman knows, in other words, that a theory of justified belief cannot be this easy. He notes that if reliability is important to justified belief, he must say

²⁰² Ibid., p.112.

²⁰³ Goldman rejects 3 and 4 for similar reasons. 3 says that when p is logically true, we believe it. 4 says that when we believe p, it is logically true. But the real problem, Goldman says, is that both 3 and 4 may not mirror justification, since in either case we might believe p for a host of unjustified reasons. If this occurs, then any theory of justified belief that ignores it will be woefully incomplete.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.113.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p.113.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.115.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p.115.

'just *how* reliable a belief has to be for justification.'²⁰⁸ Goldman acknowledges this requirement, but insists that his theory 'must be vague in this respect,' for assessments of such reliability will itself change with how the processes are classified, which will vary according to our interests in doing so.²⁰⁹ Goldman also acknowledges that he must indicate whether reliability refers to possible realizations of belief forming processes, or actually observed ones.²¹⁰ He says that his theory concerns *actual* processes, as well as any relevant counterfactual instantiations of these. But given these preliminaries, he offers his reliabilist theory of justification:

5. If S believes p at t, and this belief results from a reliable cognitive belief forming process, then his belief in p at t is justified

Goldman notes that theory 5, unlike its Cartesian precursors, answers the question of *why* a belief is held, or what causes and sustains it. But as stated, he admits that theory 5 will not do, since beliefs are often the products of other false beliefs, yet are justified. Goldman splits his belief forming processes into *unconditional* or *conditional* ones. He says that processes have unconditional reliability when they 'tend to produce true beliefs,' but have conditional reliability when certain other 'presupposed beliefs are true.'²¹¹ Goldman says that

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p.115.

²⁰⁹ Earl Conee and Richard Feldman in 'The Generality Problem for Reliabilism' note that such admissions have revealed a 'generality problem.' In other words, if reliable types are delineated broadly or narrowly, they will be 'more or less easy to satisfy' (p.297). But without a specification of types, reliabilism will be incomplete. Conee and Feldman insist that there is no answer to this problem, (p.308).

²¹⁰ Alvin Goldman, 'What is a Justified Belief,' p.115.

²¹¹ Ibid., p.116.

this distinction leads to another one between *belief independent* processes and *belief dependent* ones. He says that belief independent processes are our varied modes of 'direct contact with the external world,' and belief dependent processes are those that make use of other true beliefs.

Goldman notes that these distinctions between unconditional and conditional reliability of belief forming processes and between belief independent and belief dependent ones are important revisions of his original theory. He says that now, given these revisions, beliefs are justified either if they result from an unconditionally reliable belief independent process, or result from a conditionally reliable belief dependent process. Goldman says that his is a '*complete* theory of justified belief,' since it says that beliefs are justified when they 'have an ancestry of unconditionally and/or conditionally reliable cognitive operations.'²¹² Goldman says that his reliabilism contrasts with his four Cartesian theories of justified belief, which make the justificational status of a belief 'wholly the function of what is true of the cognizer at the time of belief.'²¹³ But also, he insists that his reliabilist theory is also *historical* in that 'it makes the justificational status of a belief depend on its prior history,' on the various causal antecedents that predate the belief in question.²¹⁴

Goldman admits, however, that there is one final change to be made to his reliabilist theory of justified belief. He considers the case of a person 'who follows a reliable belief forming process, but has no reason to believe that it is reliable.'²¹⁵ To illustrate, imagine an orphan who has many true memories of his orphanage. Nonetheless his adopted parents tell him that, as a child, they used to

²¹² Ibid., p.118.

²¹³ Ibid., p.120.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.120.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.122.

read him stories of orphanages, and because of these he has taken story for reality, has confused the two. The orphan believes that his parents are the *most* reliable justification that he has concerning his early childhood, but even so, he persists in believing all his orphanage memories anyway. It follows that his belief forming processes are reliable, but he does not believe they are so. Goldman admits that, as it stands, his reliabilist theory of justified belief would say that the orphan is justified, but his childhood memories, 'intuitively, are *not* justified.' He admits that actual reliability of processes is 'not enough for justified belief,' but the belief in them is also required.²¹⁶

In light of this complication, Goldman retracts his criticism of the need to be in an epistemic position to construct an argument that p, of assumption C from chapter one, and his criticism of the epistemological internalism that it implies. Goldman had held that our epistemic position to construct an argument is not important, since we can have justified belief without knowing how we have it or being able to state anything about it. He had held that reliability of belief-forming processes always trumps any internal conditions for justified belief. Goldman now attempts to account for the orphanage case above, where there is a divergence between reliable belief forming processes and the belief in those processes, and so says that we must not only have reliable belief forming processes, but must be able believe in them.

6. If S believes in p at t, and this results from a reliable cognitive process, and there is no other unconditionally reliable or conditionally reliable process *available* to him that, had it been

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.122.

used by S in addition to the process actually used, would have resulted in S not believing in p at t, then his belief in p at t is justified.²¹⁷

By offering theory 6, Goldman retracts his criticism of the need for an epistemic position to construct an argument that p, his criticism of assumption C, and the epistemological internalism these entail. He now says that, S is justified in believing that p if and only if it is produced by a reliable belief forming process, he knows that he has it, and can state why he believes in it. These admissions entail that he *is* in an epistemic position to construct an argument or assumption C, and that internalism is true. Goldman does not exactly concede these points, and only asks whether his theory 6 ‘amounts to an acknowledgement’ that a need for an epistemic position and epistemic internalism are partly correct? He admits that these positions are correct, but doubts whether his version of them ‘would be appealing to internalists.’²¹⁸ .

But even if Goldman, by offering his theory 6, retracts his criticism of the need for an epistemic position to construct an argument, of assumption C and the epistemic internalism it entails, it does have an advantage over its precursors, one which any theory of justified belief should acknowledge. This is that it blocks the orphanage case above, where there was a divergence between the reliability of his belief forming process and his belief in that process. In that case, the reliable belief forming process that the orphan used was the memories of his childhood. But even so, there was the competing factor of the authority of his parents, and had he used that he would not have believed his orphanage memories. Goldman

²¹⁷ Ibid., p.122.

²¹⁸ Alvin Goldman, ‘Strong and Weak Justification,’ p.59.

says that although it may seem counterintuitive, the orphan should have believed his parents, and the justification of his beliefs would come from them. His parents would have produced false beliefs in him, but even so, they would have been justified ones. Goldman insists this is no problem for his theory 6, for it is a theory of justified belief, not of knowledge.

Goldman does not, however, offer a successful response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for two reasons. The first reason is that, in his theory 6, he explicitly invokes the *availability* of a belief-forming process. Goldman recognizes that this is an odd move for a reliabilist like him to make, and so says that ‘it is implausible to say that *all* available processes ought to be used, at least if we include such processes as gathering new evidence.’ He further says that availability is *not* constructibility and usability, and only requires that ‘the cognizer be *led*, by methods he already employs,’ however that is done.²¹⁹ But for his theory 6 to get the correct result of justified belief, he says, there still must be a distinction between those processes that are *really* available and those that are not. Goldman says that the available processes include ‘calling previously acquired *evidence* to mind, and *assessing* the implications of that evidence.’ But plainly, ‘evidence’ and ‘assessing’ are epistemic terms, and so his theory of justified belief does not meet his own condition A, and so fails by its own standards.

Goldman admits, secondly, that when Cartesian scepticism about the external world is at issue, he ‘cannot suppose that he knows *which* belief forming practices are reliable and which are not.’ To remedy this situation, he claims that there are two types of justification of beliefs. He says that strong justification is

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.59.

what obtains when our beliefs are produced by reliable belief forming mechanisms, and *weak* justification obtains when ‘we have done all that we can do in forming our beliefs, and so are blameless.’²²⁰ Goldman admits that when Cartesian scepticism about the external world is at issue, we can only count on weakly justified beliefs. But given this admission, he suggests that we should assess beliefs relative to their reliability in the *normal* world, for they do seem to be reliable there. But Goldman admits that when such scepticism is at issue, we do not know that this is a normal world. He concedes that to take such scepticism seriously is also to admit that ‘there is an element of luck’ in just how justified our beliefs really are.²²¹ This response just capitulates to skepticism, and does not challenge it.

In the end, Goldman does not try to challenge Cartesian scepticism about the external world. It is no accident that, instead of pretending that his reliabilism is a solution to scepticism, he merely shifts the goals of his theory of justified belief. Goldman insists that ‘what we *really* want is an explanation of why we count, or would count, certain beliefs as justified and others as unjustified.’ But if that is all we want, he says, ‘such an explanation must refer to our beliefs about reliability, not the *actual* facts.’ These explanations, he says, do not refer to facts, but this ‘does not affect the adequacy of the explanation.’ This is quite a disappointing change, actually, for in most circumstances we do hope for more than mere reliability, and not having anything more usually would affect the adequacy of the explanation. Goldman does not offer an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for he retracts his criticism of the need for an epistemic position, of assumption C, and of the epistemic internalism

²²⁰ Ibid., p.59.

²²¹ Ibid., p.64.

it entails, and because he concedes that his reliabilist theory of justified belief does not challenge such scepticism.²²²

3.5

John Locke, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, attacks Cartesian scepticism about the external world by offering his representational realism. This is the position that our knowledge of the external world comes through our representations, and so it adheres to assumption D from chapter one. Locke concedes that because our knowledge of the world is only representational, it is always *indirect*.²²³ But he insists that even though our access to the world is indirect, that is not a reason to hold that we do not have knowledge of it, or to become sceptics. In particular, he argues that our simple ideas, although not in direct contact with what they are about, still *resemble* those objects. In particular, he does not claim that these ideas always do resemble objects, but only that they often do.

The notice we have by our senses of the existing things without us, or the deduction of the reason employed about the clear abstract ideas, is an assurance that deserves to be called *knowledge*. If we have reason to persuade ourselves that our faculties act and inform

²²² Christopher Hill, in 'Process Reliabilism and Cartesian Scepticism,' tries to elaborate. To challenge reliabilism, he claims, the sceptic must vacillate between two kinds of evidence. Hill also says that there is nothing wrong with begging the question against the sceptic. But plainly, the Cartesian sceptic does not vacillate at all, and also it is illegitimate to beg the question in any argument.

²²³ John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, says that 'the mind, in all its thoughts and reasoning, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which *alone* it does or can contemplate; it is evident, that our knowledge is *only* conversant with them' (p. 442). If this is accurate, though, it has an unfortunate consequence, for then our knowledge of the world must be, at best, indirect.

us rightly concerning the existence of objects that affect them, I think that at that point, no one can in earnest still be so sceptical as to be uncertain.²²⁴

But plainly, even if our simple ideas resemble objects in the world, and even if those ideas amount to knowledge, that still reveals the mind as a sort of closed theatre:

The understanding is not so much unlike a closet wholly shut from light, with only some little opening left, to let in external visible resemblances, or ideas of things from without; would the pictures coming into the dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, that this would resemble the understanding of a man in reference to objects of sight and the ideas of them.²²⁵

But actually, Locke does not even try to refute Cartesian scepticism about the external world, but just dismisses it. He merely says that the testimony of the senses is the best we can hope for. In point of fact, most sceptics are perfectly happy with his representational realism, his adoption of assumption D, and with his closed theatre version of the mind. This is because, as he admits, if our *only* evidence of the world comes through our representations of it, then we need some justification that they really provide good evidence. But then, the worry is that any attempt to find such justification leads to an *infinite regress* of

²²⁴ John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, p.538.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.110.

representations that are supposed to be evidence for others, making it impossible to ever know that the world exists. It seems that Cartesian scepticism about the external world follows.

It seems that the easiest way to answer this regress of justification of evidence is to affirm *direct realism*. This is the position that our access to the world is not representational, or that assumption D is false. David Armstrong, in a similar attempt to escape this evidentiary regress of representations, argues that we have *non-inferential* knowledge of the external world. He insists that if we have such knowledge, we are *already* in contact with the world, do not represent it, and so assumption D is false.²²⁶ But what exactly is this non-inferential knowledge, and why should we think that we possess it? Armstrong addresses both of these questions. He analyzes such knowledge as follows. In particular, he says that S knows that p non-inferentially, iff he has no reasons for his belief, but even so:

1. S believes that p.
2. p is true.
3. S believes that p, and this is *empirically sufficient* for the truth of p.²²⁷

Armstrong, though, simplifies this, for if his 1 and 3 are true, his 2 is trivially true. In other words, his 2 drops out:

1. S believes that p.

²²⁶ David Armstrong, *Perception and the Physical World*, p.24.

²²⁷ David Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, p.189.

3. S believes that p, and this is empirically sufficient for the truth of p.

Armstrong indicates that non-inferential knowledge is made of 'particular matters of fact concerning the environment.'²²⁸ He characterizes these as 'simple judgments of perception,' and calls his a *moderate* view. Armstrong attempts to avoid the threat of any evidentiary infinite regress by offering a version of direct realism, the position, he says, that 'the objects of perception are *physical existents* of a certain sort.' This realism is direct, he says, in that these objects 'can be *immediately* perceived.' Armstrong says that, given that this is so, the objects of perception are prior to any representations of the world, such that assumption D from chapter one is false. It follows that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is but an illusion produced by our imagined ignorance of what we already know, and so can be discarded.

Armstrong claims that his theory 'has particular importance in the case of non-inferential knowledge because it serves to solve the problem of the infinite regress.'²²⁹ But he says that his theory is different from attempts to find an epistemically privileged class of beliefs, and so his theory is unlike traditional attempts to refute scepticism about the external world. Armstrong says that his view does not demand either that we are aware of our knowledge, or can make statements about it, but rather 'all that is necessary is that this be satisfied.'²³⁰ To stop the regress, he says, all we need is to possess non-inferential knowledge, and nothing more. But obviously, it is one thing to claim that we need only possess non-inferential knowledge to refute such scepticism about the external world, and

²²⁸ Ibid., p.190.

²²⁹ Ibid., p.193.

²³⁰ Ibid., p.193.

another to spell out the details of this. Armstrong needs a characterization of the empirical sufficiency cited above. In particular, he needs a characterization of such sufficiency that will issue in non-inferential knowledge, yet will stop any epistemic regress of justifications.

Armstrong proceeds to detail how our beliefs are empirically sufficient for truth. He says that such sufficiency 'is a matter of being able to subsume the situation under a *covering law* of a certain form, a law which, however, may be quite unknown to us even though we are certain that the situation before us is a case where something *is* empirically sufficient for us.' Armstrong says that beliefs are empirically sufficient for truth only if they can be subsumed under a law of nature that encompasses the interactions between them and the physical existents they are about. But he does not elaborate about such laws of nature, and only says that 'I deliberately refrain from making this part of the analysis of what it is to know something non-inferentially.' Armstrong insists rather that 'the notion of something being empirically sufficient for something else is, I think, an intuitively clear one.'²³¹ If this is correct, then 'we must, logically must, start from the beliefs that we are in fact certain of.' In such cases, he says, 'we cannot but take it that we know.'²³²

Is this all Armstrong says about non-inferential knowledge? His account, as of yet, is quite incomplete, for all he has done so far is to say that we have non-inferential knowledge when our beliefs are empirically sufficient for truth, and they are so sufficient if they can be subsumed under laws of nature. Armstrong then declines to say *what* these laws are, and even refuses to do so, on principle. But if he does not define these, then he has no right to say that the empirical

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p.195.

²³² *Ibid.*, p.206.

sufficiency of beliefs is intuitively clear, or to conclude that there are certain beliefs that we cannot help but call knowledge. This is as incomplete an account of knowledge as is possible to find. It is fortunate, then, that Armstrong elaborates his account of non-inferential knowledge. To illustrate, he compares such knowledge to a thermometer.

Suppose, on a certain occasion, a thermometer is reading T. There must be some property of the instrument and/or its circumstances such that, if anything has this property, as a matter of natural law, the temperature is T. Now here, we might find it hard to specify this property. The specification might have to be given in the form of a blank check to be filled in only after scientific investigation. But it may be relatively easy to recognize that a certain thermometer is operating reliably, and so that such a specification is possible.²³³

Armstrong compares the reliability of thermometer readings with the reliability of the person having non-inferential knowledge. The two are alike, he says, for in both cases, *if* we can assume that a property of the instrument and person exists, and *if* we can assume that the appropriate laws of nature that subsume them hold, then both are reliable. Armstrong offers this thermometer/knowledge analogy to begin to answer *how* beliefs can be empirically sufficient for truth, which he previously left unargued. But so far, the only addition to his account is that now he says that for any belief, what is further necessary for the empirical sufficiency

²³³ David Armstrong, *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge*, p.167.

of belief are the properties of the person *and* the laws of nature in conjunction. He has not yet said *what* these properties or laws are, or how they produce the empirical sufficiency in our beliefs.

Armstrong proceeds to formalize his account of non-inferential knowledge. In particular, his thermometer analogy of knowledge, he says, is meant to illustrate that ‘there is some specification of S such that, if any person is so specified, if they further believe p, then p *is* the case.’²³⁴ Armstrong admits that for this to work, he needs to specify what counts as the ‘*sort* of thing p is,’ and so he needs to ‘bring p within the scope of a universal quantifier.’²³⁵ But he insists that this required universality must be understood carefully, for actually non-inferential knowledge always involves ‘reference to an individual,’ and predicating some property of that individual.²³⁶ Armstrong finally offers what he takes to be the best possible account of non-inferential knowledge. He says that S knows that c is J, iff

Jc

$(\exists H) [Hs \text{ and there is a lawlike connection in nature } (x)(y) \{ \text{if } Hx, \text{ then } (\text{if } BxJy, \text{ then } Jy) \}]$.²³⁷

Armstrong notes that H is ‘*any* general property’ about us that permits us to believe p.²³⁸ He says that for H to be useful in a variety of conditions, it must ‘not be so specific that it becomes unique,’ nor so general that it cannot be satisfied.²³⁹

²³⁴ Ibid., p.168.

²³⁵ Ibid., p.169.

²³⁶ Ibid., p.170.

²³⁷ Ibid., p.170.

²³⁸ Ibid., p.172.

²³⁹ Ibid., p.173.

In point of fact, he says that H must be just specific enough 'to be repeatable.'²⁴⁰

Armstrong also says that to exclude irrational or accidental beliefs, H must have only 'nominally relevant characterizations in it.' He says this to insure that *only* nomic relations of H and a law of nature count as knowledge.²⁴¹ Armstrong adds that the laws of nature must 'in principle be able to be investigated by scientific method,' must be able to 'yield counterfactuals, or more generally, subjunctive conditionals,' and must 'hold independently of whoever may record their existence.'²⁴²

But how does all of this help Armstrong respond to the Cartesian sceptic about the external world? He defends direct realism, the view that physical existents are the immediate objects of experience. Armstrong says that such realism applies to non-inferential knowledge, or to the simple judgments of perception. But given his account of our properties and laws of nature, his point is that these judgments constitute beliefs that are 'completely reliable.'²⁴³ Armstrong admits that his account may sound overly optimistic, for most beliefs are not completely reliable, but even so 'this will not touch the *paradigms*.' These paradigms, he says, are reliable 'as a matter of contingent fact.' Armstrong concedes to the sceptic that 'error may be logically possible,' but insists that this is all,' for he insists that most sceptical hypotheses *themselves* 'are nominally impossible.'²⁴⁴ The Cartesian sceptic about the external world must be incorrect,

²⁴⁰ In his 'Replies,' Armstrong says that 'H is the *conditions actually obtaining* in which S holds his belief. If it is made too detailed, then every true belief will be nominally sufficient for the state of affairs that makes it true. But if it is made less specific, no belief will be sufficient for truth.' The state of affairs should be a 'reliable channel whereby S believes p.' H should 'specify the channel' (p.247).

²⁴¹ David Armstrong, *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge*, p.179.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p.168.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.183

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.190.

for we are *already* in contact with the external world, and any suggestion that we are not is produced by ignorance of this.

Armstrong does not, however, provide an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for two reasons. The first reason is that he says that non-inferential beliefs are empirically sufficient for truth when condition H and a law of nature cooperate. It follows that when these conditions are satisfied, error is nomically impossible. But this is quite implausible, and apart from that, it is hard to see how this is relevant here. The sceptic does *not* admit that condition H and a law of nature cooperate, and then ask whether a belief that is held under these conditions is empirically sufficient for truth, or is completely reliable. The sceptic insists that H and a law of nature fall *within* the scope of his hypotheses, and so claims to not know whether they cooperate at all. Armstrong tries to counter this objection by saying that any sceptical hypotheses are *themselves* nomically impossible, and so he can ignore them. But this is a desperate move, for he does not know that sceptical hypotheses are nomically impossible, and so his criticism of Cartesian scepticism about the external world is a failure.

But even if Armstrong were correct about his direct realism for non-inferential beliefs, that their paradigms are empirically sufficient for truth, there is a second problem here. William Lycan notes that 'even if there are a *few* actual cases of completely reliable belief, they will be tiny drops in a vast doxastic ocean.'²⁴⁵ Armstrong, even if he is correct, only establishes the unimportant point that there may be few non-inferential beliefs that are empirically sufficient for truth and so amount to knowledge. But then, he is not in a much better a position

²⁴⁵ William Lycan, 'Armstrong on Knowing,' p.150.

than the sceptic. Lycan also notes that Armstrong puts such stringent requirements on knowing that 'for most knowledge, the requirement is obviously never met,' and so he sets himself up to fail from the start.²⁴⁶ Lycan concludes that even if Armstrong is correct about his direct realism for a few non-inferential beliefs, scepticism 'seems guaranteed for all our *other* beliefs.' Armstrong does not offer an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism, because his direct realist account of knowledge is false, and even if it were true, it would be compatible with scepticism anyway.

3.6

In this chapter, so far, we have seen that Descartes, Quine, Nozick, Goldman, and Armstrong all fail to rebut Cartesian scepticism about the external world. It follows that, as of yet, such scepticism remains an undefeated position, even if it undermines our confidence about the world. The main reason why Descartes, Quine, Nozick, Goldman, and Armstrong all fail is that they each offer arguments against the general sceptical argument by denying assumptions A through D, but these attacks do not work. In the end, this is because these assumptions are worth keeping. To see this, let us recap this argument and these assumptions, which should reveal, in each particular case, where all these philosophers go wrong. This should also provide some hint about what moves could be made to rebut such scepticism. The general sceptical argument is the following:

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p.151.

1. I can know that p only if I can rule out the possibility that q (if I can know that not q).
2. But I cannot rule out the possibility that q.
3. I do *not* know that p.

This general sceptical argument, as we have seen, usually invokes five assumptions:

- A. If any subject S has knowledge at all, part of that knowledge is *a priori*. This is knowledge that is derived independently of experience.
- B. If S knows that p, and S knows that p logically entails that not q, S is thereby placed in an *epistemic position* to know that not q.
- C. S knows that p only if S is in an epistemic position to *construct an argument* that p is significantly more likely to be true than q is.
- D. The *only* evidence S has for propositions about the external world being true are just those arrived at through *representations* in his mind.
- E. There is no *necessary* connection between the meanings or contents of the words or thoughts S employs and the actual state of his environment.

Descartes seeks to counter the general sceptical argument by meeting the epistemic condition in premise 2, but does no such thing. Quine attacks assumption A with his criticisms of the analytic/synthetic distinction and a priori

knowledge, but his arguments are unconvincing as is his naturalized epistemology. Nozick attacks assumption B by offering a theory of knowledge that denies epistemic closure, but his arguments, in the end, incur more problems than they solve. Goldman denies assumption C, only to retract his criticism, admitting that his position cannot even challenge scepticism. Armstrong denies assumption D, but his position seems implausible, and even if true, it does not help.²⁴⁷ It follows that the solution to Cartesian scepticism about the external world must lie elsewhere.

Descartes, Quine, Nozick, Goldman, and Armstrong all fail to counter Cartesian scepticism about the external world, and so, it is natural to turn to Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge, to their versions of semantic or content externalism, each of which denies assumption E from chapter one. To recall, this is the position that there is a necessary connection between meaningful or contentful types or tokens and the external objects those types or tokens are about. It follows that if Putnam and Burge are correct, Cartesian scepticism about the external world is false. These philosophers attempt to defeat such scepticism about the external world, not by offering an alternative epistemological theory, but by offering a semantic or contentful one that has epistemological implications. The promise of semantic or content externalism is that, unlike the previous attempts, it should overcome such scepticism by an indirect route, but one that shows such scepticism to be *incoherent*. The two key questions here will be whether semantic or content externalism is true, and if so, whether it provides an adequate answer to such scepticism.

²⁴⁷ If I am correct that these arguments against assumptions A through D from chapter one are failures, I have still not done much to establish that those assumptions are justified. To do so, though, would take too much space here and this is why I call them assumptions. But as we have seen, denying those assumptions causes more problems than it solves, and leads to spurious solutions to scepticism.

Chapter Four

In these next two chapters, I will address semantic or content externalism as a response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In point of fact, though, semantic or content externalism has a varied history. Martin Heidegger notes that the human being ‘does not first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been proximally encapsulated.’ He says that rather, the human being ‘is *already* always outside alongside entities which it encounters.’²⁴⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein says that our meanings or contents only exist *within* a host of language games, like the roads of an ancient city, set ‘in a shared form of life.’²⁴⁹ He notes that we can only understand each other ‘by sketching the actions of a variety of humans, as they are all mixed up together.’²⁵⁰ Gareth Evans says that our demonstrative thoughts only take place in the context of ‘a continuing informational link between subject and object.’²⁵¹ He notes that these thoughts ‘would not have been *available* to be thought if the object referred to had not existed.’²⁵² These varied forms of semantic or content externalism have been used as arguments against Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

In this discussion of Putnam and Burge and their versions of semantic or content externalism, I will keep the argument as simple as possible. In the literature on such externalism, certain side issues have taken on a life of their own. In particular, many philosophers have puzzled over the apparent implications of externalism for our privileged access to our meanings or contents. The worry is that by making our meanings or contents depend on what is external

²⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.89.

²⁴⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 23.

²⁵⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 567.

²⁵¹ Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, p.146.

²⁵² *Ibid*, p.64 .

to us, it may seem that we have to go and examine parts of the world to find out what our meanings or contents are, and this would violate our privileged access to these. But if we do not go find out what our meanings or contents are, then we might be easily be incorrect about them. These observations suggest that externalism and privileged access are incompatible.²⁵³ In what is to follow, I will ignore such issues, not because they are unimportant, but because they could be the subject of another thesis. The question here will be whether Putnam and Burge prove that their versions of semantic or content externalism are true, and whether, if either version is true, that provides an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

In this chapter, I address the work of Hilary Putnam. In section two, I address his argument in his ‘The Meaning of ‘Meaning’,’ wherein he attacks the Fregean theory of meaning in terms of a ‘mode of presentation’ of an object to a mind, wherein a ‘thought is expressed,’ and descriptivist heirs to it. Putnam offers an alternative *causal* account of meaning for *natural kind terms*, such as ‘water,’ ‘aluminum,’ or ‘beech,’ etc. He insists that such meanings are environmentally bound, and so, to the extent that this is so, are not in the head. In this section, I follow Eddy Zemach and argue that Putnam does not make good his case for his causal theory of meaning, and so it has little force against any traditional theory of meaning, and much less does it provide an adequate response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In this section, I will not speak of his semantic or *content* externalism, since he does not do so either. In this early period, Putnam only speaks of natural kind term meaning. But since his

²⁵³ Paul Boghossian, ‘Content and Self-Knowledge,’ notes that according to semantic or content externalism, we cannot discriminate *which* environment we are in (p.159). It follows that, given externalism, our meanings or contents may change, but we may not know this (p.171). Boghossian insists that semantic or content externalism, albeit unintentionally, sacrifices our claims to self-knowledge.

conclusion is that meaning is environmentally bound and so not in the head, this entails semantic or content externalism.²⁵⁴

In section three, I address what Putnam says in his *Reason, Truth, and History*. In effect, he argues in two stages. In his first stage, he extends his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms in two directions. Putnam first extends his causal theory to all words, and also to thought content, and so, he addresses *representation* itself. In his second stage, he argues that if his causal theory of meaning or content is true for all representation, we could not be brains in a vat. It follows that we cannot say or think that we are brains in a vat without incoherence, and so scepticism about the external world is false. In this section, though, I argue that Putnam does not succeed with his causal theory of meaning or content, for his intuitions here are easily questioned. In particular, his characterizations of other theories of representation are inaccurate, and his criticisms of them apply to his causal theory also. But even if he were to be correct, he cannot employ it to show we are not brains in a vat without begging the question. Putnam does not touch the substance of Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

4.2

Putnam begins 'The Meaning of 'Meaning',' by saying that, even though Frege has made attempts to clarify what meaning is, 'it is as much in the dark as it ever was.'²⁵⁵ Frege said that meaning includes the mode of presentation, in

²⁵⁴ Colin McGinn, 'Charity, Interpretation, and Belief,' p.190.

²⁵⁵ Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of 'Meaning',' p.215.

which a *single aspect* of the thing referred to is thereby revealed.²⁵⁶ But when this revelation occurs to a mind, he says, a thought is expressed by that mind.²⁵⁷ This is typically interpreted as implying that meaning is but a set of descriptions of an object, 'none of which presuppose that the object referred to actually exists.' Saul Kripke further attacks this Fregean theory of meaning in all its forms, and argues that the meanings of proper names cannot be understood in descriptivist terms, but rather what occurs is that semantic *baptisms* 'fix their reference,' and these engender verbal chains that govern their use. Kripke also argues that the meanings of natural kind terms are not fixed by descriptions at all, but are fixed by their essential properties, such that 'science attempts to find the nature, and so the essence, of natural kinds.'²⁵⁸

Putnam agrees that the Fregean theory of meaning and its descriptivist heirs are mistaken in all of their forms, and so launches his own theory of meaning for natural kind terms. Putnam begins by saying that the Fregean theory of meaning, in terms of the mode of presentation wherein a thought is expressed, or the more modern version, in terms of a set of descriptions of an object that do not presuppose existence of objects, all can be thought of as the 'intension' of terms. Putnam also insists that Frege and any descriptivists must say what natural kind terms are *true of*, which can be thought of as their 'extension.'²⁵⁹ But given this much background, Putnam proceeds to launch a criticism of this Fregean

²⁵⁶ Gottlob Frege, in his 'On Sense and Reference' says that although we 'cannot aspire to comprehensive knowledge of objects,' our meanings and contents are *objective* (p.159). Frege insists, however, in 'Letter to Jourdain' that such objectivity of meaning and content is needed for *communication*. He insists that without such objectivity, 'a common science would be impossible' (p.320).

²⁵⁷ Gottlob Frege, 'Letter to Russell' p.290.

²⁵⁸ Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, p.138.

²⁵⁹ Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of 'Meaning'', p.219.

theory, which rests on two assumptions that have hitherto been uncritically accepted. These assumptions are:

1. The meaning of our terms is just our being in a *psychological state*.
2. The meaning of any such term *determines* its extension.²⁶⁰

Putnam says that assumptions 1 and 2 are implicit in the Fregean theory of meaning, as well as any modern descriptivist versions of it. He concedes that assumptions 1 and 2 may seem appealing, for collectively, they mirror our intuition that meaning is *in* our minds. But even so, Putnam objects to the conjunction of assumptions 1 and 2, and hopes to show that ‘these two assumptions are *not jointly satisfied* by any notion, let alone the traditional notion of meaning.’²⁶¹ He insists that this notion of meaning ‘is a concept that rests on a false theory,’ and so must be replaced. Putnam offers his own causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms as just such a replacement, according to which his assumption 1 is abandoned entirely, but his assumption 2 is significantly changed, yet kept.

Putnam notes that to understand the Fregean theory of meaning and any descriptivist heirs to it, we must clarify what ‘psychological state’ means in assumption 1. This assumption, he says, is constrained by *methodological solipsism*, which is the assumption that ‘no psychological state, properly so called, presupposes the existence of anything other than the subject to whom that

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p.219.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p.219.

state is ascribed.²⁶² Putnam cautions that adopting this assumption is a *restrictive* program, in that it binds psychology to 'certain mentalistic preconceptions,' all of which he finds implausible.²⁶³ But even so, he disregards these preconceptions for the moment, and notes that the states that meet this restriction are *narrow* psychological states and so remain the same regardless of any environmental factors, and those that do not are *wide* psychological states, which may change when the environment does.²⁶⁴ Putnam insists that actually, the notion of psychological state in assumption 1 is narrow. This assumption, he says, implies that knowing the meaning of any term is a matter of being in a narrow psychological state.

But Putnam should also say, for the Fregean theory of meaning or any descriptivist heirs to it, in what sense meaning 'determines' extension in assumption 2. He does not offer any interpretations of this, but what such philosophers seem to intend is that meaning determines by presenting a set of necessary and sufficient conditions in which what they are saying is true. But any such determining as presenting a set of truth conditions seems mysterious, and so may just exchange one problem for another. Putnam is now ready to launch his attack on the Fregean theory of meaning and any descriptivist heirs to it. He first notes that if knowing the meaning of any natural kind term is just being in a narrow psychological state, that state just *is* its meaning. But if meaning also determines extension, and if this relation is transitive, then narrow psychological state also determines extension.

²⁶² Ibid., p.220.

²⁶³ Jerry Fodor, in his 'Methodological Solipsism Considered as a Research Strategy,' argues that such solipsism is *not* implausible, for it entails the 'representational theory of mind'. This is valuable, he says, because 'there are no alternatives that are even remotely plausible' (p.226). Fodor insists that his representational theory of mind is the best *scientific* approach to the mind, which is a virtue.

²⁶⁴ Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of 'Meaning'', p.220.

The meaning of natural kind terms is just a matter of being in a narrow psychological state, which in turn determines their extension.

But he notes that this has an important implication, which is that:

Two speakers *logically* cannot be in the same narrow psychological state yet use their natural kind terms to mean quite different things.²⁶⁵

Putnam insists that the Fregean theory of meaning, as well as any descriptivist heirs to it, is committed to this consequence. The trouble with this, he says, is that 'it is possible for two speakers to be in exactly the same psychological state in the narrow sense, even though the extension of the term in the idiolect of the one is different from the extension of the term in the idiolect of the other.'²⁶⁶ Putnam says that it follows that the Fregean theory of meaning, as well as any descriptivist heirs, cannot be true. He does not stop there, though, for he hopes to do more than refute a traditional theory of meaning. To do this, Putnam offers his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms, according to which his assumption 1 must be abandoned entirely, for meaning is not being in a narrow psychological state, but his assumption 2 is true, for meaning does determine extension, but in a unique way.

²⁶⁵ Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of 'Meaning'', p.222.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p.222.

Putnam proceeds to offer his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms. In essence, he hopes to show that assumption 1 is false, and assumption 2 is true, but is true in a way that has been hitherto ignored. To illustrate how this is possible, Putnam offers the following thought experiment. He asks us to suppose that at the end of the galaxy there is a planet that is remarkably similar to Earth, called Twin Earth. The inhabitants of Twin Earth, he says, speak what sounds like English. Earth and Twin Earth are exact duplicates, and all the objects and persons on each planet have doubles on the opposite planet, all of which have the same physical and behavioral histories. It follows that every event on either planet has always been duplicated on the other. But Putnam says that there is a subtle difference between Earth and Twin Earth. The natural kind term 'water' on each planet, he says, refers to a different chemical structure. In particular, Earth water is made of H_2O , but Twin Earth water is made of XYX . Putnam insists that these are different natural kinds.

Putnam has only claimed, so far, that if an Earth spaceship ever landed on Twin Earth, the crew would initially suppose that the word 'water' had the same extension on both planets. But these space travelers would soon discover their mistake. This would be corrected once it was determined by laboratory tests that the liquid surrounding them is composed not of H_2O , but of XYZ . But Putnam has not yet made any headway in his attempt to abandon his assumption 1 and keep his assumption 2, for those who perform the laboratory tests *know the difference* between the two waters. It follows that meaning may not be causally tied to *our* psychological states, but it is still tied to *expert* states. The experts still mean what they do *only* because of their narrow psychological states. Putnam proceeds to cite a division of linguistic labor, according to which people depend for their

understanding of natural kind terms ‘on the structured cooperation of a subset of speakers.’ He later adds that ‘the *whole* meaning of the word is only known to some group of experts.’²⁶⁷ But plainly, his experts still mean whatever they do because of their narrow psychological mental states, so his assumption 1 is still true for them.

If Putnam hopes to abandon his assumption 1 entirely but keep yet modify his assumption 2, he must divorce psychological state and meaning altogether, for everyone. To achieve this, he extends his thesis, and so asks us to roll back the time to about 1750, before the development of chemistry on Earth and Twin Earth. In this time, he says, ‘*no* experts knew the chemical structure of the substance water.’²⁶⁸ Putnam insists that his point still applies, for his twins on Earth and Twin Earth were in the same psychological state, yet they understood the term ‘water’ differently.²⁶⁹ This is the key move in his argument, for now meaning is not being in a narrow psychological state for anyone on either planet. It follows that his assumption 1 is false entirely and for everyone. Putnam also insists that his assumption 2 can be salvaged, yet must be changed. This is so, he says, for his thought experiment shows that although twins are physically and behaviorally the same, their different *environments* insure that their natural kind terms determine different extensions. Putnam says this is because their kind meanings are determined by their environments, and so, in that sense are not in their heads.

But Putnam has, as of yet, only *asserted* that natural kind term meaning is determined by the environment, and so is not in the head. He still needs to *argue* to his conclusion. Putnam offers two arguments for his conclusion, although, as

²⁶⁷ Hilary Putnam, *Representation and Reality*, p.23.

²⁶⁸ Hilary Putnam, ‘The Meaning of ‘Meaning’,’ p.224.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.224.

he sees them, they are 'two ways of making the same point.'²⁷⁰ His first argument is that natural kind terms such as 'water' have an 'unnoticed indexical component.'²⁷¹ Putnam notes that the only way to teach someone how to use a natural kind term such as water is by using *samples*, by pointing and saying '*this is water.*' By doing this, he says, we refer to the normal members of local water, whatever they are. Putnam notes that the indexicality here is that pointing reveals that this water 'bears a certain similarity relation to water around here.'²⁷² He admits that this 'is a *theoretical* relation, and may take an indefinite amount of investigation to determine.' But even so, he says, when his twins use natural kind terms, although they share a narrow psychological state, they restrict their domain of reference to these same-kind relationships of their worlds. Putnam concludes that the environments of the twins determine their natural kind term meanings, which are not in their heads.

But no matter how Putnam tries to fill out his argument that natural kind terms have an indexical component, he incurs trouble. In point of fact, even other semantic or content externalists have not accepted his argument. It is often noted that natural kind terms such as 'water' are *not* indexical words.²⁷³ Indexical words, it seems, have a bifurcated sort of meaning. In other words, part of indexical meaning is constant, and they retain this across possible worlds. The other part of indexical meaning what varies in different worlds. It is often noted that natural kind terms are not like this, for they only involve a *single* constant meaning of the terms

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p.234.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p.234.

²⁷² Putnam defines this 'same-kind relationship' for water. He says that when he points to common samples of water, he refers to 'most of the stuff I and other speakers of my linguistic community have on other occasions called water,' and so, accesses the same kind. But even so, he cautions that same kind relation is but 'a *defeasible* necessary and sufficient condition' for being water' (p.225).

²⁷³ Tyler Burge, 'Other Bodies,' p.105.

involved. But as semantic or content externalists have also noted, if it were true that natural kind terms were real indexicals, this may be 'inconsistent with the water thought experiment itself.'²⁷⁴ If natural kind terms were indexicals, their meaning would amount to being in a narrow psychological state and this would then determine extension. The meanings of natural kind terms such as 'water' would just be the narrow psychological states that his twins *share* across worlds.²⁷⁵ Putnam seems to be wrong about indexicals, and if he were correct, that undermines his thought experiment.

But if we read Putnam carefully here, we can see that he is correct. In particular, he does *not* assume that natural kind words like 'water' just are indexicals without qualification, for he only says that such words have an indexical *component*. Natural kind terms, he says, are taught with certain samples, and this implies that the kinds invoke a same-kind relationship, albeit a theoretical one, to water around here. Putnam is not making a controversial claim here, and even agrees that on either planet, once we know the essence of water or twin water, 'nothing else could be that liquid.'²⁷⁶ He agrees that natural kind terms have a single interpretation, after all. Putnam is also correct about the consistency of his thought experiment, for he eventually concedes that 'the actual way we use *language* militates against the wide or narrow distinction.' He even says that he 'comes to bury the narrow or broad meaning or content distinction, not to rescue it.'²⁷⁷ This is a natural development for him, since his argument that natural kind terms have an indexical component makes this distinction very difficult to hold.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p.99.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p.108.

²⁷⁶ Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of 'Meaning'', p.234.

²⁷⁷ Hilary Putnam, *Reality and Representation*, p.55.

Putnam is correct that his indexicality argument is consistent with his thought experiment.

Putnam offers a second argument for why natural kind term meaning is environmentally bound, or is not in the head. He makes use of the notion of 'rigid designation,' to make his case. This is the idea, originally applied to proper names, that they are used rigidly if they designate the same individual in all possible worlds where that object exists. But as applied to natural kind terms, the idea is slightly different. The idea is that 'science attempts to find the nature, and so the essence, of natural kinds.' Putnam develops this position, and claims that natural kind term meaning cannot be understood as the descriptions of kinds. This is because, he says, 'we may always give an operational definition' of any kind, but even so, 'the intention is *never* enough to make the name synonymous with the description.'²⁷⁸ Putnam insists that this is because we actually use natural kind terms rigidly 'to refer to *whatever* things share the nature that things satisfying the description *normally* possesses.'²⁷⁹ He claims that his twins designate their respective waters rigidly, accessing their apparently different 'essential properties' in their respective worlds.

But if Putnam is going to use rigid designation to show that natural kind term meaning is environmentally bound, and so not in the head, he must define what he intends by the 'essential properties' of such kinds. He ignores many contemporary arguments against such a distinction in properties, and says the following. Putnam insists that these are the properties kinds are '*ultimately* made of, and how they are arranged or combined to produce superficial

²⁷⁸ Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of 'Meaning'', p.238.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p.239.

characteristics.’²⁸⁰ He says that the ‘*hidden structure* generally determines what it is to be a member of a natural kind.’²⁸¹ Putnam then offers the following argument. He insists that given the combination of rigid designation of natural kinds with a resurgence of essentialism about those kinds, his twins on either planet use their water words to designate different essential properties concerning their waters. But since his twins across possible worlds use their water words to designate different properties, they mean different things by them. It follows that their respective environments determine their meanings, which again are not in their heads.

Putnam summarizes his discussion in ‘The Meaning of ‘Meaning’,’ by saying that his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms such as ‘water,’ ‘aluminum,’ or ‘beech,’ gives rise to two problems. The first problem, he says, is ‘to account for individual competence.’²⁸² Putnam must be careful here, for he rejects his assumption 1, that meaning is just being in a narrow psychological state, altogether and for everyone. It is hard then to see how he has *any* room in his causal theory of meaning for such competence at all.²⁸³ But even so, he insists that individual competence is still important, for without a ‘minimal level of competence,’ we would not mean anything at all by our natural kind terms. This individual competence, he insists, amounts to the fact that we must master a *stereotype* of any given kind, one that ‘captures features of the most paradigmatic members of the kind.’²⁸⁴ He says that mastering such stereotypes is the minimum condition for talking about natural kinds, and our ‘linguistic obligation to our community.’ Putnam insists that mastering such stereotypes is our individual

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p.239.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p.241.

²⁸² Ibid., p.246.

²⁸³ Noam Chomsky, ‘Language as a Natural Object,’ p.128

²⁸⁴ Hilary Putnam, ‘The Meaning of ‘Meaning’,’ p.246.

competence, but is not his assumption 1. In other words, stereotypes do not determine extension.

Putnam says the second problem is 'to account for the determination of extension.' But he says, this problem is solved, for he affirms his assumption 2, that meaning determines extension, albeit not in its traditional guise. He says that meaning determines extension, but now does so in accordance with his indexicality and rigid designation arguments, and so same-kind relationships or essential properties are *'part of the meaning'* of terms about kinds.²⁸⁵ Putnam does not mean that same-kind relationships or essential properties are *themselves* part of us, which would be a form of linguistic idealism. He means rather that our indexical or rigid designations to same-kind relationships or essential properties determine our meanings about kinds, however that is done. In essence, his argument is that:

1. The way we use natural kind terms is to indexically refer to or rigidly designate those kinds (premise).
2. This reference or designation accesses the same kind relations or essential properties of kinds (from 1).
3. This referring or designating to natural kinds is independent of our psychological states (from 1 and 2).
4. It is logically possible to be in the same narrow psychological state, yet to refer to different kinds (from 3).

²⁸⁵ Putnam, in his 'Is Semantics Possible?' insists that 'meaning indeed determines extension,' but does so 'only because extension is *part of the meaning*' (p.151). He insists that often experts do *not* know about the extension, but still, it enters into meaning. Putnam insists that this may happen in many ways, but adds that 'no particular way is necessary,' as long as it does happen (p.151).

5. The meanings of our natural kind terms are causally tied to actual natural kinds (from 1 through 4).
6. The meanings of our natural kind terms are not in our heads, after all (from 1, 2 and 5).

The determination of extension, Putnam says, is done 'by construction, so to speak.'²⁸⁶ In other words, in premises 1 and 2, he claims that our natural kind term meanings are determined by the natural kinds in the world. But in premise 3, he says that this has little to do with what is going on in our heads, which makes premise 4 plausible, and these two premises, collectively, amount to the rejection of his assumption 1, and so meaning has little to do with our narrow psychological states. Putnam further says that given his premises 1, 2, 3 and 4 together, his conclusion 5 follows, and so his assumption 2 is also true, and so meaning does determine extension, in his unique sense. Putnam concludes that, in this meager sense, his conclusion 6 is true, and so meaning is not in the head, after all.

Putnam uses his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms to argue for scientific realism. This is the position, put simply, that terms in scientific theory typically refer, and that those theories are approximately true. There are much more elements to scientific realism, but all these need not be cited here. Putnam defends such realism insofar as we indexically or rigidly refer to kind relationships or essential properties in the world. He notes that since we do this, it gives us a way to talk about a kind of metaphysical necessity between natural kind terms and the kinds they are about. The benefit in this, he says, is that

²⁸⁶ Hilary Putnam, 'The Meaning of 'Meaning'', p.270.

scientific realism allows us to explain the success of science better than any alternative hypothesis.

The concept of reference we have constructed has the following property, that reference and truth are so construed that, at least in the paradigm cases, at least for an important class of sentences, at least if things go if they should, sentences will be accepted if and only if they are true, and predicates will be applied to things if and only if those things have the properties corresponding to those predicates. In the paradigm cases, sentences convergently mirror the truth.²⁸⁷

In point of fact, Putnam says, since scientific theories mirror the truth, there is a related benefit. This is that we can now explain scientific theory change over time. He notes that our theories may have changed so drastically that all the scientific entities postulated by one generation 'do not exist from the standpoint of a later science.' If he is correct, we still indexically or rigidly refer to the same-kind relationships or essential properties over time. This reveals, yet again, that there is this kind of metaphysical necessity that tracks truth. Putnam sees this as an advantage, for it circumvents a host of relativistic positions that question the accumulation of scientific knowledge.

But more importantly here, Putnam also uses his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms to refute Cartesian scepticism about the external world. He does this insofar as, according to his theory, it is *not* possible for us to have the

²⁸⁷ Hilary Putnam. 'Language and Philosophy,' p.290.

natural kind meanings we do, unless we have had *enough* causal contact with those kinds. Putnam says that since we *do* have natural kind term meanings concerning a variety of kinds, we know there is a metaphysically necessary connection between such kind term meanings and those kinds themselves. He implies that we can *know* of this necessary relation between our natural kind term meanings and the kinds themselves because we *introspect*.²⁸⁸ The mere introspection of our natural kind term meanings puts us in an epistemic position to know that we are in contact with those kinds. If all this is correct, there is less possibility of deception from our senses, from our dreaming or waking states, or from an evil demon. Putnam can conclude that it may still be that we are deceived about natural kinds on occasion, but that cannot happen very much. He can discard Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

But even if Putnam is correct about his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms, his victory over Cartesian scepticism about the external world is quite limited. This is because, even if he is correct that there *is* a metaphysically necessary connection between our natural kind term meanings and those kinds themselves that *only* concerns natural kind terms. In other words, even if he is correct, this is compatible with there being *no* such necessary connection between the meanings of our *other* words and what they are about, and with there being no such connection between our kind meanings and those kinds *after* we have had causal contact. This gets worse, for then our introspective abilities concerning our natural kind meanings will not reveal anything about our potential relations to any other kinds of objects, or even about the time of our necessary relation to natural

²⁸⁸ In point of fact, Putnam does not exactly say that *introspection* shows anything about how our meanings are necessarily connected to the world, and neither does he say this in his later period. But if his causal theory of natural kind terms shows that we have this connection, and if by using words we can know that this is so, then introspection of those meanings is the *only* thing that can prove it to us.

kinds. Putnam does not seem to notice that this renders his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms almost worthless as a response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In other words, the substance of such scepticism remains intact.

But Putnam may not succeed with his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms, and so may not succeed against Cartesian scepticism about the external world at all. In an important article, Eddy Zemach asks us to recall that Putnam ‘addresses substances *before* the development of modern chemistry.’²⁸⁹ This is important, for he hopes to abandon his assumption 1, that meaning is being in a narrow psychological state, altogether and for everyone. Putnam says that, even in cases like this, his indexicality and rigid designation arguments apply, such that his twins are still supposed to access same-kind relationships or essential properties, and understand their natural kind terms differently. It is supposed to follow that their different environments do determine different extensions, and so their meanings are not in their heads. But Zemach says that Putnam cannot just *say* that his indexicality and rigidity arguments apply here, for then ‘his argument hinges on his *promise* that meaning is environmentally bound,’ or is not in the head. But any attempt to fill out this causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms leads to a host of problems.

Zemach notes, first of all, that Putnam claims that before the advent of chemistry, natural kind term meaning still determined extension by means of indexicality and rigidity, which accessed same-kind relationships and essential properties. He insists that there is a problem here, for given that ‘there are so few examples of pure natural kinds,’ he needs a way to include *only* those properties

²⁸⁹ Eddy Zemach, ‘Putnam on the Reference of Natural Kind Terms,’ p.117.

that really compose those kinds.²⁹⁰ Zemach says that Putnam seems merely to *stipulate* that, before the advent of chemistry, relevant properties that constitute any given natural kind, and so 'it becomes analytic what it is for anything to count as a natural kind.'²⁹¹ Zemach says that this is absurd, and so suggests that we reject his stipulations, and say that, perhaps 'natural kind meanings only determine *disjunctive* extensions,' especially back then.²⁹² He suggests that, before chemistry, when the twins across possible worlds use natural kind terms to speak of such kinds, those terms have an extension that is determined by '*all* the relevant essential properties across possible worlds.'²⁹³ It follows that contrary to his water thought experiment, his twins across possible worlds use natural kind terms that have *same* meanings, and these terms determine a *single* disjunctive disjunction extension.²⁹⁴

Zemach also notes that Putnam also claims that, even before chemistry, natural kind terms, since they are indexicals and rigid designators that access same-kind relationships and essential properties, undergo a *historical* event, an 'initial semantic baptism,' and afterwards the use of the word about the kind is then 'maintained by a chain of verbal transmissions.' If this is what occurs, he admits, there is less worry about how to decide, by means of indexicality or rigidity, which natural kinds have which essential properties, for these were set at the time of the baptism. There is also less of an issue of natural kind term meanings having disjunctive extensions, for presumably baptisms on different

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p.119.

²⁹¹ Ibid., p.120.

²⁹² Ibid., p.120.

²⁹³ Ibid., p.121.

²⁹⁴ Gregory McCulloch, in 'The Spirit of Twin Earth,' claims that this strategy presupposes that 'substances that have a certain set of observable qualities *just are* that natural kind' (p.169). But actually, this strategy does no such thing. This is because, any such disjunction of properties will surely not be limited to observable ones, and will be constrained to adhere to certain physical parameters.

worlds isolate different kind relationships or essential properties. Zemach says that Putnam seems to have avoided his objection, but does not. This is because, he says, for so many natural kinds, it is plain that there never were any such baptisms. But just as important here, he says, even if there were such baptisms, 'there is no way to know if they really did constrain future use of the terms in the way required.'²⁹⁵ The historical event version of the causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms is groundless.

Zemach says that even if Putnam has solved these problems, and even if he is granted that, before chemistry, natural kind terms are subject to indexicality and rigidity, that access same-kind relationships or essential properties, he incurs a related problem. Zemach notes that 'many of our natural kind terms, for their entire history, have had empty extensions.' In the history of kind terms, such examples have been rife, and include everything from 'phlogiston' to even 'ghost.' Zemach says that Putnam must say that, even before chemistry, by means of stipulation or baptism, or a combination of these, these natural kind terms are connected to those kinds, such that there is a metaphysically necessary relationship between them. But when natural kind terms have empty extensions, such as phlogiston or ghosts, 'this is *nothing*.'²⁹⁶ Zemach notes that this entails that those who spoke of such items surely felt as though they meant certain things, could reason about them, and could explain themselves to others, but really meant nothing, all along. He says that this is an inadequate explanation of natural kind terms with empty extensions.

²⁹⁵ Eddy Zemach, 'Putnam's Theory on the Reference of Natural Kind Terms,' p.123.

²⁹⁶ Gabriel Segal, in *A Slim Book on Narrow Content*, notes that 'the problem of empty concepts cannot be swept under the rug' (p.33). In particular, he says, the only options here are that empty concepts are 'modally empty, that they do not apply to anything,' or that they are 'motley concepts, answering to anything that satisfies core descriptions' (p.54). Segal notes that neither option is good for the externalist.

Zemach concludes that Putnam is not correct about his causal theory of the meaning for natural kind terms. He says that to follow this theory, even before the advent of chemistry, would be disastrous. Zemach says that even if we grant that his indexicality and rigidity arguments are true, and so we access same-kind relationships or essential properties of kinds, regardless of whether we do this either by stipulation or semantic baptism, or some combination of these, 'this procedure will insure many impurities and errors along the way.' Zemach notes that if his twins either stipulated or baptized water, the extensions of their terms would include *whatever* they are in contact with, which would still be impure, and at this point there would be no way for them to ascertain the normal samples. He also notes that when his twins refer to failed natural kinds such as phlogiston and ghosts, which never existed, they would have no way to correct these errors either. Zemach says that problem is that his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms seems to entail that 'we do not know, and cannot know, the reference of substance terms.'²⁹⁷

But if Zemach is correct against Putnam concerning the meaning of natural kind terms, it seems he should offer a replacement. He hints at a Fregean or even descriptivist theory of meaning, for he says that philosophers such as himself would say that 'it is *psychological state* that determines extension,' and again that 'the beliefs of each twin that do the important work here.'²⁹⁸ But Zemach is not offering a positive theory, and so does not elaborate. D. H. Mellor offers much the same argument, but has been more positive about such natural kind term meaning. He has noted that natural kind terms 'are chosen to fit our

²⁹⁷ Eddy Zemach, 'Putnam on the Reference of Natural Kind Terms,' p.123.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.126.

knowledge, not the other way around.’²⁹⁹ This entails, he says, that such kind meaning is governed by a cluster version of the description theory. But part of the point about this description theory is that natural kind term meaning is determined by our descriptions of kinds, none of which presupposes that those kinds actually exist. Mellor notes that our natural kind term meanings are determined by our beliefs. This theory points in a very different direction than the causal theory of such meaning.

In point of fact, Putnam may respond to all these difficulties with his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms in a variety of ways. He might say that, even before the advent of chemistry, his twins use natural kind terms that are still subject to indexicality and rigidity, and access same-kind relationships or essential properties, by stipulation or semantic baptism, or a combination of these. Putnam might say that since rival theories of reference undermine our ability to understand what our terms refer to, and our ability to understand theory change, his intuitions should carry more weight here. But actually, his criticisms of these theories of reference are by no means decisive, and even if they were, they do not lend support to any other theory. Putnam is still asking us to believe that before the advent of chemistry, his twins refer indexically or rigidly to same-kind relationships or essential properties, no matter how this is done. He is still asking us to believe that his twins referred to different waters, different natural kinds. This is a substantive claim, and as of yet, his only proof of this of are his intuitions.

²⁹⁹ Mellor, in his ‘Natural Kind Terms,’ notes that ‘on a cluster version of the description theory, taking account of the division of linguistic labor, counterfactuals can suppose the lack of almost any property of the kind (p.309). Mellor goes on to question essentialism itself, for ‘the supposed essential properties of a kind are really no more essential than other shared properties of a kind’ (p.311).

Putnam may also respond that all these objections miss his point about natural kind term meaning, for 'as long as there *could* be such a community' that determined such meaning indexically or rigidly, he makes his point. He might add that his theory of natural kind term meaning tries to address 'all *possible* kinds of understanding' and not just how things work in this world.³⁰⁰ If he followed this line of argument, so long as his theory of natural kind term meaning is even possible, then he has made a case to answer. But this response will not work, for we will still want to know how particular communities use such terms. If his water thought experiment does not even reveal how *we* do this, and only gives a misleading picture of this, it is not any good. It should be obvious that how any possible community may use natural kind terms has little to do with how we use them. Putnam still needs an argument to show that, before the advent of chemistry, his twins, on their respective worlds, refer indexically or rigidly to kind relationships or essential properties, and so to different waters. He still needs an argument to show that his twins are environmentally bound, that their meanings are not in their heads.

Putnam does not, in the end, respond in either of the ways just cited, but rather responds by restating how his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms demands that we refer to natural kinds. This is an important modification of his original theory. By doing this, in effect he attempts to carve out a middle position between merely stipulating that such kinds are fine enough to be distinguished between possible worlds and merely historically baptizing kinds to have the right properties, which governs our the future term use about them. Putnam insists that 'it is easy to modify the example' to avoid the problems cited

³⁰⁰ Gregory McCulloch, *The Mind and its World*, p.173.

above, and so to get this balance about natural kinds right.³⁰¹ To answer the objections, postulates that his two waters differ more from one another. In other words, he says:

The waters on the other planet need not be that similar to ours. Suppose that on the other planet, it is actually a mixture of twenty percent alcohol, and eighty percent water, but the body chemistry of the people there is such that they do not get intoxicated or even taste the difference in this mixture. Such a liquid would be very different from water, but a typical speaker might be unacquainted with these differences. This liquid tastes different to us, but it does not to them. It also behaves differently when you boil it. The typical speaker on either planet does not know of these differences.³⁰²

In this passage Putnam does not say that natural kinds are stipulated such that he merely asserts that they are different across possible worlds, and neither does he say that natural kinds are semantically historically baptized and word so use follows from that, without offering any support for this claim. By contrast, now he says that since his waters are *so* different that it is less plausible to say that his twins refer to the same substance across possible worlds, and so, he also says that it is less plausible to say that such a substance possesses a disjunctive extension, one that could include anything. Putnam concludes that when his twins refer to their respective waters, it is now more intuitive to say that they refer to different

³⁰¹ Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, p.22.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p.23.

things altogether, such that their environments determine their kind term meanings, which are not in their heads.

Putnam does not vindicate his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms with this response. In particular, in his water thought experiment, he suggests that, even before the advent of chemistry, his twins refer, either indexically or rigidly, to same-kind relationships or essential properties that are different, that they do this by stipulation, by historical event, or a combination of these, and so their kind terms have different extensions. Putnam concludes that his twins use natural kind terms that are environmentally bound, and so their meanings are not in their heads. But actually, this response will not do, for he seems to forget that he is still speaking about the time *before* the advent of chemistry, and so, as of yet, it is just his intuition to say that his twins would care about this water difference then, would want to distinguish their waters. It may be, after all, that these subjects only care that their waters *do* certain things for them, and so are defined functionally. Putnam does not appreciate that this is a live possibility that cannot be ruled out by fiat. There does not seem to be any reason, as of yet, to share his intuitions about his twins.

But even if Putnam were correct that in his water thought experiment, before the advent of chemistry, his twins would hope to indexically or rigidly distinguish their respective waters by same-kind relationships or essential properties, however that is done, this still does not address the other problems cited above. Putnam cannot ignore the problem that, by his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms, when we use such terms, and these terms have always had empty extensions, this implies that we mean nothing by them. He does not want to say that these natural kind term meanings can be captured in descriptions or even

that they have disjunctive extensions, and so he has no answer to this problem. Putnam also has no real answer to the problem that his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms insures and protects errors about such kinds. If we follow his causal theory and so decide, by means of stipulation or baptism, that any given kind has a set of properties, it will be difficult ever to correct errors about it after the fact. He provides no way to correct such errors, beyond noting that they are corrected though time. But actually, his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms prevents such correction anyway.

In the end, it does seem that Putnam can easily use his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms to argue against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for two reasons. The first reason is that he never makes good his case for that theory. In his water thought experiment, he claims that his twins, by using their kind terms, indexically or rigidly designate natural kinds by accessing same-kind relationships or essential properties, and that they do this, by stipulating them, by semantic baptism, or a combination of these. But as we have seen, his twins may only stipulate a disjunctive extension which they share across their worlds, and there is no reason to believe that any semantic baptisms have occurred, which may limit such disjunctions. This gets worse, for if he follows his theory of natural kind term meaning regardless, it follows that empty terms about kinds mean nothing, and he has no way to correct errors about such kinds. It follows that Putnam does not make good his case for his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms, and so cannot use it against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, after all.

Putnam incurs a second problem with his use of his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms as an argument against Cartesian scepticism about

the external world. This problem is that, to launch his theory, he must assume that we *are* in contact with the natural kinds of the external world he says that we are, and that this can be inferred by introspection. But since the possibility that our senses, our dreaming or waking state, or an evil demon, may deceive us about the natural kinds of the external world is at issue, he cannot do this here. In other words, since these natural kind term meanings would seem the same to us in any case, he cannot just assume that the kinds in question are real, or are that are in the contact with kinds we think we are. It is not a good response to Cartesian scepticism about the external world to say that such natural kinds *really* do exist, and that we can know this by introspection. Putnam has to assume that such scepticism is false to launch causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms. It may yet be that his theory is correct, but he cannot invoke it against such scepticism without begging the question.³⁰³

So does this mean that Putnam fails to refute Cartesian scepticism about the external world? If he only had his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms to offer against scepticism about the external world, he would fail. But as many have noted, he is unusual amongst thinkers for his 'intellectual courage to weigh contrary views, and to change his mind.'³⁰⁴ In particular, instead of his adopting the common tactic of stubbornly offering newer ways of saying the same thing, which here would be a different version of his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms, he has repeatedly changed his mind when objections force the issue. Putnam does not abandon his causal theory of meaning just yet, but rather he expands its

³⁰³ Putnam does not satisfy either of the two success conditions from chapter two for arguing against scepticism about the external world. He assumes that we are in causal contact with given natural kinds, and that we can know this by introspection, both of which he cannot know here. Putnam also implies that the skeptic makes a semantic error, by adhering to a false theory that leads him astray, which is surely not his error.

³⁰⁴ Christopher Norris, *Hilary Putnam: Realism, Reason and the Uses of Uncertainty*, p.2.

scope and alters his metaphysical position that underlies it. These changes may not turn out to be improvements, and often seem to be just ‘artifacts of a philosophical culture.’³⁰⁵ But even so Putnam uses these changes to relaunch his attack on Cartesian scepticism about the external world. The questions for us will be whether this new attempt succeeds, and whether, if it does, that allows him to attack such scepticism.

4.3

A

Putnam, in his *Reason, Truth and History*, presents his argument for his causal theory of meaning and his argument against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, but in a different guise. He argues in two stages. In his first stage, Putnam expands his causal theory in two directions. He no longer restricts his theory to natural kind terms, but rather applies it to *all* other words, and he does not direct it only at words, but at *thoughts*. Putnam now offers a causal theory of both meaning and content, and so addresses the conditions of *representation* itself.³⁰⁶ In his second stage, Putnam argues that if his causal theory of meaning or content for representation is correct, we could not be brains in a vat. He argues that given his causal theory of meaning or content, the conditions for representation are missing in this case. Putnam insists that we cannot even say or

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p.182.

³⁰⁶ Putnam, in *Reason, Truth, and History*, says that he is now searching for the ‘preconditions for thinking about, representing, referring, etc’ (p. 16). Putnam says that ‘the whole problem that we are investigating is how representation can enable us to refer to what is outside the mind’ (p. 27). Putnam says that he offers a ‘transcendental argument’ to reveal the conditions of possibility of these phenomena.

think that we are such brains without that revealing that we are not. If he is correct, he shows that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is not only false, but is incoherent. This is as much of a refutation of such scepticism as anyone could ask for.

Putnam begins by considering what may constitute the meanings or contents of representations. In particular, he asks us to imagine an ant crawling on a patch of sand, and postulates that 'by pure chance the line that it traces curves and crosses itself in such a way that it ends up looking like a recognizable caricature' of a given person.³⁰⁷ His intuition here, as well as in similar examples offered later, is that the ant has *not* succeeded in depicting anyone. Putnam claims that this is because the ant 'has never seen this person, or even a picture of him, and it had no intention of depicting this person.'³⁰⁸ His intuition here can be strengthened. If the ebb and flow of the tides washing up on the beach, together with an ocean breeze, just happen to impose marks on the sand that form what we would take to be a caricature of any given person, we would say the same thing. Putnam would say that neither the tides, nor the wind, nor any combination thereof, could have succeeded in depicting anyone. In all of these cases, he would insist that resemblance may be included in representation, but it cannot be representation.

Putnam asks the obvious question, 'if lines in the sand cannot in themselves represent anything, how is it that word or thought forms can in themselves represent anything?'³⁰⁹ He first considers the *substance dualist* answer to this question, the notion that 'words and thoughts are of an essentially different nature than physical objects, and these alone have the characteristic of

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p.1.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p.1.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p.2.

intentionality,' or can represent. Putnam rejects this dualistic answer, for if representation is explained in terms of such intentionality, the problem is just pushed back. This should be obvious, he says, for 'just postulating mysterious powers of the mind solves nothing.' Putnam calls such positions *magical* theories of reference, for they suppose an intrinsic connection between meaning or content, and the world. He insists that the details of such dualistic theories do not matter, for 'even a large and complex system of representations, both verbal and visual, still does not have an intrinsic, magical connection with what it represents.'³¹⁰ This entails that representation requires more than the occurrence of words or thoughts in a mind.

Putnam offers another example, so as to introduce his own position. He cites an 'intelligent, rule governed, computer.'³¹¹ This computer, he says, although fully mechanical, can fool us into believing that it is conversing with us, seeming to discourse about *whatever* we choose to talk about.³¹² It may seem that the computer can converse with us, but he says, this intelligent rule governed computer is only fooling us, and so we should not attribute meaning or thought, and so representations to it. Putnam says that 'what we have is a device for producing sentences in response to other sentences, but *none* of these is connected to the real world.'³¹³ But then, he must say why we, as living beings, are so different.

We are able to perceive, handle, and deal with apples or fields.

There are language entry rules that take us from experiences of

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.9.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p.10.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p.10.

apples to utterances about them, and language exit rules that take us from decisions expressed in linguistic form to actions concerning apples or fields, other than speaking. Lacking either language entry or exit rules, however, there is no reason to regard the conversations of a machine as anything more than syntactic play. This is syntactic play that resembles intelligent discourse, to be sure; but only as, and no more than, the ant can draw to resemble a person.³¹⁴

In other words, Putnam says that we use language entry and exit rules, but the computer does not. These rules, he says, connect us to the world by means of our behavior, which the computer is barred from. He insists that the illusion that the intelligent rule following computer has meaning or content and so represents is produced by the fact that we follow these entry and exit rules, which we have then unconsciously applied to the computer, but should not have. Putnam also insists that unlike the computer, our 'understanding is not an occurrence but an *ability*.'³¹⁵ He says that these abilities are necessary to rule out cases of blind interaction between mind and world, which would preclude meaning and content, and so representation.

Putnam does not say what he intends by his claim that abilities are necessary for meaning or content and so representation, although he still makes various claims about them. He says that 'it is not the phenomena themselves in our heads, but rather the ability of the thinker to *employ* them' that makes for

³¹⁴ Ibid., p.11.

³¹⁵ Ibid., p.20.

meaning or content.³¹⁶ Putnam says that since this is so, linguistic signs do not intrinsically correspond to objects, but rather depend on *how* they are employed, and by *whom*.³¹⁷ In a later paper, he extends this thesis, and says that ‘our capacity to refer does not amount to one ability but is actually a whole *complex set* of abilities.’ Putnam adds that such sets of abilities are irreducible, insofar as they ‘cannot be described in language that does not avail itself of intentional and normative notions.’³¹⁸ In another late paper, he goes so far as to say that they ‘cannot be described without speaking of things outside the organism.’³¹⁹ Putnam does not offer a specific position on complex abilities, but makes related claims about them, all of which suggest that they are needed to have meaning or content, and so representation.

In point of fact, Putnam has changed his metaphysical position that underlies his causal theory of meaning or content for representation. In particular, he says that his is a *transcendental* investigation into meaning or content, for now he is only searching for their ‘conditions of possibility.’ But discovering these conditions, he says, is not impossible, for they are built into the nature of minds themselves. Putnam insists that in seeking to know these conditions, he still adheres to empiricism, for he only ‘inquires into what is reasonably possible assuming certain *general* premises, or making certain broad *theoretical* assumptions.’³²⁰ Putnam says that he no longer wishes to defend anything like the metaphysically necessary relation between natural kind meaning and the kinds they are about that he espoused in his earlier work. This may sound like quite a change, but at this point, he does not abandon such necessity

³¹⁶ Ibid., p.20.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p.52.

³¹⁸ Hilary Putnam, ‘Realism without Absolutes,’ p.287.

³¹⁹ Hilary Putnam, ‘The Question of Realism,’ p.305.

³²⁰ Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, p.16.

completely. Putnam now says that metaphysical necessity and even reality itself must be assessed as something that is *internal* to our conceptual schemes. In essence, he says, his position is only 'internal realism.'

Putnam notes that since meanings or contents, and so representations, can be variously related to the world, there are '*many* different correspondences which represent candidate reference relations.'³²¹ This is a kind of indeterminacy of reference, he says, where the trouble is to find a way to pick from a plethora of different correspondence relations to the world. Putnam says that, to regain any determinacy of reference here, we must refer back 'to our own conceptual schemes.'³²² This is a change from his former work, for he had held that, when we use natural kind terms, we indexically or rigidly refer to same-kind relationships or essential properties of those kinds, by stipulation or baptism, and so kinds *themselves* determine the extensions of our terms. Putnam now insists that any such appeal to such a bare causal connection between natural kind terms and kinds 'presupposes that we are *already* able to refer to the kinds and properties that make up that causal chain.'³²³ He insists that his causal theory of meaning or content for representation, understood in terms of causes and abilities, does not hearken after a metaphysical realism that cannot be had, or a kind of objectivity independent of us.

B

Putnam offers his causal theory of meaning or content for representations, at least in part, to refute Cartesian scepticism about the external world. To do this,

³²¹ Ibid., p.47.

³²² Ibid., p.52.

³²³ Ibid., p.66.

he notes that the supposition that we may be brains in a vat raises the same sceptical issues but do so 'in a modern way.'³²⁴ Putnam was not the first to cite such a version of the brains in a vat hypothesis, but he was perhaps the first to combine it with a theory of meaning or content against such scepticism.³²⁵ In particular, he insists that for any brains in vats, the necessary causal and action related conditions for meaning or content are not met. But if this is correct, it implies that if we even say or think we are brains in a vat, we reveal that we are not. To make this result as vivid as possible, he imagines the following hypothesis:

Imagine an individual who has been subjected to an operation in which a scientist removes his brain from his body and places it in a vat of nutrients. Suppose that the subject's nerve endings are connected to a highly sophisticated computer system. By running the appropriate program, the scientist is able to obliterate his memories of the operation. The result is that from a phenomenal standpoint, his life would seem to proceed without interruption. Nonetheless, his life would be an illusion, for none of his experiences would correspond to reality. The subject would be a brain in a vat.³²⁶

³²⁴ Ibid., p.6.

³²⁵ Jonathon Harrison, in his 'The Philosophers Nightmare, or the Ghost not Laid,' offers a similar brain in a vat thought experiment, where a scientist in the future extracts the brain of his subject, and lets him live his life, 'as though all is normal' (p.188). Harrison has his scientist eventually place his subject back into the world. He insists this story is coherent, a ghost of philosophy, not yet put to rest.

³²⁶ Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, p.6.

To add to this tale, Putnam adds a unique twist here. In particular, he says that ‘instead of having just one brain in a vat, we could imagine that *all* human beings are brains in vats.’³²⁷ He even speculates that there may be no evil scientist, but rather the universe ‘just *happens* to consist in automatic machinery tending a vat full of brains and nervous systems.’³²⁸ But from this, it follows that we are all subject to a ‘collective hallucination, rather than a number of separate hallucinations.’³²⁹ Putnam adds this twist to avoid the objection that, by virtue of our causal and actional connection to his evil scientist, we really do have a connection to the world. If this were the case, he would have no way to even launch his argument.

Putnam insists that this second stage of his argument will show that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is false, for ‘the supposition that we are actually brains in a vat, although it violates no *physical* law, and is perfectly consistent with everything we have experienced, cannot *possibly* be true.’³³⁰ The reason this is impossible, he says, is because, although the beings in that possible world can say or think what we do, still they cannot refer to what we refer to. Putnam does concede that his brains in a vat are unlike his other examples, since unlike ants or computers ‘they are *functioning* brains, and they function by the same rules as do brains in the real world.’³³¹ He admits that because of this, there is this difference in his examples, such that it would be *absurd* to deny consciousness to the brains.³³² This may sound like a significant admission, but he insists that it does not matter. Putnam insists that the mere fact that brains are

³²⁷ Ibid., p.7.

³²⁸ Ibid., p.7.

³²⁹ Ibid., p.7.

³³⁰ Ibid., p.7.

³³¹ Ibid., p.7.

³³² Ibid., p.8.

conscious does not entail that they have the meaning or content, or the representations that we do. He says that 'what rules out this possibility is not physics, but philosophy.'³³³

To illustrate this, Putnam notes that when any brain in a vat attempts to refer to a tree, 'he does not succeed.' But if the brain does not refer to actual trees, he must say what they do refer to. Putnam cites various options here, postulating that although the brain itself is unaware of it, perhaps 'it refers to trees in the image or to the impulses that cause tree experiences, or to the features of the program that are responsible for those impulses.'³³⁴ But as he says, it does not really matter whether the brain in a vat refers to images, impulses or programs, since all of these options are still *not* what we refer to as trees. By his causal theory of meaning or content for representation, *whatever* his brains have causally and actually interacted with fixes their meaning or content, and this is different from what we have. He insists that this implies that the brains and ourselves have different meaning or content, and so representations. Putnam concludes that 'once we see that qualitative similarity is by no means sufficient for sameness of reference,' there is no reason to attribute to the brains and ourselves the same meanings or contents.

In the end, Putnam seems to offer a surprisingly simple brain in a vat argument against Cartesian scepticism about the external world. But actually, his argument has two components, which are both necessary. In effect, his argument is a combination of his causal theory of meaning or content for representation, along with the supposition that we might be brains in a vat. In point of fact, there have been many different interpretations of both components of his argument,

³³³ Ibid., p.15.

³³⁴ Ibid., p.13.

many of which are more complex than the original, but even so most commentators agree on its general outlines. Putnam concludes not just that we are not brains in a vat, but the supposition that we are is *incoherent*. In particular, he argues as follows:

1. The causal theory of meaning or content for representation is correct (premise).
2. If brains in a vat say or think 'we are brains in a vat,' this is false, for their meanings or contents, and so representations, are not about brains or vats at all, but are about one of the vat options, cited above (from 1).
3. If actual humans say or think 'we are brains in a vat,' this is false because their meanings or contents, and so representations, are about brains in a vat, and as a matter of fact, they are not brains in a vat (from 1).
4. But we have meanings or contents about, and so represent, actual objects and we speak a real language (premise).³³⁵
5. It follows that we are *not* brains in a vat (from 1, 3 and 4).

In this argument, Putnam assumes that his causal theory of meaning or content is true, and so our causal and actional interactions determine the meaning or content of our representations. But then, he notes that brains in a vat and actual humans refer to different objects, and so speak different languages, although they are

³³⁵ In this premise, it will be prudent to follow the majority of commentators who say that if brains in a vat refer to one of the vat options, such as objects in the image, to impulses, or features of the program, then in a sense, they are literally speaking a different language. If this interpretation is correct, the brains both speak of aberrant kinds of objects, and because of that, speak a different language.

unaware of this. It follows that when they speak or think about their respective predicaments, they are both incorrect, but for different reasons. Putnam insists that we *do* refer to actual objects, and speak a real language. But since we can know this much, he says, we also know that we are in the real world. This entails that we are not brains in a vat. Putnam concludes that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is false, after all.

Putnam uses his brains in a vat argument to refute Cartesian scepticism about the external world. To do this, he argues that if his causal theory of meaning and content for representation is true, we are causally and actionally in touch with certain types of objects. But since we do have such meanings or contents about these actual objects and speak a real language about them, there are metaphysically necessary connections between our meanings or contents and the actual objects they are about. Putnam again says that we know these meanings or contents just because of our power to *introspect* them. This introspection puts us in an epistemic position to know that our meanings or contents correspond to actual objects, and are in a real language. This is a more encompassing thesis than his last effort, for now his thesis applies not just to the meanings of natural kind terms, but rather applies to *any* meanings or contents, to representations, about the external world. If Putnam is successful with this causal theory of meaning or content for representation, he will have shown that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is false.

But actually, even if Putnam is correct against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, his success is still quite limited. His victory seems to be more encompassing here, for now there is a metaphysically necessary connection between *all* of our meanings or contents and so representations about the external

world and the parts of world they are about. But as many philosophers have noted, even though his victory seems to be more impressive here, it is less so than it first appears. To see this, notice that even if he is correct about his causal theory of meaning or content for representation against scepticism about the external world, it is still possible that *after* the causal contact and actions between us and the world have occurred, we may be spirited away and placed in a vat, and this may happen repeatedly.³³⁶ Putnam may be correct about his causal theory of meaning or content for representation, but this does not show that we are not presently deceived. It is still possible that within the parameters of his theory, we may yet have been spirited away and placed in a vat, and we would not know this now. The substance of Cartesian scepticism about the external world remains untouched.

Putnam may not succeed at all with his brains in a vat argument against Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In essence, this is because he incurs problems with his causal theory of meaning or content for representation, and these in turn reveal problems with the rest of his argument. Putnam first encounters trouble because of the way in which he objects to 'magical theories of reference,' or those theories that suppose that meaning or content has an *intrinsic* connection to parts of the world.³³⁷ Putnam claims that it is always possible to find circumstances wherein that meaning or content or representations exist but the connection to the world is only accidental, which renders them mere 'syntactic play.'³³⁸ He insists that magical theories of reference, by supposing such intrinsic connections, do not explain meaning or content and so representation, but rather presuppose what they want to prove. By contrast,

³³⁶ Peter Ludlow, Externalism, Self-knowledge, and the Prevalence of Slow Switching,' p. 49.

³³⁷ Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, p.5.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.11.

Putnam insists that there are no such intrinsic connections between meaning or content and so representation and the world, but rather these are possible only because of our causal or actional interactions with it.

Putnam insists that most theories of meaning or content and so representation are magical, but this is quite unfair. In particular, this is because he treats them as all *equally* committed to an intrinsic connection between meaning or content and the world, and all in the same way. Putnam claims that such theories may even stipulate *noetic rays* between mind and world to establish such connections, but says that 'no present day philosopher would espouse such a position.'³³⁹ The trouble with this response is that if such supposedly magical theories of meaning or content can amount to more than noetic rays directed at the world, there may be no problem. Daniel Dennett offers such a theory of meaning or content and so representation, based in his homuncular functionalism. In point of fact, though, his theory is quite different from the above stereotype of a magical theory.

In artificial intelligence, there is a distinction in homunculi between representation and representation user. But there is typically a trade off between the sophistication of representation and user. The more raw and uninterpreted the representation, the more fancy the user has to be. The more interpreted and automated the representation, the less fancy the user has to be. This fact lets us get away with lesser homunculi delivering messages at higher levels, since their lower brethren have already done the work. The

³³⁹ Ibid., p.51.

important point here is that at no point do self-understanding homunculi enter this picture.³⁴⁰

Dennett insists that his homuncular theory of meaning or content and so representation breaks it down into functions that *collectively* manage the job. He concedes that one may object that individually, such homunculi 'do not represent at all.' This objection may seem tempting, he says, but he notes that in conjunction, homunculi 'can bear delicate informational relations to things in the world.'³⁴¹ Dennett further says that the connection between meaning or content and parts of the world is produced by powers of the brain, which he explains with his homuncular functionalism. But plainly, this does not invoke any magic here, in the sense of entailing any mind to world intrinsic connections. The point here is not to defend any position on meaning or content, but only to point out that they are not all equally magical. To say that they are gives the false impression that any alternative is better.

Putnam still owes us a positive explanation of *how* his causal theory of meaning or content for representation works. In other words, he must explain how our being in causal and actional contact with the world allows us to move from mere syntactic play, to having meanings or contents. Putnam surprisingly offers no explanation here, beyond what he has already said. He just claims that since such causes and abilities are not magical, do not suppose any intrinsic connection to the world, but are related to it in a number of practical ways, there

³⁴⁰ In his 'Artificial Intelligence as Philosophy and as Psychology,' Dennett goes on to say that 'one gets the advantage of the trade off only by sacrificing versatility and universality in subsystems and their representations,' so homunculi cannot be too versatile in the messages that they send and receive (121). Dennett insists that the intent of this move that, 'in the end, all the homunculi are discharged.'

³⁴¹ Daniel Dennett, 'Styles of Mental Representation,' p.224.

is no problem. Putnam even postulates that 'if there were robots and we had them as friends, we would quickly feel sure that they were *conscious*.'³⁴² But actually, he does *not* seem convinced that robot causes and actions will allow them to have meanings or contents, for he then says that such a case is 'so bizarre that it is not clear what to say.'³⁴³ The worry here is that, given his position, it might be that *our* causes or actions will not allow us to move from mere syntactic play, to having meanings or contents, or representations. Putnam owes us an explanation of how our causes and actions actually do make a difference here, or how they allow us to move from mere syntactic play, to having meaning or contents, but does not offer one.

Putnam also incurs the related problem that his internal realism might just be a kind of relativism in disguise. He holds that relativism, 'cannot distinguish between correctness and incorrectness of representations,' but his position can.³⁴⁴ In particular, he says that internal realism is constrained by 'experiential inputs' imposed by the external world, and so, it provides a sense in which norms can exist. But he also ridicules the idea that our representations might correspond to a world that we do not influence, and even says that 'objects are as much *made* as discovered.' Putnam goes so far as to ask that 'why should there not be equally coherent but *incompatible* conceptual schemes which fit our experience just as well,' and expects an answer that such schemes can exist.³⁴⁵ The trouble with all of this is that if our conceptual scheme makes our world, and if different schemes can really be incompatible, there is no sense in which all such schemes can really be beholden to the same world. He may not be worried that the threat of

³⁴² Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, p.101.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.102.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.122.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.73.

scepticism will issue in relativism, but this is no solution here. The reason this is so is because relativism incurs so many problems of its own that its benefits become unclear.³⁴⁶

In the end, it does not seem that Putnam makes his case against magical theories of reference, for he insists that they are all equally magical when they are not, because his causal theory of meaning or content may be equally magical, or may even be relativistic. Putnam may not be entitled to employ his causal theory of meaning or content for representation in his brain in a vat argument. But if Putnam cannot employ his theory of meaning or content for representation, then there is much less motivation to say that brains in a vat and actual humans have different meanings or contents, and so represent different things. This does not, as of yet, tell us what brains or human meanings and contents are, or what they represent. But if there is no causal or actional component to meaning or content, then it seems that our *beliefs* will have to play a role. In what is to come, we will see that brains in a vat and actual humans can share beliefs, the meaning or content of which will be *narrow*, in the sense that these are determined by intrinsic properties of the person. This is an enormous topic, and we will have to pursue it later.

Putnam may still overcome these objections to his causal theory of meaning or content for representation. But even if he does so, that still may not help him to refute Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In an influential paper, Anthony Brueckner notes that his premise that we represent actual objects, and speak a real language is the real problem here. This premise, he says, implies

³⁴⁶ Putnam seems committed to the odd position of Nelson Goodman, that there are actually many worlds. He is so committed, because the combination of his saying that there are incompatible conceptual schemes, all of which are still equally correct, entails that there are equal amounts of schemes and worlds. This position is far from being a solution to scepticism about the external world, to say the least.

a disquotation principle, to the effect that we can take the quotes off any sentence or thought, and they still have the meaning or content 'that we take them to.'³⁴⁷ Jane McIntyre says the problem is that this premise and principle cannot just be assumed in this sceptical context. In particular, she notes that even if his causal theory of meaning or content were true, both actual humans and brains in a vat 'are still entitled to assume' that they represent objects and speak a real language, and so to disquote. But if we insist that our words and thoughts refer to real brains and vats, such that when we disquote, our words or thoughts have the meaning or content we take them to, that entails that there is an external world. Brueckner insists that this may be true, but it is still 'something that has to be shown, not assumed in advance.'³⁴⁸

To respond to this charge, Putnam responds in a variety of ways. He first says that, given his internal realist position, he can ask 'from *whose* point of view is the story being told?'³⁴⁹ The problem is that such storytelling presupposes an objective point of view, where truth is independent of observers altogether. Putnam says that according to internal realism, there is no such point of view, and so he can presuppose that we refer to real objects or speak an actual language, and can disquote, for these practices are 'internal to the practices where they occur.' To defend this further, he might say that such practices are *primitive*, are based in 'the very constitution of human nature.'³⁵⁰ But even if internal realism is true, such that we cannot reach an objective point of view from which to offer a

³⁴⁷ Anthony Brueckner, 'Brains in a Vat,' p.156.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p.160.

³⁴⁹ Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, p.50.

³⁵⁰ Gary Ebbs, in 'Scepticism, Objectivity, and Brains in Vats,' says that Putnam 'undercuts the illusion of an absolutely objective perspective on our current situation, from which it would be possible to express the thought that we are brains in vats' (p.252). Ebbs notes that we cannot separate ourselves from our practices to say we are brains in a vat, such that all claims about such things are internal.

brain in a vat hypothesis, and even if from within our internal perspective we can know our objects or language, and can disquote, all this does not matter. This is because, from their perspective, brains in a vat believe that they know their objects and language, are able to disquote, but are incorrect. Putnam may have established that the brain in a vat hypothesis cannot be intelligibly proposed, but that does not bear on its truth.

Putnam also responds that this objection ignores his causal theory of meaning or content for representation. In particular, given his causal theory of meaning or content for representation, 'it should not be further required that we identify objects or language' in order to know them, or to be able to disquote. In other words, given his causal theory of meaning or content, in any given context, 'all that is required is that we *have* the words or thoughts' to know them, and that is it.³⁵¹ If we do have such meanings or contents and so representations, we can disquote. But this response does not work either, for if his causal theory of meaning or content were correct, it is true for both brains in a vat and actual humans, albeit in different ways. It follows that brains and humans still, from their point view, each seem to refer to objects or speak the same, and so seem to disquote the same, but the brains are incorrect in doing so. Putnam still owes us an argument that we are not actually the brains. It may be that his causal theory of meaning or content and so representation is true, but he does not say in what way it is true.

Putnam lastly replies that the concern over how we know that we refer to actual objects and speak a real language, or about disquotation, can be dismissed

³⁵¹ Crispin Wright, in 'Putnam and Brains in a Vat,' continues that 'we are tempted to ask for identifying knowledge' of our objects or language, but says that 'the temptation, although understandable, is confused' (p.225). The consequence of this is that 'brains could work out the words we use, and convince themselves of something, but they could not have the thoughts we do' (p.233).

altogether, although for a different reason. In particular, he claims that by taking his causal theory of meaning or content for all representation for granted, he can then skip his claim that we refer to actual objects and speak a real language, for his theory of meaning or content still entails that if brains in a vat or actual humans ever *say or think* that they are such, this is false. Putnam says that if this is so, his argument still shows that brains in a vat or actual humans cannot really *be* brains. He argues that:

- A. If brains in a vat or actual humans say or think ‘we are brains in a vat,’ this is *false*.
- B. If either brain or humans say or think ‘we are brains in a vat,’ they are *not* brains in a vat.

In this argument, Putnam seems to claim that since his causal theory of meaning or content for representation guarantees that what brains in a vat and actual humans say or think is false, neither can be brains.³⁵² If he is correct here, he circumvents all the problems about knowing what objects or language we speak, or about disquotation. But although this sounds good, it must not be overlooked that if both actual humans and brains in a vat say or think falsely that they are brains, what they say or think is still false for *different* reasons. But plainly, such a difference in the reasons for brain or human falsehoods should be noticed in this context.

Putnam says that on his causal theory of meaning or content for representation, when brains in a vat say or think that they are brains, what they

³⁵² Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History*, p.15.

say or think is false because they cannot refer to brains or vats, but rather refer to one of the vat options cited above, albeit unwittingly. But he also says that when actual humans say or think that they are brains in a vat, the reason why what they say or think is false is because they are not brains at all. But Putnam does not seem to notice that, since he concedes that the *only* reason why what the brains in a vat say or think is false is because of this referential failure, this is compatible with their being such brains. These brains do not refer to brains or vats, but refer to one of the vat options, yet have always been in a vat. The trouble now is that, as of yet, we do not know that we are not the ones who are merely suffering from such referential failure, and so, do not know that we are not brains in a vat. Putnam does not offer any serious reason to suppose that we might not be in this situation, but just not know it. It follows that he does not, as of yet, show that we cannot be brains in a vat.

Putnam eventually acknowledges that the criticisms cited above of this causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms and his causal theory of meaning or content for representation have a point, and so changes his mind, yet again. This is significant, for it changes the character of his arguments. In particular, he gives up on the metaphysically necessity connection between meaning or content and the external world in any form, even as assessed internally within a conceptual scheme. Putnam concedes that this type of necessity is quite odd anyway, for it was supposed to be '*sleeping* in substance all along, only to be awakened by scientific discoveries.'³⁵³ Putnam abandons such necessity, and opts for *physical* necessity instead. To illustrate this kind of necessity, he cites the example of a perpetual motion machine.

³⁵³ Hilary Putnam, 'Why is a Philosopher?' p.110.

The idea of a perpetual motion machine is physically *impossible*. The commonsense picture is of this fact as something quite independent of whether anyone ever has known, does know, or will ever know this fact. This fact is not the same as no one has ever built such a machine. But we discovered that there could not be a perpetual motion machine by discovering the laws of thermodynamics. But a perpetual motion machine would have been a physical impossibility even if these laws had never been discovered.³⁵⁴

In essence, Putnam says that this impossibility explains ‘how and why attempts to build such a machine have failed,’ although this, as of yet, does not explain physical necessity.³⁵⁵ To do this, he offers a definition of physical necessity for natural kinds, which is that they are the same when ‘they have the same microstructure *and* follow the same laws.’³⁵⁶ This definition is vague, he says, and even admits that tough questions may be decided by our *interests*. But regardless of such hedges, his point is that physical necessity is still determined ‘in the actual world.’ Putnam goes on to say that he does not intend to extend this kind of necessity to *all* possible worlds. He concedes that he ‘will no longer insist that it is conceivable that any natural kind is different, yet is not logically possible.’³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Hilary Putnam, ‘Is Water Necessarily H₂O?’ p.56.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.57.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.68.

³⁵⁷ Putnam insists that, given his change to physical necessity, ‘the question about substance identity in *all* possible worlds can be dismissed,’ and so there is no issue about it ‘not being logically possible’ that any kind has any essential property. Putnam even suggests that if we want to describe any kind as different in essence in some *other* possible world, to ‘go ahead and do so’ (*Ibid.*, p.70).

Putnam uses his notion of physical necessity to launch his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms, and his causal theory of meaning or content for representation, yet again. In particular, he says that we use natural kind terms indexically and rigidly to refer to same-kind relationships or essential properties. He also says that we use representations, by virtue of our causal contact and actions, to refer to objects in the world. In either case, he says, our meanings or contents mirror certain types of objects, and there is a relationship of physical necessity between them. This is plainly a more modest position, for it only addresses *this* world. Putnam cites an objection about modality, that ‘since we only observe what happens in the *actual* world how are we to know what is really physically possible in any other possible world?’³⁵⁸ He responds that ‘what is physically possible is *internal* to physical theory itself,’ although he admits that this answer may not work. This is because, he concedes, such possibility is ‘relative to the physical theory that is *selected*,’ and this can vary.³⁵⁹ Putnam replies that other theories may not matter, since now his argument only addresses our knowledge here.

In point of fact, Putnam lowers his standards here, for now he contends only that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is false in this world. This is good enough, he says, for if it is still physically impossible that *we* could have the meanings or contents and so representations we do unless the objects that we have interacted with exist in this world, that is as much proof against scepticism as could be desired. But can Putnam even use the notion of physical necessity at

³⁵⁸ Ibid., p.71.

³⁵⁹ Putnam insists that the debate here is not just ‘about stipulating physical possibilities.’ The real objection, he says, is about whether ‘he can make sense of *unrelativized* notion of physical possibility’ (Ibid., p.72). Putnam admits that this seems pressing, for he concedes that ‘what I need to support my argument is a general criterion of substance identity, not a series of notions’ (Ibid., p.72).

all in this context? It seems that he cannot, for when such scepticism is raised the modal criticism cited above can be launched again only now as applied to the actual world. In other words, for him to know what is physically necessary in this world, he would again have to base his estimation of that on the theory selected, even if that is internal to the physical theory itself. But any such theory about the physical world would be included within the sceptical hypotheses, and is unavailable to him here. Putnam fails to resurrect the parts of his former causal theories of meaning or content or representation to be used against Cartesian sceptic about the external world.

So does Putnam manage to make any headway against Cartesian skepticism about the external world? He tries to use his causal theory of meaning for natural kind terms against scepticism about the external world. But as we have seen, his arguments for that theory do not work, and even if they did, he could not employ them without begging the question against scepticism. Putnam attempts to use his causal theory of meaning or content for representation to refute scepticism about the external world. But as we have seen, he insists that all other theories of representation are magical when they are not, and by his standards, his theory is vacuous or relativistic. He also says that our meanings or contents refer to actual objects, and that we speak a real language, and brains in a vat do not. But as we have seen, this begs the question against the sceptic. Putnam lastly relinquishes his claims to any metaphysically necessary connection between meaning or content and parts of the world, and opts instead for mere physical necessity between them. But he cannot assess such necessity without begging the question against the sceptic. Putnam does not refute Cartesian scepticism about the external world.

Chapter Five

5.1

In this chapter, I will examine the work of Tyler Burge, and the position he calls ‘anti-individualism,’ which has become known as *social* externalism. In section two, I address the argument he offers in his ‘Individualism and the Mental,’ the focus of which are his thought experiments concerning our propositional attitudes expressed by terms such as ‘arthritis,’ ‘brisket,’ ‘contract,’ etc. Burge says that in one linguistic community, a subject suffers from incomplete understanding of ‘arthritis,’ and in another such community, his twin does not. He says that since arthritis is taxonomized differently in these communities, we should ascribe different arthritis beliefs to them. Burge responds to four attempts to reinterpret his arthritis subject in his thought experiment, all of which would indicate that he does not have arthritis beliefs. He argues that these reinterpretations misunderstand our practices of belief ascription, and also that they suppose implausible accounts of how his subject would react to correction by his doctor. It follows that Cartesian skepticism about the external world is false.

In section three, I examine what Burge says about Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In point of fact, his attitude towards such scepticism is equivocal, to say the least. In ‘Individualism and the Mental,’ he did not speak of such scepticism at all, although others have credited him with refuting it. In this section, I argue that Burge does not interpret his own arthritis thought experiment correctly, for his subjects do not have the belief contents he ascribes to them. I

also agree that if his social externalism is followed regardless, it leads to counterintuitive results about how we should *count* beliefs and contents. These consequences suggest that social externalism is false, and so cannot be used against skepticism. In a recent article, Burge concedes that it will be difficult for his social externalism *not* to beg the question against Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In his ‘Cartesian Error and the Objectivity of Perception,’ he takes a different tack altogether. In this paper, his argument is that since such scepticism does not support individualism, it is not a troubling philosophical position. In this regard, I argue that Burge does not show that what is really important is defeating individualism.

5.2

Burge begins ‘Individualism and the Mental,’ by attempting to clarify how we should think of propositional attitudes and their contents. In particular, he says that when we ascribe the belief content ‘that p’ to any given agent, the ‘p’ here fills out what we are talking about. He says that this ‘p’ can be thought of informally as a ‘content clause.’³⁶⁰ In such belief contexts, he says, ‘we cannot substitute just any extensionally equivalent sentence’ for ‘p,’ since the subject in question may not *know* that these sentences are equivalent. Burge says that when this occurs, such equivalent sentences ‘are usually cognitively different for the subject.’ He also notes that when this occurs the relevant terms in content clauses must be put in ‘oblique position.’ In an important sense, he says, such content clauses are not a matter of convention, for aside from characterizing our

³⁶⁰ Tyler Burge, ‘Individualism and the Mental,’ p.74.

perspective they 'are also our *primary means* of identifying mental states or events' at all.³⁶¹ Burge stops short of saying that our content clauses always reveal our real attitudes, but even so, his position here will loom large in his argument to come.

To begin, Burge proceeds to offer a number of thought experiments concerning our attitudes about social items that are expressed with words such as 'arthritis,' 'brisket,' 'contract,' etc. To focus the issues, it will be prudent to concentrate on his 'arthritis' thought experiment, which has three steps. In the first step of this experiment, he asks us to imagine that a subject possesses a variety of beliefs about arthritis, most of which are true. In particular, he says, this subject holds that arthritis occurs in the joints, that it impedes free movement, is painful, and the like. Burge then imagines that his subject also believes falsely that he has arthritis in his thigh. The mistake this agent makes, he says, is that he believes that arthritis is all that we take it to be, that it is a disease of the joints, yet he has just expanded its extension to include the muscles. Burge postulates that his subject eventually visits his doctor and complains that 'I have arthritis in my thigh,' and his doctor corrects him. But when his doctor corrects his actual world subject, this subject does not object, but rather just changes his beliefs to accord with expert opinion.

Burge then asks us to imagine a counterfactual subject, whose physiology and behavior remain constant to the actual one, but who lives in a different linguistic community. In this community, he says, his subject has the same experiences as the last one, and also believes that he has arthritis in the joints and thigh. This subject also believes that the extension of 'arthritis' includes both the

³⁶¹ Ibid., p.77.

joints and muscles. Burge says that here, as in most such thought experiments, there is one difference. In this linguistic community, he says, arthritis is socially taxonomized as ‘a disease that occurs in the joints *and* muscles.’ It may be that we do not have a name for this disease in our community, but we can call it ‘tharthritis’ to talk about it here. Burge notes that his counterfactual subject has full understanding of his disease, and so does not make any mistake. He says that when this subject goes to see his doctor and says ‘I have tharthritis in my thigh,’ this occasions a treatment. It is plain that, at this point, his twins must diverge in physiology and behavior. This is no matter, for his point only concerns their belief contents when they are still twins.

To conclude, Burge offers an interpretation of his counterfactual subject. His counterfactual subject, he says, before his doctor visit, has been physically and behaviorally the same as his actual world subject, but even so, ‘he *lacks* the attitudes commonly attributed with content clauses containing ‘arthritis’ in oblique position.’ In particular, he says, this subject lacks occurrent thoughts and beliefs that he has arthritis in the thigh. Burge insists that this should not come as a surprise, for given that arthritis is a disease that is part of the actual linguistic community and not his, ‘it is hard to see how he could have picked up the notion of arthritis.’³⁶² Burge concludes that his actual and counterfactual twins may have been, up to this point, physically and behaviorally the same, but their belief contents still differ. He claims that the differences seem to ‘stem from differences from outside these subjects, from the norms of their *social* environments,’ and their respective attempts to defer to these. This is plainly a radical result, for it entails that, regardless of the fact that these subjects process information and act

³⁶² Ibid., p.79.

in ways that are indistinguishable, the norms of our linguistic communities changes their belief contents.³⁶³

In point of fact, Burge seems to offer a simple arthritis thought experiment, and intends to prove his social externalism by doing so. But it is important to examine his argument carefully, for so often, both he and those who summarize his position move so quickly that it is natural to wonder why his argument has created such a stir. The fact is that his argument is quite complex, and it presupposes a position on many issues in the philosophy of mind, most of which he needs to defend. It will be prudent, before getting into any of the details, to cite his premises and conclusion. Burge argues from the difference in ascriptions of belief contents to his subjects, to their really having different contents.

1. The propositional attitudes that the actual subject has are ascribable by using the term 'arthritis,' even though he has incomplete understanding of the concept of it (premise).
2. The attitudes that the counterfactual subject has are ascribable by using the term 'tharthritis,' and he has, as a matter of hypothesis, complete understanding of it (premise).
3. The actual and counterfactual subjects have had, before their respective doctor visits, the same life history, or have shared the same physical and behavioral states (premise).

³⁶³ Burge puts this point quite generally, and says that 'propositional attitudes partly depend for their content on social factors independent of the individual (p.85). There are no exceptions here, he says, and so it follows that 'social context infects even the distinctly mental features of attributions.' Burge insists that 'no mental phenomena are insular,' such that all content is really social (p.79).

4. The attitude contents that the actual subject has about arthritis are different from the attitude contents the counterfactual subject has concerning tharthritis (from 1-3).
5. The difference that separates the actual and counterfactual subjects, their attitude contents, are determined by their *social* environments (from 1-4)

In this argument, Burge claims that for his actual or counterfactual subjects, what makes the difference in their belief contents are *social* norms, and their attempts to *defer* to these. He insists that his argument appeals to ordinary intuition, and has a broad application. It can be run '*wherever* it is possible to ascribe content where the subject incompletely understands belief content,' although he later lifts this restriction.³⁶⁴ To make his thought experiment more plausible, he says that he has explained the premises and conclusion of his argument to many people 'unspoiled by conventional philosophical training,' all of whom find the three steps of his experiment 'painfully obvious.' If this is so, his arguments will be difficult to counter.

Burge says that the first step of his arthritis thought experiment, concerning the interpretation of his actual world subject, 'is the most likely to encounter opposition.'³⁶⁵ This is because, he says, if it could be established that his actual world subject does *not* have arthritis beliefs in the first place, nothing else follows. But he insists that the motive for this criticism is the assumption that

³⁶⁴ Burge, in 'Intellectual Norms and the Foundations of Mind,' offers new twin thought experiments that do *not* rely on incomplete understanding. He says that subjects can *doubt* 'perceptually backed, indexically mediated applications' of terms, and form nonstandard theories of objects, p. 703. Burge says twin subjects doubt these in ways that presuppose different social communities.

³⁶⁵ Tyler Burge, 'Individualism and the Mental,' p.89.

‘we do not have any attitudes about concepts we do not fully understand,’ and says that this assumption is without foundation.³⁶⁶ Burge says that we have a bias toward taking natural discourse literally, but this is not arbitrary. This bias reflects our complex practice of ascribing belief content, and rests on the following two principles:

1. In cases in which a subject incompletely understands attitude contents and uses a term that expresses it, it is correct to interpret what he says or thinks in a *literal* way.
2. In such cases, the subject possesses attitude contents that are provided by the standard content clause he uses. In other words, his beliefs are captured by the clauses we employ.

Burge says that these two principles are latent in his previous comments about content clauses, which concern our attempts to understand the cognitive perspective of subjects. The important point here is that, if these principles are plausible, he will have gone quite a way towards defending his interpretation of his actual world subject in the first stage of his arthritis thought experiment. But even so, Burge admits that he has ignored an important distinction. In particular, there is a great difference between cases of *incomplete* understanding wherein we would still ascribe to a subject the usual belief contents, and cases of *complete* misunderstanding, where we would more naturally reinterpret a subject as having different belief contents.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p.89.

In point of fact, Burge faces the problem of citing the conditions under which a subject merely incompletely understands a concept, as opposed to complete misunderstanding. Instead of doing this, he says that ‘the subject’s overall linguistic competence, his allegiance and responsibility to communal standards, the degree and source of misunderstanding, and the point of the report, all affect the issue.’³⁶⁷ This is an odd position for him to take, though, for his whole position rests on his saying that, even in cases of incomplete understanding, subjects still have the attitudes in question. Burge concedes that ‘it is important to allow for different levels or types of competence,’ and that there is a *minimal* level needed for ascriptions.³⁶⁸ He says that when a subject thinks about something entirely unrelated, he misunderstands the concept. But also, when someone parrots beliefs, he fails to grasp the concepts involved. Burge says that in such cases, subjects ‘possess none of the thoughts *semantically related* to that concept, and so make none of the relevant *inferences*’ about them.³⁶⁹ In these situations, he says, literal ascriptions of belief contents to subjects are not warranted, after all.

Burge says that the cases where subjects completely misunderstand the concepts involved, insofar as they intend something else entirely, or the cases where they merely parrot the apparent beliefs of others, ‘do not exhaust the whole story of incomplete understanding.’ He says that, such cases are rare, and should not be allowed to rule our intuitions. In other cases of incomplete understanding, all we need to do is ‘to *keep track of*, and often make explicit, the nature and extent of his deviance.’³⁷⁰ He claims that we need only cite the eccentricity that any given

³⁶⁷ Ibid., p.91.

³⁶⁸ Tyler Burge, ‘Reply to Antoni Gomila Benejam,’ p.276.

³⁶⁹ Tyler Burge, ‘Individualism and the Mental,’ p.91.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p.91.

subject evinces, and then we can make allowance for his errors. But even given such rules of thumb, the question still remains as to when subjects have incomplete understanding of concepts, as opposed to having entirely different ones. Burge does not offer any serious advice here, but merely insists that, since we do attribute contents with incomplete understanding, and since such literal ascriptions of belief content are our primary means to understanding others, we should treat agents literally whenever possible. He insists that this is not charity, and so ‘unless there are *clear reasons* for construing discourse as ambiguous, we should not do so.’³⁷¹ Bit plainly, this response does not delineate what the limits of incomplete understanding really are.

To defend his actual world subject in the first step of his arthritis thought experiment Burge describes four methods for reinterpreting him, each of which concludes that he does not have arthritis beliefs. He is rather short with the first two methods. Burge says that the first method relegates the difference between his actual or counterfactual subjects to the fact that they differ only in their ‘beliefs *of* objects,’ which they may yet be ignorant of. He counters that his arthritis thought experiment ‘can appeal to only paradigmatic cases of beliefs in content clauses the relevant terms of which are put in oblique position,’ yet can make the same point.³⁷² Burge says that the second method of reinterpretation of his actual world subject claims that he merely has ‘indefinite beliefs,’ and so, only confused ones. He responds that his actual subject has definite beliefs, for ‘the subject and his fellows typically know and agree on precisely how to confirm or infirm his beliefs.’³⁷³ Burge also suggests that this objection that his actual

³⁷¹ Ibid., p.91.

³⁷² Andrew Woodfield, ‘Thought and the Social Community,’ p.124.

³⁷³ Burge insists that the beliefs of his actual world subject would be ‘inexplicable if it is assumed that the subject must fully understand his attitude contents’ (p.100). But also, he insists that this is

subject may have only indefinite beliefs about arthritis is only plausible in light of the assumption that 'literal attribution of contents requires full understanding,' which he questions.

Burge claims that the two remaining attempts at reinterpreting his actual world subject in the first step of his arthritis thought experiment are more challenging. It will be prudent to go slower here, for these attempts will reveal all the potential problems with his thought experiment, and hence, with his social externalism. Burge says that since these attempts at reinterpretation are related, he addresses them in tandem. The third of these methods, he says, attempts to ascribe beliefs to his actual world subject at the object level 'that capture the misconception, thus replacing contents that are apparently false by ones that are actually true.'³⁷⁴ If this is correct, he says, when his actual subject says that he has arthritis in his thigh, we should ascribe attitudes to him that reflect not the concept of arthritis, but rather that reflect his idiosyncratic concept of tharthritis, where this has an extension that includes ailments in the joints and muscles. Burge says that, according to this objection, his actual world subject in the first step of his arthritis thought experiment does not have any arthritis beliefs at the object level, but instead only has tharthritis ones. But since his actual world subject does not have arthritis beliefs, nothing follows.

Burge says that the last, closely related, attempt at reinterpreting his actual world subject in the first step of his arthritis thought experiment is metalinguistic. In other words, he says, if the object level description of his actual subject is correct, that he has an idiosyncratic set of belief contents about tharthritis, he still

an unreasonable restriction anyway, because 'limiting oneself to fully understood attitudes provides no significant advantage in finding elegant and simple semantic theories of natural language' (p.102).

³⁷⁴ Ibid., p.93.

seems to be in error about something. The actual subject commits an error not about what object he is thinking about, since he is thinking about tharthritis, but about the linguistic way in which he expresses his beliefs. It may be that his actual world subject, since he has no word for his idiosyncratic concept of tharthritis in his community, does not have any choice but to commit this metalinguistic error, but that is that. Burge says that this objection entails that the actual and counterfactual subjects have the same set of object level belief contents about tharthritis, but the former makes a linguistic error about how to express them. This reveals that his errors here are metalinguistic in nature. The only difference between these subjects is that one makes a metalinguistic error, and this is not sufficient for a difference in belief content.

Burge says that if these object level and metalinguistic reinterpretations of his actual world subject in the first step of his arthritis thought experiment were to stand, there would be no issue of his having belief contents about arthritis. To counter these reinterpretations, he responds in two general ways. The first way, he says, is that both attempts at reinterpretation 'do not respect our *ordinary* practices of propositional attitude ascriptions.' This is not to advocate a blind devotion to such practice, he says, but rather, since our ordinary practices of ascription are our primary means to understand each other, they should be respected whenever possible.³⁷⁵ Burge also responds in a second way, and claims that the object level and metalinguistic attempts at reinterpretation of his actual world subject is that these procedures 'do not respect what the actual or counterfactual subjects would say and do' when they realize that they have been

³⁷⁵ Tyler Burge, 'Individualism and the Mental', p.94.

using the term arthritis incorrectly.³⁷⁶ These attempts at reinterpretation do not interpret the verbal *reactions* of his subjects correctly in circumstances where they may be challenged.

To counter these object level and metalinguistic methods of reinterpretation of his actual world subject in his thought experiment, Burge makes two observations about our ordinary practices of ascribing literal belief contents. He observes, first of all, that the trouble with ascribing that arthritis contents to his actual subject is that ‘the appropriate restrictions on the *applications* of this new term would be unclear.’³⁷⁷ It is not clear, he says, what would count as that arthritis, for there are no guides to getting ascriptions of it correct. Burge says instead that ‘it is much simpler and equally informative to suppose that this subject has arthritis belief contents.’ He acknowledges that, in many cases, we can misunderstand what a subject believes.³⁷⁸ But even so, he says, to avoid misunderstanding, all we need to do is to keep the nature and extent of his deviance in mind, and we can follow ordinary practice and ascribe literal belief contents to him.³⁷⁹ Burge says that so long as we flag his eccentricity, predictions will not go awry. He says that once we have done do, we will not ascribe contents to him that he does not have.

Burge makes a second observation about our ordinary practice of ascribing literal belief contents to those who exhibit incomplete understanding, such as his actual world subject. He observes that, in special circumstances, we

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.95.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p.95.

³⁷⁸ Burge admits that there are limits here, for ‘when deviance is huge, attributions demand reinterpretation of what the subject says’ (p.91). But even so, he says, ‘frequently, common practice seems to allow us to cancel the misleading suggestions by making explicit the deviance of the subject’ (p.91). But unfortunately, he does not offer any guidance as to how to do this with any reliability.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 96.

do ascribe metalinguistic belief contents to subjects like these. But he says that these ascriptions 'are often quite misleading,' for two reasons. These subjects, first of all, may not be interested in how they express themselves, and so their 'reasoning does not fix upon words.' But second, he says that subjects like his actual world subject may not have much consciousness of their words. He insists that, actually, 'this sort of consciousness occurred rather late in human history.'³⁸⁰ Burge notes that to take account of the fact that subjects have either a lack of interest or consciousness of their words, 'there is a general presumption that the subject is reasoning at the object level, all things being equal.'³⁸¹ He notes that ordinary practice reflects this, and so we are circumspect when ascribing metalinguistic belief contents to those with incomplete understanding, such as his actual world subject.

To defend his actual world subject in the first stage of his arthritis thought experiment against these object level and metalinguistic reinterpretations, Burge makes an observation about his reaction to correction. In particular, he notes that these reinterpretations are committed to 'a highly implausible account of how the individual would react when he discovers that he had been using words about arthritis incorrectly.'³⁸² If these methods of reinterpretation of his actual world subject were correct, upon seeing his doctor, he would 'defend his concept of tharthritis,' and would say that he 'chose the wrong word to express it.'³⁸³ Burge notes that when his actual world subject consults his doctor, he does *not* say that he has been misunderstood in any way, which in turn reveals his 'willingness to

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p.97.

³⁸¹ Ibid., p.97.

³⁸² Ibid., p.97.

³⁸³ Ibid., p.97.

submit his statement and belief to the arbitration of an authority.³⁸⁴ This suggests that his actual world subject, regardless of his incomplete understanding, wants to be taken literally as having arthritis beliefs. It follows that if these object level and metalinguistic reinterpretations of his actual world subject get his reactions wrong, they too must be incorrect.

Burge concedes that this does not yet answer *why* his actual world subject would react that his belief contents about arthritis should be left to the arbitration of his doctor. His answer to this is his social externalism. Burge claims that whenever such an actual subject ‘has gained a certain competence in large relevant parts of his language, and has assumed a general responsibility for communal conventions governing language symbols,’ this affects the way in which belief contents are ascribed to him.³⁸⁵ Burge says that, given such competence and responsibility, we assume that such actual world subjects have stable mental lives, and are responsive to a host of details. In particular, given our assumed responsibility and competence here, ‘ascriptions of belief content to us take on a certain *inertia*,’ and this obtains, regardless of our incomplete understanding.³⁸⁶ Burge says that the details of the conditions of this inertial force ‘are doubtless complicated and vague,’ but it still exists. It follows that his actual world subject submits his belief contents to the authority of his doctor so as to do his part in maintaining the ‘communal conventions governing, and conceptions associated with, language symbols he is disposed to use.’³⁸⁷

Burge offers a second reason why his actual world subject would submit his belief contents to the authority of his doctor, which is more important to his social

³⁸⁴ Ibid., p.101.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p.114.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p.114.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., p.116.

externalism. In particular, he claims that his actual world subject would submit because 'linguistic symbols, interpreted in established ways, are crucial to explanation and prediction, as well as cooperative enterprises.'³⁸⁸ But since this is so, he says, whenever his actual world subject suspects his epistemological weakness in relation to a given subject, which is quite often, he is careful about the symbols he uses. This practice allows him to exploit his linguistic symbols about the world to their best advantage. This actual world subject reacts the way he does 'to secure the social advantages of maintaining communal standards of communication.' Burge admits that this is not a fully worked out explanation of the reaction of his actual world subject, but he says that it points in the right direction. This direction allows us 'to explain behavior not viewed in isolation, but also in comparison to others, against socially established standards.'³⁸⁹ This may not be a fully worked out thesis, he says, but it leads us away from theories that ignore the social world.

5.3

If Burge is correct about his arthritis thought experiment and if his social externalism follows, this seems to provide an easy reply to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. It is worth saying that, at this point, he only hoped to offer a theory of attitude content that took account of the social influence on it. But as many philosophers have noted, by doing so, he contributes to the problem of resolving the issue of scepticism about the external world. If Burge is correct in his social externalism, we have the belief contents we do only because of our

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p.116.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., p.116.

membership in our linguistic communities, and because of our intentions to defer to the norms that these communities provide. This suggests the following argument, which runs from the existence of such communities, to the external world: In other words, the argument is:

1. The attitude contents we have, such as our belief contents, are mediated by our linguistic community, by the social norms it provides (premise).
2. In point of fact, we have arthritis beliefs (premise).
3. There is necessarily an arthritis linguistic community of which we are members (from 1 and 2).
4. The external world exists (from 3).

It follows that if Burge is correct here, his social externalism reveals that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is false. But even so, he concedes that his position cannot be used as an 'easy argument against scepticism.'³⁹⁰ This should be obvious, he says, for although we may have *acquired* our arthritis beliefs in a linguistic community, we might be out of step with it *now*. Burge also concedes that we have arthritis beliefs and live in the arthritis community that we think we do, but many of our *other* beliefs about that community are out of step with it. But since these possibilities are compatible with his argument above, he admits that his position 'provides only general guarantees against scepticism about the external

³⁹⁰ Tyler Burge, 'Individualism and Self-Knowledge,' p.655.

world, and nothing more.³⁹¹ Burge still holds that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is false.

In point of fact, Burge has an equivocal attitude towards Cartesian scepticism about the external world. In certain cases, he says that we possess 'near immunity from error,' although he does not say what these cases are.³⁹² He later concedes that real the problem for his social externalism 'lies in avoiding begging the question against the sceptic about the external world.'³⁹³ In particular, he admits that his position owes much to our '*empirical* background knowledge,' and so, seems to beg the question. Burge says that the sceptic about the external world will always ask 'what justifies the invocation of physical facts, and why that does not beg the question.'³⁹⁴ But even so, he says, his social externalism can still be a component in an answer scepticism about the external world for it can 'create a rational *presumption* that certain particular types of beliefs could not be held unless they bore an appropriate, albeit indirect, relation to some environment.'³⁹⁵ Burge concedes that this presumption is weak protection against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, because we want to know more than that we are in some environment, and because we want to know that this presumption is justified.

Burge offers a surprisingly weak reply to Cartesian scepticism about the external world. He may not succeed at all with his social externalism argument against such scepticism, for two reasons. The first is that his responses to the four attempts at reinterpreting his actual world subject in the first step of his arthritis thought experiment do not all succeed, and the second is that his position has two

³⁹¹ Ibid, p.655.

³⁹² Tyler Burge, 'Some Reflections on Scepticism: Reply to Stroud,' p.335.

³⁹³ Ibid., p.339.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p.341.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p.343.

very implausible consequences about how we *count* beliefs and contents. Burge makes a good case against the first two reinterpretations of his actual subject. In particular, his actual subject does not merely have beliefs of objects, but rather contents that can be put in content clauses, the relevant terms of which are in oblique position. He is also correct that, regardless of any incomplete understanding, his actual subject has definite belief contents, in that they are easily confirmed or infirmed. These responses are not controversial. Burge is not as successful with his responses to the third and fourth reinterpretations of his actual world subject in the first step of his arthritis thought experiment. To see this, let us examine his defenses in terms of ordinary practice of belief ascription and reactions to potential correction.

Burge does not seem to be correct about our ordinary practices of belief content ascription. There are good reasons to hold that his actual world subject really does have object level beliefs about tharthritis. He says of ‘tharthritis’ that ‘the restrictions on the applications of this new term would be unclear’ and so arbitrary. But there need not be any problems of this sort here. To see this, notice that he describes his actual world subject without any detail. This is the reason why the applications of this new term ‘tharthritis’ are unclear. If we knew more about why his actual subject believes what he does, we would know how this term is supposed to work, which would not be arbitrary. Burge also says that it is ‘much simpler and equally informative’ to ascribe arthritis belief contents to his actual world subject. He says that we must ‘keep track of the nature and extent of his deviance,’ and so flag his eccentricity. But any requirement that we flag his deviance and eccentricity would put an unreasonable burden on our ascribing arthritis belief contents to him. In other words, since we may not know how his

actual world subject is deviant and eccentric, it is simpler and more informative to ascribe tharthritis beliefs to him.

Burge may also be incorrect in claiming that the error that his actual world subject commits is not metalinguistic. He claims that the error of his subject is not metalinguistic, for he may not be interested in words, or again, may not have consciousness of his words. Burge claims that because of this, 'there is a general presumption that the subject is reasoning at the object level, all things considered.' But even if he is correct in all of these points, they do not affect the *source* of his error. In other words, his actual world subject may not be interested in or conscious of the words he uses to express his beliefs, and we may presume he is talking about objects, but even so, his *error* may still not be about objects. To see this, notice that it is still true that his actual world subject does not have a word, apart from arthritis, to express his belief contents. It follows that he is *forced* to choose the wrong word to expresses his belief, since he has no other word to do so. It may be that his actual world subject is not interested or has no consciousness of words, and even if we presume that he speaks about objects, but he may make a metalinguistic error. In point of fact, this metalinguistic error may be his only error.

This gets worse, for Burge does not seem to be correct about the reactions to potential correction that his actual world subject might have either. He says that upon correction, his subject 'does not defend his tharthritis belief,' and also does not say that he had been using the wrong word to express it. Burge says that his actual subject is 'willing to submit his belief to the arbitration of authority.' But even if this is what would happen, he misses the significance of it. If his actual world subject reacts like this, it does not make it any more plausible that he

had arthritis beliefs beforehand. This is because, before his actual world subject consults his doctor, he still believed that arthritis occurs in the joints and muscles. It is still a live option that he adopts arthritis beliefs *for the first time* when he talks to his doctor. Burge may also be correct that his actual world subject ‘assumes a general responsibility for communal conventions,’ and again, that he ‘wants to make use of linguistic symbols’ to their best advantage, and so reacts as he does to insure that he can do these things. But if his subject wants to be responsible and use such symbols, this does not make it more plausible that he had arthritis beliefs beforehand.

But actually, Burge may not succeed against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for a second reason. In particular, he incurs a serious problem with his social externalism, concerning how he would *count* beliefs and contents. To see this, let us say that he has overcome all four attempts to reinterpret his actual subject, and also that the rest of his experiment goes through. But his social externalist methods of belief individuation demands that subjects have the wrong *amount* of belief contents, which seem to come into and pass out of existence mysteriously. To see this, let us imagine a different thought experiment concerning a single subject. This subject, let us say, is the captain of a sailboat, and is often at sea. He eventually enters into relations with two linguistic communities, two island paradises, in which there are two sets of linguistic conventions concerning ‘arthritis.’ This subject is a taciturn fellow, and so says nothing of his travels, and the two communities do not know of each other. In spite of his silence, and the lack of contact between the communities, the languages they speak are similar.

But as usual, there is a difference between these two island communities, which again concerns 'arthritis.' In the first island community, arthritis is a disease that occurs only in the joints and in the second, arthritis is a disease that occurs in both the joints and muscles. It follows that, just as in his original arthritis thought experiment, the island communities give 'arthritis' different extensions. In this new arthritis thought experiment there are other differences, and ones that should elicit contrary intuitions. This subject has spent a great deal of time in both island communities, and so is truly a member of *both*. He has had numerous conversations about arthritis in either community, but the difference in extension of 'arthritis' in either community has never been revealed to him. But by virtue of these conversations, he has come to believe that arthritis is a disease that occurs in the joints, the muscles, *and* the organs. In point of fact, this subject has given 'arthritis' a larger extension than it has in either of his two island communities, but does not know this. He has an incomplete understanding of arthritis in both communities.

Burge does not see that this new arthritis thought experiment raises a serious problem for social externalism. To see this, notice that, if this subject is considered as a member of the first island community, the belief contents he expresses by talking about arthritis will reflect an incomplete understanding of the concept of arthritis. If he is considered as a member of the second island community, the belief contents he expresses by talking about arthritis will reflect an incomplete understanding of that concept. Burge is fully aware of this possibility, and does not deny it. To his credit, he does not take the easy way out and say that there are no such situations. But even so, his response here is more a

testament to his not seeing the problem than anything else. In particular, he notes that:

Imagine that one underwent a series of switches, and one remained long enough to acquire concepts and perceptions appropriate to each situation. There can arise difficult questions about whether one is still employing thoughts from the departed situation or taking over thoughts appropriate to the new situation. I think that general principles govern such transitions, but such principles need not settle all borderline cases. Insofar as one finds problems associated with actual switching distracting, one could carry out the objection I am articulating in terms of counterfactual situations.³⁹⁶

In point of fact, Burge does not say what general principles he has in mind that could reveal the belief contents that our subject *really* has. But also, his is not a borderline case, but is quite central. It follows that, if we do not insist that this subject be reinterpreted in some manner, such as in one of the four ways cited above, then he has a *single* arthritis belief with *two* distinct contents. But it seems to be impossible that his single belief could have two contents. It should be noted that this problem of counting beliefs and contents derives simply from following the method of ascribing beliefs as social externalism recommends. It derives merely from taking those methods seriously, and then trying to determine what

³⁹⁶ Tyler Burge, 'Individualism and Self-Knowledge,' p.658.

beliefs and contents this subject has. Burge should have trouble resisting this reasoning, for it is his theory.

To see why this is a problem, imagine that our captain sails to any number of new island communities, all of which have different linguistic practices concerning 'arthritis.' In a few years, he becomes a full member of all of them, conversing with them at will about arthritis, although he personally holds that it is a word about a disease with a larger extension than those communities. It follows that his single arthritis belief now has multiplied contents. But actually, this seems to be quite impossible, for two reasons. The first is that mere membership in many communities does not seem to do anything to *produce* new belief contents for this subject. It seems that rather, he would still only have one belief and content, all through his travels. But this consequence raises a second problem. This is that the subject of this new arthritis thought experiment has only *one physical belief state* that is the basis for all of these new contents. But since his physical state has not changed, it is mysterious how this could be true. In other words, since his one physical belief state shows no physical trace of his new contents, there is no reason to hold that any of those new contents exist. It follows that social externalism seems to have two very implausible consequences, and so, something must be done to fix it.

These problems should be even more obvious if we imagine our subject trying to *express* his belief contents. To see this, imagine that in a conversation in a bar, our subject recalls a case of a friend who has 'arthritis' in one community, although that friend is no longer there. He is recalling this case for a companion in a different community. In the bar, the subject says that 'arthritis is a terrible disease,' and says that he hopes that neither he nor his present companion

contract it. But the question here is, in this conversation, what arthritis belief contents does he express when he speaks of this disease?³⁹⁷ The best approximate answer is that, in the conversation, when he refers to his friend, he refers to the arthritis of the first community, and when he refers to himself and his companion, he refers to the arthritis of his present community. But plainly, this is absurd, for he is surely referring to the *same* disease, whatever that is, all through this conversation. In point of fact, the only reason why this absurdity arises is because social externalism seems to demand that he has as many arthritis contents as there are communities of which he is a member, and also demands that his single belief state has different contents.

Burge might try to avoid these problems of how belief contents can pop into existence with community membership, and how the same physical belief state can have multiple contents in a variety of ways. In particular, he might deny that the subject of this new arthritis thought experiment *could* exist. He may say that there simply are no such subjects who are members of two or more linguistic communities. In point of fact, though, he does not say this, and even admits that in such cases, 'there will be deference through *memory* to the old community, *and* deference through current *practice* to the new community.'³⁹⁸ Burge might also dodge these two problems by saying that they merely reflect a prior adherence to physicalism, which he rejects. He does not say this either, and even says that 'there are systematic, even necessary, relations between mental events

³⁹⁷ Tobies Grimaltos, in 'Terms and Content,' asks 'what arthritis proposition this subject *expresses*' in this conversation? He says that, since the communities have diseases with different truth conditions, he seems to 'express *two* different propositions,' in different parts of the conversation (p.44). Grimaltos makes the point that the subject only has one belief with one content, all along.

³⁹⁸ Tyler Burge, 'Reply to Tobies Grimaltos,' p.252.

and underlying physical processes.’³⁹⁹ This is so because, he says, supervenience is true, such that there is no change in mental states without some sort of change in physical states. It follows that if Burge is going to resolve these difficulties of how belief contents can pop into existence with community membership, and how a single physical belief state can have many contents, he will have to offer a different answer.

In point of fact, Burge may attack these problems of how beliefs can pop into existence with community membership, and how one physical belief state can have many contents, in another way. In particular, he may say that the subject in this new arthritis thought experiment does *not* have a single arthritis belief with two distinct contents, but rather has one belief that has the content of arthritis, and another belief that has the content of arthritis. In other words, this subject retains an arthritis belief and content *pair* for every community of which he is a member. This solution solves the trivial problem of any potential mismatch in the ratio of arthritis beliefs to contents, but any such mismatch is not really the worry here. But actually, this belief and content pair theory is vague, and admits of two versions. In the first version of this dual belief and content theory, the subject of this new arthritis thought experiment adopts belief and content pairs for each of the island communities of which he is a member. But as Burge knows, this theory solves neither the problem of how belief and content pairs can pop into existence with community membership, nor how one physical state can have multiple belief and content pairs.

Burge may then move onto the second version of this dual belief and content theory, which is that the subject of this new arthritis thought experiment

³⁹⁹ Tyler Burge, ‘Mind-Body Causation and Explanatory Practice,’ p.116.

adds and drops belief and content pairs as he travels, but always only has one pair at a time. This version of the theory may solve both of the above problems, but even so incurs a different one. In particular, this problem is that no social externalist would answer that this subject does this. To see this, recall that Burge offers arguments against all four attempts at reinterpretation of the actual world subject in the original arthritis thought experiment. The point is that plainly, these arguments apply here as well. In other words, if those arguments work, they show that this subject may just have incompletely understood various different arthritis concepts, but he still has enough mastery of them, that he should still be attributed beliefs about them. He incompletely understands those concepts, but still has belief contents about them nonetheless. But if this is so, it follows that there can be no social externalist motivation to say that this subject adds and drops belief and content pairs as he travels, but just has one belief and content pair at any given time.

In the end, Burge does not succeed with his argument for social externalism, and so he cannot use it against Cartesian scepticism about the external world. But as noted above, he has an equivocal attitude towards such scepticism. He seems to suggest that scepticism does not matter, so long as it cannot be used to support *individualism*. This is the position, he says, that the mind 'is independent of its environment,' or is self-contained.⁴⁰⁰ Burge implies that so long as scepticism about the external world cannot be used to support individualism, it is not troubling. To argue for this, he claims that Cartesian sceptical hypotheses cannot be used to support individualism.⁴⁰¹ Burge says that

⁴⁰⁰ Tyler Burge, 'Cartesian Error and the Objectivity of Perception,' p.119.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.119.

such sceptical hypotheses can be broken down into causal and epistemic components, and he examines these in turn.

These capitalize on the causal gap that we tend to assume there is between the world and its effects on us. It is possible that different causes could have produced the same effects, certainly the same physical effects on our sense organs. It follows that a person can be radically mistaken about the nature of the empirical world. There may be something causing the given person to have mental goings on, but the entities that lie at the ends of the relevant chains, and perhaps causal laws, are very different from what the person thinks. The same sensory effects could have been produced by a variety of different causes.⁴⁰²

In this passage, Burge notes that regardless of the state of the external world, we can always have the same belief contents, such that there is a causal gap between the two. If this is correct, he says, it would be odd to think that individualism might *not* be true. It seems that, apart from this, nothing more should be required to prove that individualism is true. The possibility of such different causal antecedents issuing in the same belief contents, this causal gap, seems to prove that belief content is independent of the environment, is self-contained. Burge concedes that, at first hearing, it may seem that such individualism is very plausible, and quite resistant to objection. But he says that this impression is

⁴⁰² Ibid., p.120.

misleading, for as a matter of fact, this causal gap 'is nothing that favors individualism.'

Burge says that the issues are not so simple here, for even though these Cartesian sceptical hypotheses reveal that potentially different causal antecedents might have caused our same belief contents, reveals a causal gap, this 'by itself does not favor the individualist position.'⁴⁰³ This is because it is one thing to say that different causal antecedents may issue in our having the same belief contents, and another to infer individualism from it. Burge says that this should be obvious, for 'the possibility that very different causal antecedents could issue in the same mental contents can be used *against* individualism.'⁴⁰⁴ He says that much of his work on social externalism has been spent showing how this is so, for 'both these sceptical hypotheses *and* my arguments against them make use of the possibility that different causal antecedents could have the same effects on the surfaces of the subject.'⁴⁰⁵ Burge insists that, since this is so, different causal antecedents issuing in the same belief contents, this causal gap, does not favor either position. It follows that if Cartesian sceptical hypotheses do not favor individualism, something else must do the work.

Burge suggests that since the force of such Cartesian hypotheses cannot derive from different causal antecedents issuing in the same belief contents, they must come from the claims they support about epistemology. In particular, he says, such epistemic claims suggest that we may be drastically wrong about the nature of the world. Burge notes that again issues are not so simple, for 'until this claim is turned into a claim about the difficulty of *justifying* our beliefs, it has no

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p.121.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p.121.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., p.121.

sceptical force.’⁴⁰⁶ But actually, that *is* what Cartesian sceptical hypotheses support, for they imply that when we attempt to justify our beliefs, we cannot adequately do so. But again, he insists that even though our attempts at justification do not go well at times, ‘this is still nothing that immediately favors individualism.’⁴⁰⁷

In this regard, let us assume that we *know* or have *reasonable beliefs about* what the empirical world is like. And let us grant that the thought experiments show that we could be radically mistaken in our beliefs. That is, it is epistemically possible that the world be, or has been, very different from the way we reasonably think it is, or even know it is. This is a concession that we may be deeply fallible. We can imagine being, as perhaps even being shown to be, pretty *spectacularly wrong*. It is not a concession that there is any reason to think that the beliefs that we are conceding might be wrong, really are wrong.⁴⁰⁸

Burge says that these Cartesian sceptical hypotheses show that it is epistemically possible that we are spectacularly deceived. But he says that, even if this is possible, it still may not help the individualist. The reason this is so, he says, is that two questions have been confused here. Burge says that it may be epistemically possible that we are so deceived, but that is not yet ‘to concede anything about how our thoughts about the world are *determined* to be what they

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p.121.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p.121.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p.122.

are.’⁴⁰⁹ In other words, to ask what our thoughts would be counterfactually is to ask a very different question from those cited in the sceptical hypotheses. Burge insists that there is ‘some tendency in such hypotheses to move without argument from questions of epistemic possibility to questions of *individuation*’ of belief content.⁴¹⁰

Burge says that what the individualist needs to justify in this argument is the following argumentative move. The individualist postulates an epistemically possible situation, wherein ‘things might have been radically otherwise without our surfaces being affected,’ such that, our attempts to justify our beliefs are inadequate.⁴¹¹ But from that epistemic possibility, he says, the individualist makes an inference is made about the nature of belief contents, which is that ‘things might have been otherwise and our thoughts would remain *just as they are*.’⁴¹² But he says that it is a further question of how those states are determined to be what they are, which is what needs to be supported.⁴¹³ Burge says that if individualists even offer arguments for this inference, they typically concern ‘the authoritative character of our knowledge of our own thoughts.’ He notes that, even though we are authoritative concerning our thoughts, ‘we are *not* authoritative about what our thoughts about the external world would be if the counterfactual cases were true.’⁴¹⁴ It follows that self-knowledge does not suggest any individuation of belief contents.

In point of fact, Burge does not make good his case about different causal antecedents, about the causal gap. He claims that Cartesian sceptics about the

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., p.122.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., p.123.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p.124.

⁴¹² Ibid., p.124.

⁴¹³ Ibid., p.124.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p.124.

external world and social externalists alike make *equal* use of the causal gap between the external world and our belief contents, and so it does not favor either position. But actually, the sceptic and the externalist use this causal gap in very different ways. The sceptic uses this causal gap to show that the world may be very different than we believe. By contrast, the social externalist *only* uses this causal gap to point out how, apart from cases of isolated cases of error, belief contents 'are determined by their *normal* relations between the person and the environment, against a background of veridicality.'⁴¹⁵ Burge cannot so easily claim that, just like the sceptic, he too can make use of such a causal gap between the external world and our belief contents, for he does no such thing. He uses this causal gap in a way that *already* supposes that the belief content is individuated by veridical interaction with the external world. It is still an open question whether the sceptic can use this causal gap, and if so, whether his doing so favors individualism.

Burge does not make his case about the epistemic possibility of Cartesian sceptical hypotheses either. He asks us to assume that 'we *know* or have reasonable beliefs about what the empirical world is like.' But plainly, this is an odd thing to say here, for it assumes that such scepticism about the external world is false. But immediately afterwards, he seems to retract this, and says that 'let us grant that the thought experiments show that we could be radically mistaken in these beliefs.' This is a puzzling pair of passages, for if we already know what the world is like, we are in an epistemic position to know much that scepticism about the external world questions. In other words, it is not epistemically possible that such Cartesian scepticism about the external world is true, after all. If he really

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p.131.

means this, he never considers such scepticism to be possible in the first place. But if we make the contrary assumption, that Cartesian scepticism about the world *is* actually epistemically possible, everything changes. If we might be radically mistaken about the world, that will have implications for the individuation of belief content.

In conclusion, Burge fails in his attempt to use his social externalism as an argument against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for three main reasons. In particular, he begins by offering his arthritis thought experiment in support of his social externalism. He admits that even if he is successful here, his results only amount to a 'general guarantee against scepticism,' and he may beg the question against it, regardless. But second, Burge cannot use his arthritis thought experiment to support his social externalism anyway. This is because, in his arthritis thought experiment, his actual world subject does *not* have arthritis belief contents, and so nothing follows about scepticism. Burge fails against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, for a third reason. His social externalism has two implausible consequences about how we should count beliefs and contents, and so is probably false anyway. Burge eventually appears to concede that he does not care much about Cartesian scepticism about the external world, so long as it cannot be used to support individualism, which he opposes on independent grounds.

Chapter Six

6.1

Ludwig Wittgenstein, in *Zettel*, says that ‘one of the most dangerous ideas for a philosopher is, oddly enough, that we think with our heads.’⁴¹⁶ He insists that the idea of ‘thinking in an enclosed space, gives him something occult.’⁴¹⁷ In recent years, Gregory McCulloch has gone so far as to say that semantic or content internalism is the product of ‘a kind of bewitchment,’ and that apart from that, ‘there is no argument for it at all.’⁴¹⁸ In this chapter, I argue that internalism is by no means dangerous or occult, and surely is not the product of any kind of bewitchment. In this section, I argue instead that once such emotive caricatures of semantic or content internalism are discarded, it can be seen to be a scientifically respectable position about the mind. The proper attitude towards such internalism, so it seems to me, is not to treat it as the bane of the philosophy of mind, but rather to develop the best version of it. In particular, I hold that once the outlines of semantic or content internalism are clear, it will be seen that it is a rather prosaic position, and one that should be more of an assumption than a real issue in the philosophy of mind.

In section two, I return to Descartes, and address his cogito argument, which is his first step in establishing his foundation for knowledge, and in determining his position on the mind. In this section, I address the concern over

⁴¹⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, p.605.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.606.

⁴¹⁸ Gregory McCulloch, in his *Game of the Name*, says that the philosophy of mind has been ‘subject centered’ and it has ‘barely recovered’ (p.218). But given this unfortunate fact, he insists, modern internalists, ‘are still under a kind of bewitchment’ (p.222). McCulloch says that he can ‘think of *no other reason* why externalism is greeted with such incredulous stares’ when it is propounded (p.222).

whether he intends his cogito argument as an *intuition* or as an *inference*, for this makes a difference as to what he really proves. I argue that he intended his cogito argument as a complex inference, and as such, it does not deliver the conclusion he hopes. It does not prove that he thinks and exists, but only that *something* does. In this section, I also argue that Descartes adopts a radical kind of semantic or content internalism. In particular, he claims that meaning or content is how anything *consciously seems* to him. But because of this, he must answer the objection that if meaning or content is merely conscious seeming, this leads to an infinite regress of such seemings. He does not escape this problem, but is still less committed to his conscious seeming position than is usually recognized. His radical form of semantic or content internalism is but a tenuous proposal, although it is plausible.

In section three, I address what Descartes says about substance dualism, or his claims that his mind and body are separate substances, yet causally interact. In particular, I argue that his arguments for mind and body separation are fraught with mistakes, and so prove nothing. But also, even if he could establish that mind and body are different, the two may never actually separate, and so their separation remains only potential. In this section, I also argue that Descartes does not manage to prove that his mind and body causally interact either. In particular, he says that the mind is located in the brain, and then fails to delineate how that explains their interaction. Descartes also says that his mind is not located in his brain, but rather, the two are intermingled, and this seems even more mysterious. But my point here is not only that he is incorrect about his substance dualism, but also that, even if his arguments fail, they still show that the mind itself, and its meanings or contents, are internal to the person. In the end, Descartes offers a

radical form of or content internalism in terms of conscious seeming, but a faulty theory of mind to support it.

In section four, I argue that semantic or content internalism *is* true, insofar as meanings or contents are determined by the *intrinsic* factors of the person, such that these are *narrow*. In particular, this is meaning or content that supervenes on brain states, that is relevant to causal explanations of behavior, and that represents the world in a certain way.⁴¹⁹ If this general characterization of narrow meaning or content is correct, supervenience, causal relevance, and representational ability are its essential properties. In the literature, though, there are at least three different versions of narrow meaning or content. In this section, I argue that although these versions have their virtues, they each *accept* the intuition behind semantic or content externalism, which is that there is a necessary connection between meaning or content and parts of the world, after all.⁴²⁰ But then, these versions of narrow meaning or content accept that meaning or content only becomes truth conditional after it is wedded to broad content. In this section, I suggest that narrow meaning or content should be constructed on the assumption that such externalism is false. If this is correct meaning or content can have truth conditions of its own, and is just ordinary meaning or content.⁴²¹

In section five, I turn from narrow meaning or content to a theory of mind that supports it, which is the identity theory of mind and brain. To begin, I

⁴¹⁹ Ned Block, 'What Narrow Content is Not' p.37.

⁴²⁰ In other words, these contemporary versions of narrow meaning or content accept that assumption E from chapter one, that 'there is *no* necessary connection between mind and world,' is false. But that assumption, as we have seen, is far more intuitive than its denial. It is so, just because our relation to the world is merely causal, but anything stronger relation beyond that is very difficult to establish.

⁴²¹ Tim Crane, in his 'All the Difference in the World,' notes that semantic or contentful states are, in a way, 'neither broad nor narrow,' since 'narrow mindedness, and the notion of narrow meaning or content were only introduced in *response* to the challenge of externalism'(p.21). He says that before the advent of externalism, philosophers thought of semantic or contentful states as narrow ones.

address the *type* identity theory of U. T. Place and J. J. C. Smart. I argue that their version of the identity theory is too strong, because it presupposes 'psychophysical laws' between mental and physical properties that do not exist, or are chauvinistic, although is true otherwise. In this section, I follow Donald Davidson and defend a *token* version of the identity theory, or what he calls 'anomalous monism.' This is the position that mental and physical *events* are identical, but that there are no laws between them. But as many philosophers have said, even within his event ontology, anomalous monism renders mental properties causally irrelevant, and so epiphenomenal. To answer this objection, I follow Cynthia and Graham Macdonald, and claim that the event ontology behind anomalous monism can be clarified to show that mental and physical properties can share *instances* within single events, and so both can be causally relevant. If this change works, anomalous monism emerges as a plausible version of the identity theory of mind and brain.

In this chapter, though, my intentions are limited. In particular, I return to Descartes, not to fully explore his cogito argument and substance dualism, but to show that even though these arguments fail, they reveal that his radical form of semantic or content internalism in terms of conscious seeming is plausible. In turn, this should show that his cogito and even his substance dualist arguments can be divorced from his internalism, which should mitigate much of the fear of the latter. In this chapter, I discuss narrow meaning or content, which should convey much of is wrong with previous versions of narrow meaning or content, and more importantly should suggest the right course to take, although not in any detailed way. In this section, I finally address Place and Smart, and then Davidson on the identity theory of mind and brain, again not to fully explore

these positions, but rather to show that anomalous monism is a plausible kind of identity theory that provides way to ground semantic or content internalism in terms of conscious seeming. The identity theory reveals that such semantic or content internalism is not an dangerous or occult position, but just places meaning or content within the physical world

6.2

In his First Meditation, Descartes uses his metaphysical doubts to establish a foundation for knowledge. He insists that such doubts are necessary so as to not assent to unwarranted beliefs, and eventually to free his mind from prejudice. His doubts may yet fail him with regard to this overall project, but they do reveal that his beliefs may be both indubitable and false, which in itself is a success. Descartes then does not see how to resolve his doubts.⁴²² He has doubted all his beliefs, and so may never have any certainty. But soon into his Second Meditation, he recovers his confidence. Descartes now claims that he *has* overcome his doubts with regard to his famous *cogito argument*. In particular, he insists that:

I was persuaded that there was nothing at all in the world: was I likewise persuaded that I did not exist? Not at all: of a surety I did exist if I persuaded myself of something, or merely because I thought of something mentally. But what if there is some deceiver or other, who is very powerful and very cunning. Then without a

⁴²² HR 1, p.148.

doubt I also exist if he manages to deceive me, and let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think I am something. So after having reflected all things, we must come to the conclusion that this proposition: I am, I exist, is true each time that I pronounce it.⁴²³

In this passage, Descartes offers his *cogito argument*, wherein he uses the single certain premise that ‘I think,’ and infers the equally certain conclusion that ‘I exist.’ He does not cite the premise and conclusion here, but that is his argument nonetheless.⁴²⁴ Descartes defines thought as ‘anything he is immediately conscious of.’⁴²⁵ This definition includes his consciousness of *all* his sensory and cognitive states.⁴²⁶ He says that he exists as a *substance*, which he defines as something ‘capable of independent existence.’⁴²⁷ But his cogito argument does not prove much, and so he says that there is a risk that he might ‘take some other object in place of myself,’ such that he would go astray with this bit of knowledge.⁴²⁸

Descartes adds together his premise and conclusion, and makes the claim that ‘I am *essentially* a thinking substance.’ The real outcome to his cogito argument is that he is a thinking substance, insofar as this is what constitutes him.

⁴²³ HR 1, p.150.

⁴²⁴ In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes does cite the traditional argument. In this place, he says ‘I wished to think all things false, I saw it as essential that this I who thought this should be something,’ and so it follows that ‘this *I think, therefore I am* was so certain that the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics could not shake it, and was the first principle I could be certain of’ (p.101).

⁴²⁵ HR 2, p.52.

⁴²⁶ HR 2, p.52.

⁴²⁷ Descartes, in his reply to Mersenne in the Second Objections, says ‘substance is that in which everything resides immediately’ (p.53). In his reply to the Fourth Objections, he tells Arnauld that substance is ‘that which can exist independently of anything else’ (p.102). In his reply to the Third Objections, Descartes tells Hobbes that ‘substance must be inferred’ and is ‘underneath properties’ (p.64).

⁴²⁸ HR 1, p.150.

But even if this is so, he admits that 'I do not yet know clearly enough *what* I am,' or what this substance is.⁴²⁹ But before canvassing what he says about this, it must be noted that philosophers have questioned the *structure* of his cogito argument. The debate over his argument revolves around whether he intends the argument as a mere *intuition*, or as an *inference*. In other words, the question is whether Descartes meant that every time he said or thought to himself that 'I think' he somehow also intuited that 'I exist' at that time, or whether he meant to use his single premise that 'I think' to infer his conclusion that 'I exist?' The answer to this question changes the whole import of his cogito argument, and in particular, reveals much about his theory of mind, and specifically his radical form of semantic or content internalism.

Jaakko Hintikka offers what is perhaps the most famous interpretation of the intuition reading of the cogito argument. In particular, he claims that Descartes intuits his existence in a unique kind of *performance*. Hintikka claims that he intuits that it is 'existentially inconsistent' to claim that he does not exist. In other words, he says, if Descartes were to claim that he does not exist and if this were true, he would not exist to claim that it is so. Hintikka says that when Descartes performs this, his existence 'manifests itself,' and so cannot be gainsaid.⁴³⁰ This existential inconsistency is what he intuits in his cogito argument. But as Hintikka recognizes, this reading of the cogito argument has problems. In particular, he knows that his unique reading of the cogito is not accurate, for if his reading were correct, the *only* thoughts that Descartes could

⁴²⁹ HR 1, p.150.

⁴³⁰ In his widely read article, 'Cogito Ergo Sum: Inference or Performance,' Hintikka says that the key to the cogito argument is that he 'realizes the indubitability of his existence results from an act of thinking, namely an attempt to think the contrary' (p.122). Hintikka notes that this is because 'this act refers to the thought act in which the self-verifiability of his existence actually manifests itself.'

use in his cogito intuition would be ones 'denying his own existence.'⁴³¹ Hintikka has to ignore the places where Descartes says that *any* thought he has can prove his existence, even a confused one. Descartes clearly says that any thought he has proves his existence.

In his reply to the Second Objections, though, Descartes does lean towards some version of this intuition reading.⁴³² He tells Mersenne that he does *not* intend to 'use a syllogism' to infer from his thinking that he exists.⁴³³ Descartes says that he does not intend to use the premise that 'whoever thinks exists' combined with the premise that 'I think' to infer his conclusion that 'I exist.' Instead he says that his thinking and existence are both 'intuited immediately' by him when he thinks of them at the same time. Descartes insists that this intuition of thought and existence is something *primitive*, something 'known by mental vision.'⁴³⁴ But even though such admissions may seem to commit him to an intuition reading of his cogito argument, they do not settle the question. Descartes still treats the cogito as some sort of inference, and only says that his reasoning is not intended to be syllogistic, is something intuited immediately, and yet is known by mental vision. These admissions still leave open the possibility that his cogito argument is an odd sort of inference.

Descartes tells Mersenne that his cogito argument is not a syllogism because he does *not* presuppose the premise that 'whatever thinks exists.' In particular, he says that if he did this, he would reason from a typical syllogism,

⁴³¹ Ibid., p.123.

⁴³² Ibid., p.123.

⁴³³ Descartes, in his reply, tells Mersenne that 'when we become aware that we are thinking beings, this is a primitive act of knowledge not derived from syllogistic reasoning' (p.38). Descartes tells the Marquis of Newcastle that knowledge of his thinking and existence 'is no product of your thinking' (p.147). But Descartes does not say in either place how strong his position on intuition is.

⁴³⁴ HR 2, p.38.

such that this premise would be suppressed. But Descartes insists that it was not his intention to reason from such a suppressed premise, and so he does not. He even claims that he objects to syllogistic reasoning because it is *circular*.⁴³⁵ But Descartes need not have bothered with this point, since his real resistance to using syllogistic reasoning derives from his position on how *learning* occurs. To address this, he tells Mersenne that learning always proceeds from ‘particular thoughts to general principles.’⁴³⁶ In his cogito argument, he says, he only knows his particular thought that ‘I think’ which he perceives by an intuition, and only later infers his general premise that ‘whatever thinks exists.’ Descartes says that his point is that since learning always runs from the particular to the general, he does not even know this general premise yet, and so cannot use it in syllogistic reasoning.

In their interview, Burman asks Descartes if the general premise that ‘whatever thinks exists’ is innate, and how he avoids using a syllogism. Descartes admits that his premise *is* innate, but says that he is ‘not even aware of it.’ He says that even if unknown, this innate general premise that ‘whatever thinks exists,’ links his particular thought that ‘he thinks’ to his equally particular conclusion that ‘I exist.’⁴³⁷ But Descartes tells Burman that his cogito argument is *not* a syllogism, for he only thinks his particular thoughts that ‘I think’ and ‘I

⁴³⁵ In his *Discourse on Method*, Descartes claims syllogistic reasoning is circular, and can *only* be used for ‘explaining what one already knows,’ and not for ‘learning what is new’ (p.91). He does not develop this claim, though, and when speaking to Burman, he weakens it considerably. Descartes tells Burman that syllogism is only circular in that ‘dialectic undermines good sense, rather than building upon it’ (p.77).

⁴³⁶ Descartes says essentially the same thing to Clerselier, where he insists that ‘it is certain that in order to discover the truth we should always begin with particular notions, in order to arrive at general notions subsequently’ (p.126). Descartes says that eventually this procedure works in both directions, for ‘after having then discovered the universals, we may discover other particular notions’ (p.127).

⁴³⁷ In *Conversation with Burman*, Descartes insists that ‘...the major premise, whatever thinks is, can be known; for it *is* in reality prior to my inference, and my inference depends on it.’ But since this is so, this premise ‘is always presupposed and prior. But it does not follow that I am always explicitly aware of its priority’ (p.4). Descartes holds that this allows him to evade the charge of circular reasoning.

exist.’⁴³⁸ By saying this, he incurs the responsibility of indicating *how* being unaware of, but still using his innate general premise that ‘whatever thinks exists,’ yet also thinking only his particular thought that ‘I think,’ which leads to his conclusion that ‘I exist,’ allows him to avoid using a syllogism. To address this, Descartes tells Burman that he ‘*does not separate out* these particular instances from general propositions, but rather, it is *in the particular instances*’ that he thinks of the general.⁴³⁹ He postulates that this odd containment relationship does the trick here.

Descartes says that his premise ‘whoever thinks exists’ is one of a special class of innate notions, his ‘eternal truths.’ Descartes claims that eternal truths have their ‘seat in the mind,’ and yet ‘do not provide information about the world.’⁴⁴⁰ If this is so, he says, they can only be understood *hypothetically*. Descartes means that his premise that ‘whatever thinks exists’ should now be read as the premise ‘if anything thinks, then it exists.’ This new premise may be true even if nothing ever thought or existed. Descartes means that his premise ‘if anything thinks, then it exists’ is but an *instance* of other such eternal truths. These truths are:

Substance cannot be discovered merely by the fact that it is a thing that exists, for we do not observe this. We may, however, easily discover any substance by one of its attributes, because it is a common notion that nothing is possessed of no attributes, properties or qualities. So when we perceive any attribute, we therefore conclude that some existing thing exists to which it may

⁴³⁸ Ibid., p.4.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., p.5.

⁴⁴⁰ HR 1, p.239.

be attributed, is necessarily present. Since mind is a thinking thing, there is in addition to the thinking a substance that does it. If there is any thought anywhere there must also be an underlying substance.⁴⁴¹

Descartes says that these eternal truths are the foundation of his cogito argument. He claims that he has no direct access to substances, but only knows them through their properties.⁴⁴² The reason this is, he says, is that there are 'no bare properties,' hovering in the air, the possibility of which is surely difficult even to imagine.⁴⁴³ But his main point here is that his hypothetical premise of his cogito argument 'if anything thinks, then it exists' is a mere instance of this other eternal truth concerning substance and properties. Descartes justifies his premise 'if anything thinks, then it exists' simply because it is an instance of a less controversial eternal truth.

Descartes is not yet vindicated here, for he must also justify his premise that 'I think.' To justify his premise concerning his own thought is important, for it alone makes an *existential* claim, a claim about the world. Descartes begins this task by claiming that his premise that 'I think' is his 'only belief that has resisted metaphysical doubt.'⁴⁴⁴ It resists doubt, he says, because regardless of any deception outside, here he only refers to his 'conscious seeming' to think. He says that this is because his seeming 'refers only to the mind,' and so becomes

⁴⁴¹ HR 1, p.240.

⁴⁴² In his reply to Hobbes, Descartes defines substance as that which is 'capable of independent existence' (p.63). But then, he also tells Burman that 'it is true that the attributes are the *same* as the substance, but this is when they are *all taken together*, not when they are taken individually' (p.22). Descartes offers inconsistent views on the nature of substance, although this will not be important here.

⁴⁴³ HR 2, p.249.

⁴⁴⁴ HR 1, p.155.

certain on that account.⁴⁴⁵ Descartes says that ‘if we do not refer ideas beyond themselves, they cannot properly speaking be false,’ and so there is scarcely any room for error here.⁴⁴⁶ His conscious seemings, he says, amount to his theory of thought *content*, for how things seem to him just are those contents. It follows that if any of his thoughts seem to have given contents, then they do have them. Descartes insists that since he knows what he consciously seems to think, and does so without error, he can use his premise ‘I think’ in his cogito argument, after all.

Descartes does not hold that his conscious seemings just are his thought contents without qualification. In particular, Hobbes asks whether any given pair of consciousness and thought is to be counted as ‘one thought or two.’⁴⁴⁷ Descartes responds that only Hobbes would think that there are two thoughts, but elsewhere says that ‘the thought by which we believe a thing is *different* from the one by which we know we believe it,’ and so there are two thoughts, after all.⁴⁴⁸ Hobbes notes that if Descartes really intends that such seeming and thought are different thoughts, the former would then possess all the properties of any thought, and so would be conscious too. The trouble with this, he says, is that it entails an infinite regress of how things consciously seem.⁴⁴⁹ Hobbes says that Descartes cannot so easily offer his theory that his conscious seemings just are his thought contents, for that seems to entail an infinite regress of such seemings. The problem with this, he says, is that it renders all of his conscious thoughts

⁴⁴⁵ HR 1, p.222.

⁴⁴⁶ HR 1, p.160.

⁴⁴⁷ HR 2, p.62.

⁴⁴⁸ HR 1, p.95.

⁴⁴⁹ HR 2, p.62.

indeterminate. If this objection hits its mark, his theory of thought content is actually a theory of mental suicide.⁴⁵⁰

In their interview, Burman asks Descartes the same question, and he receives a more helpful answer. In particular, here he says that his conscious seeming to have any given thought does take that thought as its object, but the former is 'but a reflection' of the latter.⁴⁵¹ Descartes further says that this reflection is voluntary, such that his mind can reflect 'as often as it likes.'⁴⁵² But actually, he does not mean that his conscious seeming as voluntary reflection *is* a separate thought, for then it would itself be conscious, and he would again face the problem of the infinite regress of seemings and resultant indeterminacy of all his thoughts. Descartes seems to intend that his conscious seeming is less than conscious, for he insists that he 'does not know that he knows' anything.⁴⁵³ He says he only knows only by that 'internal cognition that precedes reflective knowledge.'⁴⁵⁴ But if this is all he intends, it follows that his conscious seeming to have any given thought, while it is not itself conscious, makes that thought determinate. Descartes is ambivalent about his theory that his conscious seeming to think anything bestows that thought with content, and does not develop it further.

⁴⁵⁰ Saul Kripke, in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* offers the same objection. He says that thoughts are rule-governed, and must be *interpreted* to have content. Kripke says there is 'no fact about my past history, in my mind, or in my external behavior,' that can establish any interpretation (p.13). Kripke says that this leads to an infinite regress of interpretations, and so meaning 'vanishes into thin air' (p.21).

⁴⁵¹ Rene Descartes, *Conversations with Burman*, p.7.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁴⁵³ HR 2, p.241.

⁴⁵⁴ In a letter, Descartes tells Arnauld that this is 'similar to direct and reflex vision.' It follows that, he says, when anyone knows anything '*what* he knows is direct, but *that* he knows it is reflective.' This distinction, however, is far from clear, but even so, importantly, he concedes that 'direct and reflex thoughts occur together and appear to be *indistinguishable* from each other' (p.234).

Descartes cannot so easily use his premise that 'I think,' but for another reason. This is because, it seems, to phrase it as he does is *circular*. In other words, in his premise 'I think,' he *already* asserts his conclusion 'I exist.' Descartes does not then express anything informative, for what it really says is that 'I exist and think.' But Anthony Kenny notes that even though this circularity objection is correct, and although he does not correct his mistake himself, he might have easily reformulated his premise in a way that 'does *not* to refer to him at all.' Descartes might have worded his premise that 'I think' in a way that was not circular. He might have said merely not that he thinks, but rather that 'the *bare* property of thought is occurring.'⁴⁵⁵ Kenny notes that if Descartes did this, his cogito argument would use this bare property of thought as a premise to infer that a substance to which it attaches exists, no matter whose substance that is. It should be noted that this way of putting his cogito argument is quite radical, for he offers many passages that contradict it. But even so, this version of the cogito argument is not explicitly circular, and so allows him to finally formulate what he intends.

Descartes can finally offer his cogito argument. But as we have seen, the argument is very different from the way it initially appeared. Its famous premise is gone, and even its conclusion is quite different. His cogito argument is not a syllogism, but it definitely *is* an inference, although a more complex one than is usually thought. But even if this inference version of the cogito argument is correct, Descartes says much that seems to contradict it, and it does not deliver

⁴⁵⁵ Anthony Kenny, in his *Descartes: a Study of his Philosophy*, says just this. Descartes, he notes, should have said that he is 'aware of thought, no matter yet to *whom* or *what* the thought belongs' (p.60). But then, it follows that he 'can never know what substance this thought inheres in' (p.62). Kenny admits that this is not what Descartes hoped for, but even so, it avoids circularity.

what he wants regardless.⁴⁵⁶ But this inference interpretation of his cogito argument has its virtues too. In particular, it takes account of many of his related passages on the matter, and so is an expression of many elements of his philosophical project.

1. The only access to substances comes through their attaching properties (premise).
2. If there is any real property, it must attach to a substance (premise).
3. If there is any real thought property, it attaches to a substance (from 2).
4. There is such a bare thought property (premise).
5. There is a substance, whatever that amounts to (from 1, 2, 3 and 4).

It seems that Descartes offers his cogito argument as a complex inference, and this is very modest. In particular, he offers in his premises 1 and 2 the metaphysical background for what is to come. Descartes begins his cogito argument proper by offering his premise 3, for it makes the inference from a thought property to an attaching substance mandatory, even if that inference remains hypothetical. Descartes offers his premise 4 to make this inference more than hypothetical, for now there is such a thought property, and so he must infer that there is a substance after all. In other words, his conclusion 5 seems assured, for there is a substance after all, even if that is all he can prove with his cogito argument.

⁴⁵⁶ In his 'The Cogito Puzzle,' Peter Markie claims that Descartes intended no such thing. In particular, he says that 'this explains why he says that *he* exists,' and not just that something does (p.79). But then again, if Markie is correct about what he intended, his cogito argument is still circular. In effect, this is why many have sought to reinterpret his argument in a more charitable way.

Descartes reveals much about his theory of mind by offering his cogito argument. In that argument, he reveals that something thinks and exists, which he still contends is him, although that is something that he has not proven. But he does show that there is something that thinks and exists, and does so essentially. Descartes offers a radical sort of semantic or content internalist theory of thought content, one wherein content is a matter of how things *consciously seem* to him, for his seemings refer only to his mind, and so, because of that, cannot be in error. He actually seems to make a good case for his radical internalist position, for the content of his thoughts are apparently verified merely by his having them, even if this position is subject to limitations. It may be that he can never answer how it is consciousness makes thought what it is without itself being conscious, and so can never escape the infinite regress problem, or the fact that content is indeterminate. The point here is that while it is important to acknowledge these limitations to his theory of thought content, they do not dent its plausibility. It may be that all theories of thought content have a version of this problem, and that a solution to it is elusive.

6.3

A

Descartes uses his cogito argument to infer that he is 'essentially a thinking substance.' But as he knows, this claim can have different strengths, and so he treads carefully here, so as 'not to take any other object in place of

myself.⁴⁵⁷ To complete his theory of mind, he argues for his *substance dualism*. His is the combination of two claims. The first is that his mind and body are *separate substances*, and the second is that they *causally interact*. Descartes begins his argument for the separation of mind and body by utilizing his metaphysical doubt as applied to the task of determining his essence. He claims that whatever property he can doubt about himself is definitely ‘not part of his essence.’⁴⁵⁸ Descartes insists that actually, he can doubt the property that he is extended, but not the property that he is thinking. It follows that he is not a substance that is extended, but is one that thinks.⁴⁵⁹ He characterizes the substance that thinks only negatively, as being *immaterial*.⁴⁶⁰ But even so, Descartes concludes that unlike his body, his substance ‘will not cease to be,’ and because of this, is immortal.⁴⁶¹

But as many have noted, Descartes makes things too easy on himself here. In point of fact, his argument has not gone unchallenged even by his admirers. In the Fourth Objections, Arnauld notes that it is surely possible that his metaphysical doubts do not exhaust his entire essence, for he could equally apply the same argument to various objects and make them seem different when they were the same, or make them seem the same when they were different.⁴⁶² But this means, he says, that metaphysical doubt alone proves little about the separation of his mind and body. Descartes responds to Arnauld by inconsistently changing his position, admitting that it is possible that the doubted

⁴⁵⁷ HR 1, p.150.

⁴⁵⁸ HR 2, p.20.

⁴⁵⁹ HR 1, p.101.

⁴⁶⁰ Gassendi complains that Descartes calling himself an immaterial substance is vacuous. He says that ‘these are forsooth negatives, and we want to know not what you are not, but what you *are*.’ Gassendi says that Descartes should reveal the ‘positive nature of your substance’ or what he actually is (p.150). Descartes never answers Gassendi, beyond saying that he need not elaborate further.

⁴⁶¹ HR 1, p.101.

⁴⁶² HR 2, p.81.

parts of his body 'because they are unknown to me, do *not* in truth differ from myself.'⁴⁶³ But given this stark admission, he claims that he never intended to use doubt to determine his essence.⁴⁶⁴ He now insists that his doubts about himself are only intended to establish that he is essentially something that thinks, although he may yet be extended as well.

If Descartes only uses his metaphysical doubt to establish that he essentially thinks, then thought is but part of his essence, so far as he knows.⁴⁶⁵ But actually, he further says that all substances have *essential properties*, and characterizes these as the ones that are 'necessary for their existence.'⁴⁶⁶ In particular, he excludes properties that all substances have as being essential, because given that substances possess these equally, they do not distinguish them.⁴⁶⁷ Descartes must still say *how* he knows which properties of any given substance really are necessary for the existence of that substance. To do this, he tells Mersenne that *conceivability* is the best way to guarantee this, for it is 'the surest token of a real distinction,' and so other methods must be reduced to his method. Descartes insists that 'it is sufficient to conceive one of them apart from the other' to reveal such essential properties, for after doing so, the essential properties are the ones that are left over.⁴⁶⁸ It follows that if it is *inconceivable* that a substance could still exist without a given property, then that property is essential to it.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶³ HR 1, p.137.

⁴⁶⁴ HR 1, p.137.

⁴⁶⁵ HR 1, p.138.

⁴⁶⁶ HR 2, p.97.

⁴⁶⁷ Stephen Schiffer, in his 'Descartes on his Essence,' indicates why transcendental properties are not part of the essence of substances. He notes that 'not all of the necessary properties of a thing belong to its essence,' for such properties 'are necessary properties of *all* substances,' and so characterize none of them (p.22). Schiffer says that essential properties must distinguish substances.

⁴⁶⁸ HR 2, p.31.

⁴⁶⁹ Descartes tells Gibieuf that 'we cannot have any knowledge of things apart from how we

Descartes further says that each substance has but 'one essential property,' such that its other properties are dependent on this.⁴⁷⁰ He does not yet say exactly why he believes this, but even so, he insists that substances with more than one property would have 'two essences' which he says 'is a contradiction.'⁴⁷¹ If substances have but one essential property, he admits, it is important to know what this one property is. To answer this Descartes says that it is inconceivable that his mind exists without the property of thought, or that his body exists without the property of extension. It follows that the one essential property of his mind is thought and that the one essential property of his body is extension. This is important, for if his merely conceiving their difference and conceiving what they cannot exist without has shown that mind and body to have different essential properties, and if there is only one such property for each substance, then mind and body are different substances, after all. Descartes seems to have offered a valid argument here, and so seems to prove his case for the separation of mind and body.

But Descartes does not really prove that the mind and brain are separate substances. Arnauld launches an elaborate argument to indicate why this is, although all the objectors offer some version of it.⁴⁷² The trouble is that Descartes

conceive of them.' But about mind and body, he says, 'the idea that they are inseparable involves a contradiction,' for him (p.125). This is why Descartes tells Mersenne that his own mind is 'the measure of truth' (K, p.67). In other words, he says, conceivability is our best and only guide to possibility.

⁴⁷⁰ HR 2, p.63.

⁴⁷¹ Descartes informs Regius that when substances are in question, 'the subject is simple.' But given such simplicity, he says, substances *cannot* have two essential properties. This is because 'the one and same subject would have two natures, which is a contradiction' (p.436). But Descartes offers no reason why the subject is so simple, or why having two essential properties is a contradiction.

⁴⁷² The objectors to the *Meditations* all question whether Descartes has really conceived his mind and body correctly. He says such substances have different essential properties, have one essential property each, and that their properties have nothing in common. The objectors do not grant these claims, and offer different arguments to question them.

Caterus: It appears the distinction between mind and body is proved by the fact

may *not* have conceived the essential properties of either mind or body at all, and so his argument for the separation of his mind and body cannot even begin. In point of fact, he may have only conceived of their *apparent* essential properties, and that reveals nothing about their real essential properties. Descartes cannot then use his conceptions of mind and body to infer that these substances can really exist apart. Arnauld says that to conceive of the *real* essential properties of mind and body, what is needed is what he calls 'adequate knowledge' which he defines as an exhaustive knowledge of *all* their properties.⁴⁷³ Descartes does not have such adequate knowledge, he says, and so he cannot just assert without any

that they can be *conceived* as distinct and isolated from each other. But this distinction is but a formal and objective one, which is intermediate between a real one and one merely of reason (p.8).

Mersenne: You know that you are a thing that thinks, but you do not yet know what a thinking thing is. What if it were a body that by its various motions produces what we call thought. How will you *prove* that a body cannot think, or is not thought itself (p.25)?

Hobbes: it does not seem to be good reasoning to say I am a thinking one, hence I am thought. The entity is one thing, its essence is another. It is surely possible for a thing that thinks to be the mind, and yet be corporeal. The opposite has been *assumed*, not proved (p.61).

Arnauld: the proof has proceeded so far as to exclude from the nature of the human mind whatsoever is corporeal. The problem is, however, how it follows from the fact that one is *unaware* that anything else belongs to ones essence, that it does not so belong (p.82)?

Gassendi: You say you are not the complex of members that we call the human body. Why do you *assume* that you are none of these things? You then say that your existence does not depend on what you do not know. But again, it seems you have no reason to assume this (p.142).

Sixth Objectors: when you say that you think and exist, someone will maintain that you *deceive yourself*, and that you do not think, but are only moved, and that you are nothing other than corporeal motion. No one has been able to grasp your proof of the opposite (p.234).

Bourdin: you have *presupposed* as a basic premise of your proofs that thinking is a property of the mind, of a wholly incorporeal thing. There are many people who claim that the brutes think, and hence regard thought as an attribute common to all extended souls (p.290).

The objectors all deny that Descartes really has understood mind or body properties correctly. He offers the claims about his mind cited above, but as the objectors point out, this is not enough. These are all suppositions, not proofs. These objectors say that he does not provide anything beyond that, and so his dualism remains unproven.

⁴⁷³ HR 2, p.82.

further argument say that he conceives of the essential properties of mind and body, for he may be wrong in his estimation of these.⁴⁷⁴ He does not prove the separation of mind and body.

Descartes responds that Arnauld requires too much of him, since 'adequate knowledge of the properties of mind and body is not had by anyone.'⁴⁷⁵ He insists that instead, he has what he calls 'complete knowledge' of mind and body, which is *whatever* knowledge he needs that allows him to 'recognize either as a substance.'⁴⁷⁶ Descartes insists that the knowledge required for such substance recognition is that their respective properties have 'nothing in common' and so are 'mutually exclusive.'⁴⁷⁷ But now, he says that the knowledge needed to recognize that mind and body are substances reveals that they are different substances. This is so because they have been revealed to have properties that have nothing in common and are mutually exclusive, and so 'cannot exist in the same substance.'⁴⁷⁸ Descartes says that Arnauld has misunderstood what is required for knowledge of substances, and so is wrong to say that he does not know the essential properties of mind and body. He concludes that mind and body are separate substances.

Descartes says that his complete knowledge of mind and body rests on his claims that their properties have nothing in common and are mutually exclusive. But since his claim for the separation of mind and body now rests on these latter claims, he should say why he believes them. Descartes tells Arnauld that mind

⁴⁷⁴ HR 2, p.82.

⁴⁷⁵ HR 2, p.97.

⁴⁷⁶ HR 2, p.98.

⁴⁷⁷ Descartes tells Arnauld that mind and body have no properties in common and are mutually exclusive. He says that 'in the case of mind, not only do we understand that it exists apart from the body, but also that all the attributes of body may be denied of it.' Descartes also insists that since mind and body are so different from one another, they demand 'reciprocal exclusion of one another' (p.102).

⁴⁷⁸ HR 2, p.102.

and body have no properties in common, for 'not only do we understand that it exists apart from the body, but also that all the attributes of body may be denied of it.'⁴⁷⁹ In other words, he conceives that his mind exists with the property of thinking and his body exists with the property of being extended, and the continued existence of either substance does not presuppose the other. Descartes further informs Regius that the essential properties of either mind or body are mutually exclusive, for since each subject is simple, it follows that these 'substances cannot have two essential properties,' which would be a contradiction.⁴⁸⁰ If this is so, he says, he 'cannot see how the properties of mind and body could exist together in the same substance,' and so mind and body are separate substances.⁴⁸¹

Descartes believes that he has defended his argument for the separation of mind and body, which has three stages. He begins with his metaphysical doubt as applied to himself, so as to isolate thought as part of his essence. But he admits that he may yet possess other essential properties. Descartes next says that he conceives that his mind and body have different essential properties. By this move he hopes to exclude those other properties such as extension from his essence. But he recognizes that he must show why his mere conceptions of mind and body reveal their separation. Descartes lastly says that his knowledge of mind and body is complete, for they possess essential properties that have nothing in common and are mutually exclusive.

1. If I cannot metaphysically doubt any property about myself, that property is part of my essence (premise).

⁴⁷⁹ HR 2, p.102.

⁴⁸⁰ HR 1, p.436.

⁴⁸¹ HR 2, p.32.

2. I cannot doubt my thought properties (premise).
3. I am essentially a thinking substance, although I may yet be something else too (from 1 and 2).
4. The essential properties of my mind and body can be known by my conceptions (premise).
5. The essential properties of my mind and body are thought and extension (from 4).
6. Mind and body are substances that have but one essential property (premise).
7. The essential properties of my mind and body have nothing in common, and exclude each other (from 5 and 6).
8. I have complete knowledge of mind and body (from 4 and 7).
9. I am only a mind (from 5, 6, 7, and 8).

In this argument, Descartes concludes that mind and body are separate substances. But there are problems here, for if he is incorrect about his premise 1, then he cannot infer his premise 3, and so his doubts prove nothing about his essence. If he has no support for his premise 3, this casts doubt on his premise 4, for his doubts fuel his conceptions. Descartes cannot then infer premise 5, and so does not know the essential properties of mind and body, nor his premise 6, that substances have only one. If he does not know the essential properties of mind and body, nor that each has only one, his knowledge of the properties of mind and body is not complete. It follows that Descartes just asserts the same thing three times over, which is that he is convinced that his mind and body are separate substances.

But even if Descartes were correct in his argument for the separation of his mind and body, there is a further problem. This is that his mind and body may be separate substances, yet may never *actually* separate. It may be that he is correct that he can doubt his body but not his mind, that his mind is essentially thought and his body is essentially extension, and that his knowledge of these substances is complete, such that their properties have nothing in common and are mutually exclusive. But all these facts do not prevent the two substances from still sharing *accidental* properties, and doing so forever.⁴⁸² It might even be that the essential property of the one substance is always an accidental property of the other, such that mind would then be essentially thought but would be accidentally extended, and body would then be essentially extended but would always accidentally think. If this were so, it would not matter that he may be correct against his objectors about his doubts, their essential properties and his complete knowledge of them, for all this does not establish that the two substances will actually separate.

Descartes never retracted his position about the separation of mind and body. But even so, he admits to Mersenne that his dualism is merely *potential*, for he says that his argument 'is unaffected by the power that disunites them,' as though the two *can* separate, but may never.⁴⁸³ This is a significant admission, because if his argument is unaffected by what disunites them, it only shows that they *can* separate. Descartes further admits that his argument does *not* prove that

⁴⁸² J. A. Shaffer, in *Philosophy of Mind*, offers essentially the same criticism, for he notes that 'from the fact that the essence of mind is one thing, having consciousness, and the essence of body another, occupying space, it does *not* follow that the mind and body are two separate entities. If mind and body can share accidental properties, the same thing can have *both* of these properties' (p.35).

⁴⁸³ HR 2, p.59.

'the soul is not bound by nature to die.'⁴⁸⁴ He acknowledges that for all he knows, even if mind and body are separate substances, the soul may die after all. Descartes has hoped to prove much more than this. He begins by insisting that he wants to show that his mind 'will not cease to be,' and if he has not shown this, his argument has little interest. He admits that he shows no such thing, and so fails to achieve his goal.⁴⁸⁵ It is revealing that in many places, he insists that matters about the soul must be taken on faith, and that he has no good argument for the separation of mind and body.

B

Descartes has *not* proven his case for the first half of his substance dualism, his case for the separation of mind and body. But to proceed with his argument at all, this failure must be ignored. Descartes also claims that mind and body *interact causally*, which is the second claim of his substance dualism, and is as important as his first. In his Third Meditation, he first outlines what he takes to be the conditions for *any* two objects of a given substance to interact causally. Descartes claims that in any such interaction, there must be 'at least as much reality in cause as in effect.' By saying this, he is referring to the *proportion* of properties transferred from cause to effect. It follows that this effect cannot proceed from anything 'less perfect than itself.'⁴⁸⁶ But actually, Descartes is not saying anything novel here, for he holds that these claims are equivalent to the

⁴⁸⁴ K, p.87.

⁴⁸⁵ Douglas Long, though, in 'Descartes Argument for Mind/Body Dualism,' insists that his argument does work, for 'if anything is not essentially corporeal, it is not corporeal at all' (p.266). But as we have seen, if Descartes only proves that the mind and body are distinct in essence, his dualism is only potential. But plainly, this is not a form of distinctness between mind and body worth having.

⁴⁸⁶ HR 1, p.162.

truism that 'nothing comes from nothing.'⁴⁸⁷ By this he means that the properties of the world cannot just change without any prompting at all. He says that since the world has already been created, these claims imply that 'the amount of matter in the world cannot change.'⁴⁸⁸

Descartes does not really address the issue of causation, but rather neatly avoids doing so. To say that proportionally as much reality is transferred between cause and effect, or that nothing can come out of nothing, or even that the amount of matter cannot change, does not answer *how* one object causes changes in another, or what causation is. Descartes does not really answer this question concerning how causation occurs, beyond saying that it does. He does say that the properties of the cause must be 'formally or eminently' transferred to the effect, although this is not much better.⁴⁸⁹ By saying this, he means that some properties in the cause must be *sufficient* to produce the effect, either by being those same properties, in which case there would be a case of property transfer, or more likely, by some cause properties merely *conspiring* to produce the properties of the effect, however that is accomplished.⁴⁹⁰ But again, this does not explain how properties do this, beyond stating that they do. Descartes does not offer a serious account of causation, for it amounts to the claim that causation is a matter of proportion of cause and effect.

Descartes proceeds *not* to apply this account of substantial causation to minds and bodies, but to specifically warn against it. He insists that mind and

⁴⁸⁷ HR 2, p.35.

⁴⁸⁸ K, p.228.

⁴⁸⁹ HR 2, p.56.

⁴⁹⁰ In his Third Meditation, Descartes offers an example of such causation by composition. In particular, he says that the stone is caused to exist because it is produced by something that has formally or eminently, all that 'enters into the composition of the stone' (p.162). He says that even though cause and effect do not share any properties, 'we must not imagine that it is less real a cause.'

body interaction 'should not be understood after the manner that bodies affects one another.'⁴⁹¹ In his reply to the Fifth Objections, Descartes tells Gassendi, that while mind and body are both substances, they are not both *in* the world in the same way. He says that because of this 'the mind can act independently of the brain,' and even that the brain is of 'no use to pure thought.'⁴⁹² Descartes says that if there is to be *any* causal interaction between mind and body, it is unique. He does not despair over this odd sort of mind body causation, but sees it as guaranteeing our unique position in the world. Gassendi only asks *how* it is possible that the mind and body are in causal relation at all. In particular, he asserts that since these substances have nothing in common and are mutually exclusive, 'it is a mystery how these could be in *any* causal relation.'⁴⁹³ This is certainly a reasonable question to ask, for without an answer to it, mind and body interaction will remain a mystery.

Descartes responds by saying that Gassendi makes the 'groundless assumption' that substances that have nothing in common and are mutually exclusive cannot interact.⁴⁹⁴ He notes that 'since it cannot be proven that two such substances cannot interact, the objection is worthless.'⁴⁹⁵ But Descartes should not respond in this way, for although Gassendi does assume that two substances that have nothing in common and so are mutually exclusive cannot interact, his doing so is not groundless. In particular, if mind and body really have nothing in common and are exclusive, it seems that there is no way for them to interact. In point of fact, his objection that mind and body causal interaction is a mystery is merely a request to know *how* such interaction is possible. Gassendi is

⁴⁹¹ K, p.138.

⁴⁹² HR 2, p.212.

⁴⁹³ HR 2, p.199.

⁴⁹⁴ HR 2, p.132.

⁴⁹⁵ HR 2, p.132.

asking something quite reasonable, and by doing so, locates the burden of proof where it should be. Descartes obviously has the burden of proof here, and it is not enough for him to say that such interaction does occur. It is fortunate, therefore, that he does not leave matters here, and offers two accounts of mind and body causal interaction.

Descartes offers two conflicting explanations of how mind and body causally interact, although, as we will see, both accounts incur problems, albeit different ones. He offers the first of these explanations less often than the second, although many have insisted, in greater detail, that this first explanation is his real position.⁴⁹⁶ In his Sixth Meditation, Descartes claims that interaction between mind and body occurs because the mind is *located* in the body, and has its ‘principal seat in the brain.’⁴⁹⁷ To argue for this claim, he notes that the body can be divided, as in cases of severe injury. In such cases, he says, there is less body after the division. Descartes notes that if his mind were not located in the brain but was instead intermingled all over his body, then after such a division ‘there should be less of a mind too.’⁴⁹⁸ But actually, he says, when there actually is such bodily division, this is not what occurs, for the mind remains the same. Descartes infers that if his body were divided in this way, his mind would not be divided off with it. But this implies, in turn, that his mind must be located in the undivided part of his body, in his brain.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ Margaret Wilson, in her *Descartes*, notes that Descartes offers two competing accounts of mind and body interaction. But she says that his pineal gland account of interaction has the least problems, since it is ‘far more intelligible’ than the alternative, and because ‘we can understand his reasons for holding it’ (p.218). Wilson still notes that Descartes does not explain mind and body interaction.

⁴⁹⁷ HR 1, p.197.

⁴⁹⁸ HR 1, p.197.

⁴⁹⁹ HR 1, p.293.

Descartes infers that his mind is not only in his brain, but also, the point of interaction is in his pineal gland. If this is so, he says, the interaction between his mind and body occurs when his mind desires to communicate with the body, and makes use of the nerves to 'radiate messages throughout the body.' Descartes also notes that when his body is affected it too uses the nerves that radiate messages back to his mind, and the latter 'interprets messages.'⁵⁰⁰ It follows that there is interaction between mind and body, which is managed by the pineal gland. This is how causation occurs between mind and body. But that said, Descartes admits that although mind and body interact in this way, this account renders their connection indirect, and hence fallible. He admits that any messages between mind and body in either direction can be misunderstood, but insists this is no problem.⁵⁰¹ This is because, he says, the causal interaction between these substances usually works, and mistakes are rare. Descartes says that although such mind and body causation is indirect and fallible, that is the way it occurs, nonetheless.

But Descartes does not develop this location explanation of mind and body interaction further, and for good reason. It is difficult to say if he recognizes the problems here, for he does not mention them. The first problem is that if his body was divided and his mind was not, it would *not* follow that his mind must be in his remaining body. This is because his mind might have always been intermingled throughout his body, but because his mind is not extended, it would not be constrained by his body. It might happen that, upon any such bodily division, it would move back into his remaining body. But second, even if his mind is located somewhere in his body, since it is need not be in any particular

⁵⁰⁰ HR 1, p.294.

⁵⁰¹ HR 1, p.294.

place, it may not be in his brain or his pineal gland. If the mind has to be so located, it could surely be anywhere in the body. There is little reason to infer that his mind must be in his brain or pineal gland. Descartes may have not developed this location explanation of mind and body interaction because of these problems. But it is probably more accurate to say that he knows that this explanation does not work.

Descartes seems to suspect that his location explanation of mind and body interaction does *not* really explain what it is supposed to. He seems not to have noticed that merely locating his mind in his brain and saying that his mind or body uses nerves to radiate messages in either direction does not reveal how these two substances, whose properties apparently have nothing in common and are mutually exclusive, can interact.⁵⁰² It follows that by offering his location explanation, he merely pushes the question of mind and body interaction one stage back, for now, what we need to know is how his nerves that radiate messages across substances in either direction can somehow traverse the gap between them. Descartes does not attempt to explain this, beyond just offering a location of this event. It follows that he has merely explained the interaction of mind and body by offering yet another mystery. He surely knows that his location explanation of mind and body interaction is insufficient and so pursues a different explanation altogether.

Descartes offers Princess Elizabeth a very different account of how mind and body can causally interact. In particular, he says that the mind and body are *intermingled*, such that the mind is not really located at all. His mind is actually

⁵⁰² HR 2, p.201.

in the whole body, and is 'not in any of its parts to the exclusion of the others.'⁵⁰³ Descartes says that the interaction of mind and body must be understood in terms of their 'substantial union.'⁵⁰⁴ It may seem that if the mind is in whole body, 'it *itself* has extension.'⁵⁰⁵ Descartes seems to support this, for he tells Elizabeth to attribute extension to the mind.⁵⁰⁶ But as he explains to Henry More, he only intends that she attribute an 'extension of power' to the mind.⁵⁰⁷ He may not want to attribute extension to the mind, but he does not explain this extension of power either.

Nature teaches me by these sensations of pain, hunger, and thirst that I am not only lodged in my body like a pilot in a vessel, but very closely united to it, and so to speak so *intermingled* with it that I compose one whole. If this were this not the case, when my body is hurt, I who am merely a thinking thing, would not feel pain, for I would feel this wound by the understanding only, just as a sailor perceives by sight when something is damaged in his vessel. These modes of pain, hunger, thirst are in truth nothing other than confused modes of thought, produced by the union and apparent intermingling of mind and body.⁵⁰⁸

Descartes tells Elizabeth that this substantial union of mind and body is what he calls a 'primitive notion.' These notions are *not* the eternal truths cited above, but

⁵⁰³ HR 1, p.345.

⁵⁰⁴ K, p.138.

⁵⁰⁵ HR 2, p.199.

⁵⁰⁶ K, p.143.

⁵⁰⁷ K, p.258.

⁵⁰⁸ HR 1, p.192.

are in fact a rare breed of notion that 'form a model for *all* other thought.'⁵⁰⁹ He further says that such notions 'can only be understood through themselves.'⁵¹⁰ These primitive notions are then insulated from any sort of reduction or even criticism. Descartes also claims that the primitive notion of the union of mind and body is experienced within, but can be 'known very clearly by the senses.'⁵¹¹ He says that only the senses can reveal this union, because only they 'partake of *both* mind and body,' and so can reveal *how* these substances exist together. Descartes tells Elizabeth that if she would see mind and body interaction like this, she would not be confused.

Descartes thinks he answers Elizabeth, yet incurs many problems by his answer. In particular, if his mind and body are intermingled as he says, he may yet have accidentally rendered his mind something that has real extension.⁵¹² He can deny this, but he has not explained how such intermingling does not render his mind extended either. Descartes has also said that the union of mind and body is a primitive notion. But even assuming there are such primitive notions, it is unlikely that thoughts about the union between mind and body are one of them. The union of mind and body does not form a model for all other thought, since many people do not even believe in it, and can live without it. The union of mind and body is also not understandable only through itself, since it is understood by combining the notions of mind and body.⁵¹³ In point of fact, the union of mind and body has few of the properties of the alleged primitive notions, and so calling

⁵⁰⁹ K, p.138.

⁵¹⁰ K, p.138.

⁵¹¹ K, p.141.

⁵¹² HR 2, p.199.

⁵¹³ David Yandell, in 'What Descartes Really Told Elizabeth: Mind and Body Union as a Primitive Notion,' denies this. He holds that mind and body union *is* primitive, such that 'interaction depends on their union.' But he says that 'the dependence relationship is *logical*, not explanatory,' (p.437.) But Descartes wanted to use the union of mind and body to explain their interaction, and so this dodge will not work.

it one only seems to be a way to avoid explaining mind and body union and so interaction. Descartes needs a better defence of the union of mind and body as a primitive notion than anything he says here.

In point of fact, the real trouble Descartes by offering his intermingling argument is the same as with his location argument, which is that he has not explained mind and body interaction. In particular, he claims that mind and body union is a primitive notion that is clearly understood by the senses, and this reveals how their interaction occurs. But merely saying that a primitive notion of mind and body union reveals their interaction is an assertion that will only convince the already converted. Descartes admits that he appreciates the *psychological* difficulty in imagining mind and body interaction, for he says that 'it is impossible to imagine the distinction and union of mind and body at the same time.'⁵¹⁴ But by admitting this, though, he does not admit that mind and body union does not explain their interaction, but only that it is psychologically difficult to see how it could. Descartes does not seem to realize that the problem is more than psychological, and because of this, we have no idea how such interaction could occur. He might as well say that any mystery is psychological in nature.⁵¹⁵

In conclusion, Descartes offers his cogito argument to introduce his position about the mind. He proves that something thinks and exists, and that is all. Descartes says that thought content is conscious seeming, and so, offers a radical sort of semantic or content internalism. He leaves his cogito argument, but

⁵¹⁴ K, p.141.

⁵¹⁵ Daisie Radnor, in her 'Descartes on the Union of Mind and Body,' canvasses various analogies he offers to explain this psychological difficulty, such as that mind and body union is like a hand and a body, or again like gravity and body. Radner has little trouble showing that mind and body union bears little resemblance to these other unions, and so they do not help explain anything (p.169).

still must say what constitutes his conscious seeming. Descartes tries to do this by arguing for his substance dualism. But as we have seen, his arguments here fail, for he does not establish mind and body separation, nor does he establish that they interact causally. It follows that even if his radical sort of semantic or content internalism is true, he is wrong about the mind. If Descartes has any hope of saving his radical internalism, something must be done. It is to this task that we now turn, for once his internalism is supplemented by contemporary versions of narrow meaning or content, and his substance dualism is replaced with the identity theory of mind and brain, his radical internalism emerges as a respectable position. There may be nothing to fear from his semantic or content internalism, after all.

6.4

In essence, Descartes holds that thought content is just how things consciously seem to him, and so, he adheres to a radical form of semantic or content internalism. But as it stands, this is quite an anemic theory. This need not be so, for *narrow* meaning or content can fill in this picture. Ned Block notes that this is meaning or content that supervenes on brain states, that is relevant to causal explanations of behavior, and that represents the world in a certain way.⁵¹⁶ But there are three versions of such meaning or content in the literature. These theories define it in terms of phenomenal seeming, functional roles, or narrow functions, respectively. But as Gabriel Segal notes, these versions have their merits but they all *accept* the intuitions behind semantic or content externalism,

⁵¹⁶ Ned Block, 'What Narrow Content is Not,' p.37.

that the twin thought experiments show that ‘there is a necessary connection between mind and world.’ These three versions of narrow meaning or content, he says, are then ‘forced to build from whatever is left over,’ which is a revisionary and difficult thing to do.⁵¹⁷ It is easier to reject these externalist intuitions at the outset, and then to say that narrow meaning or content is just ordinary meaning or content. But to see how this is so, it will be prudent to examine these three versions of narrow meaning or content.

To begin, Jerry Fodor offers the first version of narrow meaning or content, which stems from his *representational* theory of the mind. This theory of mind claims that ‘propositional attitudes are to be viewed as relations between organisms and token mental representations.’⁵¹⁸ Fodor says that representations are encoded into *symbols*, and so are literally in our heads. To this extent, he is a realist about the meaning or content in our brains, and so, says that we can only represent because there is a language of thought. The syntax of such symbols, he says, is their grammatical category and their potential combinations in sentences or thoughts. The semantics or contents of symbols, by contrast, are their representational meaning or content. Fodor concedes that mental processes concerning such symbols are sensitive only to syntax of symbols, for ‘they have access only to the formal properties of such representations.’⁵¹⁹ He notes that this *formality condition* entails that mental processes have no access to the semantic or contentful properties of the representations.⁵²⁰ Fodor notes that the importance of this condition is that syntax is all that is important when considering why symbols are tokened the way they are.

⁵¹⁷ Gabriel Segal, *A Slim Book on Narrow Content*, p. 121

⁵¹⁸ Jerry Fodor, ‘Introduction: Something on the State of the Art,’ p.27.

⁵¹⁹ Jerry Fodor, ‘Methodological Solipsism Considered as a Research Strategy in Psychology,’ p.241.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.247.

Fodor concedes that all he has accounted for, so far, is the syntax of symbols for twins across possible world, but has said nothing about their meaning or content. He says that relevant meaning or content is *narrow*, for it just is the 'phenomenal seeming' that twins share. It follows that, concerning the water thought experiment, twins across possible worlds hold 'a universally quantified belief with the content that all the potable, transparent, kind of stuff is wet.'⁵²¹ Fodor also says, concerning the arthritis thought experiment wherein one twin subject has incomplete understanding, both express 'the same belief about tharthritis,' but we must be wary in attributing beliefs in such cases. Fodor insists that phenomenal seemings as narrow meanings or contents are entirely fixed by our *perspective*. But even so, he says, 'establishing the identity of the meanings or contents of beliefs is not yet to say how they shall be *evaluated*.'⁵²² The latter, he suggests, proceeds by 'general practical principles.' This local evaluation, he says, provides such beliefs with their truth conditions.⁵²³ Fodor concludes that 'by distinguishing the content of a belief from its truth conditions,' there is no problem about meaning or content.⁵²⁴

Lynne Rudder Baker notes that Fodor incurs a serious problem here. In particular, she notes that, if he is correct about his representational theory of mind, then by his formality condition, mental symbols and processes 'are *not* essentially semantic, but only syntactic.'⁵²⁵ It follows that the semantic or contentful states of his twins universally quantified water or arthritis belief would either be arbitrary, or

⁵²¹ Jerry Fodor, 'Cognitive Science and the Twin Earth Problem,' p.101.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, p.110.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, p.112.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p.112.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p.113.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.115.

⁵²⁵ Lynne Ruder Baker, 'A Farewell to Functionalism,' p.144.

would derive 'entirely from relations to the environment.'⁵²⁶ If the semantics or content of his water belief is derived from the environment, this is tantamount to admitting that semantic or content externalism is true. But as Lepore and Loewer say, even if he solves this problem, and even if some of the terms in his universally quantified water or arthritis beliefs amount to narrow meaning or content, 'it is not clear that *all* the terms involved in formulating such beliefs can be thought of as narrow.'⁵²⁷ The problem is that some terms, such as potable, or disease, 'are more susceptible to externalist intuitions than others.'⁵²⁸ If this is so, these philosophers say, it seems that only some beliefs can have narrow meaning or content, and the rest will be externalist.

Fodor does not respond directly to the charge that because of his representational theory of mind, his mental symbols and their processes either reduce to syntax, or derive their meaning or content from the external world. But his position has the recourses to deal with this objection. In particular, his position entails that so long as mental symbols and their processes preserve truth, their semantics and contents will take care of themselves. In other words, twins quantified water or arthritis beliefs have the same syntax, and their semantics or contents are a derivative property. This will be a phenomenal seeming that is the same for both twins, but is locally evaluated and assigned truth conditions. Fodor does respond to the charge that not all the terms in twin thought experiments are susceptible to his treatment. He insists that if some of the terms in the experiments are susceptible to his sort of phenomenal seeming account, there is 'no reason to assume that they all cannot be.' Fodor notes that it is 'not an objection to my position that such terms *must* be treated in a way that favors externalism.' In sum,

⁵²⁶ Ibid., p.144.

⁵²⁷ Ernest Lepore and Barry Loewer, 'Solipsistic Semantics,' p.607.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p.608.

there are both problems and responses for this phenomenal seeming version of narrow meaning or content.

In an important article, Colin McGinn offers a second version of narrow meaning or content, which is based in his version of conceptual role semantics. He cites the work of Hartry Field, who notes that meaning or content should be split into two independent factors, into *functional roles* and reference. He says that functional roles should be characterized as part of a holistic network of other such roles. But unlike Field, he insists that such roles should not be characterized causally, but in an *intentional* vocabulary. McGinn says functional roles are ‘determined by the persons subjective conditional probability function’ on particular sentences or thoughts.⁵²⁹ But this entails, he says, that roles are ‘based on his propensity to assign probability values conditionally upon other sentences or thoughts, which depends on associated descriptions.’⁵³⁰ McGinn claims that this has implications for issues of meaning or content, for it seems that ‘the only important component for psychological explanation is functional roles.’ This seems to entail, he says, that reference drops out as explanatorily idle. This means that functional roles, put intentionally as subjective probability functions, are narrow meaning or content.

It follows that McGinn offers his conceptual role semantics as a version of narrow meaning or content. This is so, he says, for the twins across possible worlds share functional roles and so are disposed to the *same* subjective probabilities that govern their beliefs concerning water or arthritis. But given all this, he says, twins across possible worlds, whether they have water or arthritis beliefs, would be *explained* the same. McGinn notes that the other part of meaning

⁵²⁹ Colin McGinn, ‘The Structure of Content,’ p.216.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.226.

or content is reference itself. But he admits that given his conceptual role semantics, he has ‘a problem of motivating the theory of reference at all.’⁵³¹ McGinn finds a use for reference at the point of communication, ‘in the intention with which assertions and other kinds of speech acts are made.’⁵³² He notes that to fulfill the intention to *communicate* a belief about the world, ‘a speaker must exploit signs in representational relation to things in the world.’⁵³³ McGinn notes that this is not the important position that reference has occupied in so many other theories of meaning or content, but even so, he wants to find a use for reference. But he says that for reference to have a practical use at all it must be demoted to facilitating communication.

John McDowell insists that conceptual role semantics has many problems. In particular, he says that functional roles cannot be characterized abstractly. McDowell says that conceptual role semantics ‘does not have the general *normative* notion of rationality at its disposal.’⁵³⁴ But if it cannot make use of rationality, he says, it can only ‘draw at most from certain *transitions* that minds are prone to do,’ but it cannot say they should reason. McDowell insists that conceptual role semantics holds that ‘the normative force of intentional content can be captured outside of that content,’ and so the attempt to do so is a kind of ‘naturalistic fallacy.’⁵³⁵ Joseph Owens adds that if functional roles are characterized intentionally by subjective conditional probability functions, a related problem arises. This position is problematic, he says, for put in this way, ‘roles presuppose externalist methods of meaning or content individuation.’⁵³⁶ This is

⁵³¹ Ibid., p.235.

⁵³² Ibid., p.245.

⁵³³ Ibid., p.245.

⁵³⁴ John McDowell, ‘Functionalism and Anomalous Monism,’ p.335.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., p.329.

⁵³⁶ Joseph Owens, ‘In Defence of a Different Doppelganger,’ p.536.

because, he says, we categorize actions in terms of their worldly effects, which are different for the twins and their respective water or arthritis beliefs.⁵³⁷ Owens concludes that conceptual role semantics cannot make use of functional roles as a theory of narrow meaning or content.

In an effort to address these charges, Brian Loar says that conceptual role semantics has more recourses than its critics suggest. In particular, he says that at the same time we both ‘*have* such roles, and yet hope to *characterize* them in physical functional terms.’⁵³⁸ But if that is correct, he says, ‘there is no philosophical barrier to the idea that when we have thoughts, *without realizing it*, we discriminate physical functional properties.’ The idea here, he insists, is for ‘functional states to *mirror* rationality.’⁵³⁹ To say that our having function roles *cannot* mirror rationality is not an argument, but an assertion. But Loar also says that when functional roles are characterized intentionally by our subjective probability functions, this ‘involves no apparent conceptions of external reference relations.’⁵⁴⁰ By contrast, he says, these roles embody what he calls ‘realization conditions’ of our meanings or contents, or how it seems from our perspective. He says that such realization conditions are still not truth conditions, for the latter are only gained by being wedded to broad meaning or content.⁵⁴¹ In sum, there are again both problems and responses for this conceptual role version of narrow meaning or content.

In his later work, Fodor changes his mind, and offers the third version of narrow meaning or content. To do this, he borrows from David Kaplan and cites his distinction between *character* and *content*. The character of any utterance, he

⁵³⁷ Ibid., p.541.

⁵³⁸ Brian Loar, ‘Subjective Intentionality,’ p.101.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., p. 109

⁵⁴⁰ Brian Loar, ‘A New Kind of Content,’ p.126.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p.136.

says, is the *function* which assigns to each context a particular content.⁵⁴² Fodor adapts this notion of character, and so says that narrow meaning or content is similar. In other words, he says, meaning or content is a function that ‘maps thoughts *and* contexts onto truth conditions,’ and so, these are identical only if they determine the same mapping across possible worlds.⁵⁴³ If this works, we have ‘an extensional identity criterion for narrow meaning or content’⁵⁴⁴ But Fodor admits that his narrow function version of narrow meaning or content is quite unusual, for as a mere function, it cannot be expressed by itself, and so is *ineffable* on that account. He says that this is because, as separated from a context, any given narrow function is only content potentially, and so, it ‘only gets to be content, when, and only when, it gets to be *anchored*.’⁵⁴⁵ By the time such functions are anchored, though, they are broad meaning or content.

Fodor says that narrow functions, by themselves, are ineffable, for ‘we cannot *say* what the twin thoughts have in common.’⁵⁴⁶ But at least, he says, narrow functions still determine the same mappings of truth conditions across worlds. In other words, he says, ‘if anyone were to be transported to any other twin world, their narrow functions would determine certain broad meanings or contents.’ Fodor next says that the way that we can know such narrow functions is by inferring them from his causal theory of broad content. In particular, his theory is that broad content is determined by ‘the primacy of veridical tokenings of symbols’ in the world, while mistaken symbols are asymmetrically dependent upon them, such that these latter are wild.⁵⁴⁷ Fodor says that ascertaining such

⁵⁴² David Kaplan, ‘Thoughts on Demonstratives,’ p.37.

⁵⁴³ Jerry Fodor, *Psychosemantics: the Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind*, p.48.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.48.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.50.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.50.

⁵⁴⁷ Jerry Fodor, *Psychosemantics: the Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind*, p.101.

asymmetric dependence supposes psychophysical regularities, such that 'broad contents are defined by *psychological laws* that connect environmental properties with mental properties.' But then, he says, narrow meaning or content 'is actually a construction out of broad content, constrained by various mechanisms that mediate such correlations.'⁵⁴⁸

Paul Bernier notes that Fodor incurs many problems with his theory that narrow functions are narrow meaning or content. In particular, he notes that if narrow functions are not themselves meaning or content and are so only potentially, and are so only when anchored in a context, a problem arises. Bernier says that such narrow functions 'are either not content at all, or just are broad content.'⁵⁴⁹ The reason this is so, he says, is because by the time we can understand meaning or content, it is already broad. But then it seems that there is little motivation to postulate narrow functions at that point. Bernier also says that broad meanings or contents are supposed to be determined by asymmetric dependence. In that case, he notes, when stimuli are diverse enough so that mental symbols are tokened by all sorts of items, asymmetric dependence is broken. He says that then, the broad meaning or content of such symbols will include *all* the disjuncts of items that caused the tokenings. Bernier notes that since such broad meanings or contents are supposed to allow us to infer narrow functions, then 'our only way to do this is undermined by error.'⁵⁵⁰

Fodor responds by admitting that since narrow functions, by themselves, do not have semantic or contentful properties, and so, by the time we understand them, they are broad meaning or content. But he says that this does not affect his position, for even then, it is still reasonable to infer that twins across possible worlds do

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., p.268.

⁵⁴⁹ Paul Bernier, 'Narrow Content, Context of Thought, and Asymmetric Dependency,' p.333.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., p.335.

share such a narrow function, one that determines their broad contents in different contexts. Fodor also grants that on his causal theory of asymmetric dependence for broad meaning or content, the dependence is often broken, and so yields disjunctive results.⁵⁵¹ But even so, he insists that ‘you get some room to wiggle if you think of denotation in terms of *nomic relations among properties* instead of in terms of particular instantiations.’ This is because, he says, across possible worlds, twins can still be subsumed by a *single law*, despite the fact that they make mistakes.⁵⁵² Fodor says that even when asymmetric dependence is broken, we can discount mistakes by establishing such a law, and still infer narrow functions. In sum, there are again both problems and responses for this narrow function version of narrow meaning or content.

To see what has occurred here Gabriel Segal first notes that while phenomenal seeming, functional role, and narrow function versions of narrow meaning or content may have their virtues, they are all subject to a dilemma. The first horn of this dilemma, he says, is that phenomenal seemings, functional roles, or narrow functions, are not meaning or content at all. This impression is aided by the fact that phenomenal seemings have no truth conditions of their own, and only gain them when evaluated locally, functional roles may be characterized intentionally, but are really just realization conditions, and narrow functions, which are not truth conditional at all, are ineffable until anchored.⁵⁵³ Segal says that the second horn of the dilemma is that phenomenal seemings, functional roles, or narrow functions, if they are meaning or content at all, may be just functions of their physical and social environments. In other words, he says, if these versions of meaning or content deserve the name of content at all, they are broad. If this is

⁵⁵¹ Jerry Fodor, ‘Replies,’ p.268.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p.302.

⁵⁵³ Gabriel Segal, *A Slim Book on Narrow Content*, p.121.

correct, phenomenal seemings, functional roles, or narrow functions, are broad meaning or content in disguise.⁵⁵⁴

In point of fact, Segal says, it is no accident that phenomenal seeming, conceptual role, and narrow function versions of narrow meaning or content are all usually attacked in the same way. In essence, this is because what gives rise to the dilemma cited above is that these three versions of narrow meaning or content all *accept* semantic or content externalist intuitions, which are that the physical and social thought experiments show that there *is* a necessary connection between mind and world. Segal says that this entails that these versions of narrow meaning or content have unwittingly set themselves a very difficult task. In particular, these versions each hope to carve out a position that is still meaning or content, yet is not truth conditional.

In essence, the mistake here is to attach too much significance to the externalist intuitions generated by the kinds of thought experiments that have been given to us. The mistake is to take these experiments too seriously, and then draw from them a conclusion about the extension of concepts. This problem is that, once this is done, the *only* move left for the internalist is to try to develop and defend some revisionist view of psychology. To do this is difficult, to say the least. The truth is that psychology as practiced by the folk and scientists is already, at root, internalist.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, p.121.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid, p.122.

In this passage, Segal says that the thought experiments given to us do not demand that externalism is true, and so it is more plausible and simpler to say that the externalist intuitions are false, at the outset. If this move is possible, he says, it follows that narrow meaning or content 'does not need to posit any fancy and additional notion of meaning or content beyond what is already at work in psychology.'⁵⁵⁶ Segal notes that if this is correct, narrow meaning or content does not have to avoid truth conditions either. The benefits of this kind of narrow meaning or content are that it can have truth conditions of its own, and so, because of that, is no longer mysterious. It follows that narrow meaning or content is just ordinary meaning or content.

In point of fact, Putnam and Burge have already shown how this might be so. These philosophers do not succeed with their types of externalism. In the water thought experiment, before the advent of chemistry, there is little way to know what twins across possible worlds would say about their water. It should not be assumed that these twins would care to indexically or rigidly distinguish their respective waters, according to same kind-relationships or essential properties. In the arthritis thought experiment, moreover, even when the subject has an incomplete understanding of arthritis, it is easy to say what his belief contents are. This is because we already know what he believes, and this seems concern tharthritis. If Putnam and Burge do not succeed with their arguments for externalism, there is no reason to say that narrow meaning or content must be constructed out of broad content, or that it cannot have truth conditions of its own. This kind of narrow meaning or content eliminates the mystery here that beset

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid, p.123.

other versions of it. This kind of narrow meaning or content, it turns out, is just ordinary meaning or content.

There is an important question, lastly, of whether there is anything more to be said about such narrow meaning or content. In a sense there is not, for as such, this kind of narrow meaning or content has truth conditions of its own, and as such, is not mysterious. It follows that narrow meaning or content is just ordinary meaning or content, and might well supervene on brain states, be casually relevant, and represent the world. But there is more to be said, although now the focus of what can be said about it must change. The debate must shift back to more traditional questions. The traditional question of what meaning or content is at all, be it mode of presentation, a set of implicit descriptions, or just use itself, is still unsettled. The traditional question of the way in which such meaning or content can exist in a physical brain, whether it exists locally or in a distributed manner, or whether really exists or is only an instrumental posit, is also unsettled. These questions are relevant, but they are different ones, and cannot be explored here. But if this theory of narrow meaning or content is correct, it still requires a theory of mind to support it. The most natural successor to substance dualism is the identity theory of mind and brain.

6.5

In his seminal paper, 'Is Consciousness a Brain Process,' U. T Place argues for the identity theory of mind and brain. He begins by insisting that his position is an *empirical* one, 'not to be dismissed on logical grounds alone.'⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁷ U. T. Place, 'Is Consciousness a Brain Process,' p.44.

Place says that the identity theory of mind and brain is not a claim about meaning or content. Place notes that, rather, when the meanings or contents of any two theoretical kinds differ, it is an empirical question whether or not they refer to the same items. But he concedes that the question of the potential identity of the mind and brain is importantly different, for given our unique perspective on the two, 'the operations that have to be performed to verify the two sets of characteristics inhering in the object can *seldom if ever* be performed simultaneously.'⁵⁵⁸ Place further says that the case of mind and brain is difficult, for 'the observations required to verify statements about consciousness are *fundamentally different* from those to verify statements about the brain.'⁵⁵⁹ But even so, he says, there are good reasons to hold that mind and brain actually are identical, and proceeds to delineate these.

To complete his theory, Place asks why we are so ready to assume that the mind and brain are different. The reason, he says, is that the difference in 'verification procedures' for mind as opposed to brain encourages us to say that they are different. Place notes that this only gets worse, for we falsely think that we should be able to verify the difference or identity of mind and brain by *introspection*. The trouble with this, he says, is that when we introspect, since we do not see our brains, we are led to assume that mind and brain are different. But Place insists that these are mistakes, and ones that make the mind and brain seem different when they are actually the same. He insists that rather, as with other difficult theoretical identifications, mind and brain can only be seen to be the same '*within* the appropriate scientific body of *theory* that provides an immediate

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p.46.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., p.47.

explanation of the observations.⁵⁶⁰ Place postulates that once we see the mind and brain as just another theoretical identification, there will be no problem in saying that the two are the same. He later even says that, scientifically speaking, we already know enough to say that if the mind is anything 'it must simply be the brain.'⁵⁶¹

Place does not, as of yet, offer any arguments *for* the identity theory of mind and brain. J. J. C. Smart offers one such argument, which is that 'science is increasingly giving us the view whereby organisms can be seen as physiochemical mechanisms.'⁵⁶² Smart says that everything seems to follow strict deterministic physical laws, and because of this, so too does the mind, in some sense. This seems to entail that the mind and brain are identical. Smart insists that if substance dualists deny that physical laws control our minds, such exceptions 'would represent nomological danglers.'⁵⁶³ If such dualists insist that our mental or contentful states really are such nomological danglers, they should say *how* that could be so. In other words, he says, dualists should say how minds escape strict deterministic physical laws. Smart says that the trouble here is that dualist attempts to do this, although they rarely bother to delineate such things, are woefully inadequate. It follows that dualists should explain how minds can escape physical laws but do not. If dualists are correct in their position, it remains just an *intuition*.

The identity theory of Place and Smart is often called a *type* identity theory. This brand of the identity theory of mind and brain has become unpopular, for a host of reasons, although many of them are not serious. The two

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., p.48.

⁵⁶¹ U. T. Place, 'Materialism as a Scientific Hypothesis,' p.103.

⁵⁶² J. J. C. Smart, 'Sensations and Brain Processes,' p.161.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., p.162.

main complaints are the following. The first derives from the fact that our knowledge of minds or brains can be had independently of one another. To see how this might be so, Frank Jackson asks us to imagine a neuroscientist who has *all* the physical facts about a given experience, such as seeing a sunset. But this scientist, he says, even though she knows all the physical facts about such experiences, has never seen a sunset herself. Jackson insists that if this scientist were to see a sunset, she would still learn something. But he notes that since his neuroscientist already has all the physical facts about seeing sunsets, 'what she learns cannot be a physical fact.'⁵⁶⁴ Jackson infers that what his neuroscientist learns is *phenomenal*, such that there is an element of our minds that is purely subjective. Jackson concludes that the identity theory of mind and brain does not account for such subjectivity, and so is incomplete.⁵⁶⁵

Daniel Dennett notes that Jackson does not make his case against the identity theory of mind and brain. In particular, he says, his case turns upon asking us to imagine that his neuroscientist 'has *all* the physical facts about seeing sunsets.' Dennett notes that imagining his having all the physical facts is an immense task, and one that we can never achieve. It follows that we may be 'mistaking a failure of imagination as an insight into necessity.'⁵⁶⁶ He says that if we would first imagine her having all the physical facts about isolated properties, such as textures and colors, our intuition might be that she can 'leverage her way to complete knowledge about all sorts of things,' including sunsets.⁵⁶⁷ This

⁵⁶⁴ Frank Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia,' p.251.

⁵⁶⁵ Frank Jackson, in 'What Mary Didn't Know,' admits that 'I grant that I have no proof' that his neurophysiologist 'acquires, aside from abilities, factual knowledge upon his release' (p.292). But Jackson says that 'my claim is that the knowledge argument is a valid argument from highly plausible, though admittedly not demonstrable, premises, to the conclusion that physicalism is false' (p.292).

⁵⁶⁶ Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p.401.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.403.

neuroscientist would already know all about experiencing sunsets and so would not learn anything new upon seeing one. Dennett rejects the need to saying what the neuroscientist does learn upon seeing a sunset, which is a strategy other philosophers have adopted.⁵⁶⁸ If he is correct, all such responses are unnecessary, for the neuroscientist already knows all the physical facts about sunsets in question.

In an important work, Saul Kripke says that this knowledge based objection to the type identity theory of mind and brain can be put differently. He notes that, when we refer to experiences or the brain, we use rigid designators, such that our words about them designate their essential properties. Kripke says that when we designate experiences, we access their immediate *phenomenological* qualities.⁵⁶⁹ But this entails, he says, that 'it is not possible that any pain may have existed, and yet not have been *this* pain.'⁵⁷⁰ In other words, he says, if any pain exists, it is the pain we think it is. Kripke says that given this phenomenal quality, since our references to experiences or the brain are *rigid*, any identity between them is a *necessary* one. But he says that the identity between does not seem to be necessary, but to be contingent, and this cannot be explained away as the product of any 'epistemic intermediaries.' It follows that barring any other explanation of their contingency, they are not necessarily identical, and so may not be identical at all. The identity theory misidentifies the essences of mind and brain, which may not be identical.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁸ Lawrence Nemerow in 'Physicalism and the Cognitive Role of Acquaintance' notes that what the neuroscientist learns is not any knowledge of a phenomenal sort, but merely 'sophisticated *imaginative* abilities that give rise to other such abilities' (p.498). He notes that if the neuroscientist sees a sunset, she would be able to imagine it later, and to do certain things with this knowledge.

⁵⁶⁹ Saul Kripke, 'Identity and Necessity,' p.189.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.190.

⁵⁷¹ Kripke, in *Naming and Necessity*, says that, 'the usual moves and analogies are not available' to the identity theorist (p.155). He says that 'no identity theorist seems to me to have a convincing

But as David Papineau argues, Kripke does not make his case against the mind and brain identity theory. In particular, he notes that if we rigidly designate our phenomenal or brain properties, and if any identity between those properties is necessary, there may still be no problem. This is because, he says, ‘we rigidly designate experiences such as pain in *both* phenomenal and material ways.’⁵⁷² In other words, when we designate pain, the property that we designate is often both phenomenal and material, or is indeterminate between the two. Papineau notes that the apparent contingency of the identity of phenomenal and brain properties arises because of a kind of epistemic intermediary between them, which is that ‘we conceive of them differently.’ In other words, he says, we simultaneously have pains and brains, and from our unique perspective, the difference in what our conceptions are about is unavailable to us. But if mind and brain are necessarily identical, and if we rigidly designate them both in both phenomenal and material ways, we are ‘conceiving the impossible.’ Papineau says that is what occurs in this case.

The second objection to this version of the identity theory of mind and brain is more serious, because it is typically offered not by those harkening after some remnants of substance dualism, but by those who are much more sympathetic to the identity theory. The trouble is that this version of the identity theory of mind and brain supposes that certain types of mental properties nomically match up with certain types of brain properties, or instantiate strict psychophysical laws. The problem with these laws is that, ‘given the possibility that the mental properties are multiply realized by physical ones, such laws do

argument’ against the view that mind and brain may be different. Kripke does not offer any conclusions here, but still says that any identity theory is unlikely to succeed against his attack (p.155).

⁵⁷² David Papineau, *Thinking about Consciousness*, p.87.

not exist, not even disjunctive ones.⁵⁷³ There are far too many potential disjuncts here to make any sort of law, and those that exist are of such a heterogeneous character that there is no principled way to unify them. But furthermore, if we pretend that such psychophysical laws exist anyway, the laws we will create will be unduly chauvinistic. It follows that there can be no strict psychophysical laws between mental and physical properties, and so the identity theory of mind and brain is false.

But as should be obvious, even if this objection to the identity theory of mind and brain is correct, it does not prove that all versions of the theory are false, but only that the type version of it is less plausible. This is plain, for the objection only shows that mental and physical property correlations are wildly disjunctive, and perhaps even infinitely so. But this point, although surely true, would only prove that all forms of the identity theory of mind and brain are false if at least one of those disjuncts of mental properties that are correlated with brain properties is *not* physical at all, or is purely phenomenal. In other words, this objection only favors substance dualism if one of these mental disjuncts emerges out of physical properties, but is nothing but pure phenomenon. But obviously, this objection shows no such thing. This is because, even though mental properties may be multiply realizable by physical properties, all the disjuncts may be physical, nonetheless. But even though this multiple realization objection does not show that all forms of the identity theory of mind and brain are false, we still do not know what form the theory should take.

Donald Davidson attempts to answer this question by offering a weaker token version of the identity theory of mind and brain that denies that there are

⁵⁷³ Jerry Fodor, 'Special Sciences,' p. 127

psychophysical laws, which is based in his ontology of mental and physical *events*. In particular, he says that unlike mental or brain states, events of any kind are spatiotemporal particulars.⁵⁷⁴ Davidson calls his theory ‘anomalous monism,’ since he holds that mental events cannot be captured within any physical laws, and so, to that extent, are anomalous. But also, he says, his position is monistic since he holds that mental events ‘are still physical under *some* description.’⁵⁷⁵ To explain what he means, he conveniently summarizes his position in three principles.

1. Mental events causally interact with physical events.
2. Events related as cause and effect fall under strict deterministic laws.
3. There are no strict deterministic laws for mental events.⁵⁷⁶

Davidson claims that each of these principles is difficult to deny. To deny principle 1, he says, would be either to imply that our words or thoughts would be epiphenomenal, or that there is no world to interact with. To deny principle 2, he says, would be to insist upon a notion of causation that does not entail strict deterministic laws, and this he finds implausible. Davidson also claims that to deny principle 3 would be to deny a kind of freedom of the will. But importantly, he does not say that we have freedom in the sense that we step outside the causal nexus, but only that our belief that we do cannot be explained away. In effect, he

⁵⁷⁴ Davidson, in his ‘The Individuation of Events,’ proposes that ‘events are identical if and only if they have exactly the same causes and effects’ (p.169). But in his ‘Reply to Quine,’ he concedes that it is difficult to count such causes and effects, and so abandons this formulation of events. He insists that events are just ‘spatiotemporal particulars,’ which is a neater and better account (p.176).

⁵⁷⁵ Donald Davidson, ‘Mental Events,’ p.207.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.208.

only hopes to defend the position that mental events are free from strict deterministic laws.

But as Davidson recognizes, his three principles seem to be inconsistent. He says that his principle 1 says that mental and physical events causally interact, and principle 2 says that any events that do so must instantiate a strict deterministic law. These two principles contradict his principle 3, which says that for mental events, there are *no* such strict deterministic laws. Davidson notes that the only solutions are either to deny one of these three principles, or to find some way to 'make them consistent.' In point of fact, some philosophers have denied principle 1, for they still cling to the older version of the identity theory, which rules out such interaction. But other philosophers have said that principle 2 assumes strict deterministic laws, which, they say, is an unreasonable theory of causality, and so must be replaced with singular causation.⁵⁷⁷ By contrast, still other philosophers have said that principle 3 proves too much, for it seems to entail that parallelism between mind and brain is true.⁵⁷⁸ Davidson, by contrast, adopts the unique strategy of trying to show that his three principles are consistent, after all.

Davidson says that the way to make principles 1, 2 and 3 consistent is to make an important distinction, one that is already implicit in his event ontology. In particular, he claims that 'causality is about relations between individual events *no matter how described*.'⁵⁷⁹ But the laws about events, he says, are not like this. Davidson says that, rather, 'laws are *linguistic*, and so events can

⁵⁷⁷ Elizabeth Anscombe, in 'Causation and Determinism,' notes that 'over and over again it is assumed that any singular causal statement implies a universal statement' (p.147). In point of fact, she says, 'examples are recalcitrant, but that does not deter.' Anscombe says that philosophers who adhere to this offer no reasons for it. But plainly, she says, 'such a position needs reasons' (p.147).

⁵⁷⁸ Jerry Fodor, in 'Making Mind Matter More,' p. 74.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.215.

instantiate laws, *only* as those events are described in one way or another way.⁵⁸⁰

It follows that, given such a distinction between events and linguistic laws, he can reason that his principle 2 is not about events at all, but to be about descriptions of events in terms of strict deterministic laws. To this effect, he changes his principle 2 to the following.

4. Events related as cause and effect instantiate a strict deterministic law *under some description*.⁵⁸¹

To put this all together, Davidson says that by principle 1, there is causal interaction between mental and physical events, regardless of how they are described. By principle 4, he says, when events are described correctly, they instantiate a strict deterministic law. He insists that, lastly, by principle 3, when there is causation between mental and physical events, such that a strict deterministic law is instantiated, mental types do not appear in it. But here, Davidson says that when there is causation between mental and physical events and this instantiates a strict deterministic law, 'this law is physical.'⁵⁸² In other words, strict laws are all physical laws. It follows that his principles are consistent after all.

Davidson explains his principle 3, the anomaly of mental events, in more detail. He says that this anomaly is the product of the different fact mental and physical events have different *constitutive* features. He first says that the mental is *holistic*, for 'there is no assigning beliefs to a person one by one,' on the basis of whatever clues. Davidson insists that rather, we 'make sense of beliefs only as

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., p.215.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., p.215.

⁵⁸² Ibid., p.215.

they cohere with others.⁵⁸³ The meaning or content of any given belief cannot be understood individually, but rather that it 'is determined by its place in the pattern.'⁵⁸⁴ He says that given these claims, the mental is characterized by 'holistic conditions of coherence, rationality, and consistency.' Davidson also notes that principle 3, mental anomaly, follows because of a second constitutive feature of mental events, that they are *normative*. He says that we attempt to adhere to a 'constitutive ideal of rationality.' It follows that, given certain inputs, there are ways we *ought* to reason, and conclusions we *should* reach.⁵⁸⁵ By contrast, he insists that the physical is not holistic and normative in this way, but rather, generalizations about it 'give us reason to believe that there is a precise law at work.'⁵⁸⁶

Davidson says that, given the different constitutive features of mental and physical events, there can be no *psychophysical laws* between them. In other words, he says, given the 'disparate commitments of the mental and physical schemes, 'there cannot be any tight connection between the realms if each is to retain allegiance to its proper source of evidence.'⁵⁸⁷ Davidson claims that even though mental and physical events are identical, their connections 'can only be stated by shifting to another vocabulary,' or by changing the subject.⁵⁸⁸ There can be no psychophysical laws between mental and physical events, for if either were characterized in such laws, it would cease to be what it is, which would amount to an elimination of both. Davidson says that this has implications for the social

⁵⁸³ Ibid., p.221.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., p.221.

⁵⁸⁵ Donald Davidson, in 'Paradoxes of Irrationality,' splits rationality into a 'principle of total evidence,' according to which we should believe only that which is the most supported and a 'principle of continence,' according to which we should act on our most favored desire (p.178). Davidson does not say that these principles are all rationality is, and insists that we are irrational all the time.

⁵⁸⁶ Donald Davidson, 'Mental Events,' p.219.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., p.221.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., p.222.

sciences. In particular, he insists that 'the social sciences cannot be expected to develop in ways that exactly parallel the physical sciences, nor can we expect to explain human behavior with precision.'⁵⁸⁹ Davidson says that even though many may find this to be an unfortunate consequence, it is not. He says that this is the hallmark of those sciences.

Davidson still offers anomalous monism as a token identity theory of mind and brain. In particular, his principle 1 says that there is causal interaction between mental and physical events. By itself, this does not entail anything concerning the identity of mind and brain, since substance dualists believe this too. But Davidson also insists that, by his principle 4, the causal interaction between any events instantiates strict deterministic laws, albeit only under some description. He interprets this to mean that the only such laws that exist are *physical*, such that the physical realm is a 'closed causal system.' Davidson intends that physical laws govern the movements of all matter 'without any assistance from anything outside themselves.'⁵⁹⁰ He says that if mental and physical events are both subsumed under strict deterministic laws in a closed system, *and* if these laws are physical, they both have physical descriptions. But any two events that have physical descriptions 'just are physical events.'⁵⁹¹ Davidson argues for his identity theory of mind and brain by saying that all events have physical descriptions.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁹ Donald Davidson, 'Philosophy as Psychology,' p.231.

⁵⁹⁰ Donald Davidson, 'Mental Events,' p. 222.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.223.

⁵⁹² Davidson, in his 'Reply to J. J. C. Smart,' says that his claim that 'causal relations have strict laws to back them' is harmless, for it 'does *not*, in any sense, make my argument circular' (p.247). But alone, such laws *do* beg the question against the substance dualism. Davidson still says that his conclusion follows, 'but only when combined with other premises,' although he does not say what these are.

Davidson does *not* offer anomalous monism as a different argument for the identity theory of mind and brain, in the sense of adding to the evidence for the theory. He offers his position as an articulation of the most plausible form of that theory, and this is where his principle 3 comes in. This is an important clarification, for it indicates that he already holds that the identity theory is true in some form, and only hopes to say why. This form of the identity theory, he says, is that as his principle 3 demands, mental and physical events have different constitutive features concerning holism and normativity, and so there can be no psychophysical laws between them. But actually, if his anomalous monism is not a different argument for the identity theory of mind and brain after all, it may seem to be vacuous on that account. It is not entirely vacuous, though, for it still articulates the intuitions behind the identity theory, which is that even if mental and physical events may not seem to us to be identical, they are identical in some way. In essence, Davidson offers anomalous monism not as a new argument for the theory, but to show how it can be true.

Davidson says that this anomalous monism has advantages. In particular, on his telling, anomalous monism does not suppose that there are psychophysical laws between mental and physical events, but rather insists that they are impossible, from which it follows that it escapes the apparent flaws of other identity theories. In other words, anomalous monism does not embody a false theory of the relation of mental and physical properties. Davidson also notes that the benefit of this lack of such laws is that it also provides a degree of autonomy for mental events, for now they 'are removed from the direct reach of physical law.' This autonomy of mental events prevents any potential reduction to physical events.

Two features of mental events in their relation to physical events, their causal dependence and their nomological independence, combine to dissolve what has seemed to be a paradox, the efficacy of meaning or thought in the world, and their freedom from strict law. It follows that when we represent mental events, we locate them amid physical happenings through the relation of cause and effect. But as long as we do not change the idiom, that same mode of portrayal insulates mental events from the strict laws that explain physical phenomena.⁵⁹³

But Davidson also says that anomalous monism is an improvement upon older forms of the identity theory, since it does not assume any psychophysical laws, and so delivers a kind of *autonomy* of the mental. But as usual, things are not so simple, for many philosophers have asked whether anomalous monism can really distance itself enough from other identity theories to avoid their problem of unwanted reduction, yet not be so different from them so that the theory incurs the problems of substance dualism. Davidson knows that this is clearly a difficult balance to get right, yet also that much hangs on doing so. The worry here is that anomalous monism may be just one of these unfortunate options in the disguise of new terminology.

In a series of articles, Ted Honderich says that if Davidson is correct about anomalous monism, it is difficult to see 'how mental properties could be causally relevant.' This is because, he says, even within his event ontology, we can specify that causal relations 'hold between the relevant *properties* of

⁵⁹³ Ibid., p.224.

events.’⁵⁹⁴ But given anomalous monism, he says, we would still hope that mental events are causally relevant because of their mental properties. Honderich says that this is the problem, for only physical events enter into strict deterministic laws, and do so because of their physical properties. In other words, this entails that ‘only physical properties are causally relevant to behavior.’⁵⁹⁵ Jaegwon Kim notes that the trouble is according to anomalous monism, ‘mental properties are causal idlers with no work to do.’ It may be that anomalous monism was not supposed to be a kind of epiphenomenalism, but it is one regardless. In particular, he says, anomalous monism, as an identity theory of mind and brain, is an ‘almost complete failure.’⁵⁹⁶ But anomalous monism was supposed to be an improvement on older versions of the identity theory.

Davidson responds that Honderich has confused causal events and linguistic laws about them. In particular, he says, according to his event ontology, ‘causality is a relation between *events*, and it holds between them no matter how they are described.’⁵⁹⁷ But then it makes no sense to pick any given property of an event and call that *the* cause.⁵⁹⁸ Davidson insists that ‘interest aside, *every* property of every event is causally relevant,’ and so events do not cause by virtue of their properties at all, but do so as *wholes*.⁵⁹⁹ But that said, says, token mental properties are still causally relevant, for each *supervenes* on some physical properties. In other words, there can be no change in mental properties unless there are changes in physical ones. Davidson says that this does not lead to

⁵⁹⁴ Ted Honderich, ‘The Argument for Anomalous Monism,’ p.63.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.65.

⁵⁹⁶ Jaegwon Kim, in *Philosophy of Mind*, clarifies the sense in which anomalous monism is a version of epiphenomenalism. He notes that ‘it is not epiphenomenalism in the classic sense, since mental events are allowed to be causes of other events. The point is that it implies epiphenomenalism about mental *properties*, for it still renders them causally irrelevant’ to behavior (p.138).

⁵⁹⁷ Donald Davidson, ‘Thinking Causes,’ p.6.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13.

⁵⁹⁹ Donald Davidson, ‘Problems in the Explanation of Action,’ p. 112.

reductionism of one to the other, for supervenience 'does not require that the *same* physical properties change with the *same* mental ones.'⁶⁰⁰ He says that supervenience still yields regularities between mental and physical properties, albeit imprecise ones. It follows that supervenience and regularities that guarantee the causal relevance of mental properties.⁶⁰¹

Davidson defends anomalous monism against the charge that it renders the mental causally inert, and in so doing, elaborates his theory. But he cannot really escape this charge so easily. Tim Crane notes that if causation is between events, and if events cause as wholes, that would seem to 'make it mysterious *why* events are related as they are.' Davidson says that events are individuated by their causes and effects, and later that they are individuated by space and time regions, but this is no help here. This is because he has 'no way to explain why events are causally related as they are,' beyond just saying that they are.⁶⁰² In other words, we can and do organize such causal relations and space time regions in any number of ways, and so it seems that he still does not explain why events are related as they are. Davidson avoids the problem of saying how mental properties are causally relevant, but does so at the cost of making events *primitive*, which renders them ineffable. Julia Tanney notes that if events causation is between events, and if cause as wholes, and if we do not know why events are related as they are, this has the further effect that it 'robs us of the explanatory connection between events and laws.'⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰ Donald Davidson, 'Thinking Causes,' p.7.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁶⁰² Tim Crane, in 'The Mental Causation Debate,' says that Davidson 'rejects the principle that causes have their effects by virtue of some of their properties' (p.227). But as he says, this is not helpful, for it 'leaves us unable to explain why some explanations are better than others by invoking certain features of reality' (p.228). In other words, this leaves him unable to explain anything.

⁶⁰³ Julia Tanney, 'Why Reasons May not be Causes,' p. 117

To make this worse, Jaegwon Kim notes that Davidson may accidentally belie one of his main selling points, the anomaly of the mental. In particular, he may do this because he tries to insure the causal relevance of mental properties by saying that they supervene on physical properties, such that there are regularities between the two kinds of properties. But even if this works, it seems, the worry then is that ‘once we begin talking about dependencies and correlations between specific physical and psychological properties, we are in effect talking about psychophysical laws and these raise the specter of unwanted reductionism.’⁶⁰⁴ In particular, the trouble here is that given this outlook on mental and physical properties, there little plausibility in ‘resisting local reductions’ of the former to the latter. Jerry Fodor adds that it may be that these psychophysical laws have to be hedged with clauses that allow for various potential exceptions, but are strict nonetheless. It follows that mental properties may be causally relevant, but at the cost of insuring that they are not anomalous, after all. It follows that anomalous monism is not an alternative to the older versions of the identity theory of mind and brain.

Davidson incurs an even more serious problem, for as Brian McLaughlin notes he does not overcome the original charge in the first place. This is because, he says, there is little reason to grant that all the properties of events are causally relevant, or that events cause as wholes, at all. McLaughlin insists that Davidson is incorrect here, for his event ontology is ‘entirely compatible with looking *within* events to isolate *which* properties are causally relevant.’⁶⁰⁵ In particular, for any given mental or physical event, it is still an open question which of those properties is causally relevant. McLaughlin notes that Davidson tries to dodge

⁶⁰⁴ Jaegwon Kim, ‘The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism,’ p.276.

⁶⁰⁵ Brian McLaughlin, ‘Davidson and the Charge of Epiphenomenalism,’ p.32.

this difficulty by citing his thesis that mental properties supervene on physical ones, which implies regularities between them. But he notes that this move encounters the same problem, for 'there is no reason whatsoever to think that if mental properties weakly supervene on physical ones, then mental properties are causally relevant.'⁶⁰⁶ Davidson tries to defend anomalous monism from the charge that it makes mental properties causally inert, but he implies that events are primitive, he accidentally opens the door to psychophysical laws, and he does not solve the problem.

So is there anything Davidson can do to save anomalous monism? Cynthia and Graham MacDonald have created such an argument, which is that, even within his event ontology we can 'distinguish between properties and their *instances*.'⁶⁰⁷ To illustrate, these philosophers cite the analogous case of how biological properties share instances with physical properties. In such cases, these philosophers say, to exemplify the former just is to exemplify the latter, despite the distinctness in properties. Macdonald and Macdonald claim that biological and physical properties are different, for they still 'partake of different *patterns*, such that each is nomological for a certain type of effect.'⁶⁰⁸ In other words, biological or physical properties are different properties after all, for they engage in different patterns, with 'different causal powers in their respective sciences.'⁶⁰⁹ Macdonald and Macdonald insist that biological and physical properties share instances, and are both causally relevant. In point of fact, these philosophers

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid, p.37.

⁶⁰⁷ Cynthia and Graham Macdonald, 'Mental Causes and the Explanation of Action,' p.148.

⁶⁰⁸ Cynthia and Graham Macdonald in 'Supervenient Causation' note that 'in the case of biology, the pattern that is produced is design,' insofar as 'natural selection produces functional properties,' which are normative. It follows that 'biological properties are different from biochemical properties upon which they supervene because they are adapted to each other and the environment' (p.18).

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., p.18.

suggest, this distinction suggests a way to understand the relationship between mental and physical properties.

Macdonald and Macdonald insist that mental and physical properties are like this. These philosophers note that mental and physical can share instances, but are different properties. These properties are different, for again they partake of different patterns, with different causal powers. The only thing that is unique here is that 'the distinctive pattern that mental properties display is that of rationality.'⁶¹⁰ The kind of pattern is inessential here, for given that these philosophers are correct generally, mental and physical property instances are both causally relevant.⁶¹¹ Macdonald and Macdonald seem to offer the best defence of anomalous monism against the charge that it makes mental properties inert, although what they defend is *different*. If these philosophers are serious about their analogy between biological and physical properties and mental and physical properties, there will be a great deal of *regularity* between their types. This may not entail that such properties are reducible to each other, but within the parameters of such regularity, many psychophysical laws between them will still be possible.⁶¹²

In conclusion, Place and Smart offer an identity theory of mind and brain that is supported by science, but is too strong. To remedy this, Davidson offers his anomalous monism, which says that mental and physical events are identical, although there are no psychophysical laws linking them. But anomalous monism seems to make mental properties causally inert, and his defence of his own

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., p.18.

⁶¹¹ Cynthia and Graham MacDonald, 'How to be Psychologically Relevant,' p.72.

⁶¹² To put this differently, Jaegwon Kim says that mental properties will be locally reducible to physical ones. Macdonald and Macdonald say that such reductions are not forthcoming, for mental and physical properties have different patterns. But actually, the truth may be somewhere in the middle, for now the amount of reduction possible will vary with the amount of correlation between the two patterns of properties.

position is inadequate. Macdonald and Macdonald show that anomalous monism can be defended with property instances. Davidson may accept such a defence in terms of property instances, but he would disapprove of the motivation. This is because, he adheres to semantic or content externalism, for he says that 'in the plainest and methodologically basic cases, we cannot but take objects of belief to be the cause of that belief.'⁶¹³ But his anomalous monism and his externalism can be divorced. In particular, given his claims about supervenience and regularities between mental and physical events, meaning or content is determined by our intrinsic properties. It follows that that semantic or content internalism is true, and so meaning or content is narrow.

⁶¹³ Donald Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,' p.318.

Chapter Seven

In this chapter, I summarize my conclusions. There are three of these. My first conclusion is that Cartesian scepticism about the external world has not been overcome in any satisfactory way. In the introduction, we noted that it would be unwise to succumb too quickly to tempting solutions to such scepticism. This is so, for aside from betraying our principles as philosophers, such easy solutions to scepticism may insure that our knowledge claims about the external world will have less chance of succeeding, and also, may affect all our future inquiries about not only scepticism itself, but other matters. In other words, the interest in such scepticism is not an idle fancy. In the introduction, we also saw that Cartesian scepticism about the external world follows a certain structure, one that I called the general sceptical argument.

1. I can know that p only if I can rule out the possibility that q (if I can know that not q).
2. But I cannot rule out the possibility that q .
3. I do *not* know that p .

Descartes, to rule out the q of this general sceptical argument, searches for a 'firm and permanent structure in the sciences,' or a foundation for knowledge. He does this by using his metaphysical doubts to eliminate any of his beliefs that do not belong in that foundation. Descartes manages to doubt all his beliefs, but does not really find his foundation for knowledge, for he can never know that he has it, even if he does. Descartes further uses his natural light of reason and proof of God to

escape his scepticism about the external world, but this entails his Cartesian Circle. He offers three solutions to this circle, but none of them work. It follows that Descartes neither finds his foundation for knowledge nor escapes the Cartesian Circle, and so he does not rule out the q of the general sceptical argument, and should have remained a sceptic.

Quine, Nozick, Goldman, and Armstrong, as we saw, also respond to Cartesian scepticism about the external world, and so also attempt to rule out the q , of the general sceptical argument. Quine criticizes the analytic/synthetic distinction and a priori knowledge, and offers his naturalized epistemology as a replacement. But he does not succeed in his criticisms, and so his naturalized epistemology is compatible with scepticism. Nozick offers an account of knowledge that denies epistemic closure. But he does not succeed in denying such closure, and his position leads to a stronger kind of scepticism, about inference. Goldman insists that the reliability of belief forming mechanisms is more important than knowledge. But he concedes that knowing which belief forming mechanisms are reliable is impossible here, and so concedes the argument to scepticism. Armstrong argues for direct realism, insofar as we have non-inferential beliefs about the world that are completely reliable. But there are no such beliefs, and they could not be enough to answer scepticism anyway. Quine, Nozick, Goldman, and Armstrong all fail against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, and so fail to rule out q of the general sceptical argument.

My second conclusion is that by offering their different versions of semantic or content externalism, Putnam and Burge do little to threaten Cartesian scepticism about the external world, or to rule out the q of the general sceptical argument. To see this, recall that both of these philosophers offer their versions of externalism not

as epistemological theories, but rather as semantic or contentful ones that have epistemological implications. Putnam and Burge each try to refute such scepticism, and so rule out *q* from the general sceptical argument, in the following way. These philosophers say that their formulations of semantic or content externalism reveal a metaphysically necessary connection between our meanings or contents and the objects they are about. Putnam and Burge, in other words, both offer the following argument.

1. There *is* a necessary connection between the meaning of my words or the contents of my thoughts, and any actual state of the environment.
2. I *can* rule out that *q* (of the general sceptical argument).
3. I *know* that *p*, after all.

Putnam and Burge may offer very different versions of semantic or content externalism, but they each invoke, in their formulations, a kind of metaphysical necessity between our meanings or contents and the parts of the world these are about. These philosophers each utilize this metaphysical necessity to infer that scepticism about the external world must be false. But as many have noted, the refutation of such scepticism cannot be this easy. In other words, it does not seem possible that there could be such a metaphysical connection between our meanings or contents and parts of the world. But also Putnam and Burge also fail because even if there were such a connection between our meanings or contents and part of the world, they could not cite it without begging the question against scepticism.

Putnam and Burge offer arguments that fail against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, but for different reasons. Putnam does not succeed with his causal theory of meaning of natural kind terms, or with his theory of meaning or content for all representation. In both cases, he does not make good his case for these theories, and his use of them begs the question against scepticism. Putnam concedes that there is no metaphysically necessary connection between our meanings or contents and the world. Burge fails against scepticism about the external world because he does not make good his case for his anti-individualism, his social externalism. But also, his social externalism has the odd consequence that it demands that beliefs and contents pop into existence with community memberships, and that single beliefs can have many contents. Burge even concedes this is so, for he says that there is no easy argument against scepticism about the external world, and that, it is difficult for his position to not beg the question against it. But my main conclusion here is that semantic or content externalism fails against Cartesian scepticism about the external world, and so only offers false hope to its opponents.

My third conclusion of this thesis is that if Cartesian scepticism about the external world remains unscathed by all these attacks, and if the q of the general sceptical argument remains in full force, then at least, this requires a semantic or content internalist version of the mind. Descartes offers such a version of mind, but much needs to be corrected here. In offering his cogito argument, he notes that thought content is how things consciously seem to him, and because of this, he infers that substance dualism is true. But Descartes does not succeed with his cogito argument, for it only proves that something thinks and exists, not that he does. In point of fact, he does not prove his substance dualism, for he does not make his case

either for the separation of mind and body, or for their causal interaction. It follows that Descartes leaves us with his theory that his thought content is a matter of how things consciously seem, but gives us no way to make sense of this. It follows that if all he leaves is the notion that thought content is how things seem, he leaves very little. But also, my conclusion here is that there is a way to show that his approach to the mind is correct

Descartes offers a version a semantic or content internalism that can be supplemented by narrow meaning or content. But as we have seen, there are three versions of narrow meaning or content, in terms of phenomenal seemings, conceptual roles, or narrow functions. The trouble with these versions of narrow meaning or content is that, since they all accept the semantic or content externalist intuitions that there is a necessary connection between mind and world, they have a difficult time doing remaining both meaning or content, yet not truth conditional. It is easier to reject such intuitions at the outset, and so, to affirm that narrow meaning or content is just ordinary meaning or content. But even if this is correct, it still amounts to a theory of meaning or content without a theory of mind to support it. Davidson helps here, by offering his token identity theory of mind and brain, his 'anomalous monism.' He delineates how mental events can exist in a physical world. It may just be that there are no psychophysical laws connecting mental and physical events, but they are still both physical, nonetheless. Davidson offers a theory of mind wherein narrow meaning or content comfortably, although its form will have to change.

In closing, it will be prudent for me to cite an important lesson of this thesis. In particular, Cartesian scepticism about the external world should have an intellectually therapeutic effect upon those who take it seriously, one with both

theoretical and ethical dimensions. William James notes that ‘in this matter of belief we are all extreme conservatives.’⁶¹⁴ He says that we only change our beliefs as much as we must to preserve the coherence with the rest. Bertrand Russell notes that the same is true for ethics, for here the need to achieve certainty is even more pressing, regardless of the facts.⁶¹⁵ He says that it is no exaggeration to claim that our history is littered ethical positions held to regardless of the facts. George Santayana claims that Cartesian scepticism about the external world is ‘chastity of the intellect.’ The lesson here is that such scepticism can reveal that our conservative tendencies in theory and ethics to be mistakes, for they lead us into bad reasoning, and so, to false conclusions. It follows that Cartesian scepticism about the external world can and does have a therapeutic effect upon those who take it seriously, and that is its main value.

⁶¹⁴ William James, ‘What Pragmatism Means,’ p.38.

⁶¹⁵ Bertrand Russell, ‘The Value of Scepticism,’ p.12.

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