

Social Externalism, Segal and Contradictory Intuitions

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In his recent publication, *A Slim Book About Narrow Content* (2000)¹, Gabriel Segal has attempted to argue that the social externalism of Tyler Burge is inadequate as an account of the fundamental nature of folk psychological explanation. The first part of this paper will comprise a rebuttal of this argument, on the basis that Segal assumes the truth of a disputed premise. In part two I will discuss the ramifications of the rebuttal of the argument. Briefly: the rebuttal leaves both internalists and externalists with a messy situation concerning our intuitions, and the natural way to create some order can raise problems for the social externalist. So the position expressed in this paper as a whole is that whilst Segal's argument, as it stands, fails to seriously call social externalism into question, it does indirectly mount a serious challenge. Finally, I shall outline a response the externalist can make.

I – Segal and Social Externalism

1. Segal's argument

Segal's argument is intended to show that a certain form of social externalism, attributed to Tyler Burge, cannot give an acceptable account of belief ascription when faced with certain crucial puzzle cases. "Consumerism" (the label is from Kaplan 1989) is the theory that one's words have the meaning they do because of the linguistic conventions of the community of which one is a member. One's ability to be a functioning (competent and appropriately deferential) member of that linguistic community endows one's words with certain properties, and affects the beliefs and concepts one may correctly be attributed.

Words come to us prepackaged with a semantic value. If we are to use *those words*, the words we have received, the words of our linguistic community, then we must defer to *their* meaning...To use language as language, to express something, requires an intentional act. But the intention that is required involves the typical consumer's attitude of compliance, not the producer's assertiveness. (Kaplan 1989, 602)

This position is exemplified in the intended conclusion of Burge's well-known Twin-Earth thought experiments: intrinsic duplicates can be in different mental states, purely because of a difference in the linguistic practices of their communities. What beliefs a person has is not fixed by what is going on in their heads – social environment plays a determining role. Whilst

¹ All unattributed references are to this work.

acknowledging the intuitions that support such a conclusion, Segal believes it is a mistake to rely on them:

There is, indeed, a tendency to think that...Alf believes that he has arthritis in his thigh, while Twin Alf does not. The mistake is to take this tendency too seriously and then to draw from it a general conclusion about the extension of concepts. (122)

The scenario Segal claims to demonstrate the inadequacy of consumerism is a variation on Burge's own thought-experiment. "Arthritis" and "inflammation of the joints" are synonymous, and so anyone, and in particular any expert, who knows enough about medical ailments to know that they are synonymous will express the same concept with the two expressions. Alf is not such an expert, and is not aware of the synonymy, and actually thinks he has arthritis in his thigh. Not only, therefore, is he not aware of the synonymy of "arthritis" and "inflammation of the joints", he would deny that, if asked. "Alf therefore has two different concepts that he expresses by 'arthritis' and 'inflammation of the joints'" (65). Where the experts have *one* concept, Alf has *two*. But given the assumptions that a) Alf has some minimal competence with the term "arthritis", and can use "inflammation of the joints" to mean what it should mean, and b) Alf would certainly defer to a room full of arthritologists, consumerism tells us that Alf gets to express the same concept/s with the expressions as the experts do. But plainly, Segal argues, he doesn't. The "prepackaged semantic value" of "arthritis" and "inflammation of the joints" is the same, and yet Alf clearly attaches different semantic values to the expressions. So what consumerism tells us is false. Despite his competence Alf has his own idiosyncratic concept that he expresses with the term "arthritis", that he does not share with the experts.

It is clear that the crucial step in Segal's argument is the claim that by not realising that arthritis is just an inflammation of the joint, Alf comes to express different concepts with the expressions. The support for this step is not explicit in Segal's exposition of the argument, but we can plausibly say that it consists in the following thought: Alf will assent to the sentence "I have arthritis in my thigh", and will assent to the sentence "I do not have an inflammation of the joint in my thigh". Alf is, by presumption, rational, and would not assent to both "a is F" and "a is not F", and so Alf uses the expressions "arthritis" and "inflammation of the joint" to express different concepts. Whilst this key claim is implicit and unsupported in Segal (2000), it is cited in a different context:

Fregean Principle of Difference: If a subject, s, rationally assents to P(t₁) and dissents from or abstains on the truth value of P(t₂) then t₁ and t₂ have different meanings in s's idiolect and s associates different concepts with them. (2003, 417)

With such a principle included, Segal's argument consists in the claim that the following premises lead to contradiction.

Consumerism: if a subject is minimally competent and deferential with an expression then they express the same concept with that expression as experts.

Synonymy: experts in the use of synonymous expressions express the same concept with these expressions.

Fregean Principle of Difference (FPD): if a rational subject sincerely and on reflection assents to “a is F” and “b is not F” then the subject expresses different concepts with the expressions “a” and “b”.

In response to Burge’s (1978) claim that synonyms are not inter-substitutable in belief attributions, and thus denial of *Synonymy* above, Segal formulates a version of the argument without that premise: a deferential and minimally competent subject thinks that one term, for instance “coffee”, expresses two different concepts, and assents to “all coffee [type 1] comes from exotic countries” and “all coffee [type 2] does not come from exotic countries”. By FPD, the subject expresses two concepts with the term “coffee”, where the experts surely express one. But again, given the minimal competence and deference that the subject displays despite misunderstanding the term, Consumerism gives us a conflicting answer.

Segal’s argument is thus that FPD and Consumerism together entail a contradiction. The fact that FPD is implicit and unsupported is therefore problematic. In another place he claims that it is a “[n]ormal, roughly Fregean, criteri[on] for the individuation of meaning” (2003, 416, my emphasis). I suggest that to view Segal’s argument as plausible, we should charitably interpret him as claiming that the principle is an intuitively supported rule of normal practice, and that Consumerism as a philosophical theory should therefore be abandoned.

Consumerism as characterised above is a much simplified version of Burge’s full account of belief and concept attribution², but on certain understandings of the key terms “competence” and “concept”, Burge would endorse it fully. The reading of “competence” under which Burge would endorse Consumerism is the same *minimalist* reading that is used by Segal. The readings of “concept” that a) Segal is working with and b) under which Burge would endorse Consumerism, are more complex, and will be the focus of later discussion.

We should note that on Burge’s account the reference to “experts” is inessential. Burge holds that a competent speaker defers to their linguistic community, whether or not there are experts for all particular terms used by that community. So we can say that through their competence the speaker expresses the *standardly* expressed concepts. Given that experts are competent speakers, Burgean Consumerism is a broader thesis than the consumerist principle stated above – the former entails the latter. Construed in that way, Consumerism is *prima facie* similar to the *Disquotational Principle* of Kripke (1979):

DP: if a normal English speaker sincerely assents to “p” then they believe that p.

² As given primarily in (1979), (1986) and (1993).

2. Objection to Segal's argument

Under the charitable interpretation suggested above, Segal's argument relies for its force on the strength of the claim that the Fregean Principle of Difference is intuitively powerful (maybe even obvious) whilst Consumerism is a controversial philosophical theory.

However, in employing our intuitive reactions to the famous Twin-Earth thought-experiments as support for their thesis, what externalists claim is that those intuitions reveal that our normal procedures for ascribing beliefs are deeply socially externalist. Not only that, but many externalists also claim that the truth of social externalism, as a principle of normal practice, casts significant doubt on principles such as FPD, which rely heavily on the controversial claim that we have privileged access to the contents of our beliefs. That is, some externalists claim that principles such as FPD depend on a *philosophical theory*, most famously formulated by Descartes, about the extent to which our mental life is transparent to us.

Given all this, it is possible that a social externalist may propose the very same argument as Segal, showing that FPD and Consumerism contradict, and draw the exact opposite conclusion: FPD, and its philosophical supports, must be abandoned. One example of such an argument is that put forward by Joseph Owens. He begins by accepting, like Segal, that FPD conflicts with social externalist principles such as Consumerism and the Disquotational Principle. He then highlights the extent to which our normal practice of belief ascription conforms to social externalism: if one examines normal practice, the Disquotational Principle is revealed as fundamental to the way in which we ascribe beliefs.

It is hard to see how someone could reasonably dissent from [the Disquotational Principle], suitably qualified; it seems to be a part of our customary understanding of what is involved in sincerely assenting to a sentence one understands. Kripke goes so far as to say that [it] appears to be a self-evident truth. (1989, 291)

If one looks at The Fregean Principle of Difference, the situation is different – what is certainly undeniable is that no rational person would sincerely and *knowingly* assent to contradictory beliefs. But FPD requires more than that, it requires that a rational subject will not sincerely and *on reflection* assent to contradictory beliefs. To move to this stronger principle requires the claim that through reflection, a subject has the “more primitive ability to introspectively determine sameness and difference in belief” (1992, 158). Owens argues that this principle is far from intuitively obvious, and situates it firmly within a school of philosophical thought, calling it the “Cartesian model of access” (1992, 147).

Having claimed that the Disquotational Principle is supported by our intuitive understanding of normal practice, and that FPD ultimately relies on a (controversial) Cartesian philosophical thesis, Owens rejects FPD on those grounds. The intuitive force of the Disquotational Principle is such that if the Cartesian model of access contradicts it, then so much the worse for that:

These principles [such as the Disquotational Principle] serve to “define” or at least delimit a non-Cartesian notion of belief, and to the extent that we operate with them we ought to abandon the conception of ourselves

as having some simple introspective way of discerning contradictions among our beliefs. (Owens 1989, 295)

In summary, Owens accepts two of the claims that Segal appears to make: a) that FPD and social externalism contradict, and b) that if a controversial philosophical claim contradicts our intuitions about normal practice, then it should be rejected. However, whereas Segal claims that social externalism is controversial philosophy and FPD is obviously true, Owens ultimately makes exactly the opposite claim. Their arguments share a common structure and some common premises, but give mirrored conclusions. For Segal, social externalism is a philosophical thesis whilst FPD is a principle of normal practice. For Owens, FPD is a philosophical thesis whilst social externalism is a part of normal practice.

Segal's argument, as presented by me, relies almost entirely on the intuitive force of the Fregean Principle of Difference: on the claim that it is so central to the way we think about belief, that a principle such as Consumerism that conflicts with it must be discarded. But what is clear from arguments such as Joseph Owens' is that many externalists deny the intuitive force of FPD. In fact, Owens makes a persuasive case that an acceptance of the force of the Twin-Earth thought-experiments can lead directly to a denial of the force of FPD. Segal's argument ultimately begs the question against the externalist, by assuming as intuitively obvious a principle regarded as controversial by many people. Consumerism is not seriously threatened at this point.

II – Ramifications Of Our Rebuttal of Segal

3. Messy intuitions

While this completes my discussion of the argument presented by Segal, it is clearly not any sort of satisfactory conclusion. Segal relies in his argument on the Fregean Principle of Difference. Given that he does not explicitly argue for it, I have suggested that the most charitable interpretation is that Segal believes that principle to be an intuitively supported principle of normal practice, that we shall accept if we reflect on our practices of belief ascription. However, some externalists, and I have used Owens as an example, explicitly claim that FPD is revealed as resting on controversial philosophical assumptions, by the strong intuitions that support the claim of social externalism to be a principle of normal practice. The situation thus seems to be that we have two principles, FPD and Consumerism, that are claimed to be supported by intuition as principles of normal practice. And those two principles contradict in certain key puzzle cases. Such a situation is undoubtedly messy, and is downright unacceptable on some plausible assumptions.

Firstly, we want our intuitions about normal practice to be good guides to normal practice. That is not to claim that our *prima facie* reflections on our practices of belief ascription are always correct, but that extended philosophical analysis can deliver accurate information about the ways in which we attribute mental states. Secondly, we want folk psychology and normal practice to broadly be a good guide to the *truth* about beliefs and

mental states. This is clearly controversial, but I am content to say that anyone who rejects this assumption would probably not find the issues being discussed here of paramount importance in the first place. Thirdly, and finally, we take there to be a fact of the matter about the beliefs and other mental states which a subject is in. So if we assume that the actual state of affairs is not contradictory and that folk psychology is a good guide to that state of affairs, then we should be highly reluctant to suffer a contradiction in our intuitions about normal practice.

4. A natural way out

Consumerism and the Fregean Principle of Difference both tell us what to say about the *concepts* that a subject expresses with their words when they make utterances. We can say therefore that the principles, and the intuitions that support them, contradict only insofar as they are concerned with the same *kind* of concept. This observation inspires an obvious solution to the problem of their apparent conflict: place the blame on the notorious flexibility of the term “concept”, and say that both Consumerism and FPD are parts of normal practice, but that they concern different types of concept. This is the familiar “dual-content” approach.³

We have at hand a natural and intuitive dual-content approach, in the comments made by Tyler Burge himself. I employ his version as it is reasonably straightforward and allows us to highlight clearly the crucial points of debate, and also the contentious issues will turn on what is common to dual-content views, not on the peculiarities of the model.

Burge’s distinction is between, in normal terms, a) the (roughly, public or linguistic) concept that a subject expresses with a term, and b) the (roughly, private and subjective) explication of the concept that on reflection the subject would give: the distinction is between the concept, and the conception of the concept. The concept is the *translational* meaning of the term, the *translational concept*, and the conception of the concept is the *explicational* meaning of the term, the *explicational concept*.

I distinguish between a lexical item and the explication of its meaning that articulates what the individual would give, under some reflection, as his understanding of the word. Call the former “the word” and the latter “the entry for the word”. I also distinguish between the concept associated with the word and the concept(s) associated with the entry. Call the former “the concept” and the latter “the conceptual explication”. Finally, I distinguish between a type of meaning associated with the word, “translational meaning”, and the meaning associated with its entry, “explicational meaning”. For our purposes, the explicational meaning is the semantical analogue of the conceptual explication. (1989, 181)

It is important to note that whilst the explicational meaning of a term *can* be communal, in the sense of an explication that has been agreed upon and codified, perhaps as a dictionary definition, it can also be idiolectal, in the

³ The dual-content approach has been developed most famously by Block (1986), Fodor (1987) and Loar (1988) but it was present at the very beginning in Putnam (1975).

sense of the individual's personal explication of the term: the entry in that individual's personal dictionary, so to speak. Neither kind of explicational meaning is identical to the translational meaning, which can persist through changes in both idiolectical and communal explications of a concept. Associated with the two kinds of meaning are two kinds of understanding:

[O]ne must distinguish the sort of understanding of a word in being able to use it to express a concept or translational meaning from the sort of understanding that is involved in being able to give a correct and knowledgeable explication of it. One may think with a concept even though one has incompletely mastered it, in the sense that one associates a mistaken conception (or conceptual explication) with it. (1993, 316f)

Burge's distinction clearly provides us with an account that accepts and explains the intuitions behind Consumerism and FPD, without having to conclude that normal practice is contradictory. The move from the principle that a rational subject will not sincerely and *knowingly* assent to contradictory beliefs, to FPD relies on the Cartesian idea that a subject is introspectively aware of whether her beliefs contradict. On Burge's distinction, what is clear is that a subject will certainly be aware if her beliefs contradict in their *explicational* concepts (personal dictionary definition), but may not be aware if they contradict in their *translational* concepts. We can now say that intuition supports FPD concerning explicational concepts, and not translational concepts.

FPD-E: If a rational subject sincerely and on reflection assents to "a is F" and "b is not F" then they express different explicational concepts with "a" and "b".

Turning to Consumerism, we can use Burge's distinction here as well to formulate two principles where previously we have talked of one. It is plausible to say that intuitions support the principle concerning translational concepts, but certainly not explicational concepts. A subject does not, through their ability to be a normal, competent member of a linguistic community, get to be attributed the standard explicational understanding, dictionary definition, of a term⁴. Conceptual explications vary greatly from speaker to speaker, and where there is a codified and agreed communal explication of a term, it may not be known by many or even most of the competent speakers of the language, who are nevertheless perfectly able to use that term in the standard way to express the standard linguistic concept. However, Consumerism-T is plausibly supported by intuition. We do, as a fact of normal practice, ascribe standard linguistic concepts to competent speakers on the basis of their sincere utterance or assent.

Consumerism-T: if a subject is minimally competent and deferential with an expression then they express the standard translational concept with that expression.

⁴ If we don't make the optional change and remove talk of experts, it is even clearer that DP-E is false. I do not get an expert's understanding of "arthritis" by becoming competent enough to use it, and be ascribed beliefs involving it.

So our natural solution is that if we correctly distinguish between the two aspects of meaning that speakers can express with terms, the contradiction that appeared to exist between our intuitions evaporates. Whilst the undifferentiated principles Consumerism and FPD do seem to contradict, it can be shown that intuition does not support them. Rather, it supports, Consumerism-T and FPD-E, which do not contradict. To reiterate: the consumerist principle that is a part of normal practice concerns the translational meaning of terms, the linguistic concepts they express; and the version of The Fregean Principle of Difference that is a part of normal practice is not a test for difference in translational concept expressed, but for difference in explicational concept, conceptual explication.

Now we can apply this account of the intuitions to Segal's scenario that we considered in section 1: the fact that Alf assents to "arthritis is not an inflammation of the joints" may reveal that Alf associates different explications with the translational concepts expressed by the expressions "arthritis" and "inflammation of the joint". But that does not mean that the translational linguistic concepts themselves differ – that is fixed, by his linguistic competence. Equally, Alf associates the same linguistic concept with the term "arthritis" as the experts, as they both belong, as functioning members, to the same linguistic community. But of course Alf does not share the same explicational understanding of the term as the experts. FPD-E and Consumerism-T adequately account for the situation described by Segal, without any threat of contradictory intuitions.

Clearly this is only a very rough gesture at a satisfactory account, and (as will be discussed later) its plausibility will depend on how the detail is filled in, but the bare outline is suggestive of a viable, and natural, solution.

5. Problems for the social externalist

The account given above – which I shall call the "Modification Strategy" – seems to be a natural and intuitive method of dealing with our apparently contradictory intuitions, but such dual-content accounts have normally been proposed by those with internalist inclinations. The question concerns the issue of *cognitive content*. All the parties to the debate are concerned to describe the nature of that property of belief which is relevant to and operative in normal everyday folk-psychological explanation. An externalist is an externalist precisely because she believes that cognitive content is individuated externalistically. And an internalist is such because she believes that cognitive content is individuated internalistically. Given that fact, the issue that arises most prominently from the Modification Strategy is this: which aspect of belief – the socially individuated translational concept relevant to Consumerism, or the introspectively accessible explicational concept relevant to the Fregean Principle of Difference – is relevant to cognitive content?⁵

⁵ In posing this question I am rejecting the possibility that *both* explicational and translational concepts can contribute to cognitive content. Normal practice seems to assume a single notion of psychologically operative content, and we have seen that explicational and translational concepts pull in different directions in certain situations. It seems, and I will assume, that we can therefore countenance only one of the aspects

Social externalists place great emphasis on the role of their famous thought-experiments, and the intuitions that they inspire. The idea is that two intrinsically identical individuals, Bert and Twin-Bert, can be in different mental states, purely because of a difference in their linguistic communities. Bert, in our community, believes that you can get arthritis in your thigh. Twin-Bert, in a different community, where “arthritis” is used for a condition that can occur in joints and muscles, does not believe that you can get arthritis in your thigh – despite saying that “I have arthritis in my thigh”, and being in all intrinsic respects identical to Bert. This thought-experiment supports the claim that the twins differ in the translational concepts they express with their terms. But it is written into the situation that both twins associate the same conception with the term “arthritis” – their personal dictionary definitions would be the same. So the thought-experiment so heavily relied upon by social externalists supports externalism for translational concepts, and not for explicational concepts. The twins share explicational concepts, and differ in translational concepts, so in so far as the thought-experiments support social externalism about the respects in which the twins differ, the thought-experiments support social externalism about translational content. So in order to use the those thought-experiments in such a way, the social externalist needs to show that translational concepts compose cognitive content. There are however difficulties with this requirement.

It is often held that the idiosyncratic, subjective component of beliefs is more suitable for the purposes of psychological explanation. There are a variety of ways to pursue this claim, and I shall adopt only one. I shall pursue the argument using the issue of *rationality*⁶.

The first step in the argument is to claim that issues of rationality are central to folk psychological explanation. We predict people’s behaviour under the assumption that they are rational, and make sense of their behaviour in the light of their rationality. If it turns out that someone is acting irrationally, we seem to be barred from being able to engage in folk psychology concerning them. Rationality is central to folk psychological explanation.

The next step in the argument is to claim that what matters to considerations of rationality is how a subject conceives of the world. It is rational for person A to do action X because of the way person A sees the world, their subjective view on the world – the way the world actually is seems to take a back seat. To use a concrete example: where would it be rational for Bert and Twin-Bert to apply an ointment labelled “arthritis cream”? Given that they both conceive of “arthritis” as being an ailment in their thighs, to be rational they both need to apply the cream to their thighs. This is despite the fact that in Bert’s (our) world, arthritis just cannot occur in muscles, only joints. That last fact seems irrelevant to the question of what it is rational for Bert to do.

of belief being fundamentally contributive, in a substantive sense, to that property of belief which normal practice takes to be operative in folk psychological explanation.

⁶ There are many complexities in the subject of rationality which are not directly relevant to this argument. The issue of rationality is just used here as an intuitive example of a case in which the subjective quality of belief is relevant to psychological explanation. The question of how rationality as a whole relates to externalism as a whole is a subject in itself.

To use another example. Alf says “arthritis is not the same thing as an inflammation of the joint”. Alf is, by stipulation, rational. Arthritis is the same thing as an inflammation of the joint, so it can’t be that, the way the world is, that renders his utterance rational. What renders his utterance rational is the fact that the conceptions he associates with “arthritis” and “inflammation of the joint” differ.

If we add the agreed premise that it is explicational concepts that capture a subject’s conception of the meanings of her words, we can see that this argument, in showing that what is relevant to questions of rationality is the subjective aspect of beliefs, shows that it is explicational concepts that are central to questions of rationality. Further evidence for this claim is that rationality is explicitly referred to in our formulation of the Fregean Principle of Difference, and so the two are deeply linked.

So, explicational concepts (and not translational concepts) are relevant to rationality. And we said above that rationality is central to folk psychology. So we have to conclude that it is therefore explicational concepts that are central to folk psychology, and cognitive content. Translational concepts, on the other hand, seem to have therefore no central role in folk psychology.

So while the thought-experiments support social externalism about translational concepts, they do not seem to compose cognitive content. The conjunction of a) the natural way of dealing with the apparent contradictions in our intuitions (the Modification Strategy) and b) the argument just given, seems to render the traditional thought-experiments incapable of supporting social externalism. A social externalist who adopts the Modification Strategy “is effectively conceding that [Consumerism] is inadequate to account for [Alf’s] behaviour....[T]he difference between the taxonomy of belief contents offered by [Consumerism] and the taxonomy for explaining actions is being recognised” (Patterson 1990, 321).

6. Social externalist response

What kinds of responses are open to the social externalist at this point? She could give up the dual-content approach and try and explain away the intuitions supporting the Fregean Principle of Difference. Such intuitions are very powerful, and the task seems daunting. Alternatively, the social externalist could attempt to retain the Modification Strategy, and defuse the argument just given, and claim that rationality is not as central to folk psychology as has been claimed. This could be done by showing that whilst our conception of the world is what matters when we explain our own behaviour, when we explain the behaviour of others we do not focus so much on their subjective viewpoint. We take into account many things which the subject may not be aware of, or are not aware of in the same way as us. In short, we may take into account the *context* in which the subject is embedded, and explain such behaviour without explicit concern for the rationality of the subject. We may, for instance, care about the suitability of the behaviour. This is a large issue, but it seems a well-supported claim, that what we care, in some sense, *most* about when we explain and predict people’s utterances and physical behaviour is the state of their conception of the world and the meanings of the words they use, which I am tying to the issue of rationality.

The response I want to formulate is a different one, and concerns the possibility of accepting the argument concerning rationality, but spelling out the detail of the Modification Strategy in such a way as to avoid the apparent problems for social externalism.

The problem, recall, is that it is the kind of content that Alf and the experts do not share – the explicational concept – that seems to be relevant to folk psychology. Alf and the experts associate different explicational concepts with the term “arthritis”: Alf believes that you can get arthritis in muscles, while experts do not, and they have many further technical beliefs about arthritis that Alf does not share. What appears to be the case here, however, is that it is quite easy to specify the differences in their explicational concepts, using perfectly standard words with perfectly standard meanings. The idiosyncrasy seems not to go beyond the surface.

[This sort of case] demonstrates the *strength* of linguistic content, not its commonly supposed weakness: even in those bizarre cases the appeal to linguistic contents and other non-supervenient facts about history and belief acquisition is perfectly sufficient to explain what’s going on. (Frances, 1999, 63)

This sort of view is suggested by Burge in his own comments on similar puzzle cases:

You ask me what Al would think. It would be misleading for me to reply that Al would think that you do not have a contract, if I know that Al thinks a contract must be based on a formal document....In such cases, it is incumbent on us to cite the subject’s eccentricity: “(He would think that you do not have a contract, but then) he thinks that there is no such thing as a verbally based contract.” (1979, 91)

In describing Alf’s explicational concept of arthritis, we consider it perfectly acceptable to ascribe certain standard concepts, without any hint that they themselves are idiosyncratically understood, or “private” in any sense – such as “he thinks one can have arthritis in a muscle”. Public concepts attributed to competent language-users according to principles sensitive to linguistic conventions seem perfectly adequate to explicate the most bizarre and idiosyncratic understanding of a term. On this view, a subject’s idiosyncratic explicational concept can be specified using words expressing perfectly standard public linguistic concepts, i.e. *translational* concepts. What this response does concede is that translational concepts as ascribed by Consumerism, in the form given above, are often not sufficient for psychological explanation. We may need to ascribe translational concepts in a different way in order to explain how the subject idiosyncratically groups them together in their conception of the meaning of a term:

Of course, relying on simple disquotation will get it wrong in such cases. Being more complicated than the normal case, they require different, and often more complex, that-clauses if they are to be described accurately. (Biro 1992, 288)

We can cast this response in terms of the privacy and publicity of concepts: the externalist can concede that explicational concepts are private in the sense that they may indeed not be shared by anyone else, but they are public

in that they can be, and often are, clearly communicated. So whilst explicational concepts are paramount in folk psychological explanation, their use is underpinned by that of translational concepts, which are, as we have seen, individuated according to social externalism.

We can draw out the core issue by reconsidering the original thought-experiment, with the twins Bert and Twin-Bert. Their shared explicational concepts seem to be doing the work in any folk psychological explanation we may want to give of them. And we can specify that shared explicational concept. So whilst we can't say that they both believe that one can have arthritis in their thigh – as Twin-Bert has no beliefs about arthritis – we can say that they both believe that one can have “arthritis” in the thigh, that old people get it, that their Auntie Doris has it, and all the other things that warrant the claim that they share the same explicational concept. That is, we are inclined to say that they have some important property of belief in common because we are told that they both think that one can have “arthritis” in the thigh etc.

But what is now apparent is that there is an assumption that they don't really inhabit different linguistic communities. For the purposes of all terms except “arthritis”, they inhabit the very same linguistic community, so we can specify, without difficulty, what it is that they share. What the social externalist may be able to claim is that if the difference in their linguistic communities were expanded to include certain other terms along with “arthritis”, then the impulse to say that they shared any important belief content in common would recede. Specifically, if their linguistic communities used the terms “thigh”, “old”, “Auntie” in a systematically different way, consonant with their intrinsic identity, then we may lose the ability to claim that they share any explicational concept. We would have to say that they both believe that one can get “arthritis” in the “thigh”, that “old” people get it, that their “Auntie” Doris has it. And this seems to say next to nothing about what they believe, and be of next to no use in any folk psychological explanation. When we lack translational concepts with which to specify a subject's explicational concept, the pull to claim that such an explicational concept actually exists is not there. The drive to say that Bert and Twin-Bert share a psychological important property of belief is a product not of their intrinsic similarities, but their shared linguistic environment and their responsibility to shared linguistic norms.

This response claims that the thought-experiments seem only to support social externalism concerning translational concepts because they are not really cases of subject being in different linguistic communities. If we expand the thought-experiment in the way described, it becomes apparent that explicational concepts are socially externalistic, in that they are composed of the translational concepts that have been socially externalistic all along. That is, explicational concepts themselves are sensitive to changes in linguistic environment.

Conclusion

If the contradictory intuitions raised by the social externalist rebuttal of Segal do force us to adopt a tactic such as the Modification Strategy, what is clear is that there is a lot to be done in order to make a social externalist approach to

folk psychological explanation plausible. What seems to be the case is that a simplistic version of social externalism such as Consumerism (or the Disquotational Principle) is inadequate to capture the complex relationships between a subject and their environment. Those externalist efforts focussed on such uncomplicated principles may be misguided, and as we have just seen, success for the externalist may lie in distancing themselves from such principles and developing detailed externalist accounts of a subject's idiosyncratic conception of the world.

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