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Mental Content, Holism and Communication

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by me, that the work is my own, and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Joey Pollock

Abstract

In this project, I defend a holistic, internalist conceptual-role theory of mental content ('Holism', for short). The account of communicative success which must be adopted by the Holist is generally thought to be unattractive and perhaps even untenable. The primary aim of my thesis is to show that this account is actually far more plausible than the accounts available to competing theories of mental content. Holism is thought to suffer from a special problem of communication because it entails that no two subjects *ever* mean the same thing by an utterance of the same word-forms, or share the same thought content. Many think that it is *necessary* for communicative success (or, at least, sometimes required) that the content grasped by the hearer is the same content as that which is expressed by the speaker. As such, theories such as social externalism are thought to be well-equipped to explain communicative success because they can posit shared content. Holism claims that subjects think, and speak, in their own idiosyncratic idiolects. As such, Holists must deny that it is ever required for communicative success that subjects share content. Holists must maintain instead that successful communication requires only similarity of content between speaker and hearer. This is supposed to be a serious cost of the view. In this project, I argue that it is, in fact, a virtue. Views like Holism, which can posit only mere similarity of content, are *better* placed to explain communicative success than views which can posit shared content.

In the first part of my thesis, I argue that externalist theories of content face a dilemma when it comes to explaining communicative success. They must choose between (a), endorsing an account of communication which renders the relationship between the content expressed by the speaker and grasped by the hearer irrelevant to communicative success and (b), endorsing an account which gives implausible diagnoses as to the success and failure of communicative attempts. I argue that the reason that externalist theories face this dilemma is because they allow that content and understanding can come apart. Interestingly, it is, in part, *because* they posit a communal language that they face the dilemma. In contrast, the Holist's similar content account does not face the dilemma. It can naturally incorporate understanding into its explanation of how mental content facilitates communicative success because, on Holism, understanding perfectly tracks mental content.

In the second part of my thesis, I develop an account of communicative success for the Holist and defend the account from objections. The account claims that communication succeeds to the degree that content is similar across communication partners. In defending the view, I propose a criterion for similarity of content for the Holist. I also argue that (pure) internalists can agree with externalists as to the extensions of concepts and the truth-conditions of contents without the need to appeal to any factors outside of the individual. Finally, I explain how my account of communication impacts upon a theory of testimony. Most work on testimony stipulates that the content of the testimony grasped by the hearer is the same as that expressed by the speaker. I present and defend an account of testimony which claims instead that testimonial exchanges can be successful even when the content grasped by the hearer is merely similar to the content expressed by the speaker.

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Introduction

At first glance, it might look obvious that views of meaning and mental content which claim that we share thought content (and speak a public language) can underpin a plausible account of communicative success. What could make communication easier than sharing a language? In contrast, views which claim that subjects speak and think in their own private and idiosyncratic idiolects look like they will struggle to explain how we communicate. In this project, I will argue that this first-glance appraisal is mistaken. The primary aim of my thesis is to defend a theory of content which claims that subjects *never* share thought content. I defend this theory from the objection that it cannot explain communicative success. If my arguments are successful, I will have shown that this view is not just plausible, but *superior* to views which claim that subjects share content.

The theory which I defend is comprised of the following three theses.

- A) Content internalism: the view that thought content is individuated by factors internal to the subject.
- B) Conceptual-role semantics: the view that thought content is determined by its relations to other contents in a subject's cognitive economy.
- C) Conceptual-role holism: the view that thought content is determined by its relations to *all* contents in a subject's cognitive economy.

I call the combination of these theses 'Holism', for short. Currently, this view is relatively unpopular in philosophy. This is so for a number of reasons. Firstly, content internalism is a minority view. Most philosophers – both those who work on mental content and those who work in other areas of philosophy – believe that content externalism is true. This is the view that content is individuated, in part, by factors outside of the subject, such as the social or physical environment. Conceptual-role semantics is quite popular amongst internalists, but the holistic version of it that I defend is alleged to be beset with difficulties.

The objection which will be the focus of this project is one which claims that the account of communicative success which must be endorsed by Holism is, at best, unattractive and, at worst, untenable. Holism is thought to suffer from a special problem of communication because it entails that no two speakers *ever* mean the same thing by an utterance of the same word-forms, or entertain thoughts with the same content. Meaning the same thing, or sharing content, is thought to be necessary (or at least sometimes required) for successful communication. The Holist must maintain instead that successful communication requires only similarity of content across interlocutors. This is supposed to be a serious cost of the view. In this project, I aim to show that it is, in fact, a virtue. Views which insist that speaker and hearer must grasp the same content as each other provide surprisingly implausible accounts of communication. It is *only* views which claim that subjects do *not* share thought content which can provide attractive accounts of communicative success.

The project is divided into six chapters. In the first half of the project, I argue that views of content which posit shared content face a dilemma when it comes to explaining communicative success. In the second half of the project, I present my positive account and defend it from objections. The following is a summary of each of the chapters.

The first two chapters of this project are largely expository. Their purpose is to introduce positions and distinctions which will be necessary to understand the arguments presented in Chapters 3 – 6. In Chapter 1, I introduce the mental content debate and situate Holism within this debate. In this project, I do not intend to present any arguments in favour of Holism (except insofar as its superior theory of communicative success should be considered a mark in its favour). My aim is simply to defend the view from the particular objection under consideration by developing an attractive account of communicative success which the Holist can endorse. Furthermore, my aim is to defend Holism from this objection *only* (although doing so will involve considering some related objections to the view). There are many other objections to Holism which I do not consider in this project.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the Objection from Communication. This objection claims that communicative success (at least sometimes) requires that the hearer grasp the very same content as that which is expressed by the speaker. To assess whether this is indeed a plausible constraint on communicative success, it will be necessary to consider what our options are when it comes to constructing a theory of communication, and how these different options might affect the plausibility of theories of mental content. Much of Chapter 2 is devoted to exploring these various options. This project is concerned specifically with how various theories of mental content interact with constraints on communicative success. As such, I am only interested in certain aspects of a theory of communication: those which impinge upon one's choice of a theory of content. There are features of theories of communication which can be considered independently of theories of mental content; I call these 'Theory-Neutral' conditions. I will set these features to one side. And, as such, I do not take myself to be proposing a complete theory of communicative success in this project. I identify two kinds of condition on communicative success which directly interact with theories of mental content. These I call the 'Content Relation' and the 'Understanding Requirement'. Both the Content Relation and the Understanding Requirement figure in my argument in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 3, I argue that social externalism (as well as other externalist views) cannot underpin a plausible theory of communication. The theory faces a dilemma: it must either (a) claim that which relation holds between the mental contents of the speaker and hearer is *irrelevant* to communicative success or (b) endorse an account of communicative success which gives implausible diagnoses as to the success of communicative exchanges. This argument also motivates the account of communicative success which I go on to develop in Chapter 4. The reason that externalist views of content face the dilemma is because they allow that content and understanding can come apart. In contrast, the Holist's similar content account escapes the dilemma because it claims that understanding tracks content. Because of this, Holism can incorporate understanding into its explanation of how mental content facilitates communicative success without giving up on plausible theses as to the aims of communicative success. One consequence of the success of my argument

is that even views of content which can posit shared content should *not* claim that sharing content is relevant to communicative success. If this is so, there is no reason to suppose that Holism should have to claim that sharing content is relevant to success, and thus we lose motivation for the Objection from Communication raised against Holism in Chapter 2. This argument, considered alongside the plausibility of my positive account, should be enough to disarm the Objection from Communication.

In Chapter 4, I set out my positive account of communicative success. This account involves two measures of communicative success. The first, ‘success *simpliciter*’, claims that communication succeeds *to the degree that* content is similar across communication partners. In addition to success *simpliciter*, there is ‘success relative to a context’. This measure selects a particular degree of success *simpliciter* as the threshold for success relative to a given context of communication. This context is determined by the particular communicative aims of interlocutors. After setting out this basic account, I develop a criterion for comparing concepts for similarity across different holistic conceptual networks. This account appeals to similarities between non-semantic elements in the broader cognitive economies of subjects which can ‘anchor’ holistic networks. I argue that my account of conceptual similarity motivates a complication of the account of communicative success such that it takes into consideration different dimensions of conceptual variability along which concepts can be compared.

In Chapter 5, I introduce another distinction between dimensions of conceptual variability which is relevant to communicative success. This is a distinction between conceptual-role and application-conditions. I then consider an objection to my account based on the commonly held view that internalist theories of content cannot provide an intuitively correct account of the application-conditions of concepts. I argue that internalists (and even holists) can agree with externalist views as to the extensions of concepts without appealing to any factors which are external to the subject.

In Chapter 6, I consider an objection to my account based on the view that testimonial knowledge exchange requires that interlocutors share thought content. I present a similar content account of knowledge through testimony and argue that it can maintain all the epistemic features of the traditional same content account. This account claims that a hearer can gain knowledge that P from testimony that Q *providing* that the content grasped by the hearer has the same truth-conditions as the content expressed by the speaker. This response builds on the arguments presented in Chapter 5.

Across the six chapters, I will have presented a similar content account of communicative success with some interesting features. Not only does it avoid the dilemma that I present in Chapter 3, but it can claim that subjects with idiosyncratic concepts can represent the same objects despite not sharing content. This blocks a key motivation for externalist theories of content. It is this feature of the account which allows it to maintain a plausible view of testimony. If my arguments are successful, the consequences for the mental content debate will be significant. Perhaps most importantly, we will get the surprising result that views which can posit communal languages are actually far *worse* at explaining communicative success than views which posit idiosyncratic idiolects. In fact, they are worse at explaining communicative success *because* they posit this shared language. This result strongly impacts the dialectic between internalists (at least of certain stripes) and externalists about mental content. For we will then have a new reason to reject externalist theories: if you want a plausible account of communicative success, you *must* give up on the idea that we speak the same language.

Chapter 1: Mental content, conceptual-role and holism

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the mental content debate and to situate the holistic theory of content that I will defend within this debate. I begin in Section 1 by identifying the kind of content that is of interest in this project. In Section 2, I describe how the mental content debate has developed over recent years by introducing the externalist arguments of Kripke, Putnam, and Burge. In Sections 3, 4 and 5, I introduce three families of theories of mental content: these are content externalism, content internalism, and two-factor theories. In Section 6, I introduce conceptual-role theories of content and survey a number of ways in which such theories have been understood in the literature. In section 7, I introduce Holism as a combination of theses about the individuation of mental content. With an understanding of Holism and its externalist competitors, we will be prepared to explore the consequences of these theories in the philosophy of communication and testimony.

Section 1: Mental content

The mental content debate is a debate about the metaphysics of a particular kind of apparently representational mental entity. A theory of mental content ought to provide us with an answer to the question of what things must obtain in order for a given entity to have the particular representational properties that it does. This is to ask what it is that *individuates* or *determines* mental content.¹ The factors that individuate content could be elements of a subject's external environment, they could be factors which are entirely internal to a subject, or they could be a more or less complicated mixture of the two. It is quite hard to say much about what mental content is from a theory-neutral perspective. However, in this section I will provide a rough characterisation of the kind of content that is central to this project. We can, at

¹ As stressed in Wikforss (2008) – following Stalnaker (1997) – this is a different question to the question of what kind of object mental content is, or what the semantic value of a particular concept or expression is.

the very least, identify mental content by the way it is ascribed to the thoughts of subjects, and say roughly what role contentful thoughts are supposed to play, both in a subject's cognitive economy, and in her interactions with others.

1.1 Propositional attitudes and content ascriptions

The term 'mental content' applies to the content of propositional attitudes (and perhaps other mental states as well such as perceptual states). Propositional attitudes are mental states such as beliefs, desires, hopes and fears. Mental content is what represents the (actual or non-actual) portion of the world that those attitudes are taken towards. A propositional attitude attribution has a linguistic form which can be divided into three parts. Firstly, there is a noun which represents a subject (or group of subjects). Secondly, there is a verb which represents an attitude such as belief. Thirdly, within the scope of this attitude-verb is a 'that-clause' which specifies which content that the subject takes her attitude towards. Embedded within the that-clause is a declarative sentence. For example:

- (1) Gottlob believes that there is milk in the fridge.

So, if Gottlob believes that there is milk in the fridge, the content of his belief is THAT THERE IS MILK IN THE FRIDGE.² The attitude which Gottlob takes towards this content is that of belief. Following Burge (1979), I will say that we 'attribute' propositional attitudes and content to speakers, and that we 'ascribe' that-clauses to propositional attitude reports. As Burge writes, "Ascriptions are the linguistic analogs of attributions."³ So, in (1), we attribute the belief THAT THERE IS MILK IN THE FRIDGE to Gottlob. The very same content could figure in different propositional attitudes possessed by the same subject. For example, we could also attribute to Gottlob the *hope* THAT THERE IS MILK IN THE FRIDGE. In this case, we combine the same content with a different attitude and, in doing so, attribute a different propositional attitude to Gottlob.

²Henceforth, I will use small caps to represent content and concepts.

³ Burge (1979) 75

Mental content is comprised of concepts. Some philosophers talk as if concepts are just non-sentential content. My use of ‘sentential’ here is not meant to suggest that these things are literally sentences but, rather, that they are ascribed using that-clauses with sentential form. Concepts are ascribed using non-sentential expressions. Concepts function so as to represent objects or sets of objects rather than states of affairs. Burge seems to think of concepts this way (i.e., as components of content), although he prefers to use the term ‘notion’ as he takes it to have less theoretical baggage:

I shall be (and have been) using the term ‘notion’ to apply to components or elements of contents. Just as whole that-clauses provide the content of a person’s attitude, semantically relevant components of that-clauses will be taken to indicate notions that enter into the attitude (or the attitude’s content).⁴

Others talk of the content *of* concepts as well as the content of propositional attitudes. One reason for this is that some believe that, just as different kinds of propositional attitudes can be taken towards the same content, so too can different concepts present the same non-sentential content. François Recanati, for example, suggests that there are three different kinds of concepts, which he calls ‘basic’, ‘scientific’, and ‘deferential’. Each of these three kinds of concept can have the same *content* – ARTHRITIS, for example – but represent this content under different modes of presentation.⁵ For ease of exposition, in what follows I will be using the term ‘concept’ much like Burge uses ‘notion’: concepts are themselves just non-sentential content: they are the components of sentential mental content.

The majority of those who work on mental content think that content is truth-evaluable and that concepts have extensions. Mental content is supposed to *determine* (or perhaps be identical with) the truth- or satisfaction-conditions of the propositional attitudes in which it features. If the state of affairs that a belief is taken towards obtains, the content of the belief (the part of the attitude which represents this state of affairs) is true; and if the content of a belief is true, then that belief is

⁴ Burge (1979) 75

⁵ Recanati (2000) 455

true. However, only certain propositional attitudes are intended to be evaluated for truth and falsity. For example, it is appropriate to desire things that have not yet obtained, and to hope that the things we fear will never obtain. But, it makes no sense to ask of a desire whether it is true or false (we should only ask this of the content of the desire). So, although the content of propositional attitudes is always representational, it does not always function to provide truth-conditions for the attitudes in which it figures. Some kinds of propositional attitudes such as desires are assigned *satisfaction*-conditions rather than truth-conditions: what is represented by the content is the state of affairs that would satisfy the attitude taken towards the content. If the content is true, the desire (for example) is satisfied.

1.2 Mental content and linguistic content

Propositional attitudes are not the only things to have semantic (i.e., representational) content. Propositional attitudes are expressed by means of utterances of sentence tokens which have *linguistic* content. So, if Gottlob believes that there is milk in the fridge, he may express this belief by uttering a token of the sentence, ‘There is milk in the fridge.’ Linguistic content is thought by most to be distinct from mental content, although the two are surely intimately connected. Whereas mental content is always the content of some mental state, linguistic content is the content of sentence tokens, where these may be thought of as distinct from the content of the propositional attitudes which they can be used to express.

We should also distinguish between the linguistic *meaning* of sentence and word *types*, on the one hand, and the linguistic content of sentence and word tokens, on the other. Sentence types can contain ambiguous terms and unresolved indexicals, as in, for example, ‘I will meet you by the bank.’ Sentence tokens, on the other hand, are not ambiguous in this way (although it may not always be clear to the hearer which is the intended disambiguation or referent of an ambiguous or indexical term). There are also such things as mental content and concept *types*, tokens of which are what feature in the propositional attitudes of subjects. Sentence tokens are the linguistic counterparts of content tokens, and tokens of non-sentential expressions (like token

words and word-phrases) are the linguistic counterparts of concept tokens. Contents and concepts, like token expressions, cannot be ambiguous. For a word-type which is ambiguous, there is more than one concept that can be expressed by it. It is also natural to think that the same concept or content can be expressed by word and sentence tokens in many different languages, or maybe even with different tokens from within the same language.

There are a variety of options for understanding the relationship between the mental and linguistic content of an individual speaker. Firstly, it is possible to hold that mental content and linguistic content should be identified, but this is a minority view.⁶ Secondly, one might think that the two kinds of content are individuated by the same factors, yet are individuated independently of each other, in a parallel fashion. Thirdly, one might think that linguistic content is a derivative kind of content to mental content: it inherits its content from mental content and thus is dependent for its individuation on mental content.⁷ Fourthly, one might think that it is mental content which is the derivative kind of content, in which case mental content would be dependent upon linguistic content for its individuation. Fifthly, one could think that the two kinds of content are individuated respectively by two different kinds of factor. For the purposes of this project, I will assume that linguistic content derives from mental content, where this assumption is supposed to allow for both individualist and anti-individualist methods of linguistic-content determination.

1.3 The theoretical role of mental content

Now that we have a rough characterisation of content, and what is involved in attributing contentful attitudes to subjects, I will say a few things about the explanatory utility of mental content and propositional attitude attributions. Authors typically take contentful attitudes to play a number of roles in the cognitive economy of the individual subject and also in interactions *between* subjects. Below, I will describe some of the more important roles that content is thought to play.

⁶ See, for example, Rapaport (2002).

⁷ See, for example, Grice (1957).

Firstly, the interaction between contentful propositional attitudes (and other mental states) is supposed to contribute in some way to explanations of the reasoning and subsequent intentional actions of subjects. There are two or three related issues here. The first issue is that *propositional attitudes* are supposed to play a causally efficacious role in explanations of action: that is, a subject's being in a certain contentful state is supposed to form part of the causal explanation of her actions. The *contents* of these propositional attitudes are thought to have, at the very least, an *explanatory* role in explanations of action. However, depending on the theory of content endorsed, this role may not be a *causal* one.⁸ The second issue is that content attributions are supposed to capture the rationality of the subject.⁹ The way that a subject's propositional attitudes interact with each other in reasoning depends on the contents of those attitudes and the logical relations between those contents. Attributions of content, it is thought, should not result in rendering a normal subject objectionably irrational (although most will allow that subjects can on occasion be less than rational). Further, given that a subject is (largely, or significantly) rational, we are supposed to be able to explain, not just why she draws the inferences that she does, but also why she chooses to perform certain actions by appeal to the inferential relations between her attitude contents. To take a very simple example, if Gottlob, a rational agent, possesses the belief that there is milk in the fridge, and the desire to drink milk, this is supposed to be part of the explanation of why he performs the particular action of going to the fridge and fetching the milk.¹⁰

Secondly, contentful propositional attitudes play a role in the explanation of communicative success and testimonial knowledge transmission between subjects, although they must do this via expressions of utterance tokens with linguistic content. It is these issues, of course, which are the focus of the present project. One

⁸ The weaker version of mental causation thesis states that propositional attitudes are causes of intentional action. The stronger version of the thesis claims that propositional attitudes are causes of intentional action in virtue of the properties of their contents. See Jacob (1992).

⁹ A famous example of certain kinds of content attributions rendering a subject apparently irrational can be found in Kripke (1979). This example is discussed in Loar (1988) and Stalnaker (1990). There is ongoing debate as to whether externalist theories of content can capture subjective rationality. See, for example, Brown (2004), Kimbrough (1998) and Wikforss (2006).

¹⁰ For discussion of this issue see, for example, Fodor (1980), Kim (1982), Stich (1978) and Tuomela (1989).

approach to communicative success, endorsed by Pagin (2008), takes success to be measured in terms of some relation between the content of an initial mental state in the speaker and the content of a terminal state in the hearer. It is this picture of communicative success, properly introduced in Chapter 2, which will be a working hypothesis of this project. Similarly, the so-called ‘Belief View’ of testimony treats beliefs as the primary bearers of epistemic properties and takes successful transmission of knowledge to depend on whether the resultant belief formed in the hearer possesses the same semantic and epistemic properties as the belief expressed by the speaker.¹¹ This picture of testimonial knowledge transmission relies on something like the picture of communicative success which Pagin endorses.

This rough characterisation of mental content might all seem initially plausible. However, as will become clear both in this chapter and throughout the rest of this project, it is remarkably hard to respect all of the features attributed to mental content in the above whilst appealing to a single method of content individuation. There are roughly three approaches to the individuation of mental content: content externalism, content internalism and two-factor theories. In Sections 3, 4 and 5, I will present these approaches. However, I will first turn to the series of thought experiments which have divided authors into these three camps.

Section 2: Arguments for externalism

Before various pro-externalist arguments began emerging in the 1970s, the dominant view of mental content was internalism or ‘individualism’. Roughly stated, this view (which I will set out in more detail in Section 4) claims that the content of a subject’s thought is determined entirely by factors internal – or intrinsic – to that subject. The idea that mental content is determined by such factors might seem like an intuitively plausible feature of a theory of content. After all, thoughts are things which are enjoyed by brains and brains are certainly usually internal to individuals. However, it was left absent from my characterisation in the previous section because it is now

¹¹ See Lackey (2008) for a detailed explication (and critique) of the Belief View.

(thanks to these pro-externalist arguments) a highly controversial thesis. Nowadays the popular consensus is that such theories of content are naïve and outdated, although the thesis still has some dedicated defenders.

2.1 Kripke's causal theory

The revolution began in the philosophy of language as a reaction to the descriptive theory of the reference of proper names. The descriptive theory of reference, which has its roots in the work of Frege and Russell, states that the linguistic meaning of any given singular term is a description, or set of descriptions, which uniquely determines the referent of that term.¹² So, a name such as 'Aristotle' denotes the object, Aristotle, because the description or set of descriptions associated with the name 'Aristotle' uniquely applies to that object. Due to the work of Saul Kripke (1980), the majority of philosophers now take descriptivism to be false. Although, there have been a number of prominent advocates such as John Searle (1958), Peter Strawson (1950), David Lewis (1984) and Frank Jackson (1997). Although Kripke conceded that, in some cases, it is plausible to say we do refer by description, he argued that, for the vast majority of cases, descriptivism is implausible. In 'Naming and Necessity', he levelled a number of objections against descriptivism for proper names. These objections are usually referred to as the 'epistemic problem', the 'semantic problem' and the 'modal problem'.¹³

The epistemic problem aims to show that descriptions cannot have the same meaning, or content, as proper names. This is because, if this were so, sentences which predicate certain descriptions of names, such as in (2), should be knowable *a priori*.¹⁴

2) Aristotle is the teacher of Alexander.

¹² This is how the view is set out in Kripke (1980). There is also a weaker version of the thesis which claims merely that these descriptions determine reference, but does not identify these descriptions with the content or meaning of a name.

¹³ See, for example, Cumming (2013) and Soames (1998).

¹⁴ Kripke (1980) 78

Assuming that ‘the teacher of Alexander’ is the identifying description which is supposed to give the meaning of ‘Aristotle’, such sentences should appear trivially true, or analytic, to anyone who understands the name ‘Aristotle’. Kripke thinks that it is obvious that this is not the case.

The semantic problem arises because descriptivism seems to often deliver the wrong verdict on the referents of proper names in the actual world. For example, even in cases in which an object *does* uniquely satisfy a description, this may yet be the wrong object (i.e., not the object we would intuitively take the speaker to be trying to refer to). Further, in cases where a description fails to uniquely determine a referent, we may *still* wish to say that the name refers. Kripke argues for these claims by asking us to consider examples. His most famous one is his Gödel/Schmidt case. In this example, he asks us to imagine a subject who thinks that the name, ‘Gödel’, applies just to whomsoever satisfies the description, ‘the prover of the incompleteness of arithmetic’. He then goes on to show that this description will not actually pick out the correct object as the referent of ‘Gödel’. Kripke writes:

Suppose that Gödel was not in fact the author of this theorem. A man named ‘Schmidt’, whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious circumstances many years ago, actually did the work in question. His friend Gödel somehow got hold of the manuscript and it was thereafter attributed to Gödel. On the view in question, then, when our ordinary man uses the name ‘Gödel’, he really means to refer to Schmidt, because Schmidt is the unique person satisfying the description, ‘the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic’. [...] [S]ince the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic is in fact Schmidt, we, when we talk about ‘Gödel’, are in fact always referring to Schmidt. But it seems to me that we are not. We simply are not.¹⁵

Kripke thinks that cases like these, in which we use a name despite possessing considerable misinformation, will be extremely common. As such, descriptivism will very often give us the wrong result in the actual world. A description which is uniquely satisfied might refer to the *wrong* object. And a description which is not uniquely satisfied may refer to no object at all.

¹⁵ Ibid, 83ff

Finally, Kripke argues that even when descriptivism happens to pick out the right object in the actual world, it will not yield the right results in counterfactual scenarios.¹⁶ This is the modal problem. This last problem results from the fact that names are thought to be rigid designators. Rigid designators are expressions which designate the same object with respect to every world in which that object exists. But descriptions are not rigid designators: they designate different objects in different worlds. To see this, consider that even if, in the actual world, the description, ‘the prover of the incompleteness theorem’, picks out Gödel, it will *not* pick out Gödel in counterfactual worlds in which (the object we intuitively take to be) Gödel did not prove the incompleteness theorem.

Since ‘Naming and Necessity’, descriptivists have offered compelling responses to Kripke’s various objections;¹⁷ I will present some of these in Chapter 5. However, the majority of philosophers have been convinced by Kripke’s arguments. In place of the descriptive theory of reference, Kripke encouraged the adoption of a causal theory of reference for proper names.¹⁸ According to the causal theory of reference, the reference of a proper name is determined by a causal chain leading back to an initial baptism of the relevant object. For example, the referent of ‘Gottlob Frege’ is the man himself in virtue of the fact that it is he who is connected, by the relevant causal chain, to his initial baptism.¹⁹ Kripke writes,

A rough statement of a theory might be the following: An initial ‘baptism’ takes place. Here the object may be named by ostension, or the reference of the name may be fixed by a description. When the name is ‘passed from link to link’, the receiver of the name must, I think, intend when he learns it to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he heard it.²⁰

The causal theory of reference is an externalist theory of reference because it takes the determination of reference to depend (in a certain way) on objects and causal

¹⁶ Ibid, 48ff

¹⁷ See, for example, Searle (1983) and Jackson (1998).

¹⁸ Kripke himself didn’t claim to be offering a full theory, but merely gestured at what form the correct theory of reference might take.

¹⁹ Kripke allowed that a description could be used to identify the object to be named, but he claimed that this was a different way of using descriptions to fix reference than the method employed by descriptivists (1980, 96).

²⁰ Kripke (1980) 96

relations which are external to the speaker. What Kripke attempted to show was that, when it comes to the reference of a proper name, the contribution of the external world is far more important than had been previously thought.

Although Kripke's arguments are concerned with the *reference* of proper names, a number of authors have since argued for similar kinds of theses concerning linguistic and mental content. The move from externalist theses about reference to externalist theses about linguistic meaning more generally began with Hilary Putnam and his infamous Twin Earth thought experiments. Putnam's thought experiments were later extended by others to the individuation of mental content. I turn first to Putnam's Twin Earth thought experiment. In later sections I will show how Putnam's arguments have been adapted to argue for theses about mental content and mental states.

2.2 Putnam's Twin Earth

Twin Earth style thought experiments appeal to our intuitions about how differences in a subject's physical and social environments affect the reference, truth-conditions, and content of her thoughts and utterances. The arguments all highlight a tension between the widely accepted notion that content determines things like reference, extension, and truth-conditions on the one hand, and the previously popular idea that content is determined solely by factors internal to an individual.

Putnam, in 'The Meaning of "Meaning"', introduced Twin Earth thought experiments to demonstrate that linguistic expressions denoting natural kinds – e.g., terms like 'water' and 'gold' – must have meanings which do not depend solely on factors internal to an individual.²¹ Like Kripke, Putnam was primarily concerned with aspects of linguistic meaning rather than with the content of thought. The particular picture that Putnam was objecting to was one that held that the meanings of words were determined solely by the *psychological* states of the speakers who utter them. Here Putnam understands the notion of a psychological state to be

²¹ Putnam (1975a).

methodologically solipsistic; by this he means that, “No psychological state, properly so called, presupposes the existence of any individual other than the subject to whom that state is ascribed.”²² These are psychological states in the ‘narrow’ sense. Putnam writes that the traditional theory of meaning to which he objects is based on two unchallenged assumptions:

- (I) That knowing the meaning of a term is just a matter of being in a certain psychological state [...].
- (II) That the meaning of a term (in the sense of “intension”) determines its extension (in the sense that sameness of intension entails sameness of extension).²³

Putnam argues that these two assumptions cannot be jointly satisfied by a notion of meaning.²⁴ He argues 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 A in the idiolect of the one is different from the extension of the term A in the idiolect of the other. Extension is *not* determined by psychological state.”²⁵ Putnam argues for this claim by use of examples. Here is one version of Putnam’s most famous example.²⁶

Suppose the year is 1750. Now imagine a man called ‘Oscar’, who lives on Earth. Oscar has many beliefs which he takes to be about a substance he calls ‘water’; he would express these beliefs with utterances containing word-forms such as the following: ‘Water is wet’; ‘Water is potable’; ‘Water is found in rivers and lakes’, etc. However, one belief he lacks is that water – the wet, potable stuff found in rivers and lakes – has the chemical composition H₂O. No one alive at his time knows anything of, or even speculates about, the chemistry of the future. Oscar has never even considered the possibility that there might be more to water than he is phenomenologically aware of.

²² Ibid, 136

²³ Ibid, 135–136.

²⁴ Ibid, 136

²⁵ Ibid, 139

²⁶ See Putnam (1975a) 139ff for his presentation of the example.

Now consider Twin Earth, which exists an unthinkable number of light years from Earth. On Twin Earth, there lives another man called ‘Oscar’ by the inhabitants of Twin Earth. We’ll call him ‘Twin Oscar’ to distinguish him from Earth Oscar. Twin Oscar is an exact physical duplicate of Oscar, down to the last atom.²⁷ Twin Oscar has beliefs which he would express with words of a dialect which is exactly similar to the dialect spoken on Earth, although it is not English. Twin Earth is also an exact physical duplicate of Earth, except for one crucial difference: on Twin Earth, the chemical composition of the stuff that fills the rivers and lakes is not H₂O, but a complicated compound substance: XYZ. XYZ gives rise to exactly the same superficial macrophysical properties as H₂O, but it is chemically very different. Of course, Twin Oscar, like Oscar, is completely unaware of the existence of *any* underlying chemical structure. He’s never even thought about it.

Putnam thinks that the thought experiment demonstrates that the extensions of the word-form ‘water’ in Oscar and Twin Oscar’s respective languages will be different. When Oscar and Twin Oscar utter sentence tokens involving the word-form ‘water’, they will refer to different natural kinds. On Earth, Oscar’s tokenings of ‘water’ refer to H₂O and thus his utterances are true if and only if H₂O is wet; but this is supposedly not the case for Twin Oscar. Twin Oscar’s tokenings of ‘water’ refer to XYZ, and thus his utterances will be true if and only if XYZ is wet. Putnam concludes that the totality of internal facts about a subject is not sufficient to determine the extensions of their expressions (and truth-conditions of their utterances). For, *ex hypothesi*, there is no physical difference between Oscar and Twin Oscar internally construed. Thus, if the difference is not internal to them, it must be found in their environments.²⁸ Despite the fact that they are microphysical

²⁷ Many authors have pointed out that, due to the amount of water in a human body, Oscar and Twin Oscar are actually far from microphysical duplicates. However, everyone agrees that this is just an unfortunate choice of natural kind and that the thought experiment could be run with a natural kind which need not be present in a human body. Furthermore, Farkas (2008) has argued that the Twin Earth thought experiments do not need to rely on the exact microphysical similarity of twins.

²⁸ Putnam took meaning to be constituted by a number of factors; as well as extension, he suggested that stereotypes, semantic markers and syntactic markers are also features of meaning. See Putnam (1975a) 190.

duplicates, there is a difference in the extensions of their words. As Putnam puts it, “Cut the pie any way you like, “meanings” just ain’t in the head!”²⁹

2.3 From semantic externalism to content externalism

Putnam’s argument was intended to support *semantic* externalism – the thesis that, for some expressions in a language, the meanings of those expressions depend in part on the external world in some way. However, many have taken similar thought experiments to support *content* externalism.³⁰ Content externalists believe that similar considerations support the thesis that the content of propositional attitudes is individuated, in part, by the external environment. Oscar’s thought THAT WATER IS WET is *about* H₂O, whereas Twin Oscar’s thought THAT (TWIN) WATER IS WET is *about* XYZ. As noted earlier, content is supposed to be truth-conditional, in that it determines, or is identical with, the conditions upon which something in the world will make it true. Oscar and Twin Oscar’s thoughts that they express using the word-form ‘water’ appear to be about different substances and to have different truth-conditions, just as their utterances involving the word-form ‘water’ had different truth-conditions. As Wikforss explains,

According to the *content* externalist [...] the externalist determination of meaning carries over to content in such a way that if the meaning of ‘water’ is determined externally, so is the corresponding concept expressed. This view is driven by the conviction that mental content is truth-conditional and hence the external determination of truth-conditions will carry over to the level of mental content.³¹

If we accept the pull of the intuition that the truth-conditions of the contents of Twin-beliefs are different, then it looks like we have reason to accept that, at least for some expressions, the totality of factors internal to a speaker is not sufficient to determine the content of her thoughts: the truth-conditional content of some propositional attitudes depends in part for its determination on the external environment.

²⁹ Putnam (1975a) 144

³⁰ This was first pointed out by Colin McGinn (1977).

³¹ Wikforss (2008) 162

2.4 Burge's Arthritis

What Putnam's thought experiment is taken to show is that certain features of a subject's physical environment – natural kinds – can affect the linguistic content of that subject's utterances even when there are no relevant changes inside that subject. Tyler Burge, in his own thought experiments, extended Putnam's work in four ways.³² Firstly, he extended the argument to apply to mental content as well as linguistic content; secondly, he sought to show that an individual's social environment could function to individuate content in addition to the individual's physical environment; thirdly, he attempted to show that, not just natural kind terms, but many other kinds of term can be 'Twin-Earthed' by varying the *social* environment of two microphysically exactly similar subjects;³³ fourthly, his arguments can be taken to show that not just attitude content, but propositional attitude states themselves, are dependent on the external environment. Burge takes his argument to have a very wide application. His most famous thought experiment focuses on the term 'arthritis', but, he thinks, "It does not depend [...] on the kind of word 'arthritis' is. We could have used an artefact term, an ordinary natural kind word, a color adjective, a social role term, a term for a historical style, an abstract noun, an action verb, a physical movement verb, or any of various other sorts of words."³⁴

Burge's thought experiment has a similar structure to Putnam's Twin Earth, but Burge prefers to set things up using an actual and counterfactual scenario rather than by considering two spatiotemporally distant parts of the same world. For ease of exposition, I will refer to the thought experiments of both Putnam and Burge (and similar arguments) as 'Twin Earth style'. Burge presents his argument in three steps. He first asks us to imagine a subject, Alf, who possesses a large number of propositional attitudes which we would attribute using ascriptions of that-clauses which contain the term 'arthritis'. Burge writes,

³² Kallestrup (2011) 69ff

³³ Putnam also considers the application of his argument to other kinds of terms besides natural kinds terms, for example, to the artefactual term 'pencil'. See Putnam (1975a) 16ff.

³⁴ Burge (1979) 79

For example, [Alf] thinks (correctly) that he has had arthritis for years; that his arthritis in his wrists and fingers is more painful than his arthritis in his ankles, that it is better to have arthritis than cancer of the liver, that stiffening joints is a symptom of arthritis, that certain sorts of aches are characteristic of arthritis, that there are various kinds of arthritis, and so forth.³⁵

Although Alf possesses a large number of these attitudes, many of which are true beliefs, his grasp of the meaning of ‘arthritis’ is not perfect. There is a conceptual error in his understanding: he is disposed to apply the term ‘arthritis’ to rheumatoid ailments that occur in the thigh. As such, he also possesses a belief which he would express with (3):

3) I have arthritis in my thigh

Alf reports his belief to his doctor by uttering (3). The doctor responds by stating that this cannot be true: arthritis is an inflammation of the joints only. Alf, in the face of the doctor’s expertise, relinquishes his belief and accepts the doctor’s advice on what else might be causing the pain in his thigh.

In the second step, Burge asks us to imagine a counterfactual situation in which Alf grows up precisely as he did in the first situation: he lives through precisely the same physical events up to and including his meeting with the doctor. He is stipulated to be exactly microphysically similar to Alf in the actual situation.³⁶ In short, there is nothing different about Alf, internally described, in the counterfactual scenario. What is different is his social, or linguistic, environment. Unlike in actual Alf’s community, in the counterfactual community, the term ‘arthritis’ applies not only to what ‘arthritis’ applies to in the actual community, but to other kinds of rheumatoid ailment as well. In particular, the term in the counterfactual community applies to the condition that Alf has in his thigh, and thus encompasses actual Alf’s misuse of the term.³⁷ Burge summarises counterfactual Alf’s situation thus:

³⁵ Ibid, 77

³⁶ Ibid, 78

³⁷ Ibid

The person might have had the same physical history and non-intentional mental phenomena while the word ‘arthritis’ was conventionally applied, and defined to apply, to various rheumatoid ailments, including the one in the person’s thigh, as well as to arthritis.³⁸

In the third and final step, Burge claims it is reasonable to suppose that counterfactual Alf lacks at least some (and probably all) of the attitudes that would be attributed with content containing the (actual world) concept ARTHRITIS.³⁹ The reason for this, Burge argues, is that counterfactual Alf could not have picked up the notion of ARTHRITIS, as, in his community ‘arthritis’ doesn’t mean ARTHRITIS: it doesn’t refer to all and only inflammations of the joints. Burge explains,

‘Arthritis’, in the counterfactual situation, differs both in dictionary definition and in extension from ‘arthritis’ as we use it. Our ascriptions of content clauses to the patient (and ascriptions within his community) would not constitute attributions of the same contents we actually attribute.⁴⁰

Burge thinks this shows that the contents of Alf’s thoughts in the actual and counterfactual situations are different. It would not be appropriate to attribute beliefs with the same content to Alf in each scenario: the concepts are not extensionally equivalent. But, given that Alf was internally exactly similar in the actual and counterfactual situations, whatever it is that affects the content of his thought must lie outside of his mind. Burge summarises, “The upshot of these reflections is that the patient’s mental contents differ while his entire physical and non-intentional mental histories, considered in isolation from their social context, remain the same.”⁴¹ Thought experiments like this have helped to bring into sharper focus the options available when choosing a theory of mental content. I now turn to three broad families of theory: content externalism, content internalism, and two-factor theories.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid, 79

⁴¹ Ibid

Section 3: Content Externalism

Historically, content externalism, also called ‘anti-individualism’, is simply the denial of internalism (or ‘individualism’); that is, it is the denial of the claim that *all* mental content is individuated by factors internal to the subject. As such, it seems appropriate to count as externalist any theory which claims that the content of at least one mental state of a subject is partly individuated by external factors. However, different authors can use the term slightly differently. For example, some people might deem to be externalists only those who believe that, for all concepts, external factors are relevant to individuation. We might call this ‘total’ externalism. Some might hold the weaker position that, for at least some concepts (but perhaps not all), external factors are relevant to the individuation of that concept. I take it that externalism requires the weaker rather than the stronger claim.

For a content to count as externally individuated, it must be the case that it is *partly* individuated by external factors: this is to say that its individuation depends on some relation between an individual and some feature (or features) of her environment. No externalist believes that content is *wholly* individuated by external factors – externalists allow that there are internal relata as well as external relata, although they have little to say as to the precise role played by the innards of the subject. Whatever role the internal relata play it will be minimal. For example, on social externalism, two internal requirements might be that the subject possesses general rational coherence and the intention (or disposition) to defer – thus some cooperation is required of the individual.⁴² For a physical externalist, the requirement might be more minimal still: it might just be that, given that you are an organism with a particular internal structure and/or evolutionary history, you cannot help but be a representor of particular objects in your external environment, whether you like it or not.

One thing to note is that, the sense in which content is partly individuated by external factors on externalism is different to the sense in which content is partly externalist

⁴² Ibid, 115

on a two factor theory. Pure externalists with respect to a content think that there is only one method of individuation of that content. Two factor theorists think that for a given content there are two dimensions of content individuation: in addition to there being an externally individuated dimension, there is also a separate dimension which is internally individuated. We could put the distinction this way: content which is individuated by external factors is called ‘broad’ or ‘wide’ content. Content which is purely internally individuated is called ‘narrow’ content. To be an externalist is to believe that at least some mental states have *only* broad content (even though this broad content relies partially on some internal relata). Thoroughgoing internalists (about a particular kind of content) believe that there is *only* narrow content. If one adopts a two-factor theory of content, one thinks that, for some content, that content has both a wide and a narrow dimension. I turn now to two prominent forms of content externalism which will feature in this project: physical and social externalism.

3.1 Physical externalism

If a theory states that mental content is individuated by factors in a subject’s physical environment, it counts as physical externalism. The term ‘physical’ here is to be contrasted with ‘social’, regardless of whether one thinks that language communities are part of the physical environment. There are a number of different ways in which someone can be a physical externalist.⁴³ One prominent example of a physical externalism about mental content is Jerry Fodor’s (1987) asymmetric dependence theory. Asymmetric dependence theory is a version of a causal theory of mental content.⁴⁴ Causal theories of content claim that contents are determined by their causal relations to relevant objects in the external world. Fodor describes what he calls a ‘crude’ causal theory as follows: “The symbol tokenings denote their causes, and the symbol types express the property whose instantiations reliably cause their

⁴³ Another prominent class of externalist theories of content are so-called ‘object dependence’ views which claim that certain concepts or thoughts are constitutively dependent on the objects which they are about. Examples of such view are Evans (1982) and McDowell (1977). I set these kinds of views to one side in this project.

⁴⁴ For further examples of causal theories see Dretske (1981) and Stampe (1977).

tokenings.”⁴⁵ For example, the concept MOUSE represents mice because mental tokenings of MOUSE are appropriately causally related to real live mice. This very basic kind of causal account is problematic because it fails to allow for systematic misrepresentation: the problem is that plenty of objects in the world which are *not* mice can still cause tokenings of MOUSE in a subject’s mind (for example, shrews on a dark night). This problem is known as ‘the disjunction problem’; the challenge is to explain why, for example, a given concept, *C*, is the concept MOUSE and not the disjunctive concept, MOUSE OR SHREW ON A DARK NIGHT when both mice and night-shrews sometimes cause mental tokenings of *C*. In an attempt to get around the problem, Fodor adds to the basic causal theory the notion of ‘asymmetric dependence’. The idea is that certain objects which are causes of tokenings of *C* are in some sense fundamental, whereas other objects which are causes of tokenings of *C* are non-fundamental. The non-fundamental cause will not be a content-determining cause because this cause (for example, night-shrews) would not cause tokenings of *C* *unless* the content-determining cause (the mice) did so. But supposedly the reverse is not true: the fact that mice cause tokenings of *C* is in no way dependent upon the fact that shrews sometimes do. Thus, mice are the fundamental, content-determining cause of tokenings of *C*. As Fodor explains,

Misidentifying a cow as a horse wouldn’t have led me to say ‘horse’ *except that there was independently a semantic relation between ‘horse’ tokens and horses*. But for the fact that the word ‘horse’ expresses the property of *being a horse* [...], it would not have been *that* word that taking a cow to be a horse would have caused me to utter.⁴⁶

Another form of physical externalism which claims to allow for misrepresentation is Ruth Millikan’s (1984, 1989) teleosemantic theory of content.⁴⁷ On this theory, the content of a mental state is individuated by appeal to the biological ‘proper function’ of that mental state. The basic idea is that a concept bears a representational relation to a particular object because it is that concept’s proper function to represent that object. The function itself is determined by the history, or ancestry, of the kind of concept possessing the function. As Millikan writes, “Proper functions are

⁴⁵ Fodor (1987) 98

⁴⁶ Ibid, 107

⁴⁷ Price (2001) also offers a teleological theory of content.

determined by the histories of the items possessing them; functions that were “selected for” are paradigm cases.”⁴⁸ Certain functions are adaptive and, as such, are the functions which are etiologically selected and preserved in the evolution of a species. This kind of approach is supposed to allow for systematic misrepresentation (and thus avoid the disjunction problem), because a concept such as MOUSE for a subject may be caused by the wrong kind of object, but will still represent mice because that is what it was *evolutionarily selected* to represent. The subject’s mouse-representing mechanism has evolved to represent mice and is thus malfunctioning if it represents non-mice such as night-shrews.

3.2 Social externalism

A second prominent externalist view is social externalism. Social externalism, as developed by Tyler Burge (1979), is the thesis that it is a subject’s social or linguistic environment which individuates content. As we saw in Burge’s ‘arthritis’ thought experiment, social externalists think that differences in a subject’s *linguistic community* will affect the content of that subject’s thought. On social externalism, subjects speak a shared language. And they succeed in entertaining thoughts with the same content as others in their linguistic community even when they are not fully competent with these concepts. They can do this if they satisfy two conditions. Firstly, they must possess basic linguistic competence – not with respect to any particular concept at their disposal, but with respect to their language as a whole. As Burge writes, the individual must “maintain a minimal internal and rational coherence and a broad similarity to others’ use of the language”.⁴⁹ Secondly, with respect to concepts with which they are not fully competent, they must defer to experts in their community who are masters of those concepts.⁵⁰

Thinking using community concepts gives rise to the phenomenon of ‘partial grasp’ or ‘incomplete understanding’, in addition to full understanding or mastery.⁵¹ For the

⁴⁸ Millikan (1989) 285

⁴⁹ Burge (1979) 114

⁵⁰ For a discussion of various characterisations of deference, see Greenberg (2007).

⁵¹ I use the terms ‘incomplete understanding’ and ‘partial grasp’ interchangeably.

social externalist, a subject can *think* with a concept he or she incompletely grasps or understands. Many forms of physical externalism will also claim that subjects can think using a concept they do not fully understand and, as such, will also claim that there is such a thing as incomplete understanding. Concept possession, on social externalism, is not a matter of mastering a concept. Attributing possession of a concept to a subject is consistent with that subject having very little understanding of the application conditions of the concept, or its conceptual relations to other concepts. Despite this incomplete understanding, social externalists claim that it is correct to ascribe content involving communal concepts to individuals. There are two kinds of incomplete understanding which Burge identifies. The first is ‘incorrect understanding’. This is characterised as the possession of at least one false belief as to the correct application of a concept by the subject.⁵² The second is ‘agnostic understanding’. A subject possesses agnostic understanding of a concept when she is unsure about that concept’s application conditions despite there being a determinate fact of the matter as to whether it applies to any given entity.⁵³ Incomplete understanding is thought to be extremely widespread on social externalism. As a result, subjects are quite frequently to be attributed beliefs in *conceptual falsehoods* such as the belief THAT ARTHRITIS OCCURS IN THE THIGH. It should not be noted that, although Burge appeals to partial grasp in his thought experiments, he also thinks that, even when a subject possesses *mastery* of a concept, that concept is still reliant for its individuation on her language community. This is because, although a subject may understand a given concept correctly in the actual world, had her social environment been different, the content of her thought would have been different too: it would have been such that her counterfactual understanding was incorrect understanding of a *different* concept.⁵⁴

As things stand, this presentation of social externalism appears to give us only a partial theory of content individuation. We are only told how a subject can sustain communal concepts (both in cases of partial and complete grasp) in virtue of the fact that she is willing to defer. But we are still owed an explanation of how content is

⁵² Burge (1979) 80

⁵³ See Burge (1979, 82–83) and also Brown (2001).

⁵⁴ Burge (1979) 84–85, italics in original.

determined by community practice such that it can then figure in the thoughts of cooperative participants in that community: it cannot just be deference all the way down. There must be some mechanism of content determination in place in addition to the deferential practices of subjects. It is surely the case that different versions of social externalism could appeal to different explanations of what determines content. For example, a 'pure' social externalism would hold that the supervenience base of mental content is the linguistic community alone and does not include the greater physical environment. On such a view, one could just appeal to similar internal mechanisms as are appealed to by internalists. Although, the social externalist would surely allow that these mechanisms can be *distributed* over more than one subject such that someone who is an expert in one concept might yet defer with respect to some of the concepts he uses to explicate the concept about which he is an expert. There is evidence that Burge thinks that such mechanisms could, in some cases, be wholly present within a single individual. For he countenances the possibility of individuals who opt-out of the cooperative and, because of this, are to be properly attributed idiosyncratic concepts.⁵⁵ Burge only explicitly tells us the conditions under which a subject can think a thought with a given content. He does not explicitly tell us how that content itself is determined, although he does gesture towards a combination of factors which he takes to be relevant. For example, in his (1986) he suggests that both the social *and* the physical environment can play a role in content determination. He writes, "The mental natures of many of an individual's mental states and events are dependent for their individuation on the individual's physical and social environments."⁵⁶

Social externalism is rather different to physical externalism. Most noticeably, on a purely physical externalism, the external factors relevant to individuating content can be external to *all* subjects;⁵⁷ social externalism does not claim this. On social externalism, content *is* determined by factors internal to subjects (at least partially): it is determined by the minds and practices of the experts (or perhaps groups of

⁵⁵ Ibid, 114

⁵⁶ Burge (1986) 697

⁵⁷ I say 'can be' because some ways of delineating the boundaries of the subject will allow that certain factors which individuate content in an externalist way are actually inside a subject - for example, diseases, neurons, and spleens.

experts) and grasped by deferring to these experts. This emphasis on the importance of community experts may cause social externalism to ascribe *different* contents to the propositional attitudes of subjects than physical externalism. As Wikforss explains,

For instance, social externalism does not support Putnam's claim that in 1750 (before the development of modern chemistry) 'water' on Earth expressed a different meaning than 'water' on Twin Earth. In 1750 the experts on Earth and the experts on Twin Earth would have associated all the same descriptions with 'water', and hence the term 'water' in English would have had the same meaning as the term 'water' in Twin-English.⁵⁸

Despite this, one needn't necessarily think of physical and social externalism as competitors. One could hold that different kinds of concepts are individuated by different kinds of external factors providing one has motivation for treating each kind of content differently. It is perhaps also conceivable that purely external content could have a two-factor structure in a similar fashion to how some think that internalism and externalism can co-exist; although, it is not clear what would motivate one to adopt such a theory.

Despite the differences between social and physical externalism, there are things which they agree on. Two of these things are important for my purposes. Firstly, one thing that these externalists typically hold is that subjects can succeed in thinking thoughts with the *same content* as each other (even though the theories might disagree as to the precise nature of this content). This is because, on physical externalism, different subjects are related to their physical environment in the same ways; and, on social externalism, different subjects are related to their social environment in the same ways. The second point of agreement which is of interest to this project is that both theories think that content internalism is false: factors internal to an individual are not sufficient to determine the mental content of that individual. I turn now to content internalism.

⁵⁸ Wikforss (2008) 10

Section 4: Internalism

Internalism, although quite popular before the shift towards externalism, has become a minority view since the arguments of Putnam and Burge. These thought experiments caused a flurry of responses by philosophers who still retained internalist intuitions (or, at the very least, did not have externalist intuitions). This resulted in the philosophical community generating a far clearer idea of what it is to be an internalist, and why one would want to be one. Narrow content is alleged to be required as at least part of a theory of content; it is thought by some to play a crucial role in accounting for mental causation, subjective rationality and privileged access.⁵⁹

Content internalism is often presented as the thesis that, necessarily, the content of an individual's thought is determined solely by factors internal to that individual.⁶⁰ There are at least two ways in which to sharpen this initial characterisation of internalism. One popular way to state internalism is as the thesis that, necessarily and for any individual, the content of that individual's thought is individuated solely by factors internal to that individual such that any two *microphysical duplicates* will be identical with respect to content. This kind of internalism is clearly the thesis that Putnam and Burge had in mind: both their thought experiments are attempts to show that microphysical duplicates do not necessarily share content. From this, they move to the claim that internalism is false. However, not all internalists will accept this characterisation. Some would prefer to characterise internalism as the thesis that, necessarily, for any individual, the content of that individual's thought is individuated solely by that individual's *intrinsic* properties such that two subjects can be microphysical duplicates and yet *differ* with respect to the content of their

⁵⁹ Of course, many externalists will deny that narrow content is needed to in order to deal with these issues.

⁶⁰ This is what makes internalism distinct from a pure social externalism. Pure social externalism (which, as I noted above, is not Burge's version of the view) claims that thought content is determined by factors internal to individuals, but what is distinctive about the thesis is that it allows that the content of one individual's thought can be dependent on *another* individual, or group of individuals, so long as those individuals stand in the right kinds of relations to each other.

thoughts (due to differences in their intrinsic properties).⁶¹ Both kinds of internalists will typically take the thesis to hold of *nomological* necessity. It will become clear in Chapter 5 that it is a consequence of my theory that internalism should be characterised in this second way. Externalists will deny both these characterisations of internalism. It *is* possible, on social externalism, that a particular item of mental content for a subject be entirely determined by her individual psychology (as might be possible in the very unlikely event that a subject is an expert in the use of all of her concepts, or when she simply refuses to defer to others). However, for even the most stubborn polymath, it is always possible that her situation will change such that changes in her linguistic community will alter the contents of her thoughts despite there being no relevant changes internal to her. It should be stressed that internalists will agree that, as a matter of fact, a subject's external (physical and social) environment will have an *enormous* causal effect on the content of that subject's thought: for example, it is (as a matter of contingent fact) through interacting with other speakers that we gain our language and come to form new concepts in the first place. What internalists deny is that such environmental factors play any kind of content-individuating role; the effect is merely a contingent, causal one. The relationship between the individual and her environment is irrelevant to the *individuation* of content. Any given contentful state possessed by a subject could have obtained despite that subject inhabiting a very different environment or, perhaps, in the complete absence of any external environment at all.⁶²

Whereas externalist theories of content typically claim that speakers in a language community speak (and think) using a shared sociolect, many (but not all) internalists claim that each individual thinks using her own idiolect (and possibly speaks in this idiolect as well).⁶³ For example, Tim Crane (1991) responds to Burge's thought experiment by claiming that Alf does not think using the community concept,

⁶¹ See, for example, Searle (1983) and Pelczar (2009).

⁶² Internalists are not committed to the claim that a subject could exist without any external environment at all. They may accept that some kind of environment is necessary in order for a subject with contentful states to exist at all, whilst maintaining that this environment does not play a content-*individuating* role.

⁶³ Not all internalists claim this. Wikforss (2001) for example argues that the internalist need not accept that Burge's thought experiment proves that the subjects in Twin communities possess different arthritis concepts. She does this by questioning the assumption, central to Burge's argument, that the subjects involved are making genuinely conceptual errors.

ARTHRITIS, but with an idiosyncratic concept which applies in both the actual and counterfactual scenarios. Thus the truth-conditions of his beliefs in the actual and counterfactual scenario are the same. The mistake that Alf makes in the actual world is merely metalinguistic.⁶⁴ In claiming that subjects think using idiosyncratic rather than community concepts, internalists need not claim that speakers are happy to mean seriously divergent things by their utterances, and to represent different things with their thoughts. Internalists who deal in idiolects tend to think that speakers strive to speak an idiolect which is either the same as, or at least similar to, that of their peers. Because of this, internalists allow that speakers are likely to accept correction from experts, and do, in some sense, defer to these experts' greater understanding of how the words of a language are supposed to be used. However, deference works differently on internalism: importantly, it doesn't allow subjects to literally think thoughts which contain communal concepts, or concepts which are only partially understood. On internalism, a deferring subject's concept might be something like a placeholder for a richer concept which she does not yet possess. For example, 'arthritis' for a subject with a poor understanding of the term might express a concept like *WHATEVER THE EXPERTS MEAN BY 'ARTHRITIS'*. Thus, although for the internalist deference does not allow a subject to *think* with a concept which is mastered by an expert, it might enable an ignorant subject and the expert to whom she defers to both refer to the same thing with the term 'arthritis' even though they possess different concepts. This will be roughly my approach in Chapter 5.

The choice between internalism and externalism about mental content is at root a question of what individuates content; it is a question of which things must obtain in order for subjects to have thoughts with the very content which they do, in fact, have. What motivates internalism, typically, is a need to account for the sense in which something is *shared* between Twins. And, relatedly, it is argued that narrow content is what explains rationality, mental causation and intentional action.⁶⁵ From the prominence and influence of the arguments of Burge and Putnam, one might think that what motivates externalism is the need to provide truth-conditional content. Internalists, it is often said, either provide the *wrong* truth-conditions for content or

⁶⁴ Segal (2000) offers a similar defence.

⁶⁵ Again, many externalists will deny that narrow content is needed for these purposes.

cannot provide any truth-conditions at all. It is true that many authors believe this to be the case. However, I think that things are more complicated than this. First of all, recall Wikforss's point that different kinds of externalists disagree amongst themselves as to what truth-conditions are correctly ascribed to propositional attitudes. Perhaps then, what motivates externalism is the thought that subjects' thoughts (at least, those which are expressed with the same words) ought to have *the same* truth-conditions as each other. But, once again, it is not the case that internalists uniformly deny this. Farkas's (2008) theory, for example, provides a truth-conditional theory of content of a purely internalist kind which allows for ascriptions of truth-conditions which cohere with the supposedly externalist intuitions of the Twin Earth thought experiments. And my own version of conceptual-role semantics claims to be truth-conditional in this way and yet purely internalist. One might think that a major difference between the two views is that externalism can claim that subjects share content whereas internalism can, at best, claim that subjects can entertain (different) thoughts with the same truth-conditions. But, as mentioned above, there are internalists who claim that subjects share thought content. The only uncontroversial difference between internalism and externalism then seems to be the role of the environment in the individuation of thought content.

There are a wide and colourful variety of candidate theories of narrow content. For example, Chalmers (2002) offers an epistemic conception of narrow content. And Horgan and Tienson (2002) and Farkas (2008) offer phenomenological theories. These internalist theories have much to recommend them. However, for the purposes of this project, I will be defending only one very particular internalist theory of content: conceptual-role semantics. Before turning to conceptual-role theories, I will first present a third family of theories of mental content: two-factor theories. Many theorists who adopt a conceptual-role theory do so as one part of a two factor theory of content. As such, it will be easier to understand the differences between the various conceptual-role theories presented below if two-factor theories have already been introduced.

Section 5: Two-factor theories

Philosophers who are impressed by the motivations for both internalism and externalism can adopt a theory of content which incorporates both. So-called ‘two-factor’ theories of content claim that, for at least some mental content, that content is individuated by *both* internal and external factors.⁶⁶ There is more than one way of understanding what this amounts to. The first is the claim that the internal and external factors separately determine two different *aspects* of content.⁶⁷ Another approach would be to claim that each concept has two separate kinds of content: one narrow and one wide. A two-factor theory can incorporate whichever two particular theories of content individuation you like. Block, for example, suggests that the internal aspect might be combined with a causal theory of reference, although he chooses to remain neutral on the correct way to understand the external component.⁶⁸ Two-factor theories could be described as Fregean insofar as they appeal to something like the need for a sense/reference distinction for content. However, many of them are distinctly non-Fregean in two important respects. Firstly, Fregean senses are supposed to be shareable. Many theorists think that narrow content has this feature, but some do not. As such, some varieties of narrow content have more in common with what Frege called ‘ideas’.⁶⁹ Secondly, whereas Frege believed that sense determines reference, most two-factor theorists invoke wide content precisely because they think that their internal factor does *not* suffice to determine the reference, or truth-conditions, of a given concept or content. With this third theory of content individuation in place, I now turn to conceptual-role semantics.

Section 6: Conceptual-role semantics

In the following sub-sections, I will introduce conceptual-role semantics (CRS) as a thesis about content individuation and survey the ways in which the thesis has been

⁶⁶ See, for example, Field (1977), McGinn (1982) Loar (1982), Lycan (1981) and Block (1986).

⁶⁷ See, for example, Block (1986) 627

⁶⁸ Ibid, 628

⁶⁹ See Frege (1892) 25–26 for the distinction between senses and associated ideas.

understood in the philosophical literature. I will also introduce a linguistic theory which bears a striking resemblance to CRS. In Section 7, I will introduce the version of CRS which I will defend in this project.

CRS takes the contents of mental states (or expressions of a language) to be individuated by, or identical with, the role that that content (or expression) plays in thought (or language). CRS takes content to be individuated by its role, or position, in a network, where this position is defined in terms of its relations to the positions of other mental entities in that network. As we will see in Section 7, CRS theories can be more or less holistic depending on whether it is the total network, or some subset of it, which is relevant to individuating a particular content. On CRS, *all* concepts (or contents) can be represented as nodes in a network. For every word (or sentence) that you have in your vocabulary, there is a corresponding concept (or content) in your conceptual (or inferential) network. These concepts (or contents) are connected to each other by complex relations which determine how they interact with each other in your cognitive economy in response to various inputs.

The conceptual-role of a concept or content includes that entity's relationships to representations caused by perceptual input and behavioural output as well as its internal conceptual-role. As Block writes,

The internal factor, conceptual role, is a matter of the causal role of the expression in reasoning and deliberation and, in general, in the way the expression combines and interacts with other expressions so as to mediate between sensory inputs and behavioral outputs.⁷⁰

And Harman writes,

[...] [M]eaning has to do with evidence, inference, and reasoning, including the impact sensory experience has on what one believes, the way in which inference and reasoning modify one's beliefs and plans, and the way beliefs and plans are reflected in action.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Block (1986) 628

⁷¹ Harman (1974) 11

In addition to relations to perceptual inputs and behavioural outputs, the conceptual-role of a concept can include that concept's relations to other non-linguistic representational entities in a subject's cognitive economy such as stored memories, occurrent imaginings, etc.⁷²

On CRS, it is mental entities which possess conceptual-roles. These entities are, at the very least, *language-like* insofar as they obey some systematicity/productivity principle such as the principle of compositionality. CRS is, at least, committed to there being some mental correlates of linguistic entities such as sentences and non-sentential expressions. However, as Block identifies, a proponent of CRS need not think that subjects literally think in their native language.⁷³ For ease of exposition, I will often talk as if we think in our native language. But officially, I wish to remain neutral on this matter. I will also talk of contents as if they are mental sentence tokens and of concepts as if they are mental non-sentential expression tokens. However, contents and concepts are not literally sentences and non-sentential expressions; rather, they are their mental correlates.

CRS theorists promote the idea that in understanding meanings we are not, at least primarily, 'grasping' anything (such as the truth-conditions of a sentence or the meaning of term); rather, semantic understanding is a matter of getting used to using words; understanding meanings is a matter of knowing *how* rather than knowing *that*. As Harman and Greenberg explain,

The basic understanding one has of the meaning of one's own words and expressions consists in one's being at home with one's use of those words and expressions. It is a kind of knowhow: one knows how to proceed. One can have that basic kind of knowledge of meaning without having any sort of theoretical understanding of meaning and without being able to say what is meant in any interesting way.⁷⁴

⁷²These entities need not be fully non-linguistic. For example, we can remember and imagine concept-tokens.

⁷³Block (1986) 632

⁷⁴Greenberg and Harman (2005) 4

As such, CRS's picture of language-competence is intellectually undemanding. A subject can be 'at home' with her use of a given concept without necessarily being able to explicate how that concept should be employed.

6.1 Varieties of conceptual-role theory

CRS has its roots in a number of different places; for example, in the work of philosophers such as Wittgenstein (1953), Quine (1951) and Wilfred Sellars (1955) and in the functionalist theory of mind.⁷⁵ In 'Reflections on Language Games', Sellars describes a picture of language according to which what it is to use language is to perform certain actions in certain situations. This he viewed as making moves in a language game. For Sellars, it is not the 'pieces' (so-to-speak) in the language game which have meaning, but their positions. And, of course, these positions cannot be understood independently of the positions of other pieces in the game. Sellars writes,

As I see it, abstract singular terms such as 'redness' [...] and 'that Chicago is large' are to be construed, in first approximation, as singular terms for players of linguistic roles.⁷⁶

Since Sellars, CRS has gained many contemporary advocates in philosophy. Prominent defenders include Gilbert Harman (1982, 1987), Ned Block (1986), Hartry Field (1977) and Paul Churchland (1979). There are also similar kinds of theories endorsed by linguists such as Hudson (2007) and Lamb (1998), cognitive scientists such as Johnson-Laird (1977), and in artificial intelligence the thesis has been defended by William Rapaport (2002). Not all of these authors employ the conceptual-role machinery in the same way. In the proceeding, I will distinguish various different ways in which CRS has been utilised in a theory of content.

⁷⁵ Defenders of functionalist theories include Lewis (1966, 1980), Putnam (1960) and Shoemaker (1984).

⁷⁶ Sellars (1963) 204

6.1.1 Inferential-Role Semantics

The term ‘Conceptual-Role Semantics’ is used to refer to two slightly different versions of conceptual-role theory. The first is Inferential-Role Semantics. Inferential-Role Semantics claims that the fundamental bearers of conceptual-role are mental ‘sentences’, which should be thought of as content tokens. Non-sentential mental entities such as concepts possess conceptual-roles as well, but these are derivative of the conceptual-roles of the sentences in which they figure as parts. The conceptual-roles of non-sentential expressions are defined in terms of the set of all inferential-roles of sentential contents in which those non-sentential expressions figure as a constituent. Block (1986) endorses this view as part of a two-factor theory. He writes, “A crucial component of a sentence’s conceptual role is a matter of how it participates in inductive and deductive inferences. A word’s conceptual role is a matter of its contribution to the role of sentences.”⁷⁷ The term ‘inference’ on Block’s theory should be very broadly construed so as to include even mere psychological associations. Inferential-roles, on Block’s view, should be understood in terms of the *causal-roles* of contents in a subject’s web of attitudes: it is causal-roles which mediate inferences, decision making and the like.⁷⁸

Hartry Field also endorses an inferential version of conceptual-role semantics.⁷⁹ However, Field prefers to understand inferential-role in terms of subjective probability.⁸⁰ The basic idea is that the inferential-role of a sentence or content should be understood in terms of its subjective conditional probability in relation to all sentences in the language (or web of belief) of which it is a part. Field uses the approach to define intra-subjective synonymy for two sentences. On Field’s view, if two sentences have the same subjective conditional probability with respect to all other sentences in the language (or the same subset), then they have the same inferential-role in that language. Field writes,

⁷⁷ Block (1986) 628

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Other inferential role theories include Brandom (2000) and Horwich (1998).

⁸⁰ Field (1977) 379

[T]wo sentences have the same conceptual role for a person if these sentences are equipollent with respect to that person's subjective probability function. That is, 'Hesperus = Hesperus' and 'Hesperus = Phosphorus' have different conceptual roles for me as long as my subjective conditional probability function has the property that there are sentences C for which the subjective probability of 'Hesperus = Phosphorus' given C is lower than the subjective probability of 'Hesperus = Hesperus' given C.⁸¹

Field's inferential-role theory, like Block's, figures as one half of a two-factor theory.

6.1.2 (Non-sentential) conceptual-role semantics

Non-sentential conceptual-role semantics simply reverses the order of dependence between inferential-roles and non-sentential conceptual-roles. On this view, it is the conceptual-role of concepts that is fundamental and the inferential-roles of contents that are derivative. Such a view is defended by Harman, who endorses the following theses:

H1. The contents of thoughts are determined by their construction out of concepts.⁸²

H2. The contents of concepts are determined by their 'functional role' in a person's psychology.⁸³

Harman's view is distinctive in that, while it takes itself to be a one-factor view of mental content, it is neither purely internalist nor purely externalist. Harman is disparaging of the idea that truth-conditions should play a central role in a theory of meaning.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, he still thinks that a subject's external environment (both physical and social) is relevant to the individuation of content. It enters, not as a determiner of some external, truth-conditional factor, but as an extension of the conceptual-role of a concept. Conceptual-role reaches out of the subject and into the world. Harman calls this a 'non-solipsistic' or 'long-armed' conceptual role theory.

⁸¹ Ibid, 390

⁸² Harman (1987) 55

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Harman (1982) 247

Another non-sentential conceptual-role theory is William Rapaport's 'Syntactic Semantics'. Rapaport's view is interesting because it purports to explain semantics purely in terms of syntax (in the liberal sense of 'syntax' which pertains to symbol manipulation). Rapaport writes,

Semantics, considered as the study of relations between uninterpreted markers and interpretations of them, can be turned into syntax: a study of relations among the markers and their interpretations. This is done by incorporating (or 'internalizing') the semantic interpretations along with the markers to form a system of new markers, some of which are the old ones and the others of which are their interpretations.⁸⁵

According to Syntactic Semantics, semantic understanding is a matter of modelling one domain (the syntactic domain) in terms of another domain (an antecedently understood semantic domain). However, our understanding of this semantic domain is itself to be treated as a new syntactic domain, which, in a recursive fashion, is again to be understood in terms of some further antecedently understood semantic domain. To prevent a regress, Rapaport posits a bottom level on which there is just syntactic understanding. Rapaport writes, "This base case of semantic understanding is 'syntactic understanding' [...]: understanding a (syntactic) domain by being conversant with manipulating its markers."⁸⁶ Thus, Rapaport echoes the suggestion from Greenberg and Harman quoted above that language understanding is really just a matter being 'at home' in one's use of the language.

Modelling an item in a syntactic domain in terms of some item in a semantic domain is to be understood as a matter of *pattern matching*. The system compares the two items to determine what role each item plays in its respective domain. As Rapaport explains,

The result of a comparison is a determination that the 'new' item 'plays the same role' in *its* (syntactic) domain that the corresponding 'given' item plays in *its* (semantic) domain. The two items are analogous to each other; a pattern seen in one domain has been matched or recognized in the other. *Each* item—new *and* given—plays a role in its respective domain.

⁸⁵ Rapaport (2002) 4

⁸⁶ Ibid

According to Rapaport, the roles played by each item are syntactic roles: “that is, roles determined by relationships to other items in the domain.”⁸⁷ Rapaport wishes to *identify* a term’s meaning with its syntactic role. As such, he classifies his view as a version of a conceptual-role theory: the meaning of a term, or concept, is determined by its syntactic role – where its syntactic role is determined by its relationships to the syntactic roles of other concepts in the same domain. Unlike Harman, Rapaport takes conceptual-role to be ‘short-armed’. Rapaport argues that *internal* (rather than non-solipsistic) conceptual-role is all that is needed to make sense of the language understanding of the subject.⁸⁸

6.2 Conceptual-role in linguistics

The present approach to mental content has friends in linguistics, where conceptual-network approaches to language-modelling are very popular. A prominent recent example of such an approach is Richard Hudson’s (2007) theory, ‘Word Grammar’.⁸⁹ Word Grammar represents language structure using an inheritance network. A central claim of Word Grammar is that language is a conceptual network and *nothing but* a conceptual network – that “Everything in language can be described formally in terms of nodes and their relations.”⁹⁰ Hudson writes that the claim that language is a conceptual network of interconnected elements is a commonplace in various branches of linguistics.⁹¹ He writes that theories in cognitive linguistics such as Cognitive Grammar, Construction Grammar, Stratification Grammar and Systemic Functional Grammar (an earlier incarnation of Word Grammar) all share this feature.⁹² Hudson sharply distinguishes these theories from theories in linguistics which appeal to conceptual networks *in addition* to a set of rules which complement the network.⁹³ What is distinctive about Hudson’s view is that he believes that

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid, 2

⁸⁹ See also, Lamb (1966) and (1998).

⁹⁰ Hudson (2007) 2, italics in original

⁹¹ See, for example, Langacker (2000), Adele Goldberg (1995) and Lamb (1998).

⁹² Hudson (2007) 2

⁹³ See, for example, Pinker (1998).

nothing in addition to the conceptual network is required: even the rules can be represented as part of the network.

Word Grammar represents language by means of a network of nodes and links. In Word Grammar, all concepts are represented as nodes in the network. These nodes are connected by a small number of primitive relations, represented by links (or ‘arcs’). Hudson’s theory is strikingly similar to CRS – in particular in its emphasis on the thesis that the meaning of a concept is determined by its relations to other concepts. Hudson writes,

The entire content of a network is held by the links between nodes. The nodes in a network are not little boxes full of information held in some other format; rather, nodes are nothing but the points where links meet. In slogan, ‘It’s network all the way down.’ All the content of a concept – the properties which distinguish cats from dogs, for example – is held in terms of network links. Nor is there any distinction in a network between links which somehow define a concept and those which merely describe it (i.e., between ‘analytic’ and ‘synthetic’ knowledge): from this point of view, all links have the same status.⁹⁴

There are different kinds of links which connect the nodes in different ways. Hudson stresses that the classification of the kinds of links required to model language is something which should be left to linguists.⁹⁵ It is an empirical question precisely *which* primitive relations hold between the nodes. Hudson appeals to just five primitive relations, which he calls ‘isa’, ‘argument’, ‘value’, ‘quantity’ and ‘identity’.⁹⁶

Hudson’s work is influenced by work in psychology and psycholinguistics on ‘spreading activation.’ Spreading activation is the process whereby activation (of neurons, for example) spreads ‘blindly’ between nodes which are neighbours in a

⁹⁴ Hudson (2007) 232

⁹⁵ Ibid, 10

⁹⁶ There is not space to explain these relations in this project. Descriptions of these relations can be found in Hudson (2007) on the following pages: ‘isa’ (10), ‘argument’ and ‘value’ (16), ‘quantity’ (19) and ‘identity’ (47).

network.⁹⁷ Spreading activation is a phenomenon which is generally accepted in psychology. Hudson writes,

[S]preading activation is massively supported by psychological experiment as well as by observation of speech errors, and that it in turn gives overwhelming support for the Network Postulate [...], the claim that the whole of language is best modelled as a network.”⁹⁸

Hudson notes that the evidence that supports spreading activation is to be found at every linguistic level: phonology, morphology, syntax, meaning and perception of the environment of the utterance.⁹⁹ Given that there is so much evidence for the existence of spreading activation, Hudson thinks that recognition of the phenomenon, “provides a crucial constraint on any theory of language structure: it must model language as a network.”¹⁰⁰ This is because the notion of spreading activation only makes sense on the assumption that language is a network (rather than a set of rules) as only the latter involves a notion of topological distance between nodes across which activation can spread.¹⁰¹ One interesting consequence of the work in psychology which Hudson cites, then, is that the notion of ‘distance’ between nodes, which some philosophers have complained is an unhelpful metaphor,¹⁰² actually turns out to be psychologically real and experimentally supported.

Word Grammar uses networks to *model* the language of human subjects. However, a good number of linguists take their models to aim at capturing the way language is structured in reality, and realised in the brains of human subjects. Hudson writes, “a theory of language structure can and should aim at the ‘psychological reality’ that has been on the agenda for some decades now.”¹⁰³ Word Grammar, for example, does not just provide a static representation of the conceptual connections between words in an abstract language. It aims to show how that network functions

⁹⁷ Hudson (2007) 36–37

⁹⁸ Ibid, 41

⁹⁹ Ibid, 38

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, viii

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 36

¹⁰² Cf. Pagin (2006) 17

¹⁰³ Hudson (2007) 60

dynamically inside an individual. Hudson thinks his view can offer explanations of language processing and learning, and of the evolution of language in humans.¹⁰⁴

In this section, I have suggested how work in linguistics – supported by work in psychology – proceeds along an approach which has much in common with CRS. But, of course, even supposing that some conceptual network theory in linguistics is true, this does not provide support for the truth of conceptual-role semantics as a thesis about the individuation of *content*. An externalist will think we are making a mistake: we are *conflating* what constitutes content (or meaning) with what constitutes our epistemic or cognitive grasp of that content. No externalist will deny that there are structures in the brain which are responsible for storing and processing language. What they will deny is that these structures fully individuate content. What the linguists are modelling, they will say, is our linguistic *understanding*, our *knowledge* of meaning. But content itself – the thing which is understood – is determined quite independently of these mental structures. I wish to stress here that, in the view which I defend, I am not accidentally conflating these two enterprises. Rather, I am deliberately and enthusiastically *identifying* the two in the hope that doing so will provide us with a satisfactory theory of mental content (where it is an open question as to whether doing so will succeed in providing such a theory). Having introduced various conceptual-role approaches in the literature, I now wish to state the form of the theory that I will defend.

Section 7: A holist, internalist conceptual-role theory of mental content

The view that I will defend in this project is a combination of three theses. These are as follows:

- A) Content internalism: for any subject, the content of her thoughts and concepts is individuated solely by factors *intrinsic* to that subject.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 219

- B) Conceptual-role semantics: the content of a thought or concept for a subject is fully determined (or constituted) by that content or concept's conceptual-role in the subject's cognitive economy. Conceptual-role is determined by a content or concept's *causal* relations to other contents or concepts in that subject's cognitive economy, and includes relations to sensory inputs, behavioural outputs, imaginings, memories, etc.
- C) Holism about conceptual-role: the content of a thought or concept for a subject is determined (or constituted) by that content or concept's causal relations to *all* other contents or concepts in that subject's cognitive economy (including its relations to sensory inputs, behavioural outputs, imaginings, memories etc.).

I will call the combination of these theses 'Holism' – with a capital 'H'. The reason for this is simply that 'Fully Holistic Internalist Conceptual-Role Theory' is a mouthful. As I will explain in the next section, Holism (with a capital 'H') is a very specific form of holism (with a lowercase 'h').

In the above characterisation of the view, I have chosen to remain neutral as to a few debates *within* conceptual-role semantics. Specifically, theses (B) and (C) are designed to remain neutral with respect to two issues. Firstly, I wish to remain neutral as to the choice between inferential-role semantics and non-sentential conceptual-role semantics. I believe that my arguments in this project are consistent with both these theses. However, I will mostly talk as if non-sentential conceptual-role semantics is true. Secondly, I wish to remain neutral over the issue of whether the conceptual-role of a concept is something which constitutes that concept, or whether content is said to be merely determined by conceptual-role. I think most authors opt for the latter option, taking conceptual-role to be the determination base for content. However, there are exceptions. Rapaport, for example, sometimes presents his conceptual-role theory as the thesis that "The content of a thought *is* its functional role."¹⁰⁵ One issue which I will not remain neutral on is the following. I have chosen to state internalism as a thesis about the *intrinsic* features of a subject,

¹⁰⁵ Rapaport (2002) 20, emphasis in the original.

because I believe that two subjects can be microphysical duplicates and yet differ with respect to the content of their thoughts as a result of differing in their intrinsic properties. Why this is the case will become clear in Chapter 5.

7.1 Conceptual-role and holism

A variety of theses in the philosophy of language, mind and epistemology have been described as holistic.¹⁰⁶ For example, holism of some form is present in the works of Hempel (1950) and Quine (1951). Here the kind of holism in play is confirmation holism, or epistemological holism.¹⁰⁷ Another form of holism in the literature is belief holism. This is the idea, found in Davidson (1975) and Stich (1983) that, in order to have a particular belief, it is necessary that the subject have many other particular beliefs as well. These theses are distinct from content holism, and I will not be concerned with them in the present project.

There are roughly three divisions we can make amongst characterisations of content holism to be found in the literature. I have presented these in terms of the content of thoughts and concepts, but there are corollary theses which pertain to the meaning of linguistic expressions.

- i. Total holism: The content of a thought or concept depends on that content's relations to *all* other contents in the conceptual web. (e.g., Rapaport, 2002)
- ii. Molecularism: The content of a thought or concept depends on that content's relations to contents in some *privileged subset* of the contents in the total conceptual web. (e.g., Fodor and Lepore, 1992, Devitt, 1996¹⁰⁸)
- iii. Many-one holism: The content of a thought or concept depends on that content's relations to *all* other contents in the conceptual web. Different determination bases can determine the same content. (e.g. Jackman, 1999)

¹⁰⁶ The different varieties of holism and the relationships between them are set out carefully in Pagin (2006).

¹⁰⁷ See Lehrer (1990) and Rescher (1973) for more contemporary versions of epistemological holism. Lehrer and Rescher are coherentists.

¹⁰⁸ Neither Fodor and Lepore nor Devitt endorse Holism.

Theses (i)-(iii) are each slightly different. Thesis (i), ‘total holism’, is the thesis which is involved in my presentation of Holism above. It is the most radical of the three theses. Total holism entails what authors have called the ‘Instability Thesis’. This thesis states that any change in a subject’s conceptual web will determine a change in *all* concepts and contents in that web (although these changes can be minute). The Instability Thesis, and its alleged unsavoury consequences, will be introduced properly in Chapter 2. One consequence of the Instability Thesis is that no two subjects ever mean the same things by their utterances, or think thoughts which share content. This is because no two subjects will ever possess exactly the same conceptual webs. As such, on Holism (and other forms of total holism), there are as many languages as there are non-identical speakers (and perhaps non-identical time-slices of speakers). For example, there is no such thing as *the* word ‘dog’, or *the* concept DOG. In light of this, when talking about concepts on Holism, I will always be talking about a concept *for a subject*. To represent this, I will either talk about a concept, *C*, for a subject, or I will add a subscript which contains either a subject’s name, or the first letter of a subject’s name, to indicate which subject entertains the concept. So, for example, the concept DOG for a speaker, Sally, would be represented as DOG_{SALLY} or just DOG_S. On Holism, two concepts for two non-identical subjects can never be *exactly* similar (or type-identical). For each pair of non-identical subjects, Holism can posit only ‘merely’ similar concepts and contents. Externalism, in contrast, can posit concepts which are exactly similar, or type-identical.

Total holism takes concepts to *change* whenever there are any changes made to other parts of the total conceptual web. Theses (ii) and (iii) are different in this regard, but for different reasons. Thesis (ii), which is the kind of view considered by Fodor and Lepore, characterises holism as the view that concepts depend for their content on their relations to *many*, but not all, other concepts in the same conceptual web. Fodor and Lepore describe such concepts as ‘very atomistic’. An ‘atomic’ concept, Fodor and Lepore write, is one which “might, in principle, be instantiated by only one thing.”¹⁰⁹ An *atomic* property is such that “if anything has it, then at least one

¹⁰⁹ Fodor and Lepore (1992) 1

other thing does.”¹¹⁰ As such, Fodor and Lepore understand (molecular) content holism as the claim that “properties like *having content* are holistic in the sense that no expression in a language can have them unless many other (nonsynonymous) expressions in that language have them too.”¹¹¹ The way Fodor and Lepore understand molecularism, then, is such that it is the property of having content which is holistic. Another way to state the thesis is just as the claim, presented in (ii), that content is determined by some privileged subset of the total relations which a given concept bears to other concepts in its conceptual web. These determination relations can perhaps be asymmetric such that concept, *C*, is part of the determination base for concept, *D*, but *D* is not part of the determination base for *C*. Molecularism is weaker than total holism. This is because total holism demands that content be determined by its conceptual relations to *all* other contents in its network. Molecularism merely requires that content be determined by some sub-set of these relations. As such, molecularism is not committed to the Instability Thesis. Molecularism allows that there can be changes to a conceptual network which alter the content of some concepts but not others. Thesis (iii) attempts to avoid the Instability Thesis in a slightly different way. It does so by claiming that the determination of content by its holistic base can be many-one rather than one-one. Such a theory is suggested by Pagin (2006) and Jackman (1999). This is supposed to secure the result that subjects with different conceptual webs can still share content, and that changes to the conceptual web do not necessarily entail changes in all content and concepts within that web. This is because different total bases can determine the same contents.

For the purposes of this project, I will set theses (ii) and (iii) to one side. I do this for a number of reasons. Firstly, with regard to molecularism, there is much scepticism in the literature as to whether some sub-set of a concept’s total conceptual relations can be isolated in a non-arbitrary way.¹¹² These kinds of worries might well carry over to the problem of determining when two different bases determine the same content on the many-one view. Secondly, the reason authors typically want to endorse (ii) or (iii) in the first place, is because they believe that total holism entails

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Ibid, 5

¹¹² See, for example, Fodor and Lepore (1991). For responses, see Boghossian (1993), Rey (1993).

the Instability Thesis and that the Instability Thesis is bad. But it is my aim in this project to argue that, contrary to popular belief, a fully holistic theory of content actually *better* explains the role of content in communication in spite of (or perhaps, because of) the fact that it entails the Instability Thesis. As such, a molecular view which is weakly holistic (i.e., which holds that the subset of conceptual relations relevant to content determination is small relative to the entire conceptual web), may actually suffer from the very same problems which, I will argue, are suffered by externalist accounts of content individuation. Similar considerations apply to ‘many-one’ holistic theories of content-individuation. One last thing to note about theses (ii) and (iii) is that the arguments in this project might be used to defend certain versions of these views, although I will not argue for this. Versions of these views will confront similar problems to total holism. For example, a molecular (or many-one theory) which is not fully-holistic, but *highly* or *mostly* holistic will entail a slightly weaker version of the Instability Thesis anyway. If it is problematic that subjects *never* share content, is likely also problematic that subjects *almost* never share content. However, if, as I will argue, a commitment to the Instability Thesis is not a reason to reject total holism, then one might think that similar arguments can be used to defend these weaker theories.

In fact, many holists in the literature are total-holists rather than molecular or many-one holists. For example, Rapaport writes,

Nodes that are very distant from the original one may have little to do directly with its meaning or role. But they will have something to do with other nodes that, eventually, directly impact on that original node (or are impacted on by it).¹¹³

Hudson also hints that his networks are holistic. This is brought out when he explains his opposition to nativism:

The only way in which a specific concept, with a specific content, might be innate is for all its links [...] to be put in place genetically. But this means that every single concept must be innate because every concept is defined by

¹¹³ Rapaport (2002) 8–9

its relations to other concepts. For example, if Cat is innate and links to Fur, then Fur must be innate, and so on until the entire network is innate.¹¹⁴

As I will explain in more detail in the following chapter, fully holistic theses like these, and like the one I set out in this section, entail the Instability Thesis. It is my aim in this project to show that this result should be welcomed with open arms.

Section 8: Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an introduction to the mental content debate, and to identify the particular theory of content, Holism, which I will defend in this project. I began with a rough characterisation of mental content: I described certain properties which content is popularly thought to possess and certain roles which it is popularly thought to play in a subject's cognitive economy (and in her interactions with others). Next, I summarised the recent history of the mental content debate. I described three very famous arguments which are all aimed at demonstrating that factors internal to a subject are insufficient to determine various semantic properties of her thoughts and utterances. Many of these arguments will crop up again in later chapters. For example, in Chapter 3 I introduce some Twin Earth style examples of my own in support of my argument against externalist theories of communicative success. And in Chapter 5, I reconsider Kripke's arguments against descriptive theories of reference. After presenting these pro-externalist arguments, I went on to describe three families of theories of mental content. These were content externalism, content internalism, and two-factor theories. I then introduced conceptual-role semantics and described the particular version of the view, Holism, which I defend in this project. The purpose of the next chapter is to introduce the Objection from Communication, and to introduce various options for constructing accounts of communicative success which will enable us to assess the plausibility of this objection. These first two chapters lay the groundwork for understanding the arguments presented in the rest of this project.

¹¹⁴ Hudson (2007) 232

Chapter 2: Mental content and communication

In the previous chapter, I introduced Holism as a combination of theses in the philosophy of mental content. The purpose of this chapter is to present the Objection from Communication, to introduce some background assumptions about communication, and to present a variety of theses which can be combined to create accounts of communicative success. I divide views of communicative success into two broad camps: those which endorse a ‘Same Content View’ of communicative success, and those who endorse a ‘Similar Content View’. Behind the Objection from Communication is the assumption that only the Same Content View is plausible. If the objection succeeds, only views of content which can endorse the Same Content View can offer plausible accounts of communicative success. It is the purpose of this project to demonstrate that this could not be further from the truth: in fact, the Similar Content View offers a far more plausible picture of the role of content in communicative success. And, further, only views like Holism, which deny that content is shared, can endorse an attractive version of the Similar Content View. I will argue for this in Chapters 3 and 4. However, before introducing these arguments, it will be necessary to introduce certain distinctions and views which will be essential to understanding them, and to assessing the Objection from Communication. As such, much of this chapter is devoted to delineating various different kinds of condition on communicative success which will be relevant in the chapters which follow. Over the course of the chapter, I will identify two *kinds* of condition on communicative success which are directly relevant one’s choice of a theory of mental content.

The first kind of condition states that an account of communicative success should be stated (in part) in terms of a particular relation between the content expressed by the speaker and the content recovered by the hearer. I will call this the ‘Content Relation’. After presenting the Content Relation, I shall consider a second kind of condition on communicative success which will be of central importance to this project. The second kind of condition claims that communicative success requires that the hearer must also *understand* the speaker (in some sense to be specified). I

call this the ‘Understanding Requirement’. I will present four different versions of the Understanding Requirement.

It is the Content Relation and the Understanding Requirement which will be of central importance to understanding the arguments set forth in Chapter 3. However, these are plausibly not the only conditions on communicative success. In the final section of this chapter, I will briefly introduce various conditions on communicative success which will not be of central concern to this project. I call these ‘Theory-Neutral’ conditions. The reason that they will not interest us is because this project is chiefly concerned with the ways in which considerations pertaining to communicative success affect the plausibility of various theories of mental content. These Theory-Neutral conditions are conditions on communicative success which will not affect the plausibility of endorsing any particular theory of mental content.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In Section 1, I will introduce the ‘Objection from Communication’. In Section 2, I introduce some information and background assumptions about the general picture of communication and communicative attempts which I will assume in this project. In Section 3, I introduce the Content Relation as a central feature of this account. In Section 4, I distinguish between different theses concerning understanding. In Section 5, I introduce the Understanding Requirement as a central feature of an account of communicative success and describe how different versions of the Understanding Requirement interact with different theories of mental content. Finally, in Section 6, I introduce the Theory-Neutral conditions.

Section 1: Holism and the Objection from Communication

Fodor and Lepore have launched an aggressive attack on holistic theories of mental content such as Holism. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Holistic theories of content are supposed to entail what authors have called the ‘Instability Thesis.’ I present this as follows.

Instability Thesis: *Any* change, however minute, in a subject's web of attitudes will determine a change in *all* concepts and contents within that web.

As subjects are constantly undergoing changes in attitudes, this leaves content extremely unstable: content is constantly changing as we gain and relinquish propositional attitudes and learn new concepts. A number of apparently serious problems are supposed to follow from this. Fodor and Lepore claim that these problems include the following,

that no two people ever share a belief; that there is no such relation as translation; that no two people ever mean the same thing by what they say; that no two time slices of *the same* person ever mean the same thing by what they say; that no one can ever change his mind; that no statements, or beliefs, can ever be contradicted . . . ; and so forth.¹¹⁵

It is their third claim which is supposed to pose a problem of communication for Holism: as all subjects (who are not intrinsic duplicates) will possess different total conceptual webs, all these subjects will mean different things by their utterances of the same word-forms; similarly, the contents of the thoughts which they would express with these word-forms will also be different. The problem arises because, on Holism (and theories like it), a hearer can *never* mean precisely what a speaker means by a given utterance, or entertain a thought with the same content.¹¹⁶ But, according to the Objection from Communication, it is necessary (or at least sometimes required) for communicative success that the hearer grasps the same content as that which is expressed by the speaker. And so a theory which entails that content is rarely (if ever) shared is a theory which denies that successful communication often (if ever) occurs. This argument is not made explicitly by Fodor and Lepore. Rather, authors have taken it to follow from the Instability Thesis that

¹¹⁵ Fodor and Lepore (1991) 331

¹¹⁶ On Holism, this is *in principle* impossible. On other holistic theories, this is merely never achieved in practice.

Holism will suffer from the objection.¹¹⁷ We might present the strongest form of the argument roughly as follows:

- O1) It is necessary for communicative success that the content grasped by the hearer is the same as the content expressed by the speaker;
- O2) Holism entails that subjects never share content;
- O3) Holism entails that subjects never succeed in communicating;
- O4) Subjects do succeed in communicating;
- C) Holism is false.

If we accept premise (O1), that sharing content is necessary for communicative success, then Holism is in serious trouble, for the theory willingly precludes that such sharing is possible. A slightly different argument involving a weaker version of (O1) which claimed that sharing content is *sometimes* required for success would also be extremely problematic for Holism given (O2). As noted in Chapter 1, one way to defend a *form* of holism about meaning or content is to claim that holism can posit shared content. This would be to reject premise (O2). This approach is suggested in Jackman (1999) and Pagin (2006). As I have already mentioned, I will not be pursuing this kind of defence. In fact, I think that *all* theories of communication should reject both premise (O1) and the weaker claim that sharing content is *sometimes* required – even those theories which can easily claim that content is often shared across subjects. The version of Holism which I defend in this project does indeed entail that premise (O2) is true.

In response to this argument, various holists have suggested that communication can succeed providing the content grasped by the hearer is *similar to* the content expressed by the speaker.¹¹⁸ Thus, there are roughly two views of the role of content in communicative success: views which claim that hearers must (at least often) grasp the same content as that expressed by the speaker, and views which allow that grasp

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Jorgensen (2009, 136). Jorgensen suggests that this kind of problem for holism was first pointed out by Dummett (1981, 598ff).

¹¹⁸ Many authors who are not concerned explicitly with the Objection from Communication suggest similarity of meaning as a general antidote to the Instability Thesis. See, for example, Block (1986), Churchland (1986), and Harman (1993).

of a merely similar content is always sufficient.¹¹⁹ In Section 3, I will present these options in more detail. Before considering what communicative *success* might consist in, however, I think it would be useful to take a step back and introduce some background information and assumptions about the nature of communication and communicative *attempts*. I turn to this now.

Section 2: Communication and communicative attempts

The term ‘communication’ can be used to refer to a range of different human, animal and possibly even inanimate activities. Communication via human language is one widely discussed kind of communication, but not all communication is linguistic, nor is it always between humans. The term ‘communication’ is sometimes used to refer to events which involve the more or less unconscious signals which are sent and received through body language. And some non-human animals seem to be capable of communicating with relatively primitive sounds and gestures. It also seems appropriate to talk of communication between artificial intelligences such robots or computers. All the above forms of communication have some things in common. Each involves creatures (or perhaps inanimate objects) with internal states, and the transmission of a signal, via various mediums, from the first creature to the second, causing a change in the internal states of the second creature. And, importantly, each kind of communication has *success conditions*.

Linguistic communication, as I will understand it here, is a phenomenon whereby a speaker can induce various mental states in her audience simply by making certain sounds, displaying certain written symbols, or performing certain complex gestures, in that audience’s vicinity. For the purposes of this project, I will be concerned with human linguistic communication, and its success conditions. I will also restrict my attention to spoken linguistic communication, although I take what I say in this project to be equally applicable to communication which proceeds via written language. Linguistic communication is, at least usually, a purposeful act. When we

¹¹⁹ Some authors endorse a similar content view for quite independent reasons. See, for example, Bezuidenhout (1997).

deliberately engage in linguistic communication with others, we are trying to induce a specific representational state in our audience. Typically, we have in mind a particular representation or thought which we want to cause our audience to have in mind as well. Communication seems to be a matter of a speaker attempting to get her audience to grasp a particular representation, and of the hearer attempting to grasp the representation intended; it is a matter of a speaker getting her audience to come to see how she is representing the world with her thoughts and utterances, and of the hearer coming to grasp this. As such, communication, when successful, involves a kind of *coordination* of thought between two interlocutors. There are various purposes to which communication can be put, but *all* rely on this coordination of thought for success. Sometimes we communicate to make each other laugh, sometimes we communicate to issue orders, and sometimes we communicate to ask for information about the world, or to offer such information ourselves. All these purposes rely on the hearer coming to recognise what the speaker is trying to convey. This very last purpose, the transfer of information between speakers, has recently received a lot of attention in the philosophical literature. When certain conditions are met, the transmission of information via spoken (and written) communication allows a hearer to acquire *testimonial knowledge*. For now, I will set this issue aside, although I will return to it at length in Chapter 6.

In this chapter, I will be concerned specifically with the nature of communicative events and their success conditions *insofar as* these issues interact with different theories of mental content. As will become clear, certain features of accounts of communicative success will directly affect the plausibility of endorsing various theories of mental content. The main focus of this chapter (and this project) is just these aspects of a theory of communicative success, as I am ultimately interested in the plausibility of theories of mental content. There are also features of communicative success which do not have any obvious impact on the plausibility of theories of mental content. These features are not directly relevant to the aims of this project. As such, it will be beyond the scope of this chapter (and this project) to fully address certain issues which might fall under the heading ‘the philosophy of communication’. In Section 6, I will flag such issues and set them aside.

In the next section, I shall present the basic structure of a communicative event which I will be assuming in this project. I will also say a few words about the appropriate criteria by which to judge various competing accounts of communicative success. With this set up in place, I will move on to considering what communicative success might consist in.

2.1 Communicative attempts

Following Pagin (2008), I will assume for the purposes of this project that communicative attempts are events with a particular structure. Pagin describes the structure of the event as follows,

In a communicative event there is a sender, a signal, and a receiver. The event is a process that starts with some inner state of the sender and ends with some inner state of the receiver. In between a signal is transmitted between sender and receiver. The relevant inner state of the sender takes part in causing the signal, and the signal in turn takes part in causing the relevant inner state of the receiver.¹²⁰

This description is not intended to be exhaustive; it is merely supposed to give a rough idea of what is important about the nature of the phenomenon we are dealing with. There are surely further details which should be added to this picture in order to provide an adequate account of the structure of a communicative attempt. For example, presumably, this terminal state must be arrived at by some particular causal route. There are a number of candidates for what the nature of this causal route might be. For example, the ‘Code Model’, defended by Shannon and Weaver (1949), states that subjects attempt to communicate simply by encoding, sending and decoding signals. More contemporary approaches tend to think that much more is involved in a communicative attempt. The ‘Inferential Model’, endorsed by Grice (1957, 1975) and also Sperber and Wilson (1986), claims that inferential elements play a large role in communication in addition to the decoding of signals. For example, the recovering of a particular content will require inference or enrichment from background

¹²⁰ Pagin (2008) 88

information and other pragmatic processes. Thirdly, the ‘Collaboration Model’, endorsed by Herbert Clark (1992), stresses the fact that, oftentimes, communicative success requires two or more subjects working together – for example, by asking and answering questions.¹²¹ It is beyond the scope of this project to assess which of these models of communication is correct. It is possible that all three are consistent with the views of success which I consider in this project. I am concerned, primarily, with the conditions on the success of a communicative attempt, rather than the precise structure of the attempt itself. I am interested in the question of which *relations* must hold between the content expressed by the speaker and grasped by the hearer in a communicative exchange, rather than the precise causal route which connects these two contents.

The sender and receiver, in the communicative events that are of interest to us, will both be human subjects. I will leave it open whether it is appropriate to talk of communication between other kinds of senders and receivers. The initial and terminal states of the sender (the speaker) and the receiver (the hearer) will be mental states with mental content. I set aside views which state conditions on communicative success purely in terms of linguistic content or behavioural factors.¹²² The signal in the communicative event, for our purposes, will be transmitted via an utterance of a sentence token. These utterances have linguistic content. It should be noted that there is much more to what is conveyed with a speech act than the just the literal content of the sentence token or thought.¹²³ In addition to grasping the literal content of an utterance or thought, the hearer must also pick up on any pragmatic implicatures intended by the speaker which contribute to the total speech act. There are different ways to understand how pragmatics enters the various pictures of communicative success under consideration in this project. For example, one could think that the Content Relation applies to what is conveyed by the total speech act, such that success requires either that the hearer grasp exactly what the speaker attempts to convey, or that she grasp something merely similar. Alternatively, one could think that the Content Relation applies to what is literally said but not to the

¹²¹ Paul (1996) xxv

¹²² For discussion of alternative views of communicative success, see Pagin (2008).

¹²³ Also, not all speech-acts need to be verbal, or well-formed sentences of a language.

total speech act. It should also be noted that recovery of literal content will itself rely on certain ‘near-side’ pragmatic processes. Sperber and Wilson (1986), for example, argue that recovery of the ‘semantic’ content of an utterance – its ‘explicature’ – will rely on processes of pragmatic enrichment. Thirdly, an account could state that the hearer must grasp the literal content of the speaker’s utterance or thought, but that she need only grasp something similar to the total speech act conveyed by the speaker. There is not space here to properly address the role of pragmatic processes in an account of communicative success.¹²⁴ In this project, I wish to remain neutral on the role of pragmatics in communication. The examples that I appeal to in my arguments will not involve anything more than simple cases of so-called ‘near-side’ pragmatic processes in the recovery of content.¹²⁵

2.2 Method

Before moving on to consider the various accounts of communicative success on offer, we should pin down how to measure the adequacy of such an account. Many theoretical considerations – such as simplicity, explanatory power, ontological parsimony, etc. – are relevant to assessing the adequacy of a philosophical theory. When it comes to assessing the adequacy of competing accounts of what communicative success consists in, it is plausible that commonsense judgement carries more weight than it might in the assessment of certain other philosophical debates. For example, few would think that a theory of time travel need respect pretheoretic or folk judgements. One important constraint on a theory of communicative success will be the condition that our account ought to agree with our commonsense practice of judging whether a particular communicative attempt was successful or unsuccessful. This is not to say that folk judgements play a guiding role in formulating the theory, but rather that they play a role in assessing the theory: the theory’s assessment of which communicative attempts are to count as successful ought to cohere, at least largely, with our commonsense judgements. As such, it will

¹²⁴ For discussion of the role of pragmatic factors in communicative success, see Stalnaker (1972), Sperber and Wilson (1986), Recanati (1991) and Bezuidenhout (1997).

¹²⁵ There is one exception in Chapter 3 where I suggest that certain externalist theories of communicative success might struggle trying to explain the role of implicature in communication.

be taken to be a virtue of a theory that its judgments as to the success of communicative attempts accord (at least largely) with what commonsense would judge. This is the approach taken by both Pagin and Paul. Pagin writes,

What we have is a common sense practice of judging communicative success or failure in vernacular terms such as ‘He did not understand,’ ‘She misinterpreted him,’ ‘He got the message,’ etc.¹²⁶

And Paul offers the following descriptive adequacy criterion,

Descriptive adequacy criterion: an account of communicative success [...] has to accord with our intuitions of agents understanding and failing to understand such acts as long as these intuitions are in agreement with other well-motivated considerations.¹²⁷

Any theory which disagrees significantly with commonsense would need to provide very good reasons for thinking that it is, in fact, the correct analysis of communicative success and, in addition, it must provide some plausible story as to why our commonsense judgements have gone awry. With this guide to judging the plausibility of a theory of communicative success in place, I now turn to presentation of what form such a theory might take.

Section 3: Communicative success

3.1 The Content Relation

Speakers can make hundreds of communicative attempts in a single day, but not all of them will be successful. Our background assumption about the structure of a communicative attempt appealed to two contentful inner states in the speaker and hearer respectively. But it is surely not enough for any old contentful state to be caused in the hearer: further conditions must be met in order for the attempt to succeed. It is plausible that an account of communication will measure success, in

¹²⁶ Pagin (2008) 86

¹²⁷ Paul (1996) xxiv

part, in terms of a *relation* between the initial contentful state of the speaker and the terminal contentful state in the hearer. A version of this view is argued for in Pagin (2008). The view will be a working hypothesis of the project, although in Chapter 3 I will argue that a content externalist cannot sensibly endorse it. It is this kind of view which is assumed in the Objection from Communication. Those who are convinced by the objection will claim that the relation between the initial state of the speaker and the terminal state of the speaker must be one of *identity*. The argument is that Holism cannot explain communicative success *because* it cannot claim that the hearer grasps the same content as that which is expressed by the speaker. Thus, one potential ingredient of an account of communicative success will be the ‘Content Relation.’

Content Relation: A communicative attempt will succeed only if some particular relation holds between the content of the terminal state of the hearer and the content of the initial state of the speaker.

One thing to stress about the Content Relation, as I have presented it, is that it claims that the relation we are considering is one which holds between the content of the *mental states* of the speaker and hearer. It does not claim that any particular relation needs to hold between the content of the speaker’s *utterance* and the terminal mental state in the hearer. This will be an assumption of the project, but I think it is a reasonable one. It also allows us to sidestep a potentially confusing issue.

The issue is as follows. In the previous chapter, I stated that I am assuming in this project that the content of an utterance (where this is understood as ‘what is said’ by the utterance) is just inherited from thought content. On a very strong reading of this assumption, this means that even in cases where a speaker misspeaks, her utterance still has the content of the thought she attempted to express.¹²⁸ For example, suppose a speaker possesses the belief THAT THERE IS A BEER IN THE FRIDGE and wishes to communicate this to a hearer. But suppose the speaker accidentally utters (1),

¹²⁸ This strong reading is one way of understanding Grice’s view in his (1957) and (1968).

(1) There is a bear in the fridge.

On the strong version of the assumption, the content of the speaker's utterance is still THAT THERE IS A BEER IN THE FRIDGE. If the strong reading is correct, then, whatever Content Relation holds between the hearer's mental content and the speaker's mental content will also hold between the hearer's mental content and the speaker's utterance content (although the word-forms involved the utterance will not be a good guide as to its meaning). As such, on this sort of view, one *could* hold that the Content Relation involves utterance content as one of its relata; but this is because any relation that holds between the hearer's mental content and the speaker's utterance content will necessarily hold between the hearer and speaker's mental contents.

One might take issue with the strong reading, however. We can still maintain a sense in which utterance content depends on the thought content of the speaker whilst holding that 'bear' expresses BEAR and not BEER in the example above. For example, we can claim that a word expresses whichever concept it is *typically* used to express. *If* we claim this kind of view, however, we should *not* claim that a Content Relation must hold between the hearer's thought content and the speaker's *utterance* content. For then, communicative success would simply require that the hearer in the above example grasps THAT THERE IS A BEAR IN THE FRIDGE. In such a case, the terminal state of the hearer will have a markedly different content to the initial state of the speaker (which is THAT THERE IS A BEER IN THE FRIDGE). And, in such cases, I think most would agree that communication has failed. For the speaker was not trying to communicate that there is a bear in the fridge to the hearer when she uttered (1).¹²⁹ We *could* make the following amendment to this view to get around this problem and still maintain a view upon which utterance content is one of the relata in a Content Relation. If we make it a necessary condition on communicative success that the speaker expresses her attitude *correctly*, then communication will only be said to succeed if the content of the speaker's utterance is the same as the content of her thought. However, one might think this is too strong a condition. The reason for this

¹²⁹ If the reader is not convinced of this, my arguments in Chapter 3 will lend support to this claim.

is that, in many cases in which a speaker misspeaks, the hearer will be able to work out from the context that the speaker must have misspoken. And, in many of these situations, the hearer will be able to *repair* the speaker's utterance and work out what she intended to be expressing by relying on inferences from contextual and background information. As such, a hearer may succeed in recovering the content of the speaker's initial mental state even when she fails to grasp (or deliberately disregards) the content of the speaker's utterance. I think it is much more plausible to think of the content of a speaker's utterance as a mere *part* of the evidence (alongside contextual information and background beliefs) that a hearer has for working out what content the speaker was trying to express. Communication appears to be a process which involves a great deal of inference, rather than a process which simply involves the decoding of signals. But I will not argue for this here.¹³⁰

Notice that all of the plausible options above claim that, in successful communicative attempts, a particular relation must hold between the initial state of the speaker and terminal state in the hearer. The approaches simply disagree about the role of utterance content in this picture. As such, the assumption that the Content Relation holds between mental states is supposed to be compatible with the above complications of the picture. In what follows, I will leave it (somewhat) open as to whether grasping the speaker's *utterance* content is necessary (or sometimes required) for communicative success. If one thinks that a Content Relation must hold between the content of the terminal state of the hearer and the content of the speaker's *utterance*, this can be accommodated providing that the account involves some condition which ensures that the content of the speaker's utterance is just the same as (or perhaps sufficiently similar to) the content of the speaker's initial mental state. In what follows, I ignore this complication and just talk of a relation between mental contents. Given this, I stress that when I talk of 'the content expressed by the speaker' I mean to be talking about the *mental content* which is expressed by that speaker and *not* the content of the utterance which is used to express that content. When stating different versions of the Content Relation, I talk of the 'initial' and 'terminal' states of the interlocutors to avoid this confusion. There are two

¹³⁰ For arguments to this effect, see Bezuidenhout (1998) and Rysiew (2007).

contenders for what the relation between the initial and terminal states must be. I introduce these in the following two sub-sections.

3.2 The Same Content View

The first option for a specification of the Content Relation is the one which lies behind the strongest version of the Objection from Communication. I will call this thesis ‘Necessity of Sameness of Content’:

Necessity of Sameness of Content (‘SamConN’) – A communicative attempt will succeed only if the content of the terminal state of the hearer is *the same as* the content of the initial state of the speaker.

There are also weaker versions of this thesis which simply claim that sameness of content is *sometimes* required for success (but that similarity is sometimes sufficient). I will call any view which claims that sameness of content is at least *sometimes* required for success a ‘Same Content View’ of communicative success. It should be noted that a complete view will comprise further conditions in addition to the Content Relation. Some of these I will consider later in this chapter. I will talk of Same Content Views as views which require that a speaker and hearer ‘share content’. This is just for ease of exposition. This talk of shared content is not meant to suggest that interlocutors must share *all* their concepts. Rather, the phrase is just meant to indicate that interlocutors must share the concepts involved in the content communicated.

The Same Content View is perhaps a *prima facie* plausible account of communicative success – it might just seem obvious that sharing content is required for communication. Indeed, the view appears to quite popular, at least with respect to certain distinctive kinds of communicative success. It is, for example, usually stipulated in debates about testimony that a hearer grasps the very same content that the speaker attested to.¹³¹ Goldberg (2007) argues that sharing content is necessary

¹³¹ See, for example, Burge (1993) and Lackey (2008).

for communication of knowledge via testimony. And Burge, too, sometimes suggests that the facilitation of communication (at least in cases of testimony) might require shared content.¹³² Newman (2005) uses something like the Objection from Communication to attack Searle's *de se* view of mental content.¹³³ Newman writes, "[I]f no one else could believe, disbelieve, or bear any other such attitude toward the proposition I believe when I believe that my pants are on fire, then I could not communicate the content of that belief to others in the way we ordinarily assume I can."¹³⁴ The Same Content View might be popular, but it is not the only option for a specification of the Content Relation. In response to the Objection from Communication, Holists have suggested adopting a weaker view, which I will call the 'Similar Content View'. I turn to this now.

3.3 The Similar Content View

In the literature, the standard response to the Objection from Communication is to deny that sharing content is required for communicative success. The Objection from Communication relies on what might seem like a perfectly intuitive constraint on successful communication. However, although it may seem *prima facie* appealing, we need not accept this claim. Holists should reject it and replace it with the view that communication can succeed in the absence of shared content providing that the speaker and the hearer mean *similar* things by their utterances of the same word forms (and entertain similar thought contents). Thus, in opposition to the Same Content View, we have the Similar Content View. This view endorses the following specification of the content relation: 'Necessity of Similarity of Content'.

Necessity of Similarity of Content ('SimConN') – A communicative attempt will succeed only if the content of the terminal state of the hearer is *similar* to the content of the initial state of the speaker.

¹³² Burge (2006) 164. See also Burge (1993).

¹³³ The view I present in Chapter 5 has much in common with Searle's view.

¹³⁴ Newman (2005) 159

I will call any view which endorses SimConN (and rejects SamConN) a ‘Similar Content View’. Like the Same Content View above, a complete view will comprise further conditions on success in addition to the one stated in SimConN.

There are a number of defenders of Similar Content Views in the literature. Rapaport (2003) proposes such an account. He proposes that an account of communicative success should appeal to similarity of content, where this similarity is achieved and increased through our continued attempts to communicate with each other. As such, his approach has much in common with the Collaborative Model of communication mentioned above. He claims that what is required of two subjects in order for them to communicate successfully is the ability to detect misunderstandings through a process of *negotiation*.¹³⁵ Rapaport argues that, in all communicative attempts, the content grasped by the hearer is an interpretation of what the speaker intended to express, and this interpretation is a conclusion based on defeasible inference.¹³⁶ According to Rapaport, because of the holistic nature of content-determination, we will always fail to correctly interpret our interlocutors. However, although this state of misunderstanding is the norm, providing what we interpret is *similar* to the content expressed by the speaker, we will most often very *nearly* succeed. Rapaport writes,

This is the paradox of communication. Its resolution is simple: Misunderstandings, if small enough, can be ignored. And those that cannot be ignored can be minimized through negotiation. In this way, we learn what our audience meant or thought that we meant.¹³⁷

Negotiation is a process whereby speakers may, to an extent, identify and correct the differences in content present between them. The process involves testing-out hypotheses about the content of an interlocutor’s speech acts. This testing can be as simple as asking the interlocutor questions as to what she meant by her words in cases where she uses her words in ways which conflict with our original hypotheses as to what she meant by them. In this way, we may revise our beliefs as to what a

¹³⁵ Rapaport (2003) 406

¹³⁶ Ibid, 403

¹³⁷ Ibid

speaker takes various expressions in her language to mean. Rapaport writes, “By successive approximation, we can asymptotically approach mutual comprehension.”¹³⁸ Rapaport argues that cases of negotiation leading to increased similarity of content are present in child language acquisition: a child wishing to learn how to use words in accordance with her language community will be engaged in a process of attempting to align her own concepts with the concepts of those people who are teaching her.¹³⁹ He states that there is evidence of negotiation amongst children learning their first language in Jerome Bruner’s studies of child language acquisition.¹⁴⁰

Jorgensen (2009) offers a similar defence. Again, he argues that shared content is not a prerequisite for communication; but, rather, that continued attempts at communication *result* in increased similarity of content. He writes, “What we will see is broad convergence and agreement in use as a result of speakers’ efforts to interpret each other.”¹⁴¹ The contents of our thoughts do, on the whole, tend to be very similar and this is *because* of the fact that we spend a lot of our time attempting to communicate with each other. And the more we communicate, the more similar our idiolects are likely to become. This sort of solution to the Objection from Communication concedes that we cannot eliminate differences in content completely, but we can minimise them to the point where they no longer matter to our communicative goals.

In the above, I have described candidates for what the Content Relation consists in. The candidates are SimConN, which forms the basis of the Similar Content View; and SamConN, which forms the basis of the Same Content View. As noted above, there is also an intermediary view which claims that sharing content is sometimes, but not always required for success (I have classified the latter view as a Same Content View). It will be a working hypothesis of this project that one of these Content Relations must form the basis of a theory of communicative success; the

¹³⁸ Ibid, 411

¹³⁹ Ibid, 402

¹⁴⁰ See Bruner (1983).

¹⁴¹ Jorgensen (2009) 137–138

question I am interested in is, ‘Which one?’ Answering this question is not straightforward. One of the reasons for this is that different theories of mental content interact with each of the Content Relations in different ways. As we have seen, what might be a plausible Content Relation for one theory of content can be a completely implausible Content Relation for another. Although it looks like externalist views of content can comfortably endorse the Same Content View, this would be disastrous for the Holist. The Same Content View can *only* be sensibly endorsed by theories of content which posit shared content, or a communal language. I will call such views ‘sociolectical’ views of content. It is worth noting that sociolectical views do not *entail* the Same Content View. Rather, they can choose between the two. In contrast, views which posit idiosyncratic idiolects such as Holism (I will call these views ‘idiolectical views’) can only sensibly endorse the Similar Content View (although, again, they do not entail it).

One thing to stress about the present debate is that *even if* it could be shown that sharing content is not necessary for communicative success, this would not secure the result that Holism can endorse a plausible view of communicative success. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, as mentioned above, if the correct theory of communicative success is one which claims that communication only *sometimes* requires shared content, Holism would still be in trouble. In this case, we could run a weaker version of the Objection from Communication which claims that sharing content is sometimes, or often, required for communicative success. This weaker argument would still be enough to defeat the Holist, as she must claim that content is *never* shared. Secondly, even if it can be shown that the Similar Content View states sufficient conditions on communicative success, there is a further worry, pushed explicitly by Fodor and Lepore (1992), that the idea of conceptual similarity cannot be made sense of on *Holism* (although other theories may be able to make sense of it). I deal with this objection in Chapter 4. Thirdly, even if it can be shown that the Holist’s Similar Content View is tenable, there might still be good reason to think that the account of success available to Holism’s competitors will be better. An account of mental content which posits shared content may be able to provide an

account of communication which is simpler or more compelling than the Holist's idiolectical account.

The outlook for a plausible account of communication for Holism may look quite grim. However, in the following chapter, I will argue that, contrary to appearances, it is actually sociolectical theories of content which struggle to explain communicative success. I will argue that sociolectical theories cannot endorse *either* Content Relation. In fact it is only theories like Holism which can plausibly maintain that mental content facilitates communicative success. This argument relies on the central role of understanding in explaining communicative success. I turn to the issue of understanding now.

Section 4: Understanding

Any philosopher working on communication is likely to agree that communicative success requires that the hearer understand the speaker in some sense. That is, they will endorse an Understanding Requirement as part of their theory of communicative success:

Understanding Requirement: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer understands the speaker.

I have left this statement of the Understanding Requirement deliberately vague for the moment. This is because there are a number of different options for specifying the requirement. The different ways in which it can be specified will take a bit of unpacking.

We use the term 'understanding' to refer to a variety of relationships between a subject and many different kinds of object. We can, for example, say of a subject that she understands *how* to play chess, or that she understands *the* game of chess, or that she understands *why* she has lost the game, or that she understands *that* she has lost

the game. However, the only object of understanding which concerns us here is understanding of *content* (both linguistic and mental). Even with our focus restricted, there are still further ways to understand what this consists in. In the following sections, I will identify several theses concerning different kinds of understanding and identify how these are relevant to communicative success. As we will see, different theories of mental content will interact with these theses concerning understanding in different ways.

I will first distinguish between three modes of linguistic and conceptual understanding. I will then distinguish understanding directed towards one's own concepts, or 'home language' ('self-directed' understanding), from understanding of the thoughts and utterances of an interlocutor ('other-directed' understanding). Once these initial distinctions are in place, I will be prepared to introduce the key distinctions between varieties of other-directed understanding which will be implemented in my arguments in Chapter 3. The first is a distinction between understanding the *content* of a speaker's thought (or utterance) and understanding the *way in which* the speaker herself understands this content. The second is a distinction between what I will call 'Subject-Sensitive' theories of understanding and 'Subject-Insensitive' theories. My aim in the sections which follow is not to argue for a particular theory of linguistic or conceptual understanding (although it will be clear which my preferred theory is). Rather, my aim is to draw distinctions between *kinds* of theory which will allow me to make my arguments in Chapter 3.

4.1 Abilities, acts and states

Firstly, let's distinguish between a subject's standing *disposition* – or ability – to understand a language or element within that language (her 'dispositional-understanding'), and a subject's *act* of understanding a particular content or expression on an occasion of use (her 'act-understanding'). Green explains the distinction as follows,

[I]n the "ability" construal of understanding, one understands a sentence in one's home language even if one has never encountered it before, either in

thought or communication. By contrast, the “act” construal of understanding requires a dateable cognitive event of grasping that sentence.¹⁴²

Longworth argues for an additional variety of understanding, which he calls ‘state-understanding’.¹⁴³ He describes state-understanding of sentence tokens as, “Understanding as a state entered through successful exercise of [ability-understanding] – e.g. one’s being in a state of understanding, or having [understood] what someone has said.”¹⁴⁴ The kinds of states he has in mind here are propositional states (states of knowledge, or states of belief) as opposed to dispositional states. The reason he introduces this category is that it seems most natural to state theories of understanding which treat understanding as a kind of propositional knowledge as theories which take the success conditions on understanding to consist in the entering of a certain propositional state. To see this, consider that, if such an account were stated in terms of acts or dispositions, one would have to claim that understanding involved ‘acts of knowing’ or ‘dispositions to know’.¹⁴⁵ Longworth notes that these locutions seem incapable of capturing the idea that language understanding consists in propositional knowledge of the meaning of items in the language.¹⁴⁶

These three modes of understanding are related in the following way. It is a subject’s dispositional-understanding (the dispositions she has to understand certain concepts or word-forms in certain ways) which, when exercised, determines how that subject act-understands the content she grasps on a particular occasion. An act of understanding on a given occasion will result in a hearer entering a state of understanding. An act of understanding involves, at the very least, some process whereby the target of the act of understanding – an utterance, for example – is assigned some interpretation in the subject’s home language as an item of mental content. It may require more than this: for example, it may require that the hearer have some grasp of the conceptual and inferential connections between the assigned content and other contents in her conceptual web. Which interpretation is assigned will depend on the subject’s dispositional-understanding of the concepts employed in

¹⁴² Green (2010) 1

¹⁴³ Longworth (2010) 3

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 4

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 5

¹⁴⁶ Ibid,

the content. But it will also depend on her understanding of the compositional structure of that content, and on any background beliefs and contextual information relevant to interpreting what is said with the utterance, or what was expressed by the speaker.

The three modes of understanding presented above are normative in that there are standards for success. For example, dispositional-understanding is normative in that one must possess the *correct* dispositions in order to count as having the ability to understand a given expression or concept. State understanding is normative in that a subject must enter the *correct* state in order to successfully understand an expression (for example, a state of knowledge, or of true belief). It should be noted that there is more to understanding than success conditions – for understanding is not always successful. There is a factive way of talking of understanding such as in sentences of the form ‘S understood that ‘p’ means that *m*’. But there is also a non-factive way of talking of the understanding such as in sentences of the form ‘S understood ‘p’ to mean that *m*.’ I think it is important to recognise that, even in cases where a subject fails to meet the requirements for *successful* or *correct* understanding, it is still the case that there is *some way* in which she understands the relevant utterance or content which she grasps: there is some state of understanding which she enters or disposition that she possesses, or act that she performs; it just might not be the one which is required for success in a given context. Thus, even when a subject fails to understand an utterance or content correctly, there is still some way to characterise the way in which she understands. There is some way to characterise her *misunderstanding*. Misunderstanding will be of central importance to my argument in Chapter 3.

The Understanding Requirement places conditions on the success of acts of understanding, which in turn will require that the hearer possesses a particular dispositional-understanding. Precisely which conditions are placed on dispositional-understanding will be considered in subsequent sections. Before turning to this, I will introduce a further distinction amongst kinds of understanding.

4.2 Self-directed vs. other-directed understanding

A further distinction that I think it will be useful to draw is the distinction between ‘self-directed’ understanding and ‘other-directed’ understanding (and also between the success conditions on these two kinds of understanding). The first kind of understanding concerns the manner in which a subject understands her own thoughts – it concerns conceptual *mastery*.¹⁴⁷ The second kind of understanding concerns the manner in which a subject understands an interlocutor. It is this other-directed understanding (and the success conditions on other-directed understanding) that the Understanding Requirement is concerned with.

The distinction between self-directed and other-directed understanding is different to the distinction between dispositional-understanding and act-understanding. Plausibly, both dispositional-understanding and act-understanding are required for other-directed understanding. It is also possible that both are required for self-directed understanding.¹⁴⁸ One might think that the amount of dispositional-understanding required is just the same in each case: one might think that, for example, to understand an utterance on a particular occasion, the hearer must herself both possess the concepts employed in the utterance and *fully* understand, or master, those concepts (in the self-directed sense). However, I think that most would agree that this is not the case. Rather, it is more plausible to think that the success conditions on self-directed understanding and other-directed understanding will place *different* requirements on a subject’s dispositional-understanding. Although mastering a concept may mean one possesses a dispositional-understanding of that concept which will enable one to perform successful acts of understanding of that concept, one might also think that one does not need to *master* a concept (i.e., to possess full dispositional-understanding of that concept) in order to possess sufficient dispositional-understanding for this purpose. The distinction between self-directed understanding and other-directed understanding confronts different theories of

¹⁴⁷ For examples of views of conceptual mastery, see Peacocke (1992), Dummett (1996).

¹⁴⁸ It is less clear that self-directed understanding would involve a datable cognitive event of act-understanding.

mental content in different ways. In the next two sub-sections I will describe some of these ways.

4.2.1 Sociolectical theories

Recall that, in Chapter 1, social externalism was presented as a theory of content which allows that we can think with concepts that we have not mastered.¹⁴⁹ As such, there are success conditions on the amount of dispositional-understanding required for conceptual mastery. One (apparently) attractive feature of social externalism is presumably that it can claim that subjects can *communicate* with these partially grasped concepts. On social externalism, the conditions on concept mastery (understood as full, or at least very rich, dispositional-understanding) are surely very demanding. A social externalist might, for example, require that a subject be able to correctly explicate her concept.¹⁵⁰ Alternatively, conceptual mastery might simply require that the subject employ a concept in her reasoning and speech acts in the correct way, where the correctness conditions are determined by the usage of experts in her community. On this latter option, the subject might be said to display *implicit awareness* of the correctness conditions of her concept without having to actually explicate these conditions.¹⁵¹

If one masters a concept, this may be sufficient for successfully act-understanding a content which contains that concept (providing the other concepts involved in the content are also understood). But a social externalist need not (and probably should not) make conceptual mastery a necessary condition on act-understanding the utterance (or thought content) of an interlocutor. The reason for this is that social externalists tend to think that subjects will think with a *significant number* of concepts which they do not master and, further, that they can be quite mistaken as to a concept's application conditions and yet still grasp the concept in question. Thus, if mastery were necessary for act-understanding the thoughts and utterances of

¹⁴⁹ I also noted that physical externalism should claim this.

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, Burge (1986) 713

¹⁵¹ Cf. Peacocke (2003)

interlocutors, social externalism would have to claim that we frequently fail to communicate. This is surely a result they wish to avoid.

The difference in the amount of dispositional-understanding required for conceptual mastery and the amount of dispositional-understanding required for act-understanding of an interlocutor, might be a matter of kind, or it might be a matter of degree. If one opts for the latter, there is then a question as to just how much dispositional-understanding is required for understanding the thoughts and utterances of interlocutors. Let us suppose it would be less than full mastery, but how much less? Could the social externalist claim that the level is very minimal such that no more understanding is required for communicative success than is required for mere *concept-possession*? In Section 5, I will present a version of the Understanding Requirement which claims this. It should also be noted that the kind of dispositional-understanding required for successful acts of other-directed understanding might not be *correct* understanding. I explore this option in a later section.

4.2.2 Idiolectical theories

The distinction between self-directed understanding and other-directed understanding confronts idiolectical theories such as Holism in a slightly different way. This is because, on Holism at least, understanding perfectly tracks mental content.¹⁵² As such, there is a sense in which, on Holism, subjects are always masters of their own idiolectical concepts: given the way in which concepts are individuated, there is simply no such thing as thinking with a concept one partially understands. But this is just a point about the metaphysics of concepts. Importantly, this is *not* to say that there are no correctness conditions on conceptual understanding for the Holist. As noted in Chapter 1, internalists who deal in idiolects will typically claim that cooperative subjects strive to bring their conceptual understanding in line with the conceptual understanding of others in their community. Subjects will master all of the concepts in their conceptual web; nonetheless, there is still some sense in which subjects can make mistakes. It is tempting to treat these mistakes as a kind of failure

¹⁵² Idiolectical theories do not entail that understanding tracks mental content.

of conceptual mastery. However, to avoid confusion, I think we should reserve the expression ‘conceptual mastery’ just for the phenomenon of understanding one’s own thoughts. Let us call the kind of mistakes that subjects can make, on Holism, failures in ‘linguistic competence’. The interesting question here is then *not*, ‘When does a subject master a concept?’ for she cannot but do this. The question is, rather, ‘When does a subject possess a concept which is *correct* relative to the standards set by her community?’ Linguistic competence, on Holism, is a matter of closely approximating the understanding of experts. For any given word-form of the subject’s language, she will want to express a concept with that word-form which is similar to the concept that an expert would express with that same word-form. Given the Instability Thesis, improving linguistic competence will be a matter of *replacing* deviant concepts with ones which more closely approximate community usage, rather than a matter of *change* in an enduring concept. On Holism then, a (cooperative) subject will be said to be linguistically competent with respect to a given word-form, when the conceptual-role for the concept expressed by that word-form closely approximates the conceptual-role of the concept that an expert would express with the same word-form – although her concept will nonetheless be a *distinct* concept from that of the experts due to differences between her total conceptual web and the webs of the relevant experts. So, to summarize, subjects cannot think with concepts they incompletely understand (i.e., which they do not master), but they can think with (fully-understood) concepts which are *incorrect* relative to the standards set by the linguistic community. This provides a kind of normativity of meaning for Holism. Cooperative subjects will adhere to a hypothetical imperative: if a subject wishes to comply with community usage, she will do what she can to possess the concepts which she *should* possess (according to the standards of that community). And, as Rapaport and Jorgensen have suggested, her continued attempts to communicate will enable her to increase this similarity between her own concepts and those of others in her community.

Things are a little more complicated on Holism when it comes to other-directed understanding. The reason for this is that, due to the idiolectal nature of content-individuation, the contents of the utterances and thoughts of a speaker might *diverge*

quite significantly from the content of the thoughts and utterances that an expert would express with the same word-forms. Thus, having full linguistic competence (where this is understood as possessing a concept with a similar conceptual-role to the concept that an expert would express with the same word-form) might not enable one to understand one's interlocutor if that interlocutor expresses a significantly deviant content with an utterance containing the relevant word-form. Equally, it might not be necessary for understanding one's interlocutor if *both* subjects possess concepts which are deviant in the same way. Act-understanding of an interlocutor's utterance or thought, on Holism, might require that the hearer possesses dispositional-understanding of the content she grasps, but this dispositional-understanding can be quite different from an expert's dispositional-understanding of whichever content that expert would express with the same word-forms. Thus the standards for linguistic competence can be quite different to the standards for other-directed understanding of a particular interlocutor on a given occasion. It should also be stressed that, once a hearer has satisfied SimConN by grasping a similar content, she will automatically understand this content correctly because of the relationship between content and self-directed understanding. On this view, we could think of acts of understanding as being the means by which the Content Relation is satisfied.

In the above – and particularly in Section 4.2.1 on sociolectical theories – I have largely been talking as if a certain picture of other-directed understanding is correct. This is a picture upon which other-directed understanding involves the hearer correctly understanding the utterances or thoughts of an interlocutor. This seems like an intuitively plausible picture. However, as I will explain shortly, it is not the only way to think of what understanding an interlocutor consists in. In the next section, I will begin explaining two dimensions along which the Understanding Requirement can be specified which will be of central importance to my argument in Chapter 3.

Section 5: The Understanding Requirement

In the preceding sections, I have set out a number of different issues pertaining to understanding and identified other-directed act-understanding as the kind of understanding which the Understanding Requirement is concerned with. I also explained that the way in which a hearer act-understands the speaker will be determined by her dispositional-understanding of the content she grasps as a result of the communicative exchange. Thus, the Understanding Requirement will place constraints on the hearer's dispositional-understanding. Now let's return to this Understanding Requirement:

Understanding requirement: For a communicative exchange to be successful, it is necessary that the hearer understand the speaker.

There are two dimensions along which we can sharpen this initial characterisation. The first, which I consider in the following section, concerns the *target* of the act of (other-directed) understanding. The second concerns the *kind* of dispositional-understanding which is involved in this act of other-directed understanding.

5.1 The target of understanding

What do I mean by the 'target' of the act of understanding? The target of the act is the thing which is understood. There are, I think, at least three options for what this target might be. The first is the content of the *utterance* of the speaker. The second is the content of the *mental state* of the speaker. And the third is the speaker's *understanding* of the content of that mental state. These last two options both involve understanding the speaker's mental content, but in different ways. I will go through each of these in turn.

As mentioned above, a communicative attempt involves a speaker with an initial contentful state, an utterance with a certain content, and a hearer with a terminal contentful state. As such, when considering the Content Relation, there was a

question as to whether the relation relevant to success was one which held between the content of the hearer's terminal state and the content of the speaker's *utterance*, on the one hand, or between the content of the hearer's terminal state and the content of the speaker's *initial mental state*, on the other. I stated that I will assume in this project that the Content Relation should apply to the content of the initial and terminal mental states of interlocutors. I also claimed that such a relation can hold between the *utterance* content of the speaker and the mental content of the terminal state of the hearer only in circumstances under which the content of the speaker's utterance is the same as (or, perhaps, similar to) the content of the mental state it is used to express.

Interestingly, many theories and discussions of other-directed understanding in the literature are concerned with the requirements on understanding the content of a speaker's utterance rather than (directly) understanding her mental content.¹⁵³ However, given the assumption in this project that the Content Relation holds between the *mental contents* of interlocutors, I think we should discount the option that the target of the hearer's act-understanding is the content of the speaker's utterance. This would leave us with two options remaining: either the hearer must understand the content of the speaker's mental state, or she must understand this content *in the same way as* the speaker. Just as above, if we hold that the speaker's mental content is the target of the act of understanding, then we *can* also claim that understanding a speaker's utterance content is necessary for communicative success, but only if this utterance content is the same as (or perhaps sufficiently similar to) the speaker's mental content. But, as above, this would only be because, on such a view, utterances would have the same content as the thoughts they are used to express and thus, in understanding the utterance, we would understand the mental content expressed. For ease of exposition, I suggest we think of understanding utterance content as, at most, instrumental in achieving communicative success, but not a necessary requirement. When coming to understand what a speaker was trying to express, hearers will rely on both the apparent content of the utterance expressed, and

¹⁵³ See, for example, Ziff (1970), Heck (1995), Rumfitt (2005), Schiffer (1987), and Millikan (1984). Such a treatment is also typical in the epistemology of testimony. See, for example, Burge (1993) and Audi (2006).

all kinds of background information and contextual factors (This will be so even when the utterance content is just the same as the mental content it is used to express). So, just as with the Content Relation, I think one *could* claim that utterance understanding is necessary for communicative success, but only if one also thinks that the content of the utterance must be the same as the content of the mental state expressed. I will ignore this complication in what follows.

With this complication set to one side, we can now ask a further question: Assuming that whichever Content Relation one endorses has been satisfied, must the hearer *correctly* understand the mental content expressed by the speaker as a result of the communicative exchange (where this content must bear a particular relation to the speaker's content), or must she instead understand this content in a way which is *the same as* (or similar to) *the way in which* the speaker understands the content she expresses? The way that we answer this question will present us with two options for specifications of the Understanding Requirement.

Content Understanding: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer correctly understands the content she grasps.

Shared Understanding: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer understands the content she grasps in a way which is the same as, or similar to, the way in which the speaker understands the content she expressed.

On the Content Understanding construal, what is required for communicative success is that the hearer correctly understands the content that she grasps as a result of the exchange. Anyone who endorses this proposal will have to specify some degree of understanding which is sufficient for successful Content Understanding. Or, alternatively, claim that understanding succeeds to the degree that the content is understood. I think this seems like a *prima facie* plausible picture of the nature of understanding and its role in communicative success.

The Shared Understanding version of the Understanding Requirement is a bit different. On this view, in addition to grasping the appropriate content, the hearer must understand this content in a way that is the same as (or similar to) the way in which the speaker understands the content she expressed. On Holism, as understanding tracks content, understanding a content in a similar way to the speaker will entail entertaining a similar content to the speaker. Furthermore, when a hearer grasps a content, she cannot but understand the content she grasps correctly. As such, providing SimConN is satisfied, Content Understanding and Shared Understanding will always be satisfied together on Holism. In contrast, Content Understanding and Shared Understanding can come apart when combined with social externalism. On social externalism, two subjects can understand the content communicated quite incorrectly and, importantly, they can understand it in *different* ways. The Shared Understanding Requirement demands, not that either subject understand the content correctly, but just that they understand it in the same (or similar) ways, *even if* they both understand it incorrectly. Given the above, Shared Understanding might seem like a strange view for a sociolectical theory to endorse. Why bother requiring that the hearer grasp the right content if she needn't understand it? Why indeed! In the following chapter, I will argue that the Shared Understanding Requirement is, in fact, the correct version of the Understanding Requirement. This will cause serious problems for sociolectical views of content.

5.2 Subject-sensitive vs. subject-insensitive models of understanding

There is one last division amongst views of understanding which I will make in this chapter. This is a division amongst 'subject-sensitive' understanding and 'subject-insensitive' understanding. These two kinds of understanding are not full theories of understanding, but *kinds* of theories of dispositional-understanding. In this section, I will distinguish these two kinds and give examples of specific theories of understanding that fall under each kind.

5.2.1 Subject-Sensitive understanding

A theory of dispositional-understanding is subject-sensitive if it claims that understanding captures the fine-grainedness of a subject's conceptions (and misconceptions). Subject-sensitive understanding is intended to capture what I will call the subject's 'cognitive perspective' on the content of both her own thoughts and the utterances and thoughts of others. Cognitive perspective consists in how a subject is disposed to employ content in her cognitive economy, where this includes her *perspective* on:

- (a) the inferential relations between contents;
- (b) the conceptual relations which the comprised concepts bear to other concepts in her cognitive economy;
- (c) the way in which the objects which those concepts apply to are represented; and
- (d) the way in which the states of affairs which are represented by the content are represented.

Where a subject has a certain cognitive perspective on a given content, I will say that she 'cognizes' that content to have certain properties.¹⁵⁴ I say that subject-sensitive understanding captures a subject's cognitive *perspective* on these properties and relations because, on some theories of content, the subject will be mistaken as to these properties and relations: her cognitive perspective (and, as such, her dispositions to employ content) will be incorrect. For example, on social externalism, a subject may be disposed to infer from X IS A CAT to X IS A REPTILE. In this case, her (subject-sensitive) understanding of her CAT and REPTILE concepts is incorrect. The inference that she is disposed to draw between these two contents (and which her subject-sensitive understanding captures) does not actually hold between them. On social externalism, concepts are individuated by the language community, and thus

¹⁵⁴ I am borrowing this term from Chomsky, but I do not employ it in the same way. Chomsky characterises cognizing in terms of propositional attitudes whereas I wish to use it to apply to a subject's perspective on these attitudes whilst remaining neutral as to whether cognitive perspective is best stated in terms of propositional attitudes. See Chomsky (1986).

the conceptual and representational properties of these concepts will depend on the language community rather than the individual subject. To discover the actual conceptual and representational properties of utterance and thought content, subjects must look to other members of their community, or to a dictionary. As such, the conceptual and representational properties of a subject's thoughts are (on social externalism), in a sense, inaccessible from her cognitive perspective. Note that claiming that these properties are inaccessible from the subject's cognitive perspective is not the same as claiming that a subject lacks privileged access to the content of her thoughts: it is the relations *between* concepts and contents which are inaccessible rather than the contents themselves. I wish to remain neutral on the question of whether social externalism is compatible with privileged access in this project.¹⁵⁵ Burge seems to recognise this distinction as well. He writes,

One should not assimilate 'knowing what one's thoughts are' in the sense of basic self-knowledge, to 'knowing what one's thoughts are' in the sense of being able to explicate them correctly – being able to delineate their constitutive relations to other thoughts.¹⁵⁶

Cognitive perspective is supposed to reflect the way the subject actually reasons, or is disposed to reason (even if she does so in a way which is strictly speaking irrational given the externally individuated contents of her thoughts).

On idiolectal theories, by contrast, a subject's cognitive perspective captures the inferential and conceptual relations which do in fact hold between her contents and concepts. So, if a subject is disposed to reason from X IS A CAT_s to X IS A REPTILE_s, this inference is appropriate *given the way her concepts are individuated*. Her CAT_s concept may be the wrong concept to have – relative to the standards of her community – but, given the way that this concept is individuated, the inferences she is disposed to draw from contents involving CAT_s to other contents in her web of attitudes will be rational and correct – the content of her CAT_s concept is, in part, individuated by these very inferences. On Holism, there is no gap between the subject's cognitive

¹⁵⁵ For a defence of compatibilism about social externalism and privileged access, see Burge (1988) and Falvey and Owens (1994). For incompatibilist arguments, see Boghossian (1989)

¹⁵⁶ Burge (1988) 662

perspective on the conceptual, inferential and representational properties of her concepts and contents, on the one hand, and their actual conceptual, inferential and representational properties on the other.¹⁵⁷ This is another way of saying that, on Holism, a subject cannot misunderstand the contents of her own thoughts.

5.2.2 Conceptual-role as subject-sensitive understanding

One specific theory of dispositional-understanding which is a subject-sensitive theory would be an internalist conceptual-role theory of *understanding* (as opposed to content). On this theory, a subject's dispositional understanding of a given concept is determined by the conceptual-role of that concept in her cognitive economy. We can use such a theory to characterise both self-directed and other-directed understanding. On this theory, a hearer's act-understanding of a speaker is successful when the conceptual-role of the content grasped by the hearer satisfies the correctness conditions imposed by whichever of the Understanding Requirements is endorsed (either Content Understanding or Shared Understanding). The act of understanding itself, on the conceptual-role theory, would involve the hearer connecting the content grasped to her existing conceptual web in the right way (where, the 'right' way would be the way that the speaker connects it, or the way an expert would connect it, depending on one's other commitments). How she connects this content to her existing conceptual web will depend on her dispositional-understanding, which will itself be understood in terms of conceptual-role. Take the following example. Suppose a speaker utters (2),

2) There is a pony in the barn

Suppose further that the speaker is competent in her dispositional-understanding of the concepts which comprise this content such that the conceptual-role of the content

¹⁵⁷ A further note about cognitive perspective: I do not claim that a subject necessarily has second-order beliefs about, or even a reflective awareness of, her inferential and conceptual practices – although she may have such beliefs and awareness. Cognitive perspective is intended to characterise how she is actually disposed to reason rather than to characterise her beliefs as to these dispositions.

expressed by (2) in her idiolect is correct relative to the standards of her community. What would it be for a hearer to understand (2) on the present proposal?

Firstly, she must assign an interpretation to (2) as an item of mental content, where doing so will require that she assign concepts to each of the component expressions as well as grasp the compositional structure of the content. She will, for example, map ‘pony’ to her PONY concept, and so forth. To satisfy a Subject-Sensitive Understanding Requirement, the conceptual-role of the concepts which comprise the recovered content must be the same as (or similar to) the conceptual-role of the speaker’s concepts (or, as above, the conceptual-role may need to be the same as, or similar to, an expert’s conceptual-role rather than the speaker’s). If conceptual-roles are similar in this way, then the content will participate in similar inferences in the two subjects’ respective cognitive economies.¹⁵⁸

I think that a version of this theory is the theory of understanding which should be adopted by the Holist. I will elaborate on it in Chapter 4. However, it should be stressed that this model of dispositional-understanding is available to most (if not all) theories of content – including both Holists and externalists alike. Recall that, in Chapter 1, I claimed that I wished to identify the determination base of linguistic or conceptual understanding with the determination base of mental content (that is, I claimed that they are both determined by conceptual-role). But, I also stressed that an externalist would wish to keep these two things separate. For the Holist, the subject’s cognitive perspective on the inferential, conceptual and representational properties of contents and concepts perfectly tracks the inferential, conceptual and representational properties of those contents and concepts: that is, cognitive perspective is determined by conceptual-role. The externalist will claim that what I am calling cognitive perspective (likewise conceptual-role) would simply characterise a subject’s epistemic grasp of her mental content, while that content is individuated independently of her understanding of it (i.e., by her physical or social environment).

¹⁵⁸ Plausibly, what determines a content’s conceptual-role is not merely the combination of the conceptual-roles of the comprised concepts along with the content’s compositional structure, but also any background or contextual information which is involved in the pragmatic enrichment of the content.

But the fact that externalists wish to make this distinction does not, of course, preclude them from employing something like conceptual-role as a means of characterising linguistic understanding. In fact, it seems to be a natural option for them, given that they think that there is a cognitive gap between content and our grasp of it. The externalist may say that, although the hearer does indeed grasp the content of an utterance of (2) simply by deferring and possessing minimal competence, successful communication requires that the hearer have the correct epistemic handle on this content. Conceptual-role, thought of as a determiner of understanding but not of content, is one option for understanding this relationship. On this proposal, although content would be externally individuated, a subject's understanding of that content (both self-directed and other-directed) would be an internalist matter.

In fact, I think that many social externalists would be happy with this proposal. To return to the issue of conceptual mastery for a second, one reason that employing conceptual-role understanding would be useful to them would be the following. Given that social externalists allow that subjects can incorrectly understand the content of their own thoughts, they need to appeal to some kind of cognitive machinery in order to explain the sense in which a subject has made a *mistake*. It seems that this mistake is best characterised in terms of features which are internal to the subject: incorrect understanding is (partly) a *cognitive* mistake and can be highly idiosyncratic. As such, it seems natural to explain the phenomenon by appeal to machinery which exists within the subject. And, if we are already employing a conceptual-role theory as a theory of self-directed understanding, it seems economical to extend the account to explain other-directed understanding as well.

This point about conceptual mastery applies independently of whether social externalism endorses conceptual-role as a theory of understanding. I think the fact, stressed in Chapter 1, that conceptual-role approaches are popular in linguistics (and other scientific disciplines) is at least *prima facie* motivation for thinking conceptual-role is an attractive theory of linguistic understanding. However, the point is that the social externalist should appeal to *some* subject-sensitive machinery in order to

capture the sense in which the subject has made a cognitive error when she misunderstands her own thoughts. One could appeal to a different kind of subject-sensitive machinery than conceptual-role. What is important is simply that this machinery is sensitive to the fine-grainedness of a subject's misconceptions.

Burge does sometimes talk about, “[T]he believer’s own construal of the words.”¹⁵⁹ I am not sure whether he would be happy to invoke a subject-sensitive notion of understanding in order to explain partial grasp and I will not claim that he does so. But there is nothing in his exposition of social externalism that would conflict with a subject-sensitive – or any internalist – theory of linguistic understanding. Social externalism is, after all, an externalism about mental content; it is not an externalism about all things mental. In any case, in Chapter 3, I will argue that externalists indeed *ought* to appeal to subject-sensitive understanding in their account of communicative success. Before presenting this argument, I will need to present a conception of dispositional-understanding which my argument aims to discredit. This is the subject-insensitive conception.

5.3 Subject-Insensitive understanding

A theory of dispositional-understanding is subject-*ins*sensitive if it allows that the way in which a subject is said to understand an utterance or thought content need not be reflected in the way that that content actually functions in her cognitive economy. That is, the way that she understands a content might come apart from her cognitive perspective on (a)-(d) above. Given this, a subject may be said to correctly understand an utterance or thought even when her cognitive perspective on its content is incorrect. She can be said to understand an utterance or thought even when she is disposed to employ its content incorrectly in her cognitive economy.

This approach might seem strange - for essentially it claims that a subject can understand an utterance or thought of an interlocutor *correctly* even though she possesses a large number of misconceptions as to its representational and inferential

¹⁵⁹ Burge (1978) 138

properties. And what are misconceptions if not misunderstandings? Strange or not, this approach has been adopted in the literature. As I will explain in Chapter 3, it enjoys a *prima facie* strong motivation from the desire for a liberal view of communicative success: one which attributes a large amount of success to interlocutors. By way of further elucidating the subject-insensitive approach to understanding, I will present two examples of it: propositional models and a model based on an account of testimonial knowledge transmission proposed by Sandy Goldberg.

5.3.1 Propositional conceptions

Many take understanding of language in general to consist in knowledge of some kind. As Dummett writes, “Our usual ways of thinking about the mastery of a language, or of this and that element of it, are permeated by the conception that this mastery consists in *knowledge*. To understand an expression is to know its meaning.”¹⁶⁰ Dummett, in this passage, is concerned primarily with what it is to master a language.¹⁶¹ However, it is plausible to think that if understanding a language is a matter of knowing what various expressions of the language mean, then understanding an utterance or thought of an interlocutor will involve this kind of knowledge as well. Indeed, there are plenty of authors who take understanding of the utterances of others to consist in knowledge.¹⁶²

One way of cashing-out the claim that successful understanding consists in knowledge is as a *propositional* knowledge view of understanding.¹⁶³ Alternatively, it might be that the analysis of linguistic understanding as knowledge is too strong. Pettit, for example, argues that there is such a thing as accidental understanding.¹⁶⁴ He tries to show this by presenting alleged Gettier cases of understanding. He claims that understanding, unlike knowledge, doesn't fail in Gettier cases. As such, we

¹⁶⁰ Dummett (1996) 95

¹⁶¹ The epistemic view of language mastery is very popular. For other proponents of the view see Higginbotham (1992) and Campbell (1982).

¹⁶² See, for example, Evans (1981), Higginbotham (1988), Larson and Segal (1995).

¹⁶³ For a survey of alternative models of understanding which appeal to knowledge, see Longworth (2010).

¹⁶⁴ See Pettit (2002).

should accept that understanding is not a form of knowledge (unless we want to revise some cherished beliefs about the nature of knowledge).¹⁶⁵ I will call any view which characterises understanding of others in terms of the possession of a particular propositional attitude, a ‘propositional conception’. In the remainder of this section, I will explore what a propositional knowledge conception might look like, but this exposition is largely equally applicable to other propositional conceptions (by, for example, replacing ‘knows’ with ‘truly believes’). These propositional conceptions are only subject-insensitive accounts of understanding *if they are combined with sociolectical theories*. Why this is so will become clear in what follows.

On one kind of propositional knowledge conception of utterance understanding, for a speaker, S, to understand an utterance, *u*, is for S to know what *u* means (or what is said by the speaker with an utterance of *u*), where this consists in S possessing propositional knowledge of *u*’s meaning (or what is said by *u*). As mentioned above, the propositional knowledge view is best understood as a view about state-understanding. One obvious candidate for the content of this propositional knowledge would be knowledge THAT *U* MEANS THAT *M* where *M* is some specification of *u*’s meaning as an item of mental content.¹⁶⁶ For example, understanding an utterance of (3),

3) There is milk in the fridge,

would be a matter of knowing what item of mental content an utterance of (3) expresses. On a less demanding version of this proposal, all that might be required is the propositional knowledge that an utterance of (3) expresses the mental content, THAT THERE IS MILK IN THE FRIDGE. The reason that this proposal is a subject-insensitive model of understanding if combined with social externalism is the following. On social externalism, knowing THAT *U* MEANS THAT *M* does not require that a subject has any understanding of the relevant mental content, *M*, over and above what is required in order to possess the concepts which comprise *M* in the first place. Recall that what is required to grasp this mental content might be very

¹⁶⁵ Pettit goes on to reject various other proposals in addition to the propositional knowledge view.

¹⁶⁶ An alternative would be, THAT THE SPEAKER SAID THAT *M* BY UTTERING *U*.

minimal. To reiterate: one need only possess basic linguistic competence and the disposition to defer. On this proposal, grasping an utterance content is as easy as identifying the correct mental content which is expressed by it. But this content itself can be quite poorly understood and incorrectly employed in reasoning. As it stands, this account is probably too simple to be plausible; its purpose here is merely to illustrate what a subject-insensitive notion of other-directed understanding might look like.¹⁶⁷ Understanding is subject-insensitive on this proposal because the propositional contents used to attribute understanding of an utterance to a subject have *broad content*, and thus may not themselves be understood correctly (in the subject-sensitive sense) by the subject.

5.3.2 Goldberg's Conception

An explicitly subject-insensitive account of dispositional-understanding is proposed by Sandy Goldberg (2007). Goldberg's is specifically an account of the conditions on *testimonial knowledge* transmission rather than *mere* communicative success. The account that I present below will be a Goldberg-style account of a condition on mere communicative success. Goldberg does not explicitly endorse it outside of a theory of testimony. For Goldberg, an act of understanding is a matter of mapping the lexical items of the content of the speaker's utterance onto the appropriate items of mental content in the hearer's idiolect.¹⁶⁸ Understanding will be successful if the mapping is correct and reliably attained. However, for Goldberg, doing this successfully is something which is achieved *merely* by relying on deference to public linguistic norms. That is, the kind of disposition one needs is just the disposition to defer. And, because of this,

[...] A hearer can count as having 'understood' testimony in the required sense even when she does not completely grasp all of the concepts in the

¹⁶⁷ Green points out one way in which these kinds of theories should be complicated. Merely knowing that the content of an utterance means that M is likely not sufficient for understanding. As Green explains, "Instead, understanding [a] sentence would require grasping its meaning in light of its compositional structure." (Green, 2010, 3)

¹⁶⁸ Note that the issues under discussion here are orthogonal to the question of whether language understanding requires that subjects have knowledge (tacit or otherwise) of a semantic theory. For discussion of this issue see Matthews (2003).

attested content (and even when she has a non-standard theory of the subject-matter in question).¹⁶⁹

Goldberg thinks that reliance on a public language is essential if one wants to secure communicative success in cases in which two speakers have little-to-no background information about each other's beliefs. He thinks we need a picture of communicative success which ensures that hearers are said to understand speakers in the absence of this background knowledge.¹⁷⁰ Goldberg argues that, without appeal to public linguistic norms, such correct representations will not be achievable. Or rather, that it would be, at best, *miraculous* that subjects who have little or no information on each other's background beliefs would come to represent (and understand) the content of each other's speech acts correctly without this appeal. He writes, "Without appeal to public linguistic norms, we have no satisfactory account of how hearers attain correct representations – and so, by extension, how they attain reliable comprehension – of the speech they observe."¹⁷¹ A Holist might agree with him on this front at least: Holism posits no public language, and entails that subjects do not mean the same things as each other, nor do they ever fully understand each other. On Goldberg's account, public linguistic norms *guarantee* that the hearer's mapping of the speaker's utterance onto an interpretation in her idiolect will be correct. He writes,

On the assumption that there are public linguistic norms that govern the entries of both the speaker's and the hearer's respective idiolects, *this sentence to sentence mapping will be guaranteed to be content-preserving* [...]. Such a method would yield a very efficient and reliable comprehension process. [...] Indeed, the process of understanding would then be (roughly) as reliable as is the process whereby the words used by another speaker are recovered from her utterance. This is because, once the words have been recovered by the speaker, the public linguistic norms take over, ensuring agreement between speaker and hearer.¹⁷²

Goldberg thinks that it is public linguistic norms which determine, not just the content grasped by the hearer, but also the way in which she understands that

¹⁶⁹ Goldberg (2007) 104

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 60

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 58–59

¹⁷² Ibid, 79–80, italics in original

content. Thus, utterance understanding is such that subjects can understand each other despite differences in their cognitive perspectives on the content communicated. Understanding, on Goldberg's account, appears to be just the means by which the Content Relation is satisfied. But nothing more is required of the hearer. For Goldberg, subjects can easily perform successful acts of understanding providing they are disposed to rely on the language community. A subject's understanding of expressions is itself dependent on this social determination. As Goldberg writes, "*the state of comprehension itself cannot be understood in non-relational (individualistic) terms.*"¹⁷³

One thing to note about these subject-insensitive approaches is that the *kind* of dispositional-understanding required for acts of other-directed understanding is *different* to the kind of dispositional-understanding involved in conceptual mastery. Act-understanding of an utterance (or thought) of an interlocutor is essentially a matter of identifying the appropriate mental content expressed, and having sufficient (if minimal) understanding of that content (perhaps along with an understanding of its compositional structure) to merit grasp. But a subject's understanding of her own mental content cannot consist in the same thing that her grasping of the utterance consists in. The reason for this is that, in cases of utterance understanding, both the propositional conceptions and the Goldberg-style account attribute *successful* understanding even in cases where the mental content expressed by the observed utterance is only partially grasped (and even when the subject's cognitive perspective on it is quite incorrect). But this cannot be the case with conceptual mastery: *mastery* (that is full, or rich, understanding) of a concept cannot be attributed to subjects in cases of partial grasp. For, on social externalism, to say that a concept is partially grasped is to say that it is *not* mastered. As such, one's understanding of the concepts in one's home-language must be given a different treatment to one's understanding of the utterance or thought content of an interlocutor. On these approaches, even once other-directed understanding is explained, there is then a *further* question as to how the content grasped is itself understood (in the subject-sensitive sense). One still needs a theory of dispositional-understanding which explains conceptual mastery *in*

¹⁷³ Ibid, 119, italics in original

addition to one's theory of other-directed understanding. For other-directed understanding, it is enough that the correct mental content is identified as the meaning, M, of the content expressed by the speaker. How M is itself understood by the subject is not relevant to the success of the communicative attempt. The subject-insensitive approaches do not place any constraints on a subject's dispositional-understanding of her own thoughts.

5.4 Four versions of the Understanding Requirement

Given the above, in addition to the distinction between Content Understanding and Shared Understanding, we have the following distinction between kinds of Understanding Requirement which could be added to either the Same Content View or the Similar Content View. These two kinds of requirement endorse one of the following two theses.

Subject-Sensitive Understanding ('SS-Understanding'): The kind of understanding relevant to communicative success is understanding which tracks the cognitive perspective of the subject.

Subject-Insensitive Understanding ('SI-Understanding'): The kind of understanding relevant to communicative success is understanding which is individuated by the language community (and, as such, is not sensitive to the cognitive perspective of the subject).

Here is a summary of the various distinctions introduced above. I began by distinguishing between dispositional-understanding and act-understanding. Dispositional-understanding concerns our standing ability to understand concepts and word-forms. It is dispositional-understanding which determines how we act-understand a given concept or expression on an occasion of use. I then distinguished between self-directed understanding and other-directed understanding. Self-directed understanding concerns the mastery we have of the concepts involved in our own thoughts. Other-directed understanding concerns the understanding of other

interlocutors. Next I went on to introduce two important distinctions amongst theories of other-directed understanding which result in different specifications of the Understanding Requirement. The first distinction was between the Content Understanding Requirement, and the Shared Understanding Requirement. The Content Understanding Requirement states that the hearer must correctly understand the content that she grasps (where this will be either the same as, or similar to, the content expressed by the speaker). The Shared Understanding Requirement states that the hearer must understand the content she grasps in a way which is the same as, or similar to, the way in which the speaker understands the content she expressed. Lastly, I introduced a distinction between Subject-Sensitive Understanding and Subject-Insensitive Understanding. Subject-Sensitive Understanding is understanding which is sensitive to a subject's cognitive perspective on the contents of her thoughts. Subject-Insensitive Understanding is understanding which does not track cognitive perspective. Rather, it is individuated by the language community. The distinctions presented give us several options for specifying the Understanding Requirement. These are as follows:

- Subject-Sensitive Content Understanding Requirement
- Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement
- Subject-Insensitive Content Understanding Requirement
- Subject-Insensitive Shared Understanding Requirement

These can, of course, each be added to the Same Content View or the Similar Content View, and combined with various different views of mental content to provide a wide range of views of the conditions on communicative success (some of these views will probably be extremely implausible). Fortunately, we will not need to remember all of these combinations in the next chapter. In Chapter 3, I will argue that, regardless of your choice of theory of mental content, and regardless of your choice of Content Relation, your theory of communicative success *must* endorse the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement. I present this as follows:

Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer's SS-understanding of the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's SS-understanding of the content she expressed.

I will argue that only Holism (and theories like it) can plausibly endorse this requirement.

So far in our picture of communicative success, we have two kinds of requirement: the Content Relation and the Understanding Requirement. Before moving on to my argument in the next chapter, there is one last issue to deal with. The purpose of this last section is simply to round up any additional features of communicative success and set them to one side.

Section 6: Theory-Neutral conditions

Plausibly, the Content Relation and the Understanding Requirement are not the *only* conditions on communicative success. However, they are the only conditions which have an impact on the plausibility of theories of mental content. Further conditions which do not impact upon theories of content I will call 'Theory-Neutral' conditions: these are conditions which could be accepted or rejected without there being any consequences for the plausibility of *combining* the account of communicative success with a particular theory of content – although their acceptance or rejection *will* still impact upon the plausibility of the theory of communicative success itself. An example would be the following.

It also seems reasonable to suppose that a hearer must recognise (at least roughly) what *kind* of propositional attitude the speaker takes towards the content she expresses (or at least which attitude she *purports to take* towards that content – she might lie, or be engaged in some form of pretence). For example, if a speaker expresses (or purports to express) a belief in some content, *P*, the hearer ought to

recognise that the speaker *believes* the content she expresses. If, in this case, the hearer takes the speaker to *desire* that *P*, I think we should say that communication has failed. The reason for saying so is that the hearer has failed to come to see the world as the speaker does: the speaker represents the world as one in which *P* is true, but the hearer might represent the world as one in which *P* (or some similar content) is not yet true – or, at least, as one in which the speaker believes that *P* is not yet true. Thus, even if the appropriate *content* itself is grasped, recognising the wrong attitude taken towards that content can result in the hearer failing to represent the world as the speaker does. Alternatively, one could endorse a weaker condition which simply states that a hearer must not recognise the *wrong* attitude, although she may fail to explicitly recognise which attitude the speaker takes towards her content.

In this project, I will not consider all conditions which might be involved in a successful communicative exchange. I will simply leave open which Theory-Neutral conditions should be incorporated into a full account of communicative success. Recognising the speaker's attitude will likely be one of them, but there may be others. For example, it may be thought that the intention to communicate is a necessary condition on communicative success, or that the hearer must recognise this intention. As mentioned above, a complete theory of communication will also specify the role of inference and pragmatics in communicative success.

In the arguments which follow, I will sometimes consider the joint sufficiency of various Content Relations and Understanding Requirements. Where I am considering the sufficiency of (versions of) these conditions, I will be considering whether they would be jointly sufficient *alongside* whichever Theory-Neutral requirements would constitute an otherwise 'good' case of a communicative exchange. When presenting the sufficiency directions of these conditions, I will incorporate a clause which specifies that the Theory-Neutral conditions (whatever these may be) must be satisfied.

Section 7: Chapter Summary

I began this chapter by introducing the Objection from Communication. This objection claimed that Holism cannot explain communicative success because it denies that subjects share thought content. An assumption behind this argument is that sharing content is necessary (or at least sometimes required) for communicative success. After presenting this objection, I took a step back to introduce the framework for understanding communication which I will be assuming within this project. It is from within this framework that I will defend Holism from the Objection from Communication.

The model of communicative success which I am working with states that success is to be measured (in part) in terms of some relation between an initial contentful state in the speaker, and a terminal contentful state in the hearer; I called this the 'Content Relation'. I explained that one popular view of the Content Relation is the Same Content View, which claims that this relation must be (or often be) one of identity. In response to the Objection from Communication, Holists have countered that similarity of content is (jointly) sufficient for communicative success. They endorse the Similar Content View. With these two broad pictures of communicative success in place, I moved on to considering a further intuitively plausible addition to a theory of communicative success: the Understanding Requirement. This is the thesis that communicative success requires that the hearer understands the speaker in some sense. I then went on to consider two dimensions along which this requirement can be sharpened. The first concerned the target of the hearer's understanding. I suggested two options for understanding what this might be. The first is the Content Understanding Requirement. This thesis states that communicative success requires that the hearer correctly understand the *content* that she grasps as a result of the communicative exchange. The second is the Shared Understanding Requirement. This thesis states that the hearer must understand the content she grasps in a way which is the same as (or similar to) the way in which the speaker understands the content she expressed.

The second dimension along which to sharpen the Understanding Requirement concerns the kind of dispositional-understanding required for acts of other-directed understanding. The two options here are Subject-Sensitive Understanding and Subject-Insensitive Understanding. A theory is a subject-sensitive theory of understanding if it allows understanding to track a subject's cognitive perspective on the inferential, conceptual and representational properties of contents and concepts. In contrast, a subject-insensitive model of understanding is a model which does not capture a subject's cognitive perspective on the inferential, conceptual and representational properties of concepts and contents. On this model, a subject can be said to correctly understand an utterance even when her cognitive perspective on that utterance is quite richly mistaken.

In the next chapter, my aim is twofold. I wish to raise an objection to sociolectical views of content from communication. And, in doing so, I will motivate the Holist's picture of communicative success. The argument demonstrates the central role of the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement in communicative success. It is this kind of understanding which will form the backbone of my positive theory of communicative success. In Chapter 4 I will show that, because Holism claims that mental content tracks this kind of understanding, Holism (and theories like it) will be able to claim that mental content plays a central role in facilitating communicative success.

Chapter 3: Externalism and the problem of communication

This chapter has two aims. The first is to demonstrate that sociolectical theories face a dilemma when it comes to providing an account of communicative success. In this chapter, I focus on presenting the problem for social externalism, but I think that a similar argument will apply to *any* theory of mental content which claims that understanding does not track mental content. In arguing for this, I will motivate the claim that views of understanding which track cognitive perspective must play a central role in communicative success. This is the second aim of this chapter. It will provide motivation from my positive account, which I present in Chapter 4.

The argument for the dilemma proceeds in three steps. In the first two steps, I argue for the claim that social externalism should endorse the following thesis.

Similarity of Cognitive Perspective: A communicative exchange will succeed iff (a), the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied and (b), the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is *similar to* the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

I will suggest that the best way to incorporate this thesis into an account of communicative success is by adopting the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement. This thesis was presented in Chapter 2.

The first step of the argument aims to show that, on social externalism, it is *necessary* for communicative success that the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed. I call this, the 'Argument from Miscommunication'. I present this argument in two stages. In the first stage, I present a sub-argument which attempts to demonstrate that, on social externalism, there are examples in which communicative success requires that the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed. In the

second stage, I argue that we can generalise from the examples to get the necessity claim.

The second step of the argument for the dilemma aims to show that, alongside the Theory-Neutral conditions, it is *sufficient* for communicative success that the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed. I call this the 'Argument from Successful Communication'. This argument also proceeds in two stages. In the first stage, I present a sub-argument which attempts to demonstrate that, on social externalism, there are examples in which it is enough for communicative success that the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed (assuming that the Theory-Neutral conditions are also satisfied). In the second stage of this argument, I argue that we can generalise from the examples to get the sufficiency claim.

If both the Argument from Miscommunication and the Argument from Successful Communication succeed, I will have shown that, on social externalism, similarity of cognitive perspective is both necessary and (jointly) sufficient for communicative success (alongside the Theory-Neutral conditions). In the third step of the argument, I argue that this result presents social externalism with a dilemma. This is because, if both arguments succeed, then *no* Content Relation is relevant to communicative success – neither identity *nor* similarity. However, if the social externalist attempts to reject my arguments, she must reject my diagnosis of the examples I present, and those like them. This leaves the social externalist with the following dilemma. Her choice is between (a), endorsing an account which gives plausible results as to which communicative exchanges are successful, but which renders the relationship between the mental content of the speaker and hearer *irrelevant* to communicative success or (b), endorsing an account which gives mental content a central role in facilitating communicative success, but which gives implausible results as to which exchanges are successful.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In Section 1, I present some examples of the kinds of views which my argument is opposed to. In Section 2, I present the Argument from Miscommunication and defend it from objections. In Section 3, I present the Argument from Successful Communication and defend it from objections. In Section 4, I present the dilemma for social externalism.

Section 1: Traditional Views of communicative success

My argument is opposed specifically to the combination of *social externalism* with *any* view of communicative success which rejects Similarity of Cognitive Perspective:

Similarity of Cognitive Perspective: A communicative exchange will succeed iff (a), the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied and (b), the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is *similar to* the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

I will call any such view a 'Traditional View' of communicative success. There are two kinds of Traditional View. The first kind claims that coordination of cognitive perspectives is *never* relevant to communicative success – I will call such views 'Fully-Traditional Views'. There are also views which allow that coordination of cognitive perspective is *sometimes* (but not always) relevant to communicative success. I will call any such view a 'Semi-Traditional View' of communicative success. Such views can include the combination of social externalism with *any* of the Content Relations (including the intermediary position which claims that shared content is sometimes, but not always, required for success); and with any of the versions of the Understanding Requirement presented in Chapter 2 *except* the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement. We could run a version of the argument by appeal to Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding. However, authors may object to this characterisation of understanding. Thus, to avoid the question of whether Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding *really is* what understanding an

interlocutor consists in, I am going to run the argument by appeal to cognitive perspective instead. I stress that my arguments are not against the Content Relations themselves, but only against the *combination* of social externalism with the Content Relations. As we will see, although my argument demonstrates that social externalism should not endorse *any* Content Relation, a version of the argument can be used to show that Holism *can* sensibly endorse SimConN.

In the following sub-sections, I will present two examples of views of communicative success which count as Traditional Views. These are views which reject the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement, and instead combine one of the Content Relations with one of the other Understanding Requirements presented in Chapter 2. Both of the views presented are Fully-Traditional Views.

1.1 The Liberal View of Communicative Success

One kind of Traditional View is an account which combines social externalism with SamConN and with Necessity of Subject-Insensitive Understanding.¹⁷⁴ I present these theses below.

SamConN: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the content of the terminal state of the hearer is the same as the content of the initial state of the speaker.

Necessity of Subject-Insensitive Understanding (SI-UnderstandingN): A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer *correctly* SI-Understands the content of the speaker's utterance (where a hearer can achieve this correct understanding by reliance on public linguistic norms).

Subject-insensitive understanding, recall, is a kind of understanding which is achieved purely by reliance on deference to a public language. That is, a hearer can 'correctly understand' a speaker's utterance merely by deferring to the language

¹⁷⁴ A different version of the view might appeal to SimConN instead of SamConN.

community with respect to the meaning of the utterance and the corresponding content expressed by it. Understanding is simply a matter of providing a correct interpretation of the speaker's utterance or thought content, where this interpretation will be correct when it satisfies the relevant Content Relation – SI-UnderstandingN is just the *means by which* SamConN is satisfied. A hearer can understand an utterance in this sense despite being quite mistaken as to the application-conditions of the terms involved in the utterance (and as to application-conditions of the corresponding concepts which these terms express). Given this particular combination of views, a Subject-Insensitive Understanding Requirement will be a Content Understanding Requirement *and* a Shared Understanding Requirement because both of these requirements are satisfied together when combined with social externalism and one of the Content Relations.¹⁷⁵

If we combine these two conditions with the further Theory-Neutral conditions introduced in Chapter 2, we get the following view. I will call this the 'Liberal View of Communicative Success' (or 'LVC', for short).

Liberal View of Communicative Success (LVC): A communicative attempt will succeed iff (a), the Theory Neutral Conditions are satisfied, (b) the content of the terminal state of the hearer is the same as the content of the initial state of the speaker, and (c), the hearer *correctly* SI-Understands the content of the speaker's utterance (where a hearer can achieve this correct understanding by reliance on the public linguistic norms).

This kind of account is based on an account presented in Goldberg (2007). Goldberg argues that sharing content is necessary for the exchange of knowledge through testimony, and thus opts for a version of LVC which endorses SamConN for the case of testimony. Further, he argues that a condition like SI-UnderstandingN is required for (reliably) satisfying SamConN.¹⁷⁶ LVC is very similar to the account proposed by Goldberg (2007). However, Goldberg is primarily concerned with the *epistemic*

¹⁷⁵ Given its appeal to public linguistic norms, SI-UnderstandingN really only makes sense on social externalism.

¹⁷⁶ Goldberg (2007) 79

dimension of communication.¹⁷⁷ Because LVC concerns mere communicative success rather than testimonial knowledge exchange, it is merely a ‘Goldberg-style’ account. As such, my arguments in this chapter are not intended to apply to Goldberg’s account of testimonial knowledge exchange. I will return to the issue of testimony in Chapter 6.

The reason that Goldberg opts for subject-insensitive understanding rather than the subject-sensitive model is because he wants an account of testimonial knowledge transmission which affords us a greater amount of object-level knowledge from communicative exchanges. Less liberal views would, he argues, instead have to claim that much of our testimonial knowledge is merely knowledge of the *truth* of the proposition attested to rather than object-level knowledge of the content of the proposition.¹⁷⁸ LVC is supposed to be correspondingly liberal with respect to the amount of communicative exchanges which count as successful. Supposedly, success is easily achieved *because of* the role of SI-understanding in securing reliable comprehension. If some form of SS-understanding is endorsed instead, many fewer communicative exchanges (including those which attempt to transmit testimonial knowledge) will be successful.

At this point, one might already think that LVC is implausible. That is, one may already believe that even a social externalist would wish to claim that subject-sensitive understanding must play a role in communicative success – communicative success shouldn’t be that easy. In the next section, I will present a different kind of Traditional View, which endorses the Subject-Sensitive Content Understanding Requirement.

1.2 The Conservative View of Communicative Success

Another kind of Traditional View is one which endorses the combination the following theses:

¹⁷⁷ See Goldberg (2001, 144) for his epistemic constraints on knowledge through testimony.

¹⁷⁸ Goldberg (2007) 72

SamConN: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the content of the terminal state of the hearer is the same as the content of the initial state of the speaker.¹⁷⁹

Necessity of Subject-Sensitive Content Understanding: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer possesses the correct cognitive perspective on the content she grasps (where standards for correctness are set by the language community).

If we combine these theses with the Theory-Neutral conditions, we can get the following view, which I will call the ‘Conservative View of Communicative Success’ (‘CVC’ for short):

Conservative View of Communicative Success (‘CVC’): A communicative attempt will succeed iff (a) the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied, (b) the content of the terminal state of the hearer is the same as the content of the initial state of the speaker, and (c) the hearer *correctly* SS-Understands the content of the speaker’s utterance to some specified degree (where this requires that the hearer’s cognitive perspective on the content communicated is correct relative to standards set by her community).

CVC is much more demanding than the LVC. On this view, a hearer cannot achieve correct comprehension of the speaker’s utterance or thought merely by deferring to experts. She can grasp the right *content* by deferring, but she will not count as having successfully communicated with the speaker unless she also possesses some degree of subject-sensitive understanding of the content she grasps.¹⁸⁰ As such, communication will much more often fail on this account.

¹⁷⁹ There is also a weaker version of this view which endorses SimConN instead of SamConN.

¹⁸⁰ If one thinks of SI-UnderstandingN as just the means by why SamConN is satisfied, one might think that *both* SI-UnderstandingN and Necessity of Subject-Sensitive Content Understanding are needed in this account.

LVC and CVC (when combined with social externalism) are two examples of views which my argument is opposed to. But there will surely be further views which can be constructed out of the conditions presented in Chapter 2. The upshot of my argument in the following sections is that no Traditional View states sufficient conditions on communicative success. I will argue that communication will fail *whenever* there is a significant discrepancy between the speaker and hearer's respective cognitive perspectives on the content communicated – and it is because of this discrepancy that communication fails.

Section 2: The Argument from Miscommunication

The Argument from Miscommunication is for the claim that social externalism should endorse the following thesis:

Necessity of Similarity of Cognitive Perspective: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

The Argument from Miscommunication is opposed to the combination of social externalism with any view which does not entail this thesis. This includes views which endorse any of the versions of the Understanding Requirement presented in Chapter 2 except the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement.

The argument proceeds in two stages. In the first stage of the argument, I simply wish to show that *there are examples* in which communicative success requires similarity between the cognitive perspectives of interlocutors (with respect to the content communicated). If the first stage succeeds, Fully-Traditional Views, which deny that coordination of cognitive perspectives is *ever* required for success, will not state sufficient conditions on communicative success. In the second stage of the argument, I will argue that we can generalise from these examples to get the

necessity claim. If this second stage succeeds then *all* Traditional Views (including the Semi-Traditional Views) will fail to state sufficient conditions on communicative success.

2.1 The Argument from Miscommunication – Stage 1

The following argument aims to show that *similarity* between the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps and the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed is, at least in some cases, required for communicative success.

Argument for sub-conclusion

- a1) On social externalism, there are examples in which communication fails and would succeed only if the hearer is put in a position to employ the communicated content in her cognitive economy in ways which enable her to attempt to satisfy the practical aim of the communicative attempt.
- a2) In these examples, the hearer would be put in such a position only if the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.
- aSC) Thus: On social externalism, there are examples in which communicative success requires that the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

2.2 Support for the premises

Support for the premises, (a1) and (a2), comes from consideration of examples. In order for these examples to support my argument, it must be the case that (a), they are most plausibly described as instances of miscommunication; (b), the miscommunication is explained by the fact that the hearer is not left in a position to use the content communicated to try to satisfy the aims of the communicative attempt (rather than explained by violations of some other condition such as those which

comprise LVC or CVC), and (c), if the hearer is to be left in such a position, it is required that she and the speaker occupy similar cognitive perspectives on the content communicated. I will present three examples below.

Example 1: 'Red Lobster'

A speaker, Sally, has partial grasp of the concept CRUSTACEAN. Her cognitive perspective on this concept mostly conforms with that of the experts in her community. However, it is slightly incorrect: she believes that an object can only be a crustacean if it is blue in colour. Sally utters (1) to her friend, Herbert, with the intention of getting Herbert to bring her a particular kind of object that must be blue.

(1) Bring me a crustacean.

Herbert's cognitive perspective on CRUSTACEAN conforms with community practice, and he doesn't know that Sally has partial grasp of CRUSTACEAN. As such, he takes Sally to have requested a crustacean of any colour. Because of this, he is not in a position to use the content to try and satisfy Sally's communicative aim. Wishing to do as she asks, he brings Sally a red lobster. Upon receiving the lobster, Sally is furious and reprimands Herbert for bringing her the wrong kind of object.

Example 2: 'Fortnight'

A speaker, Sophie, has partial grasp of the concept FORTNIGHT.¹⁸¹ Her cognitive perspective is such that she is disposed to apply the concept to a period of ten days. A hearer, Hamish, has a cognitive perspective on FORTNIGHT that is correct relative to the standards of his community: he applies FORTNIGHT to periods of fourteen days. He does not know of Sophie's deviant cognitive perspective. Sophie utters (2) to Hamish,

(2) Your job interview is in a fortnight.

¹⁸¹ Example adapted from Burge (1978) 121.

Sophie utters (2) with the intention of informing Hamish of when his job interview is. She takes herself to have expressed that it is in ten days. Hamish grasps the correct content. But because of his dissimilar cognitive perspective, he takes himself to have grasped something which is different to what Sophie took herself to be expressing. As such, he is not in a position to use the content to satisfy Sophie's communicative aim. He turns up four days late to the interview.

Example 3: 'Unlucky Child'

A child, Henry, who has been blind from birth, possesses standard understanding of the concept STEP. A speaker, Sabrina, although she has many true beliefs about steps, is mistaken as to their size. In particular, she believes that individual steps are each at least one hundred metres high and thus very dangerous. Henry is walking a mountain path. He passes Sabrina and asks her the following:

(3) Is it safe to continue along this path?

Sabrina responds with (4), with the intention of warning Henry that the path leads to a steep and tall drop.

(4) This path leads to some steps.

Due to his cognitive perspective on (4), Henry takes himself to come to believe that there are regular steps further along the path. As such, he cannot use the content he grasps in the way that Sabrina intended. He continues on his way and promptly tumbles to his death.

2.2.1 Diagnosis of the examples

I claim that these examples are instances of communication failure as a result of differences in cognitive perspective between speakers. As I will try to show, it is

required for success in the examples provided that the hearer be put in such a position. Premise (a1) claims that, in the examples, communication would have succeeded only if the hearer was left in a position to use the communicated content to try to satisfy the speaker's practical aim. Premise (a2) claims that, in the examples, it is only if the hearer occupies a similar cognitive perspective to the speaker that she will be in such a position. In what follows, I will explain how the examples presented support my argument.

Let's consider premise (a1) first. There are a number of ways to resist this premise. One way is to claim that communication actually *succeeds* in the examples, and so they aren't examples in which anything more is required for success. I will consider this objection later on. In the next section, I will consider an objection which claims that the examples I provided do not support my argument because communication fails for a different reason than is required for (a1) to be true.

2.2.2 Premise (a1) - Objection

Suppose an objector accepts that the various examples offered above are indeed examples of communication failure. One way to resist premise (a1) is to deny that the examples I have given actually support my argument. For my argument to be convincing, I must present examples which fail *because* cognitive perspectives are dissimilar. But an objector might try to claim that communication fails in the examples for some other reason. For example, they might claim that it fails because one of the conditions involved in a Fully-Traditional View, such as LVC or CVC, is violated. If this is so, the examples I give cannot be used to support my argument.

I think it is clear that the hearers in the examples satisfy Necessity of Subject-Sensitive Content Understanding: it is stipulated that they have correct understanding of the community concept, and the difference in cognitive perspectives is secured by giving the *speaker* a deviant understanding. One way to try to block the argument which might look promising, however, is to try and deny that SamConN is satisfied (and, with it, SI-UnderstandingN) – perhaps the speaker's understanding is just *too*

deviant. The objector can try to claim that the speakers involved are not to be attributed partial grasp of a community concept but, rather, that they possess idiosyncratic concepts. As such, their utterances and thoughts are to be reinterpreted accordingly. Sally does not possess the concept, CRUSTACEAN; Sophie does not possess the concept FORTNIGHT; and Sabrina does not possess the concept STEP. Because of this, we should think that communication fails *because* SamConN is violated – for only the hearers are in possession of the community concept.

I think this response to the argument would be completely disastrous for social externalism. This is so for a number of reasons. Firstly, one of the examples appealed to is actually an example which Burge himself treats as a case of partial grasp of a community concept, although he does not consider the issue of communicative success in particular. Burge uses the example of a subject who possesses the concept FORTNIGHT despite his dispositions to misapply the term to periods of ten days. Burge does think that misconceptions *can be* so severe that they call for attribution of an idiosyncratic concept to a subject rather than the community concept. For example, he writes,

There are also examples of quite radical misunderstandings that sometimes generate reinterpretation. If a generally competent and reasonable speaker thinks that ‘orangutan’ applies to a fruit drink, we would be reluctant, and it would unquestionably be misleading, to take his words as revealing that he thinks he has been drinking orangutans for breakfast for the last few weeks. Such total misunderstanding often *seems* to block literalistic mental content attribution, at least in cases where we are not directly characterizing his mistake.¹⁸²

But, directly following this passage, he suggests that the kind of incorrect understanding that a subject can possess can be really quite radical:

(Contrary to philosophical lore, I am not convinced that such a man cannot correctly and literally be attributed a belief that an orangutan is a kind of fruit drink. But I shall not deal with the point here.)¹⁸³

¹⁸² Burge (1979) 90–91

¹⁸³ Ibid

However, perhaps all this shows is that Burge's choice of example was ill-advised. Perhaps, in the cases just mentioned, the correct thing for the social externalist to say is that the subject does in fact possess an idiosyncratic concept and thus his utterances should be reinterpreted accordingly.

Goldberg, too, appears to have an extremely liberal view as to the conditions under which a subject can count as correctly representing (that is, SI-understanding) a speaker's utterance or thought content. For recall that on his account correct representation of an utterance is *guaranteed* by reliance on public linguistic norms. Thus it seems that nothing over minimal competence-plus-deference is required in order to understand an utterance (and, in doing so, grasp the correct content). Indeed, this liberality is supposed to be a motivation for Goldberg's view in the epistemology of testimony. But, once again, perhaps all my examples show is that a Goldberg-style account, too, should introduce stronger requirements on concept possession (and understanding).

Would introducing more demanding requirements on concept-possession enable the social externalist to avoid my argument? I think not. For Burge's argument for social externalism to work, it *must be* the case that a subject can grasp concepts despite making genuine conceptual errors.¹⁸⁴ But whenever there are these conceptual errors, we can exploit them to produce a case of communication failure due to differences in the way the concepts are deployed in the respective cognitive economies of the speaker and hearer. To avoid this result, a social externalist would have to claim that the conditions on possession of a concept are such that they exclude conceptual errors. But then the argument for social externalism no longer goes through, for we now have grounds to reinterpret a subject's utterances in *all* cases which attribute conceptual errors to the subject. If this is so, a subject's concepts are no longer dependent for their individuation on the practices of the community. Alf, for example, no longer possesses the community concept ARTHRITIS but, because of his conceptual error, possesses an idiosyncratic concept after all. In fact, things are even worse than this; for my argument does not even need to appeal to examples involving

¹⁸⁴ For discussion of the role of conceptual errors in Burge's argument, see Wikforss (2001, 2004) and Sawyer (2003).

conceptual errors – a simple empirical error would be enough. I think the first example, ‘Red Lobster’, might count as a case in which the speaker makes a mere empirical rather than a genuine conceptual error. It does not seem to be a conceptual truth that lobsters are any colour in particular. But then, to deny the example, the social externalist would have to claim that subjects who make mere empirical errors do not grasp the community concept. If they do this, there is simply no way to salvage social externalism: for now even when subjects make small mistakes, they are no longer to be attributed community concepts.

Furthermore, even if the social externalist maintains this much more demanding notion of the conditions on conceptual grasp, this will essentially smuggle cognitive perspective into the account through a back door. For now, although cognitive perspective is not required as a *further* condition on communicative success, it *is* required as a condition on concept acquisition. This is an extremely demanding view of concept acquisition. And it is a far more demanding view of communicative success than that endorsed by even the more demanding Traditional Views such as CVC. Claiming that subjects must be disposed to employ their concepts correctly (that is, without conceptual, or even minor empirical, error) if they are to count as grasping them is essentially to claim that they must have the right cognitive perspective on each of their concepts – for we defined cognitive perspective in terms of how subjects are disposed to employ these concepts in their cognitive economy. And, given this requirement, all subjects who possess incorrect dispositions, including all those in the examples above, will fail to successfully communicate with those concepts.

To summarize: claiming that the examples I have provided (and others like them) are examples in which the subjects in question do not possess the relevant concepts would be (a) to deny social externalism, (b) to concede that coordination of cognitive perspectives is required for communicative success (insofar as it is required for concept possession) and (c) to endorse an extremely demanding view of communicative success. Thus, this response is completely untenable.

2.2.3 Premise (a1) - Explaining communication failure

Claiming that communication fails due to violation of SamConN does not appear to be a good strategy for resisting the argument. Another way to resist my argument would be to claim that communication hasn't failed after all in the examples. In this section, I will try to motivate the claim that, in the examples, communication does indeed fail. And, further, that it fails due to the fact that the hearer is not left in a position to employ the content she grasps in an attempt to satisfy the communicative aim of the speaker.

What motivates this claim is consideration of the *reasons* for which the speakers attempted to communicate with each of the hearers in the examples. In each of the examples, the speakers attempted to communicate for a very particular practical purpose. I mean to understand 'practical purpose' in quite a liberal way here. The speakers attempted to communicate with the hearers because they wanted to prompt the hearers to *do* something: either to recognise something about the world, to reason in a particular way, or to perform a particular action (as a result of some process of reasoning). In communicating, the speakers were trying to get the hearers to grasp a content which they could employ in satisfying these practical purposes. But, in each example, the hearers could not even *attempt* to use the content grasped to satisfy this aim of communication. In 'Red Lobster', the speaker attempted to communicate with the intention of procuring a particular kind of object. But the hearer identified a different set of objects from the speaker as the objects of discussion; as such, he was not in a position to try to retrieve the object that the speaker took herself to desire. In 'Fortnight', the speaker attempted to communicate with the intention of getting the hearer to turn up at his job interview on the right day. But the hearer could not use the content grasped in such a way that would lead to him turning up on time. In 'Unlucky Child', the speaker attempted to communicate with the intention of warning the hearer that the path ahead was dangerous. But the hearer could not recognise that he had been warned as a result of the communicative exchange and consequently tumbled to his death. In each case, there was a specific aim of the communicative attempt and, in each case, something prevented the hearers from

being able to try to satisfy this aim. To claim that communication succeeds in the examples is to disregard these aims. This would be to claim one of two things. Firstly, one could claim that the reasons that speakers in the examples wanted to communicate successfully was for some other purpose; but it is unclear what other reason the speakers would have been communicating for such that these exchanges should be counted as successes. For example, when Sophie utters ‘Your job interview is in a fortnight’ to Hamish, it is not clear what further aims she could have other than to inform Hamish that his job interview is in ten days so that he might make it there on time. Alternatively, the objector could agree that the speakers attempted to communicate for the reasons I identified, but claim that the communicative aims of speakers are not relevant to adjudicating communicative success and failure. However, it would be bizarre to claim that the reasons for which the speakers in the examples attempted to communicate are irrelevant to whether the exchanges should be judged successful or not.

If we accept my proposed explanation of why communication fails in the examples, I think we should accept that, in the examples, communicative success requires that the hearer is placed in a position to use the content he grasps to attempt to satisfy the practical aims of the communicative attempt. Other than these practical aims, there were no other reasons for which each speaker attempted to communicate. Thus, if anything is required for success, it should be that the hearer is placed in a position to use the content to satisfy these practical aims. Note that I am not claiming that successful communication in the examples requires the coordination of *action*.¹⁸⁵ I am merely claiming that it requires that the hearer is put *in a position to attempt* to act in accordance with the speakers’ wishes if they chose to. All I mean by this is that the hearer should be able to employ the communicated content in her cognitive economy in a way which the speaker would deem appropriate, and which could result in her attempting to perform the desired action. The hearer should recognise similar conceptual connections and inferential relations as the speaker. Otherwise she will not be disposed to reason with the communicated content in the same way that the speaker does. And, as such, she will not be disposed to employ it in a way that

¹⁸⁵ For an account of communicative success which appeals to action coordination, see Paul (1999).

would lead to the satisfaction of the speaker's aim. For example, for the exchange in 'Fortnight' to succeed, it is merely required that Hamish is in a position to employ the content he grasps in an attempt to make it to his job interview. He should recognise what Sophie was trying to tell him and be in a position to use this information in his reasoning such that he can attempt to get to the interview in ten days. He may, after the successful communicative attempt, still not make it. He might decide that he doesn't want the job; or he may get hit by a bus on his way to the interview. What is required for success, I claim, is that he *can* use the content to *try* to get to the interview. Successful coordination of action is, I think, a *symptom* of communicative success, but it is in no way constitutive of it, nor does it reliably indicate it. A hearer might be in a position to use the content she grasps as the speaker intended, and yet she may still fail to comply with the speaker's aims for any number of reasons. Similarly, a hearer can accidentally act as the speaker desired even when she is not capable of deliberately employing the content she grasps in an attempt to do so. For example, in 'Fortnight', suppose Hamish, after miscommunicating, incorrectly thinks that his interview is in fourteen days. He may still succeed in turning up to the interview in ten days if, for example, he forgets what day it is. In such a case, even if he does accidentally satisfy the speaker's aim of communication, he does not *use the content* to satisfy this aim.

2.2.4 Premise (a2)

Suppose we have established (a), that my examples are indeed examples in which communication fails and (b), in the examples, success requires that the hearer is put in a position to use the content she grasps to attempt to comply with the speaker's communicative aims. That leaves premise (a2): that the hearer will be placed in such a position only if she possesses a similar cognitive perspective to that of the speaker. I think this premise should be relatively uncontroversial. Cognitive perspective, recall, is defined in terms of a subject's dispositions to employ content in her cognitive economy. As such, two subjects will possess similar cognitive perspectives on a content *if and only if* they are disposed to employ that content in similar ways. Similarly, two subjects will possess dissimilar cognitive perspectives on a content if

and only if they are disposed to employ that content in dissimilar ways. Above, I claimed that all it is for a hearer to be in a position to employ the content she grasps in the appropriate way is for her to be disposed to employ it in her cognitive economy in ways similar to how the speaker would. As such, it is only if they possess similar cognitive perspectives that the hearer will be in the appropriate position. If the hearer possesses a dissimilar cognitive perspective to the speaker, she will be disposed to employ the content she grasps in different ways, and thus will not be in a position to employ it as the speaker does. If she can't use the content as the speaker intended, then she cannot (deliberately) use the content to satisfy the particular aim for which the speaker communicated. It is only if she is disposed to employ the communicated content in her cognitive economy in a similar way to how the speaker would that she will be able to use the content to satisfy the speaker's communicative aims. Nothing else will put her in such a position. If she, for example, grasps the right content but does not cognize this content as the speaker does, she will not employ it as the speaker intended it to be employed. As the examples demonstrate, even if she cognizes it *correctly*, she still will not be disposed to employ it as the speaker would unless the speaker also cognizes it correctly (and thus possesses a similar cognitive perspective).

If the examples above are convincing, we will have it that *coordination of cognitive perspectives is (at least sometimes) required for communicative success*. One consequence of the success of the first stage is that the Fully-Traditional Views (for example, CVC and LVC) do not state sufficient conditions on communicative success. I now want to move on to the second stage of the argument and suggest that *all* examples are going to be like examples (1)-(3) above. For all communicative exchanges, it is only if cognitive perspectives are similar that communication will succeed. If this second stage succeeds, the upshot is that *no* Traditional View states sufficient conditions on communicative success.

2.3 Argument from Miscommunication – Stage 2

Stage 1 of the argument purported to show that there are examples in which similarity of cognitive perspectives (on the content communicated) between interlocutors is required for communicative success. In the following sub-sections, I will give reasons for thinking we can generalise from the examples to conclude that similarity of cognitive perspective is necessary for communicative success. I think that the examples I have provided have some intuitive clout. But, in what follows, I will offer further reasons for thinking that all examples will be like the ones presented above. I will present additional examples intended to cover a wide range of different kinds of communicative exchanges, and I will offer some general considerations which I think are motivated by features which are common to all of the examples presented here (and which should apply to *all* communicative exchanges). The considerations which weigh in favour of the necessity claim come largely from further considering *why* it is that we wish to communicate with each other. The reason that we should consider the coordination of cognitive perspectives to be essential to accounts of communicative success is that communication *always* has certain practical aims – we always communicate for some particular reason, even if it is just to get the hearer to recognise how we take the world to be. And hearers cannot use content to try to satisfy these aims unless they possess a similar cognitive perspective to the speaker. What are our practical aims, and what would enable us to satisfy them? To help answer these questions, I will consider an objection to the claim that, for all exchanges, similarity of cognitive perspectives is necessary for communicative success.

2.3.1 Objection

An objector might try denying that communication fails when cognitive perspectives are dissimilar. Indeed, a defender of a Fully-Traditional View may even think that in the examples presented above communication did not fail.¹⁸⁶ They may insist that

¹⁸⁶ An objector can, of course, agree that communication fails due to dissimilarities in cognitive perspectives in the examples above but resist my claim that coordination of cognitive perspectives is necessary for communicative success. This approach can be taken by Semi-Traditional Views.

communication succeeds just fine. Perhaps something does go wrong but, if so, this is independent of communicative success. What goes wrong may indeed be explained by appeal to the differences in cognitive perspectives between subjects: if subjects possess dissimilar cognitive perspectives, this may prevent them from having the opportunity to use the (successfully) communicated content in the way intended by the speaker. But, so the objection might go, this is a separate issue from whether communication succeeded in the first place.

2.3.2 Reply

In response, I think we should consider why we want to communicate successfully.¹⁸⁷ Amongst other things, we want to discover how our interlocutors take the world to be and to convey to them how we take the world to be. In doing so, we will enable each other to better navigate the world. As it stands, this is something that defenders of the various Traditional Views would agree with. Goldberg, for example, advocates SamConN and SI-UnderstandingN precisely to ensure that the hearer, when successful, represents the world in *exactly* the same way as the speaker. Both sides of the debate should agree that communicative success is a matter of the speaker causing the hearer to come to see how she (the speaker) takes things to be.¹⁸⁸ However, there are (at least) two ways to understand what this consists in.

On certain of the Traditional Views, ‘coming to see how the speaker takes the world to be’ is a matter of the hearer correctly representing, or understanding, the content of the speaker’s utterance or thought, where this is accomplished by grasping the correct content and understanding this content in a way which is *correct* in some way. On LVC, for example, this is a matter of grasping the correct content through SI-understanding. On CVC this is a matter of the hearer SS-understanding the content correctly. On both these views, the emphasis is on *correct* representation (and understanding) of *content*. On the other hand, ‘coming to see how the speaker represents the world’ might instead be a matter of the hearer grasping the speaker’s

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Heck (1995) 84

¹⁸⁸ Or, at least, how she *claims* she takes things to be – she might lie.

cognitive perspective on the content of her utterance: this would be for her to grasp how the speaker is disposed to reason with that content, and to grasp the way in which the speaker takes her concepts to represent the objects to which they apply. The question I must answer is: why should we prefer a view of communication upon which it is *always* the successful conveyance of our cognitive perspective which is important? I will here offer several further considerations in favour of this position.

Firstly, it is more plausible that it is a speaker's cognitive perspective on a given content that she is *trying* to convey. After all, it is only her cognitive perspective on the inferential and representational properties of the content that she can cognize. The actual inferential and representational properties of that content are opaque to her. Thus, it is her cognitive perspective that she *takes herself* to be conveying. In cases of partial grasp, she may not even assent to the content of her attitudes and utterances when what they actually represent is revealed to her. For example, recall Sophie from 'Fortnight', who is disposed to apply the concept FORTNIGHT to a period of ten days. Suppose she asserts,

(5) The party is in a fortnight.

It is surely more plausible that she is trying to communicate that the party is in ten days, rather than that it is in fourteen. This is what she takes herself to be conveying, and it is what she wants the hearer to grasp. If she is made aware of her incorrect grasp of FORTNIGHT, she will claim that she *wasn't* trying to communicate that the party was in fourteen days. It seems strange to insist that it is the content of our utterances or thoughts that we are trying to convey when we don't fully grasp what that content is. It will be of no use to us to convey this content if we don't grasp what it is that we have conveyed. This brings us to a second consideration: it is the conveyance of the subject's cognitive perspective on the content communicated that is of practical use to her when it comes to navigating the world.

We don't just want to receive information for its own sake; we want to be able to put our wisdom to work, to be able to employ it effectively in our reasoning and actions.

All the examples, (1)-(3), above were examples in which the hearers, in some sense, failed to learn something about the world as a result of the mismatch in cognitive perspectives between interlocutors. Herbert failed to learn what kind of object he was supposed to be retrieving; Hamish failed to learn when his job interview was; and Henry failed to learn that he was strolling towards his untimely death. It is only if their cognitive perspectives had been calibrated with the speakers' that these hearers would have been able to put the information gained to good use – and this would be so even though they misunderstood the contents which they grasped.

I now turn to a third consideration for favouring my position. One further reason that we communicate with others is to find out information about the *attitudes* of our interlocutors so that we can predict and make sense of their actions. But, when it comes to predicting someone's actions, it is only grasping her cognitive perspective which is of use to us, and this, again, is not something which is necessarily captured by the content of her utterances and thoughts. For example, as an extension of the 'Fortnight' example, suppose Sophie utters (6) to Hamish.

(6) I will meet you at the party in a fortnight

If Hamish wants to know how Sophie will act, it is Sophie's cognitive perspective on (6) that is useful to grasp. Correctly grasping the content of (6) alone will lead Hamish to predict that Sophie will meet him at a party in fourteen days. But this *isn't* what Sophie is going to do. To correctly anticipate how Sophie will act, Hamish needs to know that Sophie's cognitive perspective on FORTNIGHT is idiosyncratic in a particular way.

A fourth consideration in favour my position is the following. In cases in which a speaker is aware that her audience possesses a divergent cognitive perspective to her own, she will not be content to *merely* satisfy the conditions which comprise certain of the Traditional Views. In such cases, she will offer further information which will increase coordination of cognitive perspectives between her and her audience so that the hearer will be put in a position to satisfy her communicative aim. Let's first

consider LVC. Once again, consider Sophie and Hamish from ‘Fortnight’. Suppose Sophie utters (7) to a third interlocutor, Kate.

(7) Is the party in a fortnight?

Suppose that Kate knows of Sophie’s non-standard cognitive perspective on FORTNIGHT and that she believes that the party is indeed in a fortnight. If all that matters to communicative success (in addition to the Theory-Neutral conditions) is that SamConN and SI-UnderstandingN are satisfied, there would be nothing inappropriate about Kate answering Sophie by uttering (8),

(8) Yes, the party is in a fortnight.

The conditions which comprise LVC will be satisfied and communication between the two will allegedly have been successful. However, if Kate is aware of Sophie’s misconception, she will not answer with (8). Rather, she will feel the need to offer further information. For example, she may utter (9),

(9) Yes, but a fortnight is two weeks long.

I submit that the most plausible explanation for why she does this is to *improve communication*. That is, she believes that communication will fail unless she offers this further information that will coordinate Sophie’s cognitive perspective with her own. Indeed, it seems that Kate would be blameworthy *qua* interlocutor if she didn’t offer this further information. The defender of LVC must maintain that she offers this information for some other reason which is not relevant to communicative success: that Kate was indeed trying to avert some mishap, but that this mishap was not one of communication failure. This seems extremely implausible – what other kind of mishap could she have been trying to avert? I think it is plausible that cooperative speakers will *always* behave this way and that speakers would always be blameworthy for not doing so. Thus, at the very least, the burden rests on the defenders of Traditional Views to suggest some alternative explanation for why

speakers do this, or to come up with examples in which cooperative speakers do not do this.

What of CVC? The above example does not work against it. This is because CVC can still claim that Kate offers this information so that Sophie's cognitive perspective is rendered *correct*, but not necessarily so that it is rendered similar to her own. However, we can set up a similar example to thwart CVC as well. Suppose Sophie is talking to Hamish (who, recall, has correct cognitive perspective on FORTNIGHT, but does not know that Sophie's cognitive perspective is incorrect). Suppose Hamish asks Sophie,

(10) Is the party in a fortnight?

Sophie believes that the party is in ten days, and thus responds by uttering 'Yes'. However, suppose a third party, Mary, overhears the exchange, and is aware of the difference between Hamish and Sophie's cognitive perspectives on FORTNIGHT. Mary will tell Hamish that Sophie thinks that a fortnight is ten days long and, as such, that she was trying to tell him that the party is in ten days and not that it is in fourteen. I submit that the reason that Mary does this is to improve communication between Sophie and Hamish. Hamish would justifiably be angry with Mary if she did not offer this information. But if all that is required for communicative success is that the hearer grasp the correct content and correctly SS-understand this content, then there would have to be a different explanation of why Mary informs Hamish of Sophie's deviant cognitive perspective. Again, I think the only plausible explanation of Mary's actions is that she wanted to avert communication failure between Sophie and Hamish and, further, that cooperative subjects will always behave this way. At the very least, Traditional Views owe us an alternative explanation, or a counterexample.

So far, I have focused on cases in which subjects either, in some sense, failed to learn something about the world, failed to learn something about their interlocutors, or offered further information in order to *avert* this kind of failure. More accurately, we

should say that, in the first two cases, the hearers failed to *recognise* that they had learned these things as, strictly speaking, they mostly succeeded in forming the right beliefs based on what they were told; they were just unable to attain the appropriate cognitive perspective on the content they grasped. Note that satisfying the conditions which comprise certain of the Traditional Views alone won't even guarantee that the hearer is put *in a position* to learn what the speaker took themselves to be saying if the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content was non-standard: one may fully grasp the (broad) content of a speaker's utterance and still not grasp what it is that the speaker took herself to be communicating. It is never enough to correctly represent the content of the speaker's utterance, or even to correctly SS-understand it; we need to grasp the speaker's cognitive perspective on that content, otherwise the content grasped will be useless to us – we cannot act on it or reason with it effectively because we do not comprehend how it was intended to be cognized and employed. Why would we value successful communication if the information gained wasn't guaranteed to be of use to us in the ways described above?

Finding out about the world, and finding out about the attitudes of interlocutors are just two examples of communicative goals for which similarity of cognitive perspective is required. There are surely many other communicative goals we could consider in support of the argument. My claim is that *all* of these goals will be thwarted unless cognitive perspectives are similar across communication partners. Consider, for example, that a speaker cannot (deliberately) make a hearer laugh unless the hearer has similar cognitive perspective on the content of the speaker's joke; nor can she insult the hearer or lie to her, if the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content of her insults and lies is different from the speaker's. It also seems plausible that a hearer will fail to pick up on the intended pragmatic implicatures of an utterance unless her cognitive perspective on the literal meaning of the utterance that the speaker was trying to convey is similar to the speaker's. As an example of this last point, consider that if you ask me if Jones is a good philosopher, and I respond with 'Jones is an efficient administrator', you will only pick up on the fact that I am trying to implicate that Jones is a bad philosopher if your cognitive perspective on 'administrator' is similar to mine. If your cognitive perspective on

‘administrator’ is such that you apply the term to good reasoners, for example, then you will fail to grasp the intended implicature.

In the above, I have tried to offer further support for thinking that we can generalise from the examples given. The argument I have provided is not a knock-down argument. Rather, I have presented an array of examples intended to cover a wide range of cases and offered reasons for thinking that all examples of communicative exchanges will be like these. A defender of the Semi-Traditional Views can, of course, agree with my diagnoses of the individual examples and still try to resist my move to the necessity claim. However, I think the burden of proof is now on these views to provide counterexamples to the necessity claim. Underlying my argument is the idea that communication always has a particular practical aim, and it is only if we occupy a similar cognitive perspective to our interlocutors that we will be in a position to attempt to satisfy the practical aims of communication. If the defenders of Traditional Views continue to maintain that the exchanges presented (or others like them) really are cases of communicative success, then I think the kind of success that these views afford us doesn’t look like something we should be interested in achieving. A more interesting class of exchanges, which we might call ‘valuable successful communication’, are those which are of use to us when it comes to (amongst other things) determining how our interlocutors take the world to be, predicting how they will reason and act, and determining how to fulfil or thwart their desires. A hearer who can coordinate her cognitive perspective with that of her interlocutor is *always* in a better position to navigate the world – and the subjects within it – than a hearer who merely grasps the correct content of those utterances, or who merely SS-understands correctly.

2.4 The role of cognitive perspective

If my argument has been successful thus far, I have demonstrated that, on social externalism, it is necessary for communicative success that the hearer’s cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker’s cognitive perspective

on the content she expressed. Given this, I think the social externalist should add the following condition to those which comprise the Traditional Views.

Necessity of Similarity of Cognitive Perspective: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

I will have much more to say, both about the precise role that cognitive perspective plays in communicative success and about the nature of the similarity involved, in Chapter 4. As we will see, the way in which cognitive perspective is best employed is actually more complicated than this statement above. The position which I will eventually defend is one which claims that communication succeeds *simpliciter* to the degree that cognitive perspectives are similar, rather than one which claims that some particular degree of similarity of cognitive perspective is necessary for communicative success. However, I will also claim that, relative to any particular aim of communication, a threshold of *relevant* similarity will be set by the context. It is this second facet of the view which the arguments of this chapter support. For now though, this rough sketch will suffice.

Note that if a social externalist is to endorse Necessity of Similarity of Cognitive Perspective, this will drastically alter the Traditional Views which the thesis is added to. For example, this would require giving up the liberality of LVC, for the view is no longer liberal with respect to the amount of communicative exchanges which count as successful. One of the distinctive characteristics of LVC was that it allows for communicative success even in cases where subjects have minimal or highly dissimilar grasp of the concepts involved in the communicated content. But, as I have tried to show, this kind of liberality is inappropriate: it judges certain exchanges to be successful when they are unsuccessful. It should also be noted that CVC would become *extremely* demanding. This is because, in maintaining SS-Content Understanding, it already required that the hearer's cognitive perspective be correct. But because it now requires that the speaker's cognitive perspective is similar to the

hearer's, it will also require that both the speaker and hearer have correct cognitive perspectives.

Of course, *adding* Necessity of Similarity of Cognitive Perspective to the various conditions which comprise Traditional Views is not the only option for the social externalist. One option that might look sensible is to, for example, *replace* whichever Understanding Requirement is endorsed with the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement. This is the approach which I think the social externalist should endorse. However, I have not yet shown that SI-Understanding and Subject-Sensitive Content Understanding are not needed in an account of communicative success; thus, it is not yet clear that these conditions should be replaced. At best, I have shown that neither are (jointly) sufficient alongside the various other conditions which comprise the respective views of which they are a part. One consequence of my argument in the next section will be that these conditions, alongside the Content Relations, are also not necessary for communicative success *on the assumption of social externalism*.

Section 3: The Argument from Successful Communication

The Argument from Successful Communication is for the claim that social externalism should endorse the following thesis.

Sufficiency of Similarity of Cognitive Perspective: A communicative attempt will succeed if (a) the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied, and (b) the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

Like the Argument from Miscommunication, this argument also proceeds in two stages. In the first stage of the argument, I simply wish to show that there are examples in which (assuming satisfaction of the Theory-Neutral Conditions) communication succeeds when cognitive perspectives are similar across

interlocutors. This will be so even in the absence of the satisfaction of the kinds of conditions distinctive of the Traditional Views. As such, none of SimConN, SamConN,¹⁸⁹ SI-Understanding or SS-Content Understanding are necessary for communicative success. In the second stage of the argument, I will argue that we can generalise from these examples to get the sufficiency claim. If this second stage succeeds, the upshot will be that the conditions distinctive of Fully-Traditional Views are *never* required for communicative success.

3.1 The Argument from Successful Communication

The following argument purports to show that there are examples of communicative exchanges in which, assuming that the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied, similarity of cognitive perspective is all that is needed to secure communicative success.

Argument for sub-conclusion

- b1) On social externalism, there are examples in which (assuming satisfaction of the Theory-Neutral conditions) communication succeeds if the hearer is put in a position to employ the content she grasps in her cognitive economy in ways which enable her to attempt to satisfy the practical aim of the communicative attempt.
- b2) In these examples, if the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed then the hearer will be left in such a position.
- bSC) Thus: (Assuming satisfaction of the Theory-Neutral conditions) On social externalism, there are examples in which it is enough for communicative success that the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

3.2 Support for the premises

¹⁸⁹ It would be enough to demonstrate that SimConN is not needed, as it is weaker than SamConN.

Much as before, support for the premises, (b1) and (b2), will come from examples. These are supposed to be cases in which (a) communication succeeds, (b) it is enough for communicative success that the hearer is put in a position to employ the content she grasps in her cognitive economy such that she can attempt to satisfy the aims of the communicative attempt (alongside satisfaction of the Theory-Neutral conditions), and (c) for the hearer to be put in such a position, it is enough that cognitive perspectives are coordinated. I will here present three examples.

Example 1: ‘Biscuit’

Consider two separate language communities, one on Earth and one on Twin Earth. On Earth, the concept, BISCUIT, applies only to small baked goods which become softer when stale. On Twin Earth the concept, THISCUIT, which is also expressed with the word-form, ‘biscuit’, applies in a somewhat different way. It applies only to small baked goods which become harder when stale. As such, although the two concepts have some similarities, they are markedly different: there is not even an overlap in their extensions. These two communities, being Twin-communities, are identical except for this fact. Now consider two subjects: Sasha on Earth, and Harry on Twin Earth.¹⁹⁰ Sasha has the same cognitive perspective on BISCUIT as Harry does on THISCUIT. Both apply ‘biscuit’ only to small baked goods which become softer when stale. (Harry has incorrect cognitive perspective relative to his community, whereas Sasha does not.) Now suppose that the Earthling speaker, Sasha, travels (somehow, and without her knowledge) from Earth to Twin Earth and finds herself sitting by a coffee table opposite Harry. There are two plates in front of her. One is a plate of custard creams and the other is a plate of Jaffa Cakes. Sasha utters (11),

(11) Please pass me a biscuit.

Harry, upon hearing (11), picks up the plate of custard creams and passes it to Sasha. Due to his cognitive perspective on (11), Harry took Sasha to have requested an item

¹⁹⁰ They need not be microphysical duplicates.

from the plate containing small baked goods which become softer when stale. And he was able to comply with her request as a result.

Example 2: 'Fortnight 2'

Let's consider another Twin-scenario. On Earth, the concept FORTNIGHT applies to a time period that is fourteen days long. On Twin-Earth, the counterpart concept, THORTNIGHT applies to a time period which is ten days long. Now imagine two subjects, Sonya on Earth and Heath on Twin Earth. Sonya has the same cognitive perspective on FORTNIGHT as Heath does on THORTNIGHT. Both subjects are disposed to apply the term 'fortnight' to a time period which is fourteen days long (only Sonya possesses the correct cognitive perspective on her concept relative to her language community). Now imagine that Sonya (somehow, and without her knowledge) travels to Twin Earth. There she meets Heath and utters (12),

(12) Meet me at the abandoned church in a fortnight.

Given that the two occupy similar cognitive perspectives, Heath will take himself to come to believe something very similar to what Sonya took herself to have expressed. As such, Sonya will succeed in the aim for which she communicated: to inform Heath (or, to get Heath to take himself to come to believe) that he should meet her at the abandoned church in fourteen days. And, assuming Heath actually wants to comply with Sonya's request and is able to, they can succeed in coordinating their actions as a result of this exchange.

Example 3: 'Lucky Child'

The last two examples appealed to what were quite significant differences in content between the speaker and hearer. This third example involves an exchange in which there are potentially *vast* differences of content between the speaker and hearer. In the example, I present a speaker who appears to learn a language which appears to be exactly like English, but who does so purely by luck in an environment that is

isolated from *all* language communities. This example is somewhat similar to Davidson's 'Swampman', although I do not intend to use it for the same purpose. It also has an advantage over Davidson's example in that, although it is highly artificial, it does not require us to stretch our credulity as to the possibility of massively complex objects being transformed by bolts of lightning (in Davidson's example, lightning transforms a tree into a human).¹⁹¹ Imagine the following scenario.

A wealthy scientist constructs a large laboratory which contains a life-size model village. He populates the village with androids whose external surfaces superficially perfectly resemble human beings. Importantly, inside they are nothing like human beings: they run on very simple programs which do not, and are not intended to, model human cognition. Specifically, the androids are merely programmed to emit sounds and perform movements *completely at random*. The sounds can be made up of any number and combination of phonemes from spoken English. The movements that they can perform are limited to the range of movements possible for a human body. In a house in the laboratory village, the scientist places a newborn human child and, through use of video and audio surveillance, observes what happens. In most of the experiments the scientist doesn't get very interesting results. However, he repeats the experiment with further infant subjects over and over again. By sheer luck, in one of the experiments, the random movements performed, and sounds emitted, by the robots perfectly resemble that of two new and responsible English-speaking parents and, by continued luck, the androids appear to raise the child in a manner that perfectly resembles the way that humans would raise a human infant. As a result of the random inputs from the androids, the child begins to produce noises that sound just like English. By sheer chance, within a few years the child perfectly resembles a normal English speaker. In particular, her brain functions exactly as a normal girl of her age. After ten years of remarkably good luck, the scientist releases the child into a real town full of real humans. The child – let's call her Sue – approaches a boy, Hercule, standing by a barn and, pointing to the barn utters (13),

¹⁹¹ See Davidson (1987) 443–444.

(13) There is a horse in the barn.

Let us suppose that Hercule possesses a highly similar cognitive perspective on his HORSE concept to the cognitive perspective that Sue occupies with respect to her own concept, HORSE_S. However, relative to the standards set by his community, Hercule's HORSE concept is quite incorrect. Let us suppose he thinks that horses are really just two humans in a costume. Sue also employs 'horse' in this way. According to a social externalist, the exchange cannot have satisfied SamConN or SimConN (nor has it satisfied SI-Understanding-N or SS-Content Understanding). Sue is not part of *any* language community, let alone the one of which Hercule is a member. As such, Hercule cannot grasp the correct content. Nonetheless, supposing that the two subjects cognize the distinct contents in similar ways, Hercule will take himself to grasp something that is very similar to what Sue took herself to be expressing. He will employ (13) in his reasoning in ways that Sue would deem appropriate. For example, they may both employ it in (what they take to be) the same inferences: 'That is a horse, so that is alive', 'That is a horse so that is a pair of animals', 'That is a horse so that is two humans', etc. The two can go on to at least *appear* to have a non-defective conversation about the horse, although, according to the Fully-Traditional Views, they are repeatedly failing.

3.2.1 Diagnosis of the Examples

I claim that the above examples are examples of communicative success due to similarities in the cognitive perspectives of interlocutors (alongside satisfaction of the Theory-Neutral conditions). It is enough for communicative success in the examples that cognitive perspectives are coordinated. Premise (b1) claims that communication succeeds in the examples, and it is enough for success that the hearer is put in a position to employ the content she grasps in her cognitive economy such that she can attempt to satisfy the aim for which the speaker communicated (assuming the Theory-Neutral conditions are also satisfied). Premise (b2) claims that, in the examples, if cognitive perspectives are coordinated then the hearer will be put

in such a position. In what follows, I will describe how the examples provided support my argument.

3.2.2 Premise (b1)

The reasons why we should think that the examples involve communicative success are similar to the reasons for positing miscommunication in my Argument from Miscommunication. That is, motivation comes from considering why the various speakers in the examples attempted to communicate. Once again, in each case, the speakers attempted to communicate for a very particular purpose. They attempted to communicate with the hearers because they wanted to prompt the hearers to do something: either to reason in a particular way, or to perform a particular action (as a result of some act of reasoning). In each case, the hearers could attempt to do these things as a result of each communicative exchange. Importantly, it is not clear that there were any other purposes for which the speakers attempted to communicate such that these exchanges should be considered failures.

In ‘Biscuit’, Sasha’s communicative goal was to get Harry to pass her the plate of custard creams, and this she achieved. Harry seems to have perfectly-well grasped what Sasha took herself to be requesting and was able to attempt to comply with her request as a result. There seems to be nothing more that could improve communication between the interlocutors. Given that Sasha and Harry’s cognitive perspectives were similar (and assuming Harry has the means and inclination to comply with Sasha’s requests), Harry would *never* have passed Sasha anything other than what she expected (in particular, he would never hand her a Jaffa Cake, for his cognitive perspective on THISCUIT is such that he is not disposed to apply ‘Biscuit’ to Jaffa Cakes). In fact, if he *did* understand the content he grasped *correctly*, he would not have been able to attempt to satisfy Sasha’s communicative aim – he would have taken her to be making a different request and would have passed her the Jaffa Cakes instead. Thus, satisfaction of the requirements which comprise the certain of the Traditional Views, far from being required for success, would actually hinder it.

In 'Fortnight 2', Sonya communicated with the intention of arranging a meeting with Heath. And, as a result of the exchange, Heath was perfectly able to try and do as Sonya asked even though he grasped the wrong content *and* misunderstood what he grasped. It is not clear what more we could ask of the interlocutors such that communication would be improved. There seems to be nothing defective about the communicative exchange. Imagine, for example, that Sonya learns of the difference between her and Heath. Suppose that when Heath arrives at the church she apologetically informs him that their previous communicative exchange had actually failed. Heath would surely be confused. After all, he made it to the church by using the information gained in their previous exchange. What more could she want? And what grounds could she have for considering the exchange a failure?

In 'Lucky Child', Sue attempted to communicate with the intention of informing Hercule of some information about the world. Although Hercule did not grasp a similar content, it seems that there still is a sense in which he grasped what it was that the speaker was trying to tell him. Hercule was able to recognise the information that Sue was trying to convey because he occupied a similar cognitive perspective. It seems like the two of them could have a whole conversation which would not be defective except for the fact that it violates the conditions which comprise certain of the Traditional Views. This is brought out when we compare the imagined scenario to a Twin scenario in which a molecule for molecule duplicate of Sue was raised by real humans whose behavioural output was exactly similar to the behavioural output of the androids, but who were actually members of a language community rather than living in a semantically isolated laboratory. The verbal behaviour of the child raised by androids would be exactly like the verbal behaviour of the child raised by humans and their cognitive perspectives might be near identical. And yet, according to Fully-Traditional Views, only the latter child would be capable of communicating with the humans she meets upon leaving the village. But the *only* difference between these two scenarios is that in the former, SamConN, SimConN and the relevant Understanding Requirements are not satisfied, whilst in the latter (the Twin-scenario) these conditions can be satisfied. Thus, we have no grounds other than a prior commitment to these conditions for thinking that they are required for success in this

example: whether they are satisfied or not, it will make no practical difference to the interlocutors' interactions, and it is not obvious why non-practical differences should be considered relevant to the success of their exchange.

Note also that, just as it was untenable for an objector to claim that SamConN was not satisfied in the examples used to support the Argument from Miscommunication, it also won't do to try and claim that SimConN or SamConN are in fact satisfied in the examples which support the Argument from Successful Communication. Firstly, it is part of Burge's argument that subjects *cannot* possess concepts from outside their own language community. Actual-Alf, in Burge's thought experiment, is said to be incapable of possessing the counterfactual concept THARTHRTIS due to the fact that he is not a member of the counterfactual community. It is necessary to Burge's argument that Alf possesses the actual concept ARTHRITIS due to his connection with the actual language community. And the examples above all involved purported examples of communicative success *between* communities with different concepts. So there is no way that the examples could satisfy SamConN. Secondly, and more importantly, there is no reason to think that the concepts involved are significantly similar: in all examples, there was not even an overlap in extensions. Depending on how liberal one's view of concept possession is, examples can be constructed which involve concepts as disparate as orang-utans and fruit drinks.

3.2.3 Premise (b2)

Just as before, I think premise (b2) should be uncontroversial. It just says that, in the examples, coordination of cognitive perspectives is sufficient to put the hearer in a position to employ the content appropriately in her cognitive economy. I think defence of this premise is already covered by my defence of premise (a2) of the Argument from Miscommunication. What I said earlier was that cognitive perspective is defined in terms of a subject's dispositions to employ content in her cognitive economy. Subjects possess similar cognitive perspectives *if and only if* they are disposed to employ a content (or contents) in similar ways. But, as I explained above, all it is for a hearer to be in a position to employ the content she

grasps in her cognitive economy such that she can attempt to satisfy the speaker's communicative aim is for her to be disposed to employ the content as the speaker would employ the content she expressed. As such, if the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed, then the speaker and hearer will be disposed to employ these contents in similar ways. And if this is so, the hearer will be in a position to employ the content she grasps as the speaker intended it to be employed in attempting to satisfy the practical aim of the communicative attempt.

3.3 Argument from Successful Communication – Stage 2

If the argument is successful thus far, we have it that, on social externalism, there are examples in which similarity of cognitive perspective (plus satisfaction of the Theory-Neutral conditions) is enough for communicative success. As such, none of the conditions which comprise the Fully-Traditional Views (aside from the Theory-Neutral conditions) are necessary for communicative success. I now want to suggest that we can generalise from these examples to get the claim that, alongside the Theory-Neutral conditions, it is *sufficient* for communicative success that the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed. The reason for this is that *any* exchange in which subjects succeed in occupying similar cognitive perspectives will be an exchange in which the hearer is placed in a position to employ the content she grasps such that she can attempt to satisfy the practical aims of the communicative attempt. And, crucially, there are no other kinds of aims for which we communicate.

3.3.1 Guarding against objections

The considerations which weighed in favour of believing that we can generalise from the examples given in support of the Argument from Miscommunication are similar to the considerations which weigh in favour of generalising from the present examples. I think, if one is convinced by the first argument, one is also likely to be

convinced by the present argument. In my defence of the Argument from Miscommunication, I argued that communication always has certain *practical* aims. What I will claim in support of the present argument is that communication has *only* practical aims, and hearers will be in a position to satisfy these aims so long as they occupy a cognitive perspective which is similar to the speaker's. To try to claim that communication does not succeed when cognitive perspectives are similar, an objector would have to say something like 'Communication failed. What went *right* happened after communication had failed and is to be explained by the similarities in cognitive perspective between subjects.' But this kind of response seems even more unsatisfactory than the inverse response suggested as an objection to my Argument from Miscommunication. It seems that the only thing that would motivate treating examples like the ones presented as cases of communication *failure* would be a prior commitment to the conditions which comprise the Traditional Views (when combined with social externalism). But the plausibility of these conditions is exactly what is at issue. What is brought out in 'Lucky Child' is that we can set up examples such that the *only* difference between situations in which communication succeeds and situations in which communication fails on Traditional Views is the satisfaction of the various Content Relations and Understanding Requirements. In particular, satisfaction of these conditions makes *no difference* to whether hearers are in a position to attempt to satisfy the particular aim of the communicative attempt. But what reason do we have to accept these additional theses if it makes *no further* difference to the situation to have them present or absent? In comparison, whether Necessity of Similarity of Cognitive Perspective is satisfied or not *does* have a very significant impact on the situation: speakers and hearers will interact in *different* ways depending on whether this condition is satisfied or not.

One thing to stress about the present argument is that, although I set up the examples such that the hearers would always fail to satisfy Subject-Sensitive Content Understanding, the view that I am arguing for claims that *neither* subject in a communicative exchange need have the *correct* cognitive perspective on the content communicated in order for communication to succeed. Providing the cognitive perspectives of two subjects are non-standard in the same way (or similar ways),

subjects can communicate successfully, even if both subjects have incorrect cognitive perspectives. For example, to adapt ‘Fortnight 2’, suppose that, just as before, on Earth the concept FORTNIGHT applies to a time period that is fourteen days long and, on Twin-Earth, the counterpart concept, THORTNIGHT applies to a time period which is ten days long. But now imagine that Sonya on Earth and Heath on Twin Earth both take ‘fortnight’ to apply to a period of time which is four and a half days long. Thus, their cognitive perspectives are *both* incorrect relative to the standards of their respective communities. Nonetheless, given that their cognitive perspectives are relevantly similar, I claim they will be able to successfully communicate with utterances that involve the expression ‘fortnight’. If Sasha tells Heath to meet her somewhere in a fortnight, he will try to turn up in four and a half days (assuming he wants to); and this exactly what she is trying to get him to do when she attempts to communicate.

Another thing to stress is that I think there is good reason to believe that examples like the ones I have presented will not be *rare* occurrences even on social externalism. Although I set up the examples using Twin Earth, this feature of the examples is not essential. I set things up this way to signal the fact that the Earth and Twin Earth environments were near identical and thus minimise noise. But this particular kind of example could be set up on Earth. For example, suppose that, in England, biscuits are legally classified as small baked goods that turn softer when stale. But in Scotland, biscuits are legally classified as those that turn harder when stale. Supposing Sasha is English and Harry is Scottish, all Sasha would have to do is catch a train to Scotland in order to place herself and Harry in violation of the various conditions which make up certain of the Traditional Views when she utters sentence tokens which contain the word-form ‘biscuit.’ This kind of situation – in which subjects travel through different language communities – must be a fact of our everyday lives if social externalism is true. For surely distinct language communities which use the same word-forms to express different concepts exist even within the same countries and towns. Ludlow (1995) argues to this effect. He argues that the so-called ‘slow-switching’ cases introduced by Boghossian (1989) will be very common. Slow-switching cases are cases in which a subject (without her knowledge)

travels to a new language community which uses a familiar word-form to express a different concept, and undergoes a gradual change in concepts as she adapts to the new environment. When she first arrives in the new community she still expresses her old concept with the word-form but, after she has been in the community for a while, it becomes the case that she expresses the new community's concept. Some think that such cases will be rare:¹⁹² we don't, after all, often find ourselves transported to Twin Earth. Ludlow, however, thinks such shifts will be routine. He writes, "We routinely move between social groups and institutions, and in many cases shifts in the content of our thoughts will not be detected by us. [...] Nor are these cases even limited to obvious cases of movement. It may occur when we routinely cross campus to talk to colleagues in physics or psychology, or even when we pay routine visits to our favourite restaurant."¹⁹³ If this is right, we should frequently find ourselves violating the conditions which comprise the Traditional Views. And yet, in cases where we occupy a similar cognitive perspective to our interlocutor, we will not struggle to get by in these different language communities.

What is wrong with Traditional Views is that they posit additional constraints on communicative success which will always be irrelevant to the practical reasons for which we communicate. In fact, as we saw above, in some cases these additional constraints actually thwarted subjects in achieving their communicative goals. But it is just not clear that we communicate for any other reason. Communication appears to have purely practical aims, and so long as interlocutors are disposed to employ content in similar ways, they will be able to satisfy these practical aims. As such, just as communicative success, on the Traditional Views, doesn't seem to be worth achieving, communication *failure*, on these views, should not be something we should be interested in trying to avoid either. Both communicative success and failure, on Traditional Views, seem to inhabit some kind of theoretical shadow-world which is wholly divorced from our interests and interactions.

¹⁹² See, for examples, Brown (2004) and Sawyer (1999).

¹⁹³ Ludlow (1995) 48

3.4 The Objection from Communication

In my Argument from Miscommunication, I demonstrated that, at the very least, one should add Necessity of Similarity of Cognitive Perspective to the conditions which comprise Traditional Views. However, what the Argument from Successful Communication has shown is that the various conditions which make-up Traditional Views (aside from the Theory-Neutral conditions) are not merely insufficient for communicative success: they aren't necessary either. In fact, we have seen that it is *never* required (or sufficient) for communicative success that subjects share content, or understand that content correctly. If my second argument succeeds, I think we will have good grounds to reject the Objection from Communication levelled against Holism in the previous chapter. That argument, recall, included the premise that sameness of content is necessary for communicative success – and a weaker version claimed that it is sometimes required. However, my Argument from Successful Communication has demonstrated that even a social externalist (and, I think, all other sociolectical theories) should think that sharing content is *never* required for communicative success. If even views which posit shared content should claim sharing content is never required (or, indeed, sufficient) for communicative success, then there is little reason for thinking that a Holist should have to endorse a Same Content View. Even if my argument can be resisted, I have, at the very least, called into question the theoretical utility of claiming that communicative success requires shared content. It is not just that Holism can get by without endorsing such the requirement but, rather, even sociolectical theories should *reject* the requirement. In the next chapter, I will bolster my defence of Holism by setting out an attractive theory of communicative success which the view can endorse. I think the combination of my argument in this chapter and the plausibility of my positive view should be enough to defeat the Objection from Communication. Indeed, Holism is not just defensible in this regard: if my arguments succeed, its theory of communicative success will be far superior to its competitors.

3.5 From cognitive perspective to understanding

If we combine the conclusions of the two arguments presented above, we get the following thesis.

Similarity of Cognitive Perspective: A communicative exchange will succeed iff (a) the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied, and (b) the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

I think we should incorporate Similarity of Cognitive Perspective into the account as a Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement. That is: we should *replace* SI-Understanding_N and Subject-Sensitive Content Understanding. A social externalist need not do this. They could accept my argument and yet still maintain that an Understanding Requirement which is stated in terms of similarity of cognitive perspective is not really an *understanding* requirement. The trouble with this is that their view would then be that *understanding is not necessary or (jointly) sufficient for communicative success*. This sounds significantly more implausible than the claim that the correct view of other-directed understanding is the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding. This is perhaps merely a terminological issue. In what follows, I will assume that a social externalist, if she accepts my arguments, will endorse the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement, rather than eschewing talk of understanding altogether in favour of talk of cognitive perspective.

Given this, I propose that the social externalist characterise communicative success along the following lines:

Subject Sensitive Shared Understanding View: A communicative attempt will succeed iff (a) the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied and (b), the hearer's SS-understanding of the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's SS-understanding of the content she expressed.

Once again, I think that the precise way in which Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding should be employed in an account of communicative success is not as straightforward as this. To reiterate: in Chapter 4 I will present an account according to which communicative success is measured along two kinds of scale – one which measures success *simpliciter* and one which measures success relative to a context.

3.6 Cognitive perspective and subjective rationality

At this point, it is worth comparing my argument to a separate argument aimed against social externalism. Social externalism is charged with failing to capture the subject's rational perspective – as a result of this, it appears unable to explain why subjects act based on their beliefs and desires. Wikforss argues that some externalists, Burge included,¹⁹⁴ wish to uphold Frege's principle, which she states as follows: “*If it is possible for S to believe that p while doubting q, p and q have a different content.*”¹⁹⁵ Externalists who appeal to such a principle do so in order to capture the rational perspective of the subject. But Wikforss argues that social externalism is incompatible with this principle because of its commitment to partial grasp.¹⁹⁶ She explains,

If S does not understand the content of her own thoughts, then the fact that she takes a different attitude towards p than towards q cannot in itself show that the contents are different. That Bert takes a different attitude towards “Arthritis is arthritis” than to “Arthritis is a rheumatoid disease of the joints only” is explained by appealing to the idea that he fails to see that the two thoughts have the same content, not, as Frege's principle would have it, by appealing to the idea that the two thoughts *have* a different content.¹⁹⁷

The problem for social externalism, identified by Wikforss, is that the assumption of incomplete understanding renders subjects irrational, just not knowingly so. The problem is that, because of the assumption of incomplete understanding, the subject cannot discern the logical relations between the contents of her thoughts *a priori*. She

¹⁹⁴ Evans (1982) and McDowell (1977) also take their accounts to be compatible with the principle.

¹⁹⁵ Wikforss (2006) 2.

¹⁹⁶ See also Kimbrough (1998) and Brown (2004). Brown argues that social externalism can account for rationality by appeal to a different principle. See Wikforss (2006) for a response.

¹⁹⁷ Wikforss (2006) 12

needs to do some empirical investigation to work this out. Most authors will allow that subjects are sometimes less than rational. The problem for social externalism is that, given that the subject cannot grasp the logical properties of her thoughts *a priori*, she will often draw very *simple* invalid inferences; or she will fail to draw simple valid ones; and she will not be able to correct herself through reflection alone even with respect to these very simple mistakes. As Wikforss explains, the resultant picture is one on which, “The individual reasons in ways unknown to her and there is no hope of explaining her perspective by appealing to the notion of thought content.”¹⁹⁸

My two arguments in this chapter bear some similarities to this kind of objection. The argument from rationality charges that content, on social externalism, does not adequately capture the subject’s rational perspective. Specifically, it cannot explain the role of content in capturing the way that an individual subject is disposed to reason: it attributes irrationality in cases where we have no reason to think that a subject should be deemed less than rational. The present argument also appeals to the fact that, on social externalism, subjects are often mistaken as to the logical relationships between their thoughts: a subject’s cognitive perspective on the logical and representational properties of her thought contents often comes apart from the socially-determined logical and representational properties of those contents and it is this which causes problems for the social externalist’s account of communicative success. We might restate the issue in terms of rationality as follows. Social externalism, in effect, cannot explain the *coordination* of rationality *between* subjects. When communication has been successful, a rational subject should not reason from the communicated content in a way that the speaker would deem irrational (for example, the hearer should not, upon *successfully* heeding a warning, immediately walk off a cliff). And, conversely, when communication has failed, we should not expect even a rational hearer to be able to reason from the communicated content in a way which will allow her to reliably comply with the speaker’s communicative aims (for example, we would not expect her to turn up at the abandoned church unless it was by sheer luck).

¹⁹⁸ Wikforss (2006) 20

I have been careful not to state my argument in terms of the rationality of the subject, because I do not need to claim anything so strong. The point pressed in my argument is not that social externalism cannot capture subjective rationality (although I think Wikforss is correct); nor, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, is the issue one of privileged access. One further thing to note is that, for the arguments to work, I do not even need to claim that social externalism fails to capture a subject's conceptions. For example, my view is compatible with a 'minimal conception' of the subject's point of view. This view is suggested by Goldberg (2002). According to this view, we need not provide a non-trivial characterization of an agent's conceptions.¹⁹⁹ Goldberg presents the view as follows:

Let a characterization of an agent's conception be trivial iff it satisfies the following:

(Triv) The characterization of the conception expressed by a speaker's use of an expression *E* employs (= uses or mentions) that very expression in characterizing the conception.²⁰⁰

On this view, Alf, for example, conceives of arthritis *just as arthritis*. Thus, he shares this conception with others in his community who possess differing partial grasp. But the issue I am pressing is orthogonal to this problem as well: even if Goldberg is right that subjects' conceptions can be minimal, this will not help a social externalist to avoid my arguments. For I merely need to appeal to similarities and differences in the dispositions of subjects to deploy concepts. And two subjects can share minimal conceptions whilst still differing as to these dispositions. For example, this fact would be manifest in the dispositional differences between Alf (prior to correction) and his doctor, *even* if they are properly said to conceive of ARTHRITIS in the same way. Equally, subjects can possess very similar dispositions whilst differing in their minimal conceptions. What I am calling 'cognitive perspective' certainly looks like a good candidate for what captures a subject's conceptions. But I do not need to claim this in order to make my argument.

¹⁹⁹ Goldberg (2002) 597

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 616

We can grant that the social externalist can handle these issues – that she can explain subjective rationality, privileged access and the subject’s conceptions – and yet the problem still remains. The point is that, because socially-individuated content does not capture the way that a subject is *disposed to reason* (rationally or otherwise), it cannot adequately explain communicative success and failure. For, as I have tried to argue, what is important to communicative success is precisely a coordination of interlocutors’ dispositions to reason with a content; but it is a distinctive claim of social externalism that content, on the one hand, and our dispositions to employ that content, on the other, can, and often do, come apart.

Section 4: A dilemma for social externalism

I have argued that Similarity of Cognitive Perspective states necessary and sufficient conditions on communicative success. However, I think that, whether the argument is accepted or not, the social externalist is now in a very difficult position. They face the following dilemma. On the first horn, suppose they *accept* the thrust of my two arguments and allow that their account of communicative success need appeal *only* to the conditions which comprise Similarity of Cognitive Perspective. The result of this is that their account no longer appeals to *any* Content Relation. That is, neither SamConN nor SimConN (nor any intermediary position) is needed in their account of communicative success. It is not just that these conditions aren’t necessary, but that both sameness of content and similarity of content are *never* required for communicative success on social externalism. This means that the relation between the content of the initial state of the speaker and the terminal state of the hearer is *irrelevant* to communicate success on their view. Any old relation can hold between these contents and it just won’t make a difference to whether communication succeeds. If the social externalist accepts this horn then we can add communication to the list of phenomena which mental content is *supposed* to explain but which social externalism must claim it does not explain. It would then join the ranks of rationality, mental causation and privileged access as embarrassments to social externalism. Of course, social externalists will think that they have responses to at

least some of these issues. But many of their internalist rivals simply do not face these problems in the first place.

If the social externalist tries to *resist* my arguments, she will find herself on the second horn of the dilemma. There are different degrees to which the social externalist can reject the arguments. Suppose she tries to maintain one of the Fully-Traditional Views, such as LVC or CVC, and claim that similarity of cognitive perspective is irrelevant to communicative success. This would be to land herself with an objectionably poor theory of communicative success. The resultant account surely does not accord with our pretheoretical judgments as to the success of exchanges, nor with plausible principles as to the aims of communicative attempts. This option, I think, would simply divorce communicative success from the practical *aims* of communication. And, as I have stressed above, it is not clear what other aims communication might have. There are, of course, intermediary positions that the social externalist could try to occupy. They could, for example, allow that coordination of cognitive perspectives is *sometimes* but not always required (and sometimes, but not always, jointly sufficient). This would be to try and defend one of the Semi-Traditional Views. There are two problems with doing this, however. The first is that, although I have not shown this conclusively above, I have given good reason to believe that *any* case in which cognitive perspectives are not coordinated will be a situation in which the hearer is not in a position to satisfy *the only purpose for which the speaker communicated*. Thus, a theory which tries to claim that some communicative attempts succeed in the absence of coordination of cognitive perspectives will likely give some implausible diagnoses as to the success and failure of communicative attempts. The other problem is that, even if a motivation can be found for doing this in some cases, the resultant view appears rather disjointed: it claims that *sometimes* a Content Relation must be satisfied, sometimes it need not be; *sometimes* cognitive perspectives must be coordinated, sometimes they need not be, etc. These last options might not seem so bad if competing theories of content were also committed to similarly problematic accounts. However, as I will show in the next chapter, Holism is excellently placed to offer an account of communicative

success which both respects the considerations which motivate my arguments *and* gives mental content a central role in facilitating communicative success.

It should be noted that, although the arguments presented in this chapter proceeded on the assumption of social externalism, similar arguments can be constructed for all theories of content. This would simply require altering the way in which the examples are presented. Crucially for our purposes, the consequences of the arguments will differ depending on which theory of content is assumed. Successfully arguing for Similarity of Cognitive Perspective, on social externalism, entails that the Content Relation is *never* relevant to communicative success. But arguing for Similarity of Cognitive Perspective, on *Holism*, entails a version of SimConN. This is because, on Holism, content perfectly tracks cognitive perspective (and Subject-Sensitive Understanding). I think it is interesting that it is in pursuit of a communal language that social externalists allow mental content and understanding to come apart. But it is *because* they allow this that they face the dilemma. The shared language which looks like it should be so good at facilitating communicative success is actually the feature of their view which creates the problems they face when attempting to explain communication.

Section 5: Chapter Summary

There were two main purposes of this chapter. One was to motivate the claim that similarity of cognitive perspective must play a central role in an account of communicative success. The other was to show that motivating this claim allows us to pose a dilemma for social externalism (and other sociolectical theories like it). I began by summarising the kinds of view that my arguments stand in opposition to. These views I labelled ‘Traditional Views’. Traditional Views are views which deny Similarity of Cognitive Perspective. I gave two examples of these kinds of views: the Liberal View of Communicative Success and the Conservative View of Communicative Success. There are also Traditional Views which allow that

coordination of cognitive perspectives in sometimes (but not always) relevant to success.

I then began my argument. The argument proceeded in three steps. In the first step, I argued that it was necessary for communicative success that the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps be similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed. I called this, the Argument from Miscommunication. In the second step, I argued that it is sufficient for communicative success that (alongside satisfaction of the Theory-Neutral conditions) the hearer and speaker occupy similar cognitive perspectives. I called this the Argument from Successful Communication. One consequence of this second argument is that, on social externalism, sharing content is never required for communicative success. As such, we lose motivation for the Objection from Communication levelled against Holism in Chapter 2. In the third step of the argument, I claimed that the arguments presented in the first two steps, taken together, present social externalism with a dilemma. If the arguments are successful, the result is that the Content Relation is *never* relevant to communicative success on social externalism: which relation holds between the content expressed by the speaker and the content grasped by the hearer makes no difference to the success or failure of a communicative attempt. If the social externalist attempts to resist my arguments, she will be forced to adopt an unattractive picture of communicative success which fails to respect both our pretheoretic intuitions and some plausible principles about the practical aims of communicative success.

In the next chapter, I will present my positive theory of communicative success. We will see that, although social externalism should not appeal to SimConN, Holism can provide an extremely attractive theory of communicative success based on this condition. The aim of this chapter was not just to present social externalism with a dilemma, but to demonstrate the central role of cognitive perspective, and the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement based on it, in facilitating communicative success. The account of communicative success that I propose in the following chapter will not face either horn of the dilemma which faces sociolectical

theories: it will provide a picture of communicative success which both respects the intuitions brought out in the examples as to the role of cognitive perspective in communicative success, and also gives mental content a central role in the theory.

Chapter 4: A Holist account of communicative success

In the previous chapter, I argued that the views of communicative success available to the social externalist are surprisingly implausible: either they render the relationship between the content grasped by the hearer and expressed by the speaker irrelevant to communicative success or they force us to accept implausible diagnoses as to the success and failure of communicative attempts. I urged that what is important to communicative success is the coordination of *cognitive perspectives*. I suggested that the best way for the social externalist to incorporate cognitive perspective into her account of communicative success would be to employ it *as* a Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement. This result is good for the Holist for two reasons. Firstly, objections to Holism from communication are premised on the claim that sharing content is necessary for communicative success (or at least sometimes required). If even sociolectical theories should not appeal to shared content in their theory of communicative success, then it is not clear why this should be demanded of Holism. As such, the objection loses its bite. Secondly, the kind of understanding which, I argued, is in fact required for communicative success is determined by the exact same base as that which determines mental content on the Holist theory. That is, subjective-sensitive understanding can be understood as being determined by conceptual-role. As we will see, this means that, unlike social externalism, Holism can appeal directly to content in its explanation of communicative success *without* giving implausible diagnoses as to which communicative attempts count as successful and which do not. As such, the Holist's theory of communicative success, far from being defective, is actually considerably more attractive than any theory of communication available to the social externalist.

The purpose of this chapter is to set out my positive Holist view of communicative success. I will call this the 'Holist View of Communicative Success'. When I presented conceptual-role as a subject-sensitive theory of understanding in Chapter 2, I explained that it needn't be thought of as a kind of narrow content or as playing a content-individuating role. However, it *can* be thought of in precisely this way. And, as I will demonstrate, if thought of as such it provides us with an attractive picture of

communicative success which allows mental content to take centre stage. In what follows, I will be employing conceptual-role as a theory of content and a theory of (dispositional) understanding. However, much of what I say about conceptual-role can *also* be endorsed by the social externalist who accepts the first horn of the dilemma presented in Chapter 3. Rather than endorsing conceptual-role semantics as a theory of both mental content *and* understanding, they should adopt it as merely a theory of understanding.

This chapter proceeds as follows. In Section 1, I will differentiate the account of conceptual-role as a theory of content individuation from the account of conceptual-role as a mere theory of understanding. In Section 2, I will begin to present my positive account. The positive account is a version of the Similar Content View introduced in Chapter 2. Its central thesis is that communication between subjects succeeds to the degree that content is similar across those subjects. However, I will also introduce a notion of success relative to a context which is employed to assess whether a communicative attempt succeeds to the degree required by the particular communicative aims of interlocutors. In Section 3, I will present and respond to an objection from Fodor and Lepore. This is the objection that the Holist cannot provide a criterion for similarity of meaning. In section 4, I will explain how my response to Fodor and Lepore motivates a complication of the account such that it recognises more subtle similarities and differences between contents which are relevant to communicative success. In section 5, I will describe how my view relates to various theses about concept acquisition and conceptual structure. In Section 6, I will set out the theses which comprise the Holist View of Communicative Success.

Section 1: Theories of content individuation vs. theories of understanding

In Chapter 2, I characterised subject-sensitive understanding ('SS-understanding') in terms of a subject's cognitive perspective on the conceptual, inferential and representational properties of her concepts and contents. I claimed that a conceptual-role theory of *understanding* would be a subject-sensitive theory. On certain theories

of content such as social externalism (and other sociolectical theories), a subject's cognitive perspective on these properties and relations can be incorrect: it may diverge from the actual conceptual, inferential and representational properties of her contents and concepts as individuated by the public language. A social externalist may employ a conceptual-role theory in her account of communicative success by endorsing a Subject-Sensitive Understanding Requirement – although they should, of course, do this without allowing conceptual-role to play a content-individuating role. However, one can also use it to construct a theory of narrow content. In Chapter 1, I surveyed various ways in which authors have done this and presented my preferred version of the theory: Holism. The theory which I defend in this project claims that mental content and other-directed understanding are both determined by conceptual-role. This approach mirrors the approach taken by the social externalist's Liberal View of Communicative Success (LVC) from the previous chapter. Holism and LVC both claim that mental content and other-directed understanding are determined by the same factor, they just disagree as to what this factor is: LVC claimed that the determining factor was the language community, whereas Holism claims that it is (internal) conceptual-role. The structure of an account of communicative success upon which conceptual-role is considered to be content-individuating is much the same as the structure of the account of communicative success which takes conceptual-role to merely determine SS-understanding. It is the latter account which I think a social externalist should endorse. However, there are some differences between the two approaches. I turn to these now.

An externalist who appeals to SS-understanding in their account of communicative success might try to maintain that it is (wide) mental content, and *not* SS-understanding (and, with it, cognitive perspective), that captures the rationality of the subject. On Holism, by contrast, the cognitive perspective captured by SS-understanding (and by content) will properly characterise the rational perspective of the subject. The conceptual, inferential and representational properties that a subject cognizes her contents and concepts to have just *are* the conceptual, inferential and representational properties of her contents and concepts: the subjective dimension of rationality exhausts rationality. A further difference is that, on Holism, a subject's

own mental content, on the one hand, and that subject's understanding of her own mental content (in the SS-understanding sense), on the other, can no longer come apart in the way characteristic of the theory which combines social externalism with SS-understanding. On Holism, a subject's SS-understanding perfectly tracks her own mental content. With these differences in mind, I now turn to presenting my positive account. I will begin presenting this account in Section 2. As the chapter unfolds, the basic theses which comprise the account will be developed, and a final statement of the view will be presented in Section 6. A social externalist who wishes to appeal to Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding in their account of communicative success can endorse a version of the account that I present providing they simply drop the claim that conceptual-role determines mental content. As stressed in the previous chapter, the cost of doing so is that the social externalist must then claim that the relationship between the mental content of the speaker and hearer is irrelevant to communicative success.

Section 2: Holism and communicative success

2.1 Holism, the Content Relation, and the Understanding Requirement

As will be familiar from Chapter 1, holism about utterance or thought content is the view that the content of a thought (or meaning of an expression) is determined by that content's (expression's) conceptual relations to *all* other contents (expressions) in a subject's conceptual web (language). The version of the view which I am defending in this project is characterised by the following three theses:

- A) Content internalism: for any subject, the content of her thoughts and concepts is individuated solely by factors *intrinsic* to that subject.
- B) Conceptual-role semantics: the content of a thought or concept for a subject is fully determined (or constituted) by that content or concept's conceptual-role in the subject's cognitive economy. Conceptual-role is determined by a content or concept's *causal* relations to other contents or concepts in that

subject's cognitive economy, and includes relations to sensory inputs, behavioural outputs, imaginings, memories, etc.

- C) Holism about conceptual-role: the content of a thought or concept for a subject is determined (or constituted) by that content or concept's causal relations to *all* other contents or concepts in that subject's cognitive economy (including its relations to sensory inputs, behavioural outputs, imaginings, memories etc.).

On the present approach, the relationship between conceptual-role, SS-Understanding and mental content is such that both mental content and a subject's understanding of that content are determined by conceptual-role. Because of this, mental content and SS-understanding perfectly track each other such that mental content is similar just when SS-understanding is similar, and to the very same degree. This will be so both when comparing two contents across subjects and when comparing two contents within a single subject. Mental content and SS-understanding are just two sides of the same coin: a hearer will entertain a similar content to a speaker just when that hearer understands the content she entertains in a similar way to how the speaker understands the distinct content that she (the speaker) entertains.

On Holism, any change in a subject's SS-understanding will determine a change in her mental content. However, there are different ways in which SS-understanding can affect a subject's conceptual web. This is because, in addition to SS-understanding her own thoughts and utterances, a subject can also attempt to SS-understand another interlocutor's thoughts and utterances. The former kind of understanding I call 'self-directed SS-understanding'. The latter kind of understanding I call 'other-directed SS-understanding'. This distinction will be familiar from Chapter 2. Acts of other-directed SS-understanding are performed by a subject in order to form hypotheses about what her interlocutors might mean by their utterances and thoughts, but such hypotheses need not affect how that subject understands her *own* thoughts to the same degree that her own self-directed SS-understanding does so. These other-directed acts of SS-understanding will usually

affect a subject's own conceptual web very slightly. This is simply a consequence of the Instability Thesis which, recall, states that *any* change, however minute, in a subject's conceptual web will result in a change in *all* concepts and contents within that web. The result is that forming new beliefs about the utterances and thoughts of others will alter one's own conceptual web and thus will alter *all* concepts within it. But these changes will usually be rather minor. For example, if a subject, A, forms the new belief THAT DOGS ARE ROBOTS_A, this will significantly affect the subject's own DOG_A concept (if, for example, she previously believed that dogs are animals and that animals are not robots, etc.). For example, she will now be disposed to make an inference from X IS A DOG_A to X IS A ROBOT_A. Contrastingly, forming the belief that someone else believes THAT DOGS ARE ROBOTS_A will not affect her own DOG_A concept to the same extent: it will not significantly alter the conceptual-role of her DOG_A concept. In the second case, the subject will not be disposed to infer from X IS A DOG_A to X IS A ROBOT_A.

As already noted, a Holist account of communicative success should not adopt Necessity of Sameness of Content as part of their view. Sharing content would, strictly speaking, be sufficient for communicative success on Holism (assuming satisfaction of any further conditions on success). This is because satisfaction of SamConN will entail satisfaction of the various similarity-based conditions which I will outline below. Nonetheless, the necessary condition stated in SamConN is never, even in principle, satisfied on Holism and thus would be an untenable thesis for the theory (and, as I have suggested, all theories) to endorse.²⁰¹ As such, Holism should adopt some version of the weaker thesis, Necessity of Similarity of Content, introduced in Chapter 2 as a competing specification of the Content Relation.

Necessity of Similarity of Content (SimConN) – A communicative attempt will succeed only if the content of the terminal state of the hearer is similar to the content of the initial state of the speaker.

²⁰¹ Although Holism entails that content is never shared even by microphysical duplicates, other holist theories can allow that microphysical duplicates could satisfy SamConN.

As such, the Holist's view is a Similar Content View of communicative success. In addition to SimConN, we also must include an Understanding Requirement. Here, of course, I will adopt the Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding approach from Chapter 2. On this view, understanding is similar when cognitive perspectives are similar. Acts of understanding will be successful when the hearer's Subject-Sensitive Understanding is similar to the speaker's as a result of the communicative exchange.

The act of understanding itself, on this picture, is the process whereby the hearer assigns an interpretation to the speaker's utterance as an item of mental content. This process will involve the hearer mapping the lexical items which comprise the speaker's utterance onto concepts in her own idiolect, where these concepts will compose to form a content which is her (the hearer's) mental representation of the speaker's utterance. How she represents this content will be determined by her *dispositional* understanding, which is itself to be understood in terms of conceptual-role: the way that a hearer is disposed to understand a given utterance is determined by the conceptual-role of the concepts which form her representation of the speaker's utterance. In addition to this, understanding will require that the hearer grasps the compositional structure of the speaker's utterance; this determines how concepts are combined to form a sentential content with a particular conceptual-role. The conceptual-role of the content grasped by the hearer will also be affected by how the hearer computes any pragmatic implicatures intended by the speaker, and how she enriches, or alters, the content based on contextual information. As mentioned in Chapter 2, for simplicity, I largely set aside the role of pragmatic processes in communicative exchanges. The following is an initial attempt at a characterisation of the hearer's process of act-understanding of her interlocutor.

Act Understanding: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer's act of understanding is such that the hearer selects an interpretation of the content expressed by the speaker by (a) mapping the lexical items which comprise the speaker's utterance onto concepts in her own idiolect, (b) combining these to form a content based on her grasp of the utterance's compositional structure, and (c) taking into account relevant background and

contextual information which determine pragmatic implicatures and enrichments of the content.

When combined with SimConN, the result of a successful act of understanding will be that the content that the hearer grasps is similar to the content expressed by the speaker in the two subjects' respective cognitive economies. That is, the two contents will have similar conceptual-roles: they will participate in similar inferences and the concepts which comprise them will bear similar conceptual relations to other concepts in each subject's respective conceptual webs. On the present proposal, Act Understanding is a means of satisfying SimConN.²⁰² We can incorporate it into our statement of this condition to give the following view of communicative success:

Similar Content Via Understanding – A communicative attempt will succeed only if (a) the content of the terminal state of the hearer is similar to the content of the initial state of the speaker and (b) the content of this terminal state is arrived at via a process of Act Understanding.

This thesis is stronger than our initial statement of the SimConN because it specifies that content must be recovered in a particular way: via an act of understanding which involves a mapping of the content expressed by the speaker into the hearer's idiolect. It rules out cases in which the hearer grasps the right content but by accident, or by some act of God.

There are at least *two* ways in which a hearer can achieve a successful mapping. In cases where the speaker and hearer are in (rough) *agreement* as to the correct way to understand a given expression, this mapping will be straightforward. However, two subjects can communicate despite possessing divergent understandings of the correct way to interpret an expression providing that the hearer is *aware* of this difference between them. In such a case, the hearer will hold a kind of mental 'file' on her interlocutor's understanding of a given expression. This will allow her to understand the speaker's divergent conception by mapping it onto items in her own idiolect

²⁰² There are views upon which the Understanding Requirement is *not* a means of satisfying any Content Relation. The externalist version of the view presented in this chapter would be such a view.

which capture this alternative conception. This will require the hearer to map the lexical items which comprise the speaker's utterance onto concepts in the hearer's idiolect which she might *not* ordinarily express using the same word-forms. These mental files that a hearer can hold on a speaker's understanding of an expression, I will call 'profiles'. In the next section, I will describe their role in facilitating communicative success.

2.2 Profiles

When a speaker, S, hypothesises that a hearer, H, understands a word-form, *p*, differently to the way that S herself would understand *p*, I will say that S holds a *profile* on H's understanding of *p* (or, on the content of *p* for H). In many communicative exchanges, it is not necessary to hold profiles on the content of our interlocutors' understandings of their thoughts and utterances. This is because, oftentimes, the differences in content are very minute, or simply irrelevant to the communicative goal at hand (more on this below). However, as will become clear, the ability to hold profiles on the SS-understanding of other interlocutors can be crucial to communicative success. The existence of profiling should be uncontroversial even to non-Holists. Some of Burge's remarks indicate that he thinks that profiling is sometimes involved in communication. For example, he writes, after considering a number of cases in which speakers suffer from errors in their understanding of a concept:

Both sorts of cases illustrate that in reporting a single attitude content, we typically suggest (implicate, perhaps) that the subject has a range of other attitudes that are normally associated with it. Some of these may provide reasons for it. In both sorts of cases, it is usually important to keep track of, and often to make explicit, the nature and extent of the subject's deviance. Otherwise, predictions and evaluations of his thought and action, based on normal background assumptions, will go awry.²⁰³

We have seen in the previous chapter that failure to recognise a subject's deviant conceptions can indeed lead to such predictions going awry. Because of the role that

²⁰³ Burge (1979) 91

profiles can play in facilitating communicative success between two subjects who disagree substantially as to the meaning of a given word-form, a hearer can grasp a similar content to that of a speaker who has a deviant understanding providing she possesses a profile on the speaker's understanding. Given the role of profiles in communicative success, there are two ways in which a hearer might grasp the right (the similar) content. It must be the case that either (a), the content grasped by the hearer is similar to the content of the initial state of the speaker because they each possess similar self-directed SS-understanding. Or (b), in cases in which the hearer and speaker differ significantly as to their self-directed SS-understanding of what is communicated, the hearer must hold a profile on the speaker's SS-understanding of the content expressed. This consists in other-directed SS-understanding which is similar in conceptual-role to that of the speaker's self-directed SS-understanding of the particular word-forms.

In cases in which the hearer does not have reason to think that the speaker has an especially idiosyncratic understanding of the content expressed, she will map the expressions which comprise the speaker's utterance directly into concepts of her own idiolect which she would express with the same word-forms. For example, if the speaker's utterance contains a token of the word-form 'cat', the hearer will map this directly onto her CAT_H concept. In such cases, the hearer's other-directed understanding is just the same as (or highly similar to) her own self-directed understanding of whichever content she would express with the same word-forms. In cases in which the hearer holds a profile on the speaker's understanding of the content expressed, the hearer will map the lexical items which comprise the speaker's utterance into this profile instead, where the profile will contain a specification (in the hearer's idiolect) of the way in which the speaker understands the word-forms involved in the utterance. For example, if the hearer believes that the speaker applies 'cat' to overstuffed pieces of furniture, she will map 'cat' onto $OVERSTUFFED\ PIECE\ OF\ FURNITURE_H$ instead of CAT_H . This practice will be quite commonplace. To take a less artificial example, consider that a large number of English speakers believe that the expression 'nonplussed' means the same thing as 'unimpressed', when – at least according to experts – it really means the same thing

as ‘confused’. If a hearer who is aware of its proper meaning converses with a speaker who she knows to possess the common misconception, she will map the speaker’s use of ‘nonplussed’ onto her (the hearer’s) UNIMPRESSED_H concept rather than to her own NONPLUSSED_H concept, where this latter concept has a similar conceptual-role to her (the hearer’s) CONFUSED_H concept. Sometimes a hearer will be able to work out that this is the proper way to interpret a speaker even without possessing prior beliefs as to the way that speaker uses the word. She might be able to work this out just from the context. For example, suppose a stranger utters (1),

(1) Olympic gymnast McKayla Maroney is known for looking nonplussed.

If the hearer has relevant knowledge about the subject named in the utterance (namely, that there is a famous photo of her looking disappointed with her silver medal), she will be able to work out that the more likely proper interpretation of the speaker’s utterance would map ‘nonplussed’ to UNIMPRESSED_H and not to NONPLUSSED_H (or CONFUSED_H). Given this mapping, the conceptual-role (and thus the content) of NONPLUSSED_S in the speaker and UNIMPRESSED_H in the hearer will be similar, and communication can succeed.

There are a couple of things which should be noted about profiles before moving on to developing the Holist’s account of communicative success. The first is that, in the vast majority of cases, it will be not be necessary to hold profiles on our interlocutors’ understanding of particular word-forms. Rather, we operate with the default assumption that understanding is similar unless we have reason to believe otherwise. This assumption is reasonable given that we all learn language in a similar environment from those who train us to use language in a way which largely conforms with community practice. And, as Rapaport and Jorgensen have argued, the more we communicate, the more similar our general linguistic practices will become. The second thing to note is that the possession of profiles on a speaker’s understanding of a word-form might more often be the *result* of a series of exchanges rather than something which precedes the first exchange with that speaker. Oftentimes – especially when speaking to people we have not met before – we will

not hold special profiles on what they mean by a word-form. Rather, we enter into new conversations with the default assumption of similarity in play until we are given reason to suspect deviance on the part of our interlocutor. Recall from Chapter 2 the process of negotiation described by Rapaport. Negotiation begins when we are confronted with a deviant or unexpected response from an interlocutor. It can result in us coming to an agreement as to how to understand a given word-form; but it can also result in the holding of more accurate profiles on the understanding of our interlocutors when disagreement cannot be resolved. That is, through our continued attempts to communicate, we can improve our other-directed understanding of speakers with deviant understandings of particular word-forms. We may also realise well after a conversation has taken place that a particular profile should be held on an interlocutor and thus reinterpret previous exchanges in light of this.

By way of a further dig at would-be defenders of LVC, it is not clear that they can account for the role of profiles in communicative success in the *same way* that they account for other-directed understanding of content which is correctly understood (in the subject-insensitive sense). Consider that, on social externalism, where a subject possesses a quite idiosyncratic concept (that is, one that calls for attribution of an idiosyncratic concept *instead of* the community concept), we will surely misunderstand her if we rely on SI-understanding (that is, if we rely on understanding which is individuated by appeal to public linguistic norms). The content that the public language would assign to her utterance will involve community concepts and not her own idiosyncratic concepts. Suppose that a hearer knows of the speaker's misconception. In such a case, there is an obvious sense in which the hearer can understand her interlocutor only by *disregarding* the public linguistic norms. For example, suppose the idiosyncratic speaker means (or behaves as if she means) something like ORANGE JUICE by her utterance of 'Orang-utan', and suppose that the hearer knows this. When the speaker utters 'I drank an Orang-utan at breakfast', a hearer's SI-understanding of the utterance will result in her assigning an incorrect interpretation of the content of the belief that the speaker intended to express. The hearer can only understand the speaker by mapping 'Orang-utan' to her (the hearer's) ORANGE JUICE concept. Thus, LVC must appeal to a *different* kind of

utterance understanding for cases in which communicative success requires the profiling of others. But now they may need to appeal to a different kind of understanding for one or more of the following three cases: (a) self-directed understanding of one's own concepts (that is, conceptual mastery as set out in Chapter 2), (b) other-directed understanding of a subject with grasp of a community concept, and (c) other-directed understanding of a subject who possesses an idiosyncratic concept.²⁰⁴ Contrastingly, Holism appeals to the same kind of understanding (that is, it appeals just to conceptual-role) to account for all three of these phenomena.

To summarise the account so far: successful communication requires (a) that the hearer grasp a similar content to that expressed by the speaker and (b) that she recover this content via an act of SS-understanding. This act involves the mapping of the lexical items which comprise the speaker's utterance into concepts in the hearer's idiolect (it will also require that the hearer grasps the compositional structure of the speaker's utterance, that content grasped is appropriately pragmatically enriched in accordance with contextual information, and that the hearer recognise any pragmatic implicatures intended by the speaker). The act of understanding will succeed when the conceptual-role of the content in the hearer's idiolect is, as a result of the mapping, similar to the conceptual-role of the content in the speaker's idiolect. This will be so when the two interlocutors share similar dispositional understandings of the respective contents grasped and expressed. There are two ways in which a hearer can achieve a successful mapping. In cases where the speaker's self-directed SS-understanding of the content expressed and hearer's self-directed SS-understanding of the content grasped are similar, the hearer can directly map the lexical items which comprise the communicated content into her own idiolect. In cases in which the hearer supposes the speaker to have a divergent self-directed SS-understanding to her own, she will map the content into a profile she holds on the way in which the speaker understands the word-forms which comprise the utterance. If this profile (that is, her dispositional other-directed SS-understanding) contains concepts with a

²⁰⁴ I think they might claim that (a) and (c) are dealt with by the same machinery. But it might then seem odd that a special kind of understanding is involved just for case (b).

similar conceptual-role to the speaker's self-directed SS-understanding of the content expressed, communication can succeed.

This basic version of the Similar Content View so far appeals to some unspecified notion of conceptual similarity. Two contents can be more or less similar to each other. As such, the Similar Content View needs to state *how much* similarity is required for communicative success. There are a number of ways in which an account of communicative success can be constructed out of this basic picture depending on how we cash-out this appeal to similarity. One way would be to claim that there is some threshold of similarity beyond which communication succeeds. Another way would be to claim that, as similarity of content (and understanding) comes in degrees, so too does communicative success. In fact, I think the most attractive account of communicative success is one which appeals to a mixture of these two approaches. In Section 2.3, I present these three approaches. In addition to the question of the structure of the Similar Content View, there is also a question as to what conceptual similarity consists in on the Holist's view. In Section 3, I provide a criterion for similarity of meaning which the Holist can appeal to in her account.

2.3 Three kinds of Similar Content View

2.3.1 A threshold view

On a threshold version of a Similar Content View, a version of SimConN can be employed as a necessary condition on communicative success. It would look something like the following:

Similar Content Threshold: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the degree of similarity between the content of the terminal state of the hearer and the content of the initial state of the speaker exceeds n degrees.

As it is stated, the threshold view suffers from the problem of determining where exactly the threshold lies. It is surely the case that the threshold would be vague but,

even granting this, how are we to decide where the correct place to mark the fuzzy boundary between success and failure lies? A further issue with the view – one which may have struck the reader when considering LVC in the previous chapter – is that communicative success does not appear to be best understood as a binary notion. Typically, we do not treat communication as something which either succeeds or fails. But, rather, it is something that we can do more or less well, and something we can improve through successive attempts. Furthermore, it seems that different contexts can be more or less demanding when it comes to assessing whether an exchange was successful. A more plausible version of the threshold view – which is available to Holism, but not LVC – would be a view which makes degree n context-sensitive such that the position of the threshold is, in part, reliant on the context of utterance: specifically, it will be reliant on the particular communicative aims of interlocutors. However, although this view avoids positing any arbitrary boundaries, as it is stated above, it still does not respect the apparent gradability of content, understanding and success. As such, the Holist might prefer a view which claims that communicative success itself comes in degrees. I turn to this view now.

2.3.2 A degrees of success view

On a degrees of success view, it is no longer appropriate to characterise the Content Relation as stating a necessary (or jointly sufficient) condition on communicative success (although, there may be a minimal necessary condition, entailed by the view, that requires *some* degree of similarity of content between subjects). On this picture content similarity plays a different role. It offers us a picture upon which communicative success itself comes in degrees. A low degree of similarity of content between two interlocutors would facilitate a low degree of communicative success; a high degree of conceptual similarity would facilitate a high degree of communicative success; but there is no such thing as *the* degree of similarity of content necessary (or sufficient) for success. We could state the view as follows:

Similar Content Degrees: Communication succeeds to the degree, n , that the content of the terminal state in the hearer (grasped via an act of SS-understanding) is similar to the initial state of the speaker.

This view looks preferable to the threshold view because it avoids any worries about arbitrary boundaries. On the degrees of success view, we can make sense of the idea that, in some cases, we may be said to have been *somewhat* successful in our communicative attempts, even though the elimination of further misunderstanding would have resulted in us being even more successful.

One consequence of the degrees of success view is that, unlike the threshold view, we never strictly speaking *fully* succeed in communicating. This is because we can never fully share content. Rather, as we communicate, we asymptotically increase our understanding of each others' conceptual webs. Fortunately, our inability to perfectly communicate simply does not matter for our communicative goals. Recall from Chapter 2 that, as Rapaport stresses, minor misunderstandings can simply be ignored. In fact, as I will explain later in this project, in some contexts even quite major misunderstandings might not prevent the fulfilment of a particular communicative aim. Where misunderstanding affects communicative success, it can often be identified and resolved through negotiation to a point where it no longer hinders our communicative aims. It seems that completely mutual, or even very highly similar, understanding would be supererogatory to our communicative aims.

2.3.3 A combination view

There is something plausible about both Similar Content Degrees and the context-sensitive version of Similar Content Threshold. As such, I think the best way to understand communicative success is to combine the two views above. This is the approach which I will advocate. On this combination view, the degrees of success aspect would measure communicative success *simpliciter*. In addition, the threshold would then be employed to measure whether a communicative attempt was sufficiently successful *relative* to a particular purpose of the attempt. So, given a

particular context, an attempt might not require a very high degree of success *simpliciter*. As such, it would count as a low degree of success *simpliciter*, but might yet be considered highly successful relative to the threshold required by the particular context. Similarly, an exchange might involve a high degree of success *simpliciter* and yet still fail to count as success for a particular purpose if the context is particularly demanding. It is also possible that the same exchange could be considered a success with respect to one purpose of communication *and* a failure with respect to another despite occupying only one point on the success *simpliciter* scale. The basic idea is that, the greater the degree of success *simpliciter*, the fewer contexts there are in which things can go wrong. As success is just measured in terms of conceptual similarity, the same thing goes for concepts and conceptual webs: the more similar two subjects' concepts (or conceptual webs) are, the fewer contexts there are in which communication can fail between them.

In my presentation of the view so far, I have been helping myself to the notion of conceptual similarity. However, as mentioned in Chapter 2, there is a serious question as to whether a Holist can make sense of the notion of conceptual similarity on her view. Fodor and Lepore object that the Holist cannot provide a criterion for similarity of meaning. And, if this is so, my account of communicative success will be a non-starter. In the remainder of this chapter, I will present Fodor and Lepore's objection and offer a response. In doing so, I will introduce a further way in which the account so far presented must be complicated. I will argue that this complication should be welcomed.

Section 3: Conceptual similarity

Fodor and Lepore argue that the Holist cannot provide criteria for similarity of meaning between concepts without presupposing some notion of meaning identity. The problem can be set up as a dilemma for the Holist: either she must appeal to some unexplained notion of meaning similarity, in which case her account is mysterious, or she must fall back on the notion of content identity and hence abandon

her Holism. This is a relatively old problem for the Holist; it was first presented by Fodor and Lepore (1992). Since then it has been pressed by Fodor, sometimes with Lepore, in a number of places.²⁰⁵ In what follows, I will first set out the problem; I will then outline some responses in the literature (from Paul Churchland and Tim Schroeder) and explain why they are not available to the Holist. Finally, I will offer my own response.

3.1 The Objection

In their (1991) Fodor and Lepore (henceforth, 'FL') take themselves to have established that holists must abandon the content identity thesis. I present this as follows:

Content Identity: For any two non-identical speakers, S1 and S2, there is some concept, C, such that S1 and S2 share C.²⁰⁶

As I explained in Chapter 1, there are holists who argue that they can maintain Content Identity, but my own version of Holism willingly abandons it. In fact, as I have argued, it is in part *because* Holism abandons Content Identity that it enjoys such a plausible view of communication. Most authors – holist or otherwise – who give up on Content Identity think that any potential costs incurred can be avoided by simply replacing this notion with a notion of content similarity.²⁰⁷ Those who endorse Holism will adopt the following thesis:

Content Similarity: Although no two concepts possessed by non-identical speakers, S1 and S2, are identical, any two concepts, C1 in S1 and C2 in S2, can be compared for similarity.

²⁰⁵ See, for example, Fodor and Lepore (1999) and Fodor (1998).

²⁰⁶ For S1 and S2 to 'share' a concept, C, is for each of them to entertain numerically distinct yet type-identical concepts.

²⁰⁷ See, for example, Block (1986) and Harman (1993).

FL (1992) present an objection to the claim that holists can endorse Content Similarity. Their objection is that there is no workable definition of conceptual similarity available to the Holist.²⁰⁸ They argue that any explication of conceptual similarity must presuppose a robust notion of conceptual identity – that is, a notion which is defined for more than just the case of identical networks – and Holism denies that there is such a thing.

To introduce the problem, FL consider that license for optimism regarding the task of developing a notion of conceptual similarity might come from the fact that we frequently and unproblematically talk of similarities and differences between the *beliefs* of two non-identical subjects. They then consider that one might explain what it is for two speakers to have similar concepts in a way analogous to how one explains what it is for two speakers to have similar beliefs. However, as FL demonstrate, the conceptual similarity case is not analogous to our everyday understanding of belief similarity. One can tease two objections out of FL’s critique of the analogy. The first is that the belief similarity model is actually a model of what it is for two subjects to possess similar belief *sets*, rather than a model of what it is for two subjects to possess *particular* beliefs which are similar. FL write:

No doubt, one does know (sort of) what it is like to more or less believe the same things as the President does; it’s to share *many of the President’s beliefs*. For example, the President believes P, Q, R, and S, and I believe P, Q, and R; so my beliefs are similar to his. An alternative, compatible reading is: the President believes P and Q *very strongly* and I believe them equally strongly or almost as strongly, so again my beliefs are similar to his. But neither of these ways of construing belief similarity helps with the present problem. The present problem is not to make sense of believe-most-of-P, -Q, -R, -and-S or of more-or-less-strongly-believing-P; it’s to make sense of *believing something-similar-to-P* – that is, believing *more-or-less-P*.²⁰⁹

As such, this belief similarity model, even if the Holist could appeal to it, would not actually do the job they want it to. The belief similarity model explains what it is for

²⁰⁸ FL (1999) also seem to think that defenders of Content Similarity are trying to *replace* principles of content individuation with some principle of meaning similarity. They may be right that this would be a weird and fruitless thing to do, but this is not what any of the authors involved in the present debate are trying to do. As such, I do not deal with this issue here. For a response to this aspect of FL’s critique see Schroeder (2007).

²⁰⁹ FL (1992) 18, italics in original

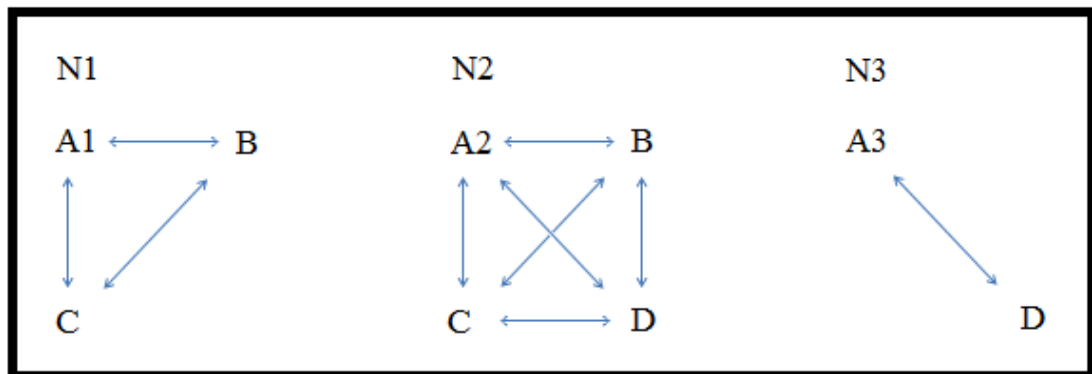
two *sets* of beliefs to be similar, where this involves identifying how many of two subjects' beliefs are shared. The model does not tell you how similar two individual beliefs are. But, it is something more like this latter task that the Holist wishes to accomplish. The Holist does not want a criterion for establishing whether two sets of concepts (or contents) are similar. She wants a criterion of similarity for determining whether any two individual concepts (or contents) are similar. The same thing goes for comparing similarities between individual beliefs: if I want to know how similar two beliefs are, I am interested in how similar their contents are. The second, related, problem with the analogy which FL point out is that this notion of belief similarity presupposes some notion of belief identity. It is because we share one or more of the *same* beliefs that our belief (sets) can be said to be similar in the manner described above. As FL explain, “[P]recisely because these colloquial senses of belief similarity *presuppose* a notion of belief identity, they don't allow us to *dispense with* a notion of belief identity *in favour of* a notion of belief similarity.”²¹⁰ Unfortunately for the Holist, replacing talk of conceptual identity with talk of conceptual similarity is precisely what she wishes to do and, as such, the belief similarity model presented here will not illuminate the task at hand. The Holist needs a different kind of explanation of conceptual similarity which does not depend on an antecedently understood notion of conceptual identity, and which will provide criteria for determining whether two *individual* concepts are similar (rather than whether two sets of concepts are similar).

However, FL suggest that no alternative will be forthcoming. They claim that, just as the belief (set) model requires appeal to a notion of belief identity, so will conceptual similarity require appeal to conceptual identity. Their reasoning runs as follows. For any concept, A1, we can ask whether it is similar to a second concept A2. The Holist might answer by saying that A1 and A2 stand in similar conceptual relations to other concepts in their respective conceptual webs. But by what criteria are these conceptual relations similar? One way to explicate this similarity would be along the lines of the belief model above. For example, we might say that concept A1 in network N1 is similar to concept A2 in network N2 if A1 and A2 are related to a

²¹⁰ Ibid, 19, italics in original

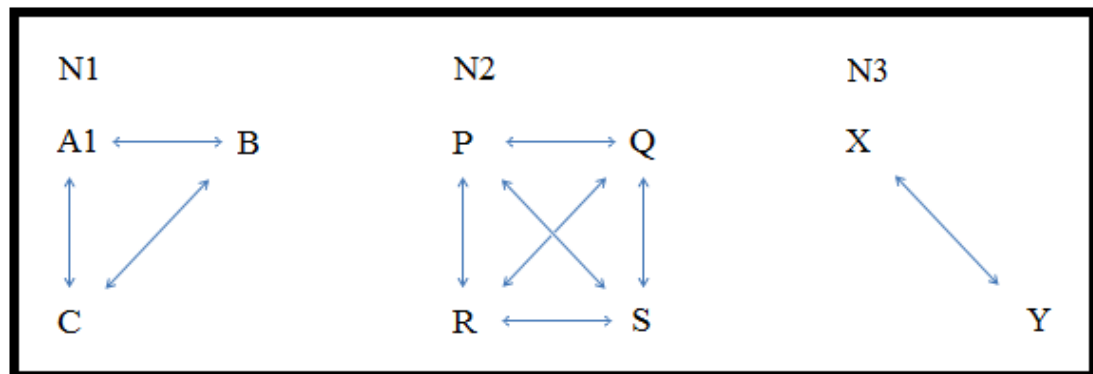
similar *set* of concepts. If A1 is related to B and C; and A2 is related to B, C and D; then we might say that A1 and A2 are similar concepts. Along the same lines, if A3, in a further network, N3, is related only to concept D, then we might say that A1 is more similar to A2 than it is to A3. This suggestion is illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 1).

Figure 1:



The problem with this suggestion is just like the problem with the belief set model: we have presupposed that we can identify concepts B, C, and D across the three non-identical networks. That is, we have posited conceptual identity. But, as FL rightly point out, the labelling of these nodes across the three networks is illicit. For, in applying these labels, we have presupposed that we can identify where each concept is positioned in each of the networks before comparing these concepts' similarities. What we should have is three arbitrarily labelled networks. But, as illustrated in Figure 2, it is a mystery how any two concepts in these networks are related.

Figure 2:



Precisely what is in question is how we are to work out what relations the concepts in N2 and N3 bear to concepts in N1 and so we cannot just help ourselves to these relations to begin with. It should be stressed that *any* positing of conceptual identity (outside of identical networks) would be problematic for the Holist because it is simply not consistent with her view. Adding a concept to the conceptual network *alters* the content of all concepts in the network. For example, when D in Figure 1 is added to N2, this *changes* the concepts labelled ‘A2’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ such that these three concepts cannot be of the same type as those which comprise network N1. This is simply a consequence of the Instability Thesis.

FL seem to think that there is no way to avoid positing some kind of semantic identity relations in an attempt to provide a criterion of similarity of meaning and, as such, the Holist must accept conceptual similarity as a primitive relation. For example, claiming that concepts A1 and A2 participate in similar inferences just presents us with another version of the problem: by what criteria are these inferences similar? It cannot be that similar inferences are those which have similar premises and similar conclusions for then we are right back where we started.²¹¹ FL think that any attempt to provide criteria for similarity of meaning will encounter some version of this problem. Their claim, I think, is not just that providing such criteria would be hard, but that it is not possible. They write,

[I]t seems sort of plausible that you can't have a robust notion of *similar* such and suches unless you have a correspondingly robust notion of *identical* such and suches. The problem isn't, notice, that if holism is true, then the conditions for belief identity are hard to meet; it's that, if holism is true, then the notion of "tokens of the same belief type" is defined *only* for the case in which *every* belief is shared. Holism provides no notion of belief-type identity that's defined for any other case and no hint of how to construct one. But if there is no construal of the claim that two beliefs are tokens of the *same* type in cases where belief systems fail to overlap completely, how in such cases, are we to construe the notion of two beliefs being of almost the same type?²¹²

²¹¹ FL (1992) 20

²¹² FL (1992) 19

In a later section, I will demonstrate why FL's objection fails. First, however, I will describe two responses from the literature. The first of these will be Paul Churchland's (1998) response. The second response is from Tim Schroeder (2007). As we will see, even if these responses achieve what their authors set out to do, neither will be adequate for the Holist's purposes.

3.2 Churchland's response

Probably the most prominent response in the literature is from Paul Churchland (1996, 1998)²¹³. Churchland defends a holistic conceptual-role theory which he calls 'State Space Semantics' (1986). Churchland is working from within a connectionist theory of mind. As such, the vocabulary uses to present the theory is quite a departure from the terms in which I presented conceptual-role semantics in Chapter 1. Fortunately, for my purposes, a brief introduction to Churchland's theory will suffice: Churchland may or may not succeed in providing a response to FL, but it is easy to see that it is not a response which is available to my Holist. The reason for this is that Churchland eventually adopts a two-factor theory of content in order to meet FL's challenge. Holism is a purely internalist theory and, as such, cannot appeal to relations to the environment in its criterion of meaning similarity.

Churchland thinks content can be explained in terms of neural activation patterns. State Space Semantics employs the notion of a 'state space' as a system of representation that can be used to model these activation patterns. Patterns of neural activation (in response to, for example, the presentation of an object to the system) are represented as regions in state space. Concepts, on Churchland's theory, are to be identified in terms of positions in state space.²¹⁴ A state space is just a geometric representation of a connectionist network (or some subsection of a connectionist network). This state space itself comprises a number of dimensions which represent properties of the object represented. Churchland writes,

²¹³ The debate between FL and Churchland spans a number of papers: Churchland (1991); FL (1992); Churchland (1993); FL (1993); Churchland (1996); Churchland (1998); FL (1999).

²¹⁴ Churchland (1986) 280

On neural network models of cognition, the primary unit of representation, and the primary *vehicle* of semantic content, is the overall pattern of simultaneous activation levels across the assembled neurons of a given population, such as the cells in layer four of the primary visual cortex, or the output cells of the motor cortex, or the “cells” in a given layer of some artificial network model. Such patterns are often referred to as *activation vectors*. [...]. A specific activation pattern can [...] be simply and usefully characterised as a specific point in a proprietary space, an n -dimensional space with a proprietary axis for the variable activation level of each of the n neurons in the representing population. Any single point in that space will represent, by way of its unique set of n coordinate values, the simultaneous activation levels of each of the cells in the corresponding neural population.²¹⁵

Given this picture of concepts, conceptual similarity can be measured by comparing positions in state space for similarity. Conceptual similarity is a matter of similarity of neural activation patterns represented by these positions. Where patterns are more similar, we can say that there is a high degree of conceptual similarity. According to Churchland, comparing the positions of objects in state-space across subjects will give us an accurate measure of how similar one subject’s concept is to another subject’s corresponding concept.

Churchland’s theory predates FL’s objection to holistic theories of content. However, Churchland intends the account to provide a robust notion of conceptual similarity which genuinely holistic theories of meaning can endorse. Unfortunately, it should be clear to see why Churchland’s account, as it is stated above, fails to do this. And, indeed, FL, and later Churchland, recognise the shortcomings of this early version of the account. The problem is that Churchland’s account represents conceptual similarity in terms of similarity of position in state space, but it does not give us any account of what it would be for two state spaces to be tokens of the same type (or of similar types). As FL put it,

[W]hat Churchland has on offer is the idea that two concepts are similar insofar as they occupy (relatively) similar positions *in the same state space*. The question thus presents itself: *When are S_1 and S_2 the same state space?*

²¹⁵ Churchland (1998) 6

*When, for example, is your semantic space a token of the same semantic [state space] type as mine?"*²¹⁶

FL suggest that a necessary condition on the identity of two state spaces would be identity of their dimensions. So, once again, we are faced with a familiar question: when are two dimensions of state space the same (or similar)?²¹⁷ Once again, an attempt at providing a criterion for similarity of meaning has presupposed meaning identity. In the case of Churchland's account, the problem is that understanding similarity of meaning as similarity of points relative to dimensions of state space requires a way of identifying when two state-spaces are tokens of the same type. We must presuppose that the two state-spaces have been identified as representing a particular concept, or as having the same (or similar) dimensions. However, if one wants to meet FL's challenge, one cannot just help oneself to labels in this way, for part of what is at issue is the correct way to label the dimensions across the two state spaces in the first place.

Churchland recognises FL's concern and amends his theory accordingly. It had previously been thought by FL that concepts, on Churchland's view, are dependent for their individuation only on their relations to dimensions of the state space. Churchland (1998) suggests that he can provide a means of labelling dimensions such that they can be compared across different networks by appeal to relations between concepts and the *external world*. Churchland writes,

A point in activation space acquires a specific semantic content not as a function of its position relative to the constituting axes of that space, but rather as a function of (1) its spatial position relative to all of the other contentful points within that space; and (2) *its causal relations to stable and objective macro-features of the external environment*.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ FL (1992) 197

²¹⁷ Ibid

²¹⁸ Churchland (1998) 8, emphasis added

As such, Churchland explicitly acknowledges that his theory counts as a two-factor approach to content-individuation.²¹⁹ Content is determined, not just by its relations to dimensions in state space, but *also* to its relations to the external environment.

The externalist aspect of a two-factor theory can be employed as a means of identifying tokens of the *same* concept types across networks. Tiffany (1999) goes further and suggests that we treat Churchland's theory as a theory of the vehicle of content, or its mode of presentation, rather than of content itself.²²⁰ Tiffany suggests that a traditional one-factor externalist theory should be employed to take care of content-individuation. Churchland's theory would then be a measure of similarity in mode of presentation rather than similarity of content. Interestingly, Churchland does not employ the second factor in either of these ways. Churchland thinks that his version of the two-factor response enables us to identify similar state spaces *without* presupposing any identities between dimensions.²²¹ Two contents in two non-identical networks do not get to be tokens of the same type merely in virtue of being causally related to the same macro-features of the environment. As such, Churchland does not take the external factor in his theory to necessarily provide a criterion of content identity. Because of this, his theory, if successful, would provide a response to FL's objection: it would demonstrate that there can be a robust criterion of meaning similarity which does not presuppose meaning identity.

Perhaps State Space Semantics can be defended. Although, it is worth noting that FL and others still have a number of misgivings about Churchland's account even after his admission that concept-world relations play a substantial role in anchoring the semantic network.²²² For my purposes, all that is important is that Churchland's account, even if it could be successful by its own lights, will not provide a solution for my Holist. The reason for this is that, in his response to FL, Churchland makes an explicit appeal to environmental factors in individuating content. And this is something that, as a committed internalist, my Holist cannot appeal to. The enduring

²¹⁹ Ibid, 30

²²⁰ Tiffany (1999) 427 – 8

²²¹ Churchland (1998) 16

²²² See FL (1999), Garzon (2000) and Gauker (2007).

worry for the Holist then is that, so far, the only means of comparing similarity in concepts across networks have involved either (a), appeal to *sameness* of content or (b), an appeal to externalist concept-world links which otherwise anchor the network. Neither of these approaches is available to the Holist for the reasons outlined above. Next, I turn to another kind of solution which does not involve either (a) or (b). Unfortunately, as we will see, this approach, too, will not be of use to Holism.

3.3 Schroeder's response

The second response I will consider is from Tim Schroeder (2007). Schroeder offers a measure of conceptual similarity in terms of similarity of extension. He sets out his account as follows. He first offers two definitions regarding the union and intersection of the extensions (at a given world) of distinct concept tokens:

$C \cap C^* w$: For two token concepts C and C^* , let the intersection of their extensions in world w be $C \cap C^* w$.

$C \cup C^* w$: For two token concepts C and C^* , let the union of their extensions in world w be $C \cup C^* w$.²²³

Schroeder thinks that because, for example, the extension (in the actual world) of one subject's concept RIPE is finite, and likewise for a second subject's RIPE*, we can provide a measure of the similarity of the two subjects' concepts by dividing the size of the intersection of their actual extension by the size of the union of their actual extension. He calls this the 'Simple Similarity Measure':

Simple Similarity Measure: The similarity of actual-world concepts C and C^* is a value between 0 and 1, given by $\text{Cardinality}(C \cap C^*)_{\text{actual}} / \text{Cardinality}(C \cup C^*)_{\text{actual}}$.²²⁴

Schroeder offers the following example of this measure in action:

²²³ Schroeder (2007) 76

²²⁴ Ibid

If you and I were both to consider only fifty objects to be ripe, and I were to agree with you about forty of them but disagree about ten, then we would agree on forty out of the sixty objects considered ripe by either of us, and our concepts would be 0.67 similar for purposes of determining the commensurability of our thoughts.²²⁵

Of course, a comparison of the actual extensions of two concepts is not a good guide to how similar those concepts are: their extensions may vary wildly, or not at all, at other possible worlds. As such, Schroeder then modifies the Simple Similarity Measure to give a measure which will take into account differences of opinion that subjects might have with respect to application of their concepts across further possible worlds. However, in order for a version of the Simple Similarity Measure to work, he recognises that the measure must deal in a *finite* number of possible cases. To achieve this, he introduces a procedure which presents him with a finitely large set of possible worlds which are supposed to include all possibilities relevant to assessing similarities between the extensions of the concepts we possess (given which world is the actual world).²²⁶ This set he calls ‘Recombination’. As Schroeder puts it, the set contains, for example, “every physically possible object that might have any bearing on distinguishing your concept RIPE* from my concept RIPE.”²²⁷ Recombination does not contain *all* possible worlds, only those that are alleged to be relevant to determining the similarities and differences between our actual concepts. Schroeder eventually ends up with a measure which he calls ‘Proportion’. Proportion is a measure of the similarity of the extensions of two concepts in all worlds in Recombination. The basic idea is simple: if two subjects perfectly agree on which possible objects in Recombination fall under the extension of their concepts, C and C*, then the Proportion for their concepts C and C* will be 1.²²⁸ If they disagree completely, the Proportion will be 0. If they disagree only slightly, Proportion might be something like 0.95, which we might judge to be a sufficiently high score to count the two concepts as similar enough for certain purposes.²²⁹ The details of Schroeder’s account, and whether it succeeds as an adequate measure of similarity of extension, are not of primary concern here. What I am interested in is whether it could provide a

²²⁵ Ibid

²²⁶ Ibid, 78

²²⁷ Ibid, 78

²²⁸ Schroeder acknowledges that this is likely to be a vague matter (2007, 84).

²²⁹ Schroeder (2007) 79–80

measure of similarity which would be attractive to a Holist trying to meet FL's challenge. I think it is clear that it will not.

Schroeder's account is not intended as a solution to the problem faced by Holism in particular, but as a solution to what he sees as a far more general problem for any theory of content.²³⁰ He thinks that even theories such as social and physical externalism will want to allow that certain of our concepts are not shared, and that the existence of such concepts calls out for a measure of their similarity. Speakers legitimately disagree as to the application of various of their concepts and are often *not* disposed to defer to experts.²³¹ Examples he gives include the concepts expressed by 'ripe', 'latte', 'seat', and 'light truck'.²³² A measure of similarity is needed, according to Schroeder, for the purposes of explaining things such as agreement, disagreement and communication when it is objects picked out by concepts like these which are under discussion. Schroeder thinks that, when it comes to explaining these phenomena, what matters is not, at least primarily, *how* we conceive of the various objects under discussion. Rather, what matters is whether or not we are thinking about more or less the same set of objects.

As such, Schroeder thinks that what is wrong with Churchland's account is that, even if it worked, it would not measure the right thing. He criticises Churchland for providing an account, not of similarity of content, but of the similarity of the way we think about things: "What Churchland proposes to measure is not the extent to which you and I are thinking about the same things; he proposes to measure the extent to which you and I think about things *in the same way*."²³³ This criticism echoes Tiffany's complaint that State Space Semantics is better understood as a theory of the vehicle of content, rather than of content itself. Schroeder thinks that a criterion for similarity of meaning *ought* to be concerned with the extension of terms. Or, at the very least, a measure of similarity of extension is required in order to adequately explain certain interpersonal phenomena (perhaps alongside accounts of the

²³⁰ Interestingly, he thinks that even Fodor will want to appeal to such a notion due to his response-dependent account of content. (2007, 71)

²³¹ Schroeder (2007) 69

²³² Ibid

²³³ Ibid, 74

similarity of other aspects of content).²³⁴ As such, Schroeder thinks his measure *ought* to ignore more subtle differences between concepts. He writes:

For the purposes of determining whether agreement, disagreement and the like are possible, what is important is not that we think of things in (roughly) the same way, but that we think of (roughly) the same things. A useful measure of concept similarity will not measure similarities in inner conceptual structure, but similarities in the way actual and possible objects are classified by concepts. To a first approximation, this means similarities in extension.²³⁵

It is possible that Schroeder's measure works perfectly well as a measure of similarity of extension. I will not argue one way or another in this regard. What is important for our purposes is that, because of the fact that it ignores these more fine-grained differences in 'inner conceptual structure', it will not be of use to the Holist. The problem with Schroeder's approach is that the measure of similarity he proposes is simply not sensitive enough to capture the fine-grainedness of conceptual-role – and, as Schroeder has emphasised – nor is it intended to. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, on Holism, plenty of distinct concepts can be co-extensive. And, indeed, plenty of seriously dissimilar concepts will have an empty extension. As such, even if Schroeder's account is successful, it will be of no use to my Holist. On Holism, similarity (and even identity) of extension is, at best, only a rough guide to how similar two subjects' concepts are.

3.4 A solution for Holism

Churchland's account provides an extremely fine-grained measure of conceptual similarity, but it relies on concept-world relations which are unavailable to Holism. Schroeder's account does not appeal to the external world as an individuating factor (his account is supposed to be compatible with multiple different ways of individuating content), but its measure of similarity is far too coarse-grained to be of use to the Holist. Thus Holism is still threatened by the dilemma presented by FL's objection: either content similarity is a mysterious primitive, or it must be explained,

²³⁴ Ibid, 75

²³⁵ Ibid

non-holistically, in terms of a robust notion of content identity. What I aim to show in what follows is that we can provide criteria for content similarity without appealing to this robust notion of conceptual identity (or identity of inference, or whatever) which FL seem to think will be required by any account. That is, the model on which to understand content similarity is a little different to our colloquial understanding of belief similarity introduced above (although, as we will see, it is not *that* different).

So far, we have it that two identical networks will be identical with respect to content. The problems come when we have to compare two concepts, A1 and A2 in non-identical networks N1 and N2. Before presenting my solution, it will be helpful to take a detour through a solution which is *not* available to the Holist, but which can be tweaked to provide a Holist solution. FL remark that there is a traditional empiricist way of understanding network semantics such that A1 and A2 can be located in two non-identical networks.²³⁶ On this approach, certain nodes in the network are anchored to entities outside of the network such that these nodes are non-holistically defined. On this empiricist picture, these nodes are the ones that represent observational properties and are tied, perhaps by causal relations, to the external objects or properties which they represent. These nodes make up a periphery of observational vocabulary from which all other items in the network can be constructed. Any non-observation node in the network can be located by its relations to these observation nodes – either by standing in direct relations to them, or by standing in relations to further non-observation nodes which stand in direct relations to observation nodes and so forth. This Quinean picture serves to anchor the semantic network such that certain nodes can be type-identified across non-identical networks by their relations to external objects and properties. This approach is not so different from the route that Churchland eventually opts for, except that Churchland would reject the empiricist thesis that complex concepts can be built up out of purely observational concepts. On Churchland's view, non-observation nodes are also directly located by their causal connections to macro-features of the environment

²³⁶ FL (1992) 199

(and, as mentioned above, Churchland thinks that such connections need not serve to type-identify concepts, but need only serve to determine that they are similar).²³⁷

Something like the belief similarity model introduced above is applicable to the Quinean network model. To take a simple example, we can say that contents A1 and A2 in non-identical networks N1 and N2 are similar if A1 stands in relation to observational nodes O1, O2, and O3; and A2 stands in relations to observational nodes O1 and O2. This picture works because we can antecedently identify O1, O2 and O3 non-semantically, without mere appeal to their position in the semantic network. O1, O2 and O3 are picked-out by their causal relations (for example) to real world objects and properties. As FL explain,

The old (empiricist) version of network semantics had a story about the identification of the dimensions by reference to which it did its taxonomising; they were to express observable properties, and an externalist (for example, causal) theory of some kind was used to explicate the relation between observable properties and terms in the observation vocabulary. In particular, that relation was assumed to be specifiable independent of the interpretation of the rest of the vocabulary.²³⁸

My solution to the problem will be somewhat empiricist in nature (although, as I will explain below, there are versions of it which are less empiricist). Providing an account which is available to the Holist will involve some slight alterations to the Quinean picture. The picture currently involves an externalist element of content determination which is not available to my Holist. It is also not thoroughly holistic in nature for the same reason that the belief similarity model rejected above was not holistic in nature: it allows that certain nodes can be type-identified across non-identical networks. I wish to remove both these elements of the picture. Firstly, I will remove all reference to external observational properties as having a meaning-fixing (and network anchoring) role. This will remove the externalist element of the picture, but it will also put us right back in our original predicament. Fortunately, I think we can replace these observational properties with something internal which will have a similar – though not identical – effect. The difference, I think, is that these ‘anchors’

²³⁷ See Churchland (1998).

²³⁸ FL (1992) 199

will not be employed to provide a means of locating type-identical contents across non-identical networks. Rather, they will merely allow us to identify *similar* contents in a way which does not presuppose either conceptual identity or primitive conceptual similarity. As we will see, conceptual networks can be ‘anchored’ internally by appeal to certain of the *non-semantic* properties which affect the causal-roles of the concepts which constitute the network. We can then compare concepts across networks by looking to see both (a), if they possess similar non-semantic properties and (b), if they stand in similar relations to further concepts which possess similar non-semantic properties, and so forth.

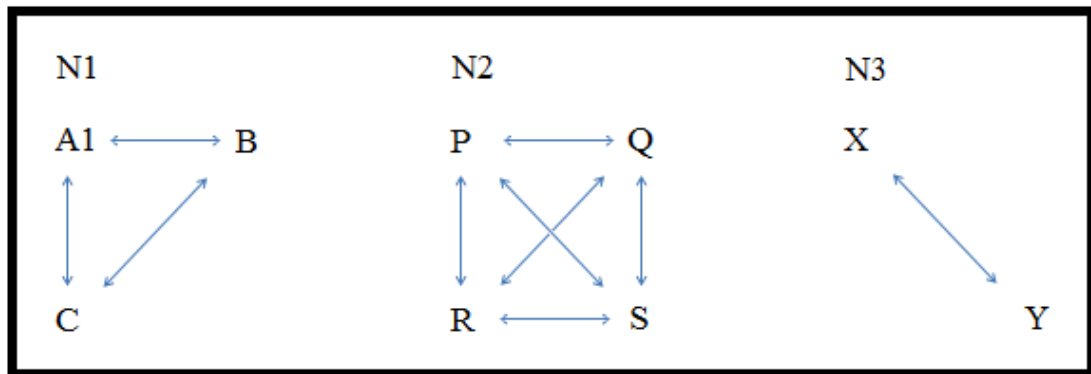
Perhaps FL are right that we cannot give an illuminating or non-circular definition of ‘similarity of content’ using only resources from within the semantic network. However, I do not see why any holist is obliged to do this any more than an atomist like Fodor is obliged to give criteria for *sameness* of content using only semantic resources. FL’s complaint is that explaining similarity of content in *semantic terms* requires appeal to a notion of identity of content. But there is no reason why we should be forced to give our explanation in purely semantic terms. The holist’s semantic network is not some free-floating system of arbitrary symbols. Rather, it is a system which is embedded in, and intimately connected with, a massively complex system of sensory inputs, behavioural outputs, stored memories, occurrent imaginings, experienced emotions etc. I will refer to these phenomena as ‘non-linguistic elements of the network’. This is just for ease of exposition. One could also think of them as being distinct from (but connected to) the network (This construal might be especially plausible for sensory inputs, behavioural outputs and the like). Which way one thinks of them will not affect my argument. Furthermore, certain of them might contain linguistic elements: one can remember or imagine conversations, for example.

As stated in Chapter 1, the position that I am defending is the thesis that content is determined (or, perhaps, constituted) by *causal*-role. In particular, we are considering the causal-role of a particular kind of representational mental entity – the concepts – which inhabit brains. The causal-role of a given concept will depend on the causal-

role of all other concepts in the semantic network such that if there is a change in the causal-role of one concept, there must be a change in the causal-role of *all* concepts in the network. However, each concept occupies a *unique* place in the conceptual web and, as such, each concept has a unique set of causal properties which determines how it is related to the other concepts in the conceptual network, how it combines with these concepts to form sentential contents, and how it interacts with non-linguistic elements of the network, etc. For example, in a given semantic network, N, the causal roles of the concepts DOG_N and HAIRDRYER_N will depend on the causal roles of all other concepts in the network. However, the two concepts possess different causal properties. DOG_N, for example, will be causally related to ANIMAL_N in a way which HAIRDRYER_N is not. HAIRDRYER_N will be causally related to mental images as of hairdryers in a way that DOG_N is not. The causal relations that these concepts stand in to each other are complex. To say that one concept stands in a particular causal relation to another concept is not to say that the first concept *causes* the second. Rather, it is to say that the two stand in a particular relationship which, at its most basic level, is to be explained by a complicated system of causal interactions. To say that conceptual-roles have a causal basis is essentially just to adopt a form of naturalism about content. This is so in much the same way that a philosopher who claims that consciousness can be fully explained in terms of causal interactions between neurons (and perhaps, most basically, between atoms and such) is a naturalist about consciousness. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Hudson (2007) suggests that the correct way to understand the causal structure of the relations between concepts in human brains is an empirical issue which linguists and neurolinguists, rather than philosophers, are best placed to study.

Given this picture, I think what we should do to solve the present problem is define conceptual similarity in terms of overlapping sets of these causal properties and relations. And, crucially, these causal properties and relations will be things which we can identify across different subjects: just because concepts in a network are holistically related, it does not follow that they have no non-holistically identifiable properties; and it is these properties which we can use to ‘anchor’ the network. To take a very simple example, consider the networks, N1 and N2, from Figure 2.

Figure 2:



My proposal is that we can work out which concepts in N1 are more or less similar to those in N2 by investigating the concepts' causal properties and relations. For example, suppose that concept A1 has causal properties, p1, p2 and p3. We can then look to see which, if any, concepts in N2 have any of these causal properties. Similarly, if P in N2 has more of these properties in common with A1 in N1 than with X in N3, we can say that P is more similar to A1 than to X.

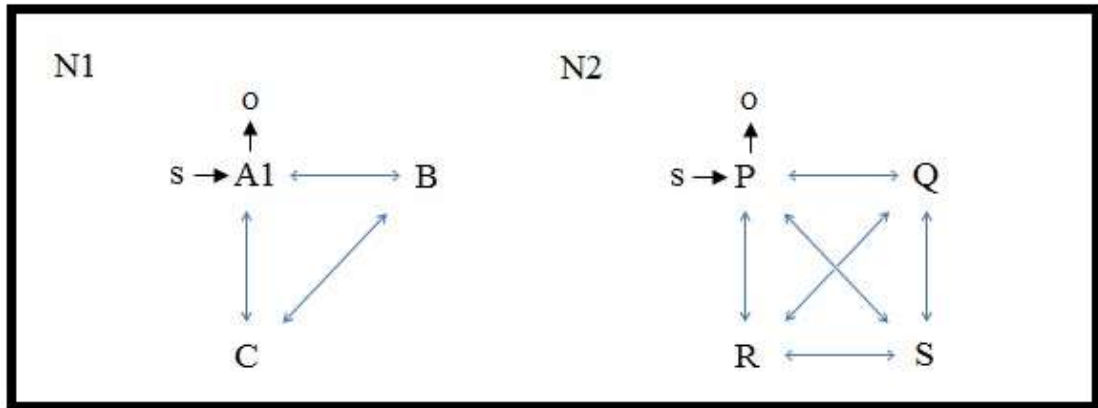
One thing to stress about the present approach is that the aim is not to type-identify *concepts* across networks by appeal to some privileged class of causal properties (This was what the empiricist picture introduced above tried to do). Every distinct concept will have a different set of causal properties as a simple consequence of the Instability Thesis. Only concepts in identical networks will have the very same set of causal properties and so only concepts which inhabit identical networks can be type-identical. Rather, the aim is to compare how (merely) similar a given concept in one network is to a second concept in a second (or the same) network. And to do this, we look to see which, if any, causal properties they share (or, alternatively, whether they possess any causal properties which are similar). As I will explain below, and in Chapter 5, we can be interested in different kinds of similarities between two concepts depending on our purposes.

But is my appeal to causal properties and relations really explanatory? Are they not just causal relations between two concepts? If this is the case, how do we identify causal properties in the first place? FL might complain that my appeal to similar

causal properties and relations is not any more illuminating than the appeal to similar inferential role, or similar state space, rejected above. Fortunately, unlike the *mere* appeal to inferential role etc., I think we can offer an illuminating account of the role of causal properties and relations in locating similar concepts. As already emphasised, in Chapter 1, Holism was not stated as a thesis which claims that a conceptual network is merely a collection of interrelated linguistic *symbols*. In fact, were this the case, it would not be clear that we would be studying anything like a language at all. As such, the kinds of causal properties and relations that we have to work with are not *just* those properties and relations which pertain to relationships between linguistic concepts. Central to the understanding of language as a conceptual network is recognition of the network's relations to the rest of the cognitive system: its relations to proximal stimuli, behavioural outputs, pictorial (or otherwise non-linguistic) representations, memories, imaginings and so forth. Crucially, these phenomena can be non-holistically identified and can be compared across subjects. And so can the causal relations between these phenomena and the various concepts which make up a conceptual network. The idea is that, in addition to its relations to other concepts, a concept also bears all kinds of relations to non-linguistic elements of the network. And we can use these elements to 'anchor' the holistic network.

To take another (much simplified) example, suppose that in N1 (or connected to N1) we find some proximal stimulus, S, and some behavioural output, O. Then suppose we find that some causal relationship holds between S and a concept A1; and suppose that some distinct causal relationship holds between O and A1. We can then look for a concept in N2 which is related in the same (or similar) ways to the same (or a similar) proximal stimulus and behavioural output in N2. That is, we find S and O in N2 and look to see if some concept is related to them just as A1 is in N1 (or we find similar phenomena, S* and O* in N2). This suggestion is represented in Figure 3, below.

Figure 3:



What is crucial to this proposal then is that we can compare these non-linguistic elements of the network (in this case S and O) across two subjects. But this should not be problematic. Surely things such as our non-linguistic representations, imaginings, proximal stimuli and behavioural outputs are indeed qualitatively similar (and possibly type-identical). After all, we all have human brains, and human eyes, human hands etc., which respond to inputs in similar ways. When I experience a representation as of a horse, for example, there is something going on in my brain which is qualitatively similar to the thing that goes on in your brain when you experience a representation as of a horse. And, if this is so, we can appeal to a no-longer illicit notion of identity in order to define *this* similarity: representations as of horses, for example, share many of their intrinsic properties.

Note that the present proposal appeals to some kind of identity, but at a different, non-semantic, level. I think there are two options for understanding which level this is. The first option is this: if we can type-identify things such as proximal stimuli, or non-linguistic representations, or behavioural outputs across systems (again, not by their relations to external objects, but by their internal characteristics), then we can use these types to compare sets of causal properties and relations across networks. But we needn't appeal to identity here if we don't want to. Suppose we claim that your representations as of horses and mine are not tokens of the same type, but are merely similar. We might say instead that yours are representations-as-of-horses and mine are representations-as-of-horses*. If this is the case, we can say that they are similar in virtue or sharing certain of the same, more basic, properties (just as we can

say that two horses are similar in virtue of sharing certain of the same properties even if we were to deny that they are members of the same type). If we believe in property- or object-types at all, there should be no regress here.²³⁹ I think that to claim that things such as representations as of horses (or, alternatively, of more basic properties of these representations) cannot be compared across systems is to deny some form of internalism. That is, the issue here would not be holism, for these properties are not holistically determined. Rather, the question would be whether such items can be type-identified without appeal to external objects. But there is no reason to suppose that the task of type-identifying these internal properties is any more difficult than the task of type-identifying any other collection of objects that have fewer than all of their properties in common. Nor would this task be any more mysterious.

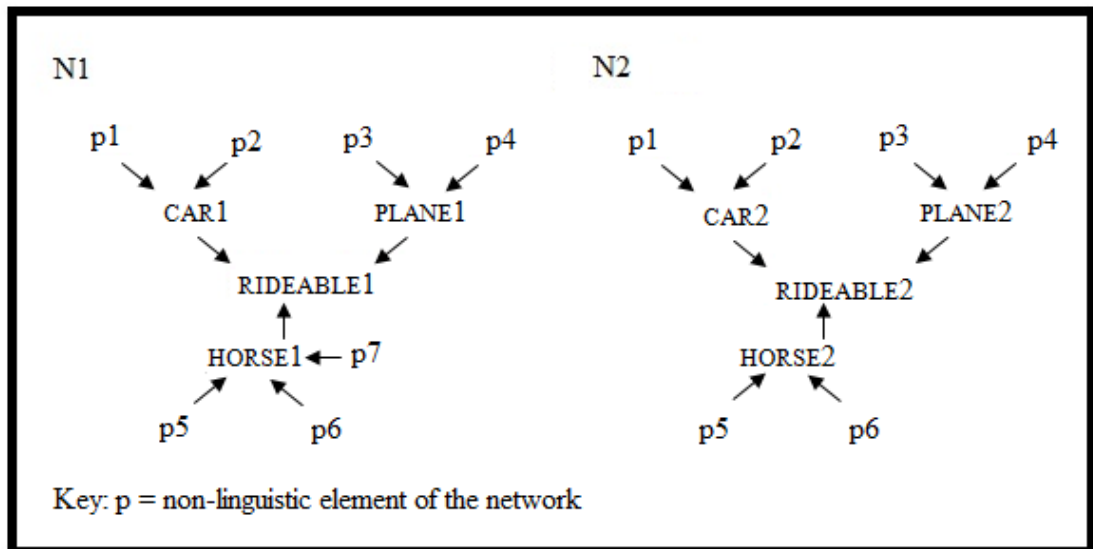
At this point, FL might complain that this story may work for concepts which are more easily understood in terms of their obvious perceptible qualities, but what of our more complex or abstract concepts? Surely it is far less plausible that we could locate these by appeal to their connections to non-linguistic elements of the network. For example, it is not obvious how we could locate the concept DEMOCRACY by appeal to its relations to proximal stimuli or behavioural outputs.²⁴⁰ Fortunately, I don't think we need to. For, once we have identified two similar concepts, A1 and P, in conceptual networks N1 and N2, we can then start comparing further concepts in these two networks in terms of their relations to A1 and P (as well as their relations to any other concepts we have located). That is, concepts are not located merely in terms of their relations to non-linguistic elements of the network, but *also* in terms of their relations to further concepts which have been antecedently located in this way. For example, suppose we have labelled a concept 'RIDEABLE1', in network N1. And suppose we have noted that it is related in particular ways to concepts which we have labelled 'HORSE1', 'CAR1', 'PLANE1', which in turn are related to certain non-

²³⁹ Many authors who do not believe in such things as property- or object-types will believe in objective similarity relations between objects and/or properties which can be used to play much the same role in my argument. Here I have in mind Resemblance Nominalists such as Rodriguez-Pereyra (2002). Such authors may also be less impressed by FL's objection that similarity is mysterious in the first place.

²⁴⁰ In fact, I think concepts like DEMOCRACY will be related to non-linguistic elements of the network – for example, memories of using the expression, or of voting.

linguistic elements of N1 (for example, representations as of horses, cars, and planes, respectively). To find out if there is a similar concept to RIDEABLE1 in a second network, N2, we can first identify whether there are any concepts which are similar to HORSE1, CAR1, and PLANE1 by determining whether there are any concepts in N2 which are related to the same (or similar) non-linguistic elements as HORSE1, CAR1, PLANE1 are related to (We might call these newly-located concepts HORSE2, CAR2, and PLANE2). We can then look to see if there is a concept in N2 which is related to these three concepts in ways which are similar to how RIDEABLE1 is related to the relevant concepts in N1. If we do find such a concept, we might label it 'RIDEABLE2' to indicate that it plays a similar causal-role in N2 to the role that RIDEABLE1 plays in N1. This example is illustrated in Figure 4, below.

Figure 4:

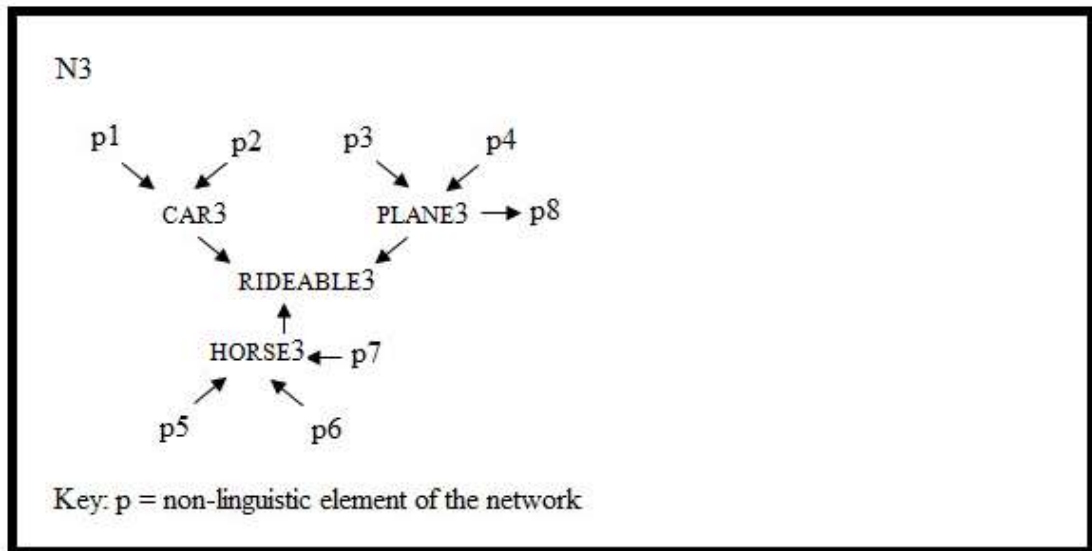


This diagram shows how two concepts, RIDEABLE1 and RIDEABLE2 can be classified as similar across two different networks without direct appeal to their connections to non-linguistic elements of their respective networks. Rather, they are located by observing their relations to further concepts which are themselves related to non-linguistic elements of the network. These further concepts have been identified as similar across networks in part due to the fact that they *share* certain non-semantic

properties.²⁴¹ CAR1 and CAR2, for example, stand in relations to the same non-linguistic elements of the network, p1 and p2. CAR1 and CAR2 are highly similar, but they are not the same concept. This is because there is a difference between their respective networks: HORSE1 in N1 is directly connected to an additional non-semantic element of the network, p7, which is not present in N2. As such, all concepts in N1 differ slightly in content to all concepts in N2. Nonetheless, RIDEABLE1 and RIDEABLE2 can be classified as similar due to the fact that they stand in particular relations to antecedently located similar concepts.

We can compare the networks in Figure 4 to a third network, N3, for similarity. N3 is illustrated in Figure 5.

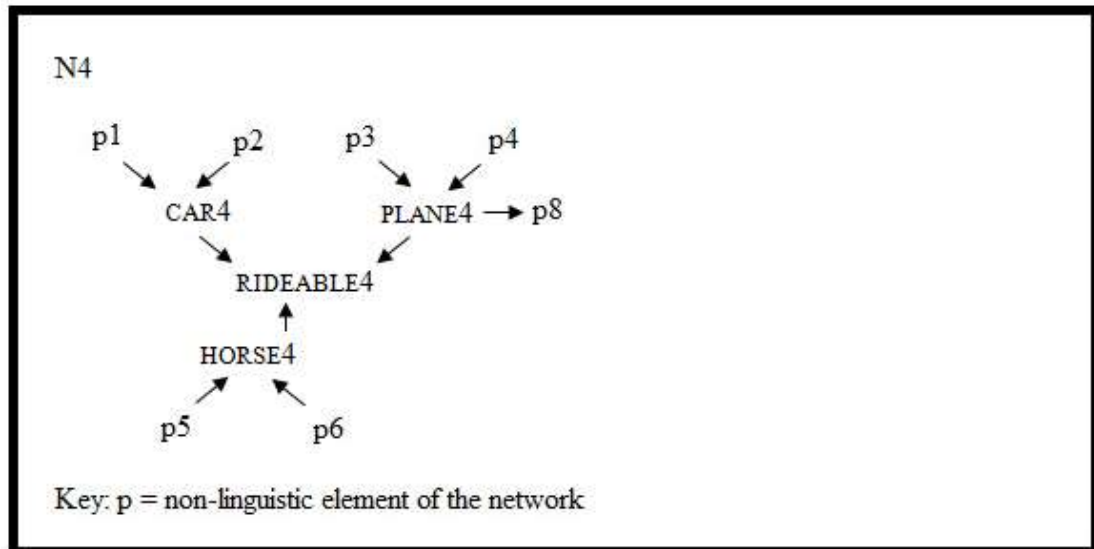
Figure 5:



N3 looks like N1, except that it has an additional property, p8, connected to its PLANE3 concept. As such, we should want to say that N3 is more similar to N1 than it is to N2. I think it is also plausible, given the nature of semantic networks, that two networks might be equally dissimilar from a third network, and yet be dissimilar in different ways. To see this, consider network N4 in Figure 6.

²⁴¹ As noted above, one could construct the diagram such that the properties, p1 – p7, are themselves merely similar and are located by appeal to further, more basic properties which they share – this would simply have made for a more complicated diagram.

Figure 6:



N4 and N1 both have one additional non-linguistic element of the network compared to N2, but each contains a different additional element: N4 contains p8 but not p7 and N1 contains p7 but not p8. As such, it looks like there is a sense in which N4 and N1 might be deemed equally dissimilar from N2. Similarly, we might think that the concept RIDEABLE2 is equally dissimilar from RIDEABLE1 as it is from RIDABLE4 even though these concepts are dissimilar in different ways.

One thing to stress about these diagrams is that the concepts represented by them are nothing like a typical human's concepts. 'CAR1' for example, is *nothing* like a typical human's CAR concept. The labels are simply there to make the diagram more accessible. The diagrams represent extremely simple networks which, due to their size, are significantly semantically impoverished. A real live CAR concept would bear an enormous number of connections to an enormous number of concepts and non-linguistic elements of the network. Even so, a human conceptual network is just a more complicated version of the networks represented in the diagrams.

To summarize the account so far, my proposal is that we can compare two concepts for similarity by observing which causal properties and relations they share. These causal properties and relations are what structure the network. To compare the causal properties of two different concepts, we must first locate them by observing their

relations to less abstract concepts. We can then use the simpler concepts to anchor our comparisons of more complex concepts in terms of these simpler concepts. To anchor the simpler concepts, we look to see if they stand in similar relations to *non-semantic* elements of the network. These non-semantic elements are things such as proximal stimuli, behavioural outputs, memories, imaginings, etc. Crucially, these elements will be things that we *can* compare for similarity across networks as they will share certain non-semantic properties. Once we have located a simple concept in one network, and a similar simple concept in a second network, we can then look to see which more abstract concepts are related to these concepts in similar ways across the two webs. As all concepts bear relations to a large number of other concepts, they can be assessed for similarity in different *respects*, as well as assessed for average similarity. As will become clear in the following sections, recognising this might prompt us to complicate the picture of communicative success presented above. However, as I will argue, this complication should be welcomed by the Holist as it allows her theory to capture the intricacies of human communication in a way which certain of her competitors cannot.

Section 4: Conceptual structure and communicative success

As I suggested above, when it comes to explaining communicative success, the context of communication will place demands on how similar the content grasped by the hearer and expressed by the speaker must be. However, given the above comparisons of concepts in networks N1-N4, I think we might want to say something more about the demands placed on similarity of conceptual-role by the context of communication. For example, perhaps in certain contexts it will matter that RIDEABLE1 is dissimilar from RIDEABLE2 *in a particular way* such that only a hearer who possessed RIDEABLE4 (rather than RIDEABLE1) could communicate successfully with a speaker who possessed RIDEABLE2, relative to the context set by the particular communicative aim of the interlocutors. If this is the case, we should measure not just how similar two conceptual-roles are, but how similar they are in certain respects

relevant to the context of communication. I will call the various respects in which concepts can vary ‘dimensions of conceptual variability’.

The same applies to comparisons of the sentential contents which contain these concepts. Consider, for example, two exchanges in which a speaker expresses her belief that P to two different hearers who each grasp similar contents, P* and P’, respectively. Suppose that P* and P’ are equally dissimilar to P, but are dissimilar in different ways, just as is the case with the concepts from Networks N1 and N4 above. This might be so if, for example, each hearer misunderstands a *different* component concept, but each misunderstands this concept to the same degree. In such a case, it might be that communication can succeed (relative to the context of communication) between the speaker and only *one* of the hearers, but not the other. This will be so even though both exchanges occupy the same point on the success *simpliciter* scale *and* even though the context is the same for each exchange. This is just to say that certain similarities between concepts and contents along certain dimensions of conceptual variability, although they contribute towards success *simpliciter*, are simply not relevant to certain of our practical aims of communication.

Examples like the previous which involve exchanges in which two contents are *equally* dissimilar from a third content (but in different ways) are not examples of exchanges which would occur in practice, although they are theoretically possible. This is simply because semantic networks are huge and complicated, and finding two which balanced each other in the manner described above would be like finding two snowflakes which perfectly mirrored each other. However, such examples serve to demonstrate how, when it comes to communicating towards some particular end, what matters might be not just average similarity of conceptual-role, but certain similarities along particular dimensions of conceptual variability which are relevant in the particular context. Given this, we might want to complicate the initial measures of similarity presented above. To further motivate this move, consider that it looks like we can construct examples with the following structure. The context of communication can set a bar on the success *simpliciter* scale which is met by two exchanges, but we might still want to say that only one of these exchanges is actually

a success relative to that context. That is: one exchange actually is more successful than the other, but there is no indication of this greater success on any scale. To see how this could happen, consider the following. A speaker expresses her belief that P_s , and P_s comprises several concepts, including C_s and D_s . Hearer1 grasps content P_{H1} which comprises concepts C_{H1} and D_{H1} . C_{H1} is extremely similar to C_s but D_{H1} is not that similar to D_s . Hearer2 grasps content P_{H2} which comprises concepts C_{H2} and D_{H2} . D_{H2} is extremely similar to D_s but C_{H2} is not that similar to C_s . Now suppose that P_{H1} and P_{H2} are equally dissimilar from P_s , although they are dissimilar in the different ways described above. As they are equally dissimilar, they will occupy the same point on the success *simpliciter* scale and, as the context is the same in both cases, the point on the success *simpliciter* scale which they must surpass for the exchange to qualify as communicative success will be the same. However, suppose that only similarity to concept C_s is relevant for the particular communicative aim. In this case, only hearer1 grasps a concept which is similar enough to C_s for success, and the difference between D_s and D_{H1} , although large, is not relevant to success given the context. It seems like in this exchange D_{H1} drags the average success down even though it is not relevant. Conversely, in the second exchange, D_{H2} brings the average up, even though it is not relevant in the given context. The problem with the simpler measure of communicative success, then, is that it only takes into account the average similarity between two contents or concepts, and this allows similarity along dimensions of conceptual variability which are irrelevant to a given context to have equal weight in the measure of success and downplays the importance of aspects which should be given greater weight. We might even be able to construct examples upon which one exchange scores higher on the success *simpliciter* scale, even though commonsense indicates that it should be judged as less successful than a second exchange which ranks lower relative to the very same context of communication.

If such examples can be constructed, then we should introduce a measure of similarity which takes into account the fact that certain dimensions of conceptual variability can be more important relative to a context of communication than others. The way to represent this, I think, is to fracture the initial two scales such that success *simpliciter* is measured on multiple scales. For each concept involved in the

speaker's utterance, there will be a scale which measures that concept's similarity to the corresponding concept grasped by the hearer. Similarly, for each dimension of the conceptual variability of the speaker's concept, there will be a scale which measures whether there is a corresponding dimension of the hearer's concept, and how similar these two dimensions are.²⁴² Thus, these scales will measure not just average similarity of concepts, but similarity in certain *respects*. The context of communication would then determine values for each of these scales which must be met for communication to succeed relative to a given context. And we can still employ an additional single scale which measures the average success *simpliciter* of an exchange considered independent from any context of communication. This revised account may sound complicated, and the way I have presented it involves a certain amount of idealisation. However, the basic idea is perfectly intuitive. What we are trying to capture is the idea that, in different situations, different aspects of objects are important to us. And, as such, when it comes to communicating for a particular purpose, certain of the ways in which we think about objects will be more important to that purpose than others. For example, for two vets discussing horses it might be particularly important that their understanding of horse anatomy is similar, whereas for two lasagne chefs discussing horses, it might be completely irrelevant whether they have a similar understanding of horse anatomy. Similarly, for two musicians discussing Paderewski, it might be particularly important that they each believe that he is a pianist, whereas for two politicians this aspect of the concept might be irrelevant.

Another thing to stress to an objector who is worried that the present theory of communicative success now involves a rather large array of scales measuring various aspects of conceptual similarity is the following. I have spent a large portion of this chapter outlining how a Holist can endorse Content Similarity which, recall, is the following thesis:

²⁴² Again, the 'corresponding' dimension will not be a type-identical dimension, but a similar dimension.

Content Similarity: Although no two concepts possessed by non-identical speakers, S1 and S2, are identical, any two concepts, C1 in S1 and C2 in S2, can be compared for similarity.

That is, I have been explaining how to understand the claim that, for any two concepts, C1 and C2, there is some way, albeit complex, to compare their similarities and differences. Given the view of communicative success pressed earlier in this chapter – that communication succeeds to the degree that content is similar – we get the more complex success *simpliciter* scale for free once we have a measure of what it is for two concepts to be more or less similar in certain respects. The degree to which two concepts are similar in a certain respect just *is* the degree to which communication succeeds in that respect. The context then just selects which dimensions of conceptual variability (such as aspects of conceptual-role) of concepts and contents are important to the success of the exchange relative to that context (this will usually be relatively few dimensions). As such, to endorse this more complicated measure of success is really just to put the Holist's theory to work: it does not require introducing any complexity which is not already part of the theory. Furthermore, this complexity is extremely *useful*. It allows us to say more subtle and accurate things about human communication; we can say things that a simple, binary, Same Content View like LVC could not hope to even gesture at. As such, the complexity, I think, should be seen as a major advantage of the Holist's theory rather than as something to worry about.

The above was an enormously simplified story of how we might go about comparing similarity of concepts in holistic webs. In practice, systematically comparing all the causal properties and relations of concepts in the conceptual network of a human would be a daunting task. Concepts have an enormous number of causal properties and relations and the project of comparing the groups of properties possessed by various concepts, and the relations between them, would be immense. But this should not worry the Holist. FL claimed that there was some *in principle* difficulty in giving an *analysis* of similarity between concepts in holistic conceptual webs. FL thought that we would not be able to do this without invoking the Content Identity thesis. But

it should now be clear that we do not need to do this. We can give an analysis of conceptual similarity in terms of similarities between the causal properties and relations of concepts. And we have a clear idea of how to go about comparing networks in the simpler cases. The human case is just a much more complex version of these simple cases. As stressed above, the complexity involved in measuring conceptual similarity is both appropriate and useful.

Furthermore, it should be noted that although the causal underpinnings of conceptual similarity are extremely intricate, the everyday task of determining *roughly* whether any one of your own concepts is relevantly similar to one of your interlocutor's is itself not so difficult. The reason for this is that the environment in which we learn language promotes increases in similarity. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it is largely because of our desire to communicate that this is so. We all acquire our concepts in similar learning environments through communicating with humans who, by and large, possess similar concepts to each other. And the more we communicate with each other, the more similar our concepts become. As Rapaport has argued, our continued attempts to communicate will increase the similarities between our concepts through our negotiations with each other. This means that, as adults, for many of our concepts, especially those that are more mundane, there is already a high degree of similarity in place. As such, we tend to have fairly stable reference points for identifying dissimilarities in certain of our other concepts when our interlocutors utter sentences which appear unusual or unexpected given the context in which they were uttered, or the previous conversational score. Our desire to communicate efficiently drives us to further similarity in conceptual networks. And our continued attempts to communicate make it increasingly easy to identify and correct deviant concepts.

Section 5: Empiricism

Is the approach I am advocating some kind of naïve empiricism about concepts? Before answering this question, a quick note about the term 'empiricism' will be

necessary to avoid potential confusion. Earlier, I talked of ‘Quinean empiricism’ as a means of anchoring the semantic network. This form of empiricism is concerned primarily with the *structure* of concepts. The traditional version of the view claims that complex concepts are all built out of more simple concepts which represent observational properties; however, one could also presumably hold a version of the view which claims that, rather than building up more complex concepts from smaller concepts, we actually divide one larger concept into smaller ones (or a mixture of both). What is important about empiricism in this sense is that *all* concepts have their roots in observational concepts. A second, and not unrelated, thesis about concepts which is often labelled empiricist is empiricism about concept *acquisition*, or language learning. This is the thesis that all, or most, concepts are learned (or acquired). It is to be contrasted with concept nativism (or ‘rationalism’). Nativism about concept acquisition, as I will understand it here, is the view that all, or most, of our concepts are innate.²⁴³ These two empiricist theses are distinct: one can be an empiricist about conceptual structure whilst believing that all concepts are innate (although this would be a weird view). Conversely, and more plausibly, one can be an empiricist about concept acquisition whilst denying empiricism about the structure of concepts. As an example of this latter combination of views, consider that a physical externalist about content might think that new concepts are *acquired* in virtue of the subject merely coming to stand in certain causal relations to her environment, but the content of these concepts may be determined quite independently of any relations they bear to observational concepts (for example, their content might be determined instead by their relations to the objects to which they are appropriately causally related).²⁴⁴ A useful distinction to mark between empiricist views of concept acquisition is between views which claim that new concepts are psychologically learned, and those which claim that new concepts are merely acquired without the need for any significant psychological effort. I think that internalist views of concepts will typically think that concepts are psychologically learned (unless the view is nativist). Externalist views of content, on the other hand, may claim instead that concepts can be acquired in the absence of much psychological understanding on the part of the subject. This gives rise to the

²⁴³ See Laurence and Margolis (2011).

²⁴⁴ Something like this position might be Fodor’s (1998) view.

phenomenon of partial understanding of one's own thoughts distinctive of externalist theories. On Holism, by contrast, new concepts are psychologically learned and cannot but be understood.

So, what is empiricist about my solution to FL's objection? As I will argue, on one way of understanding the view, it is empiricist in *both* senses. However, it need not be thought of in this way. In what follows, I will first describe how the doubly empiricist version of the view might work. I will then explain how one might endorse a less empiricist version of the view. On this latter understanding of the view, if one thinks that *some* concepts are native, then one can claim that not all concepts must be ultimately analyzable in terms of some complex combination of observational concepts. As such, Holism need not take much of stand on the empiricism/nativism debate about concept acquisition (although, it should not endorse an extreme nativism²⁴⁵). Neither must it claim to be fully empiricist in the Quinean sense introduced above.

The first version of the view is one that claims that *all* concepts are learned *and* that these concepts are constructed out of observational concepts. On this view, concepts are learned by being constructed out of further concepts which are already grasped, with help from any cognitive mechanisms already present in the system from birth. As an example of how a new concept is learned consider the following. Suppose you hear the word 'manticore' for the first time in conversation and you want to know what it means. Assuming that the concept is not innate, on the doubly empiricist view you really only have two options. You can come to learn the item by having it explained in terms of concepts which you already understand, or you can learn it through observing instances of objects that it applies to (and hence adding new non-linguistic elements to your network). Oftentimes, you will rely on a combination of both these strategies. When you first hear the term, you create a new node, labelled 'MANTICORE'. As you believe very little about what the term means, this concept is not well connected to the rest of your conceptual network. It is perhaps connected only to a memory of the context in which you learnt the term. It may also be

²⁴⁵ Holism and strong nativism are not incompatible views, but this would be a weird combination of views to hold.

connected to further nodes depending on whether you have inferred anything about the nature of the object that it represents from the context of utterance, or perhaps even from the grammar of the sentence in which the term was used. For example, if the sentence in which you first encountered the term is 'Manticores are ferocious', then you can connect MANTICORE to your FEROCIOUS concept in a particular way. As it is obvious from this sentence that the word is a noun, you might infer that 'manticore' names an object of some kind (in the liberal sense of 'object'). You can then start better connecting your new concept in light of further information that you receive and, in doing so, closing off possibilities as to what the term might mean. So, for example, if I tell you it is part lion, you will connect it to your LION concept. If I tell you it is part scorpion, you will add a further connection to your SCORPION concept. If I tell you it is mythical, you will amend your network appropriately and so on. If you are stumped because you do not have a LION concept, I can show you a picture of it.

I think that consideration of how we come to *understand* new concepts (where, as mentioned above, this may be different from acquiring them) might lend some plausibility to the fully empiricist approach. If one thinks that understanding of concepts is never innate, I think the picture described above really is the only way we can build up an understanding of new concepts (this will be so even on a Fodorian picture of concept acquisition upon which concepts themselves are not psychologically learned). Given that, on Holism, understanding and content are individuated in the same way, it should not be a surprise that we can locate concepts in the conceptual network in just the same way: by observing their connections to concepts which we have already located. *If* this picture is plausible for acquisition of (subject-sensitive) understanding, it is not obvious why it would not also be plausible for concept acquisition given the Holist's view on the relationship between content and understanding. That is: if you are on board with empiricism about acquisition of understanding, then even if you disagree with the Holist about what content is, you ought to accept that *if* content is determined by conceptual-role, it could be psychologically learned just as understanding is.

On the fully empiricist picture, all concepts would be learnt and structured in the manner described above. This kind of picture of conceptual structure has modern advocates. Prinz's (2002) account has much in common with this picture, although Prinz's account also includes an externalist element. There are also contemporary authors who endorse concept acquisition empiricism to varying degrees (See, for example, Cowie 1999 and Sampson 2005).²⁴⁶ However, I don't think that the Holist is committed to the thesis that all concepts are psychologically learned. If the Holist wishes, she can adopt a kind of weak nativism according to which certain concepts are innate, but can be *altered* by expansion of the conceptual web. For example, suppose I am born with a concept, C. When learning a new concept, D, I may understand it in terms of its relation to C but, in doing so, this will alter the causal role of C, and thus alter its content (by adding a new causal relation to concept D). If there are such native concepts, then the picture of language learning introduced above can be made less empiricist in both senses. One need not be able to trace *all* concepts back to some observational periphery if our grasp of new concepts might involve connections to native concepts. Indeed, we need not claim that *any* of our concepts are analyzable in terms of purely observational concepts.

One last thing to stress about the options available to Holism is that *none* of these options involve introducing an externalist element into the Holist's picture of content individuation. In the above, I frequently spoke about the role of the environment in the acquisition of concepts (and of understanding). But this was merely a developmental point. The external environment has only a *contingent* causal effect on concept acquisition on Holism. I stressed this point in Chapter 1: most all internalists will think that the external environment does, as a matter of fact, have an enormous causal impact on which concepts a subject possesses. However, crucially, it has this effect only contingently, through *causing* certain internal states to obtain in the subject. It is a distinctive claim of internalism that, although these states did in

²⁴⁶ Of course, empiricism in both forms has its detractors. Fodor (1975) argues against concept acquisition empiricism, for example. For examples of nativists about concept acquisition, see Chomsky (1967, 1988) Pinker (1994) Laurence & Margolis (2001) and Crain & Pietroski (2001). Fodor no longer endorses a radical nativism (Fodor 2008): he thinks that concepts are not psychologically learned, but are, rather, acquired through coming to stand in certain relations to the environment.

fact come to be through causal interactions with the environment, it is not *necessary* that these states were so caused. The very same internal states (with the very same content) could have obtained in a subject with a radically different external environment, or perhaps in the absence of any environment at all. It is very important to keep separate the necessary conditions on possessing a concept from the actual causal history of that concept. Concept acquisition empiricism concerns only the latter of these issues.

Section 6: The Holist View of Communicative Success

We are now in a position to set out the various theses which comprise the view I am defending. Firstly, recall that there are necessary conditions on communicative success which will always be in force. These are as follows:

Necessity of Theory-Neutral conditions: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied.

Act Understanding: A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer's act of understanding is such that the hearer selects an interpretation of the content expressed by the speaker by (a) mapping the lexical items which comprise the speaker's utterance onto concepts in her own idiolect, (b) combining these to form a content based on her grasp of the utterance's compositional structure, and (c) taking into account relevant background and contextual information which determine pragmatic implicatures and enrichments of the content.

Secondly, let's state the theses which concern success *simpliciter*. Here, a division can be made amongst average success *simpliciter* and success *simpliciter* with respect to some dimension of conceptual variability.

Average Success *Simpliciter*: Communication succeeds *to the degree* that the content grasped by the hearer is similar to the content expressed by the speaker.

Success *Simpliciter* Dimension: Communication succeeds with respect to some dimension of conceptual variability *to the degree* that the content grasped by the hearer *is similar along that dimension* to the content expressed by the speaker.

Thirdly, let's state the thesis which concerns success relative to a context. Plausibly, what is important to success relative to a context is similarity between concepts *along particular dimensions* of conceptual variability rather than average success. Which dimensions these are will be determined by context. As such, we have the following thesis.

Similar Content Threshold Dimension: (Providing that (a) the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied and (b) content is grasped via a process of Act Understanding) Communication succeeds relative to a context iff the content grasped by the hearer and expressed by the speaker are similar along dimensions of conceptual variability, d_1 - d_n , to degrees n_1 - n_n respectively. Both the dimensions of conceptual variability, d_1 - d_n , relevant to success and the degrees of similarity, n_1 - n_n , along these dimensions required for success are determined by the context of communication.

It is this last thesis which is supported by my argument in Chapter 3. Let us call this collection of all these theses, the 'Holist View of Communicative Success'.

Section 7: Chapter summary

In this chapter I set out my positive proposal for a Holist View of Communicative Success. This account is a version of a Similar Content View. The central thesis of

the theory is that communicative success is something which comes in degrees: communicative success succeeds (*simpliciter*) to the degree that content is similar across communication partners. On this theory, mental content plays a central role in communicative success. Success is measured in terms of a relation between mental content, where this content is grasped through an act of understanding. In addition to the success *simpliciter* measure, I introduced a further scale with a context-sensitive threshold which measures success relative to a context. The context is determined by the particular communicative aims of interlocutors. Once I introduced this basic account, I considered an objection from Fodor and Lepore. This was the objection that the Holist cannot provide a criterion for similarity of content without presupposing identity of content. If she cannot do this, then we cannot make sense of her Similar Content View of communicative success. In response to the objection, I argued that we can provide a criterion for similarity of meaning by appealing to extra-semantic factors. Concepts can be located and compared by observing the causal relations which they bear to non-semantic elements of the network *in addition to* their relations to other concepts. I argued that this discussion of conceptual similarity indicated that the basic account of communicative success should be complicated to take into account the fact that concepts can be compared for similarity in different respects – along different dimensions of conceptual variability such as conceptual-role. As such, instead of a single success *simpliciter* measure, we should employ multiple success *simpliciter* scales to represent the different respects in which two concepts can be similar. Success relative to a context then selects points on these scales as those which must be met for communication to succeed relative to the particular context of communication.

In the next chapter, I will give some examples of the account in action, and introduce a further division amongst kinds of conceptual variability which is of particular importance to communicative success. This is a distinction between conceptual-role and application-conditions. I will then introduce and respond to an objection which claims that the way in which the Holist ascribes truth-conditions to contents will force her to claim that communication with singular terms often fails. With my response to this objection in place, I will be prepared to deal with one final objection.

This objection claims that the Holist's view cannot underpin a plausible account of knowledge through testimony. I deal with this objection in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Holism, application-conditions and singular terms

In the previous chapter, I set out the Holist View of Communicative Success. After I presented the view, I considered an objection from Fodor and Lepore which claimed that the Holist could not provide a criterion for similarity of meaning. In presenting my response to this objection, I drew attention to the fact that concepts can vary along difference dimensions and that certain of these dimensions may be more or less relevant to success depending on the context of communication. In this chapter, I will introduce a further distinction between kinds of conceptual variability which will be of great importance to the account of communicative success. This distinction is between conceptual-role (which we dealt with in the previous chapter) and *application-conditions*. Once I have introduced this distinction, I will present some examples to illustrate its importance to communicative success. I will then consider an objection. This objection claims that the Holist's account of the relationship between conceptual-role and application-conditions cannot adequately explain our communicative success with singular terms. I will argue that the Holist can agree with externalist theories as to which objects are represented by singular terms and the concepts they express.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In Section 1, I will introduce the distinction between similarity in conceptual-role and similarity in application-conditions and explain the relationship between the two. In Section 2, I will present some examples which demonstrate how each dimension can be more or less relevant to success depending on the context. In Section 3, I present the objection that Holism cannot provide application-conditions which will secure widespread success in communication with singular terms. In Section 4, I will present my solution. This solution draws on arguments from various philosophers of language who defend descriptivist (and deflationist) theories of the reference of singular terms.

Section 1: Similarity in conceptual-role and similarity in application-conditions

Aside from the different dimensions along which conceptual-role can vary, there is a more general distinction we can make between two kinds of dimension along which concepts can be compared for similarity. This is a distinction between what I will call ‘similarity of application-conditions’ and ‘similarity of conceptual-role’. Because Holism is a purely internalist theory of content individuation, the conceptual-role of a concept fully determines its application-conditions. And the application-conditions of a concept are responsible for determining which object or set of objects is represented by that concept. As such, conceptual-role is responsible for determining both *which* object is represented by a concept and *how* it is represented. A concept or content cannot change wildly along one dimension without thereby determining a corresponding change along the other. However, as we will see shortly, the two dimensions are also somewhat independent. I stress that these two dimensions of conceptual variability do not require the positing of two different *kinds* of content. There is just one kind of content – the kind determined by internal conceptual-role – and this content is what determines the application-conditions of concepts in the manner characteristic of purely internalist theories of content.

1.1 Similarity in application-conditions

Conceptual-roles determine the application-conditions and extensions of individual concepts. For example, for a typical subject who possesses standard SS-understanding of the expression, ‘dog’, the conceptual-role of her DOG_s concept will determine an extension which contains dogs and only dogs. If she possesses non-standard understanding of ‘dog’, and thus the conceptual-role of her DOG_s concept is non-standard, the application-conditions, of her DOG_s concept may differ and, as a result, the extension of her DOG_s concept will also differ: it may contain only some dogs, or perhaps none at all. Conceptual-roles also determine the truth-conditions for the contents of propositional attitudes, and thus the satisfaction-conditions for the propositional attitudes in which those contents figure.

As conceptual-role is solely responsible for determining application-conditions, there *cannot* be a change in the application-conditions of a concept without there being a change in that concept's conceptual-role. However, it is a feature of Holism that there *can* be differences between the conceptual-roles of two concepts (and thus differences in those concepts themselves) which do not manifest as differences in those concepts' application-conditions or extension; the same goes for contents and truth-conditions. That is, the relationship between conceptual-roles and the application-conditions they determine is a many-one relationship. For example, a subject who gains the new belief that she would express with the word-forms, 'There is a manticore in the basement', will suffer a very minor change in all her concepts, including the concept she expresses with the word-form 'dog'. But such a change will not manifest as a difference in application-conditions. If, however, the new belief she gains contains concepts which are more directly connected to her DOG_s concept, it *may* change this concept in a way which affects application-conditions and extension.²⁴⁷ This is a thoroughly individualistic method of determining application-conditions and, as such, it might in some instances assign application-conditions to concepts which conflict with those that would be assigned by semantic externalists of various stripes. Some think this is a reason for preferring semantic externalism. As will become clear later in this chapter, whether one possesses these intuitions or not, the Holist has the resources to accommodate most, if not all, of these intuitions about the application-conditions of concepts (and truth-conditions of contents) which have traditionally been taken to support externalism. Although Holism may entail that any change in conceptual-role will result in a change in content, Holism does not entail that the application-conditions of concepts are similarly unstable. This is because application-conditions are not straightforwardly determined by everything a subject happens to think about the object represented by a concept given *equal weight*. When it comes to determining the application-conditions of a particular concept for a subject, some inferences and beliefs may carry more weight than others. The importance of this feature of the account will become clear in Section 4 when I present my response to an objection to the account.

²⁴⁷ As stressed in previous chapters, the change which occurs will be a change from one concept to a different concept, not a change in the nature of an enduring concept.

1.2 Similarity in conceptual-role

As will be familiar from Chapter 4, the second dimension along which concepts can vary is conceptual-role. Even when two conceptual-roles determine the same (or highly similar) application-conditions for two different concepts (respectively), there is still a further question as to how similar the conceptual-roles of those two concepts are. There is a limit to how much the conceptual-role of a concept can change before this difference alters the application-conditions of the concept. Conversely, it is also the case that the conceptual-roles of two concepts can be highly similar (though not identical) and yet still fail to determine the same application-conditions for those concepts. For example, the conceptual-roles of my concepts OSCAR and TWIN OSCAR are highly similar (though not identical), but the application-conditions of those concepts are quite different: I apply OSCAR only to the particular object on Earth, whereas TWIN OSCAR will only be applied to Oscar's duplicate on Twin Earth. Conversely, consider that my concept GEORGE OWRELL_M and your concept GEORGE ORWELL_Y might pick out the same object despite us having largely non-overlapping beliefs as to the object's properties. I may only believe that he is the author of '1984', whereas you may only believe that he is the author of 'Animal Farm'. In such a case, our respective conceptual-roles can still be such as to determine that the same object is represented by our concepts, despite this difference.

Section 2: Similarity and context

Just as with dimensions of conceptual-role, the extent to which each of these more basic dimensions of conceptual variability are relevant to measuring communicative success will depend on the context of communication. Recall from Chapter 3 that successful communication requires putting the hearer in a position to employ the content communicated in her cognitive economy such that she can attempt to satisfy the aim of the communicative attempt. Depending on the aim of the attempt, this might involve putting her in a position to act or reason (or both) in a particular way. In some contexts, we might not require very high similarity along either dimension in

order to succeed in achieving our communicative aims. In other contexts, we might require high similarity along one dimension, but not the other. Other contexts might require high similarity along both dimensions. To illustrate how this might work, I will consider some examples below.

2.1 Getting to the pub

The following is an example in which communication can succeed despite there being only a rough similarity between the relevant concepts of two subjects along both the application-conditions and conceptual-role dimensions. Take two subjects: a speaker, Sandra, and a hearer, Hal. Sandra and Hal differ slightly with respect to their SS-understanding of the expression ‘pub’. Sandra’s understanding of ‘pub’ is standard. She would explicate her concept PUB_S roughly as ‘a building with a bar which is licensed for the sale and consumption of alcohol’. Hal, on the other hand, has a somewhat non-standard SS-understanding and, as such, his concept PUB_H is somewhat different. He too thinks that pubs are buildings containing bars which are licensed for the sale and consumption of alcohol, but he believes that, in order to truly be a pub, a building must have been built after the 11th century. Sandra, let us stipulate, does not know of Hal’s idiosyncrasy. Now, further suppose that there is only one pub in the village of Ruddington. Fortunately, this pub was built in the 19th century and so easily satisfies the application-conditions of both Sandra and Hal’s concepts. Sandra wishes to meet Hal there and so utters (1).

(1) There is a pub in Ruddington. Let’s meet there.

In this exchange, Sandra and Hal have different concepts in mind and their respective thoughts have slightly different conceptual-roles. In addition, the respective conceptual-roles for the concepts expressed by ‘pub’ in each of their idiolects determine different application-conditions and thus different (though partially overlapping) extensions. As such, the first clause in (1) will have different truth-conditions in Hal and Sandra’s respective idiolects. For example, we might represent the truth-conditions of the content of this first clause, (1’),

1') There is a pub in Ruddington.

for Hal as follows:

H: (1') is true iff there is a building with a bar which is licensed for the sale and consumption of alcohol which was built after the 11th century in Ruddington.

Whereas the truth-conditions of Sandra's content might be the following:

S: (1') is true iff there is a building with a bar which is licensed for the sale and consumption of alcohol (which was built in any century) in Ruddington.

On our *success-simpliciter* scale, Sandra and Hal have communicated *quite* successfully, although they could have done better. There are plenty of *other* contexts in which the difference between their concepts would cause communication to fail. However, relative to the threshold set by Sandra's communicative aim in the present context, the exchange should be considered a success: it was merely Sandra's aim to arrange a meeting with Hal and, given the situation, no more than a rough similarity in both the application-conditions and conceptual-role of their respective concepts was required for this purpose. The rough similarity was sufficient to put Hal in a position to employ the content communicated in such a way that would enable him to identify the correct pub. He could then attempt to comply with Sandra's request to meet there if he so chose.

2.2 Singular terms

In the previous example, we saw that communication can succeed even when the extensions of a speaker and hearer's concepts are not quite the same. However, this example involved general terms; when it comes to communicating using utterances containing singular terms and thoughts containing singular term concepts, the context

might be more demanding. Singular terms, as I will understand them here, are those terms which represent particulars. Examples are expressions such as proper names and indexicals. Singular term concepts are just the concepts which are expressed with these terms. It seems plausible that, when communication involves such expressions and concepts, a hearer must grasp a content which picks out *exactly* the object intended by the speaker. For example, if a speaker utters (2),

2) Gordon Ramsey is in the kitchen,

it is plausible that communicative success requires that the hearer identify the very same object, Gordon Ramsey, not just some similar object such as his identical twin or some superficially similar TV chef. It would not be enough for her concept to be very similar in conceptual-role if it did not pick out the right object.

There is ongoing debate as to what is involved in communication involving singular terms and communication of *de re* thoughts. It appears that most authors agree that, in some sense, communication which concerns particulars requires that reference is preserved.²⁴⁸ One could hold a view according to which it is *only* sameness of reference which is required for communication with singular terms. Paul (1999) calls this the ‘simple object-dependent’ account.²⁴⁹ However, few would think that this is sufficient for success. Many authors argue that, although identifying the right object might be a minimal necessary condition on the threshold for communicative success with singular terms, communication requires further similarity in mode of presentation (or some similar notion such as sense, or cognitive perspective, or conceptual-role). Bezuidenhout argues for this kind of thesis.²⁵⁰ She argues that communicative success with singular terms requires both preservation of reference and similarity in ‘subjective’ or ‘psychological’ modes of presentation. She arrives at this view because she thinks aspects of propositional content are pragmatically determined.²⁵¹ Heck (1995) argues for a similar thesis but for quite different reasons.

²⁴⁸ See, for example, Evans (1982) and Perry (1998).

²⁴⁹ See Paul (1999), 89. Paul does not endorse this view.

²⁵⁰ See also, Recanati (1993).

²⁵¹ Bezuidenhout (1997) 198 ff

Heck argues that, on the assumption that belief contents are intensional, more than just the reference of the name must be preserved in communication.

There are examples in the literature which suggest that this kind of approach is plausible. For example, Loar (1976) offers an example in which mere preservation of reference is insufficient for communicative success. The example is as follows.

Suppose that Smith and Jones are unaware that the man being interviewed on television is someone they see on the train every morning and about whom, in that latter role, they have just been talking. Smith says ‘He is a stockbroker’, intending to refer to the man on television; Jones takes Smith to be referring to the man on the train. Now Jones, as it happens, has correctly identified Smith’s referent, since the man on television is the man on the train; but he has failed to understand Smith’s utterance. It would seem that, as Frege held, some ‘manner of presentation’ of the referent is, even on referential uses, essential to what is being communicated.²⁵²

In contrast, perhaps there are also examples which pull our intuitions in the opposite direction. For example, suppose a speaker, Stephanie, asks a hearer, Hank, to tell their mutual friend, Frederick, that Obama won the election. In such a situation, it might seem that all Hank has to do, relative to the context set by Stephanie’s communicative aim, is to get the reference right – it doesn’t really matter how he conceives of this referent if all he needs to do is pass on the message.²⁵³ There may even be examples of communication with singular terms in which it appears that preservation of reference is not required at all.²⁵⁴

Different examples may pull us in different directions when it comes to considering what is required for communication with singular terms. Fortunately, the Holist does not need to take a stand on this debate (except in so far as she must resist any attempt to move from preservation of reference to preservation of content). In fact, I think the Holist View of Communicative Success can explain why we can construct examples which pull us in both directions. And it is a virtue of the Holist View of

²⁵² Loar (1976) 357

²⁵³ On Holism, there will be *some* similarity in the conceptual-roles of $OBAMA_S$ and $OBAMA_H$ – why this is will be explained below. However, such an example might motivate a non-Holist to think that sameness of reference is sometimes sufficient for success.

²⁵⁴ Examples of this kind are offered in Paul (1999, 95ff).

Communicative Success that it can account for all these intuitions by mere appeal to conceptual-role (and the application-conditions it determines). The Holist can side with either of the kinds of views above. For example, she could claim that, when it comes to singular terms, the context requires mere referential similarity, or some fixed similarity in conceptual-role. What I think she *should* claim is that the degree of similarity of conceptual-role that is required for success will vary with context. She can even allow that, for some purposes of communication, even preservation of reference is not required.²⁵⁵ And, as stressed in Chapter 4, she can also claim that, relative to different contexts, the same exchange could be considered both a success and a failure. Let's consider a few more examples to see this. Suppose two subjects have slightly different sets of beliefs about Gordon Ramsey. The first subject, Jane, believes of Ramsey that he is a chef, but does not know that he is aggressive. The second subject, Kate, believes of Ramsey that he is aggressive, but does not know that he is a chef. Now suppose that Kate is very hungry but is also very timid, and tries to avoid aggressive people at all costs. Knowing this, but not aware of Kate's SS-understanding of GORDON RAMSEY_{KATE}, Jane utters (2) ('Gordon Ramsey is in the kitchen') with the intention of getting Kate to infer the belief that there is a chef in the kitchen so that Kate might then infer that this chef could make her a nice meal. However, because of the difference in the conceptual-role of the concept expressed by 'Gordon Ramsey' for Kate, Jane's communicative aim will be frustrated: Kate will not be put in a position to employ the communicated content as Jane intended. Kate, instead of going to the kitchen, will avoid it due to her fear of encountering its aggressive occupant. I think what this example shows is that, relative to a particular communicative aim, the attempt could be considered quite unsuccessful due to a discrepancy in the conceptual-role of the two subjects' respective concepts, GORDON RAMSEY_{KATE} and GORDON RAMSEY_{JANE}. This is an example in which further calibration of conceptual-roles – along particular dimensions of variability which are relevant in the context – would be required for communicative success (relative to Jane's aim of enabling Kate to get a good meal). However, the two could communicate successfully relative to some *other* purpose even given the discrepancy along certain

²⁵⁵ Just as she claims that conceptual-role can vary along different dimensions, she can also claim that, for certain purposes, success might require different degrees of referential similarity between each of the concept-pairs which comprise the contents expressed and grasped.

dimensions of the conceptual-roles of their concepts. Suppose, for example, that Kate simply wishes to inform Jane that a particular object, Gordon Ramsey, is in the kitchen. If we stipulate that their respective concepts expressed by ‘Gordon Ramsey’ pick out the same object, it is plausible that Jane’s utterance of (2) can result in communicative success (relative to Jane’s aim of informing Kate that Gordon Ramsey is in the kitchen). No further similarities in conceptual-role would be required in this case.

Section 3: A problem of false beliefs

The above examples indicate that there are cases in which the Holist View of Communicative Success works well. It seems to capture the various intuitions which pull us in different directions whilst positing only one kind of content: the kind that is individuated by conceptual-role. However, in several of the examples above, the subjects possessed only true beliefs about the relevant objects. What happens if a subject has false beliefs? For example, suppose a subject who has false beliefs about Gordon Ramsey is disposed to infer from ‘x is Gordon Ramsey’ to both ‘x is a famous chef’ and ‘x is a famous violinist.’ It looks like in this case *no* object in the actual world satisfies her GORDON RAMSEY_s concept: for there is no object that is called ‘Gordon Ramsey’ which is both a famous chef and a famous violinist. Given this, we might think that, if she utters a sentence involving the expression ‘Gordon Ramsey’ to a hearer who possesses only true beliefs about Gordon Ramsey, the two subjects will not be able to communicate successfully. It appears to be the case that their concepts have different application-conditions and pick out *different* objects. Because of this, their utterance and belief contents will not have the same truth-conditions. This result seems extremely problematic if we consider that subjects are likely to have plenty of false beliefs as to the properties of the people they attempt to talk about. For example, suppose I believe of my older brother, Liam, that he stole a chocolate bar from me on my 4th birthday, but that I am wrong about this. Then it looks like the conceptual-role of my LIAM POLLOCK concept doesn’t actually pick-out Liam as the object I am thinking about when I token this concept (or talking about

when I utter a sentence token involving his name) – for he does not satisfy all of my beliefs which purport to be about him. But *surely* I am talking about my brother when I use his name. In fact, surely I can talk and think about all kinds of people and objects even if I have a large number of false beliefs about them. This kind of problem will be familiar from the literature on descriptive theories of reference. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Kripke’s influential critique of descriptivism claimed that a theory of reference which relies only on the cognitive resources of the individual speaker will frequently deliver the wrong result when it comes to determining the referents of proper names. If Kripke is right, even a theory which restricts the set of reference-determining descriptions to some privileged subset of the total descriptions a subject holds true of an object will, allegedly, deliver incorrect results. The problem is not restricted to proper names and proper name concepts: the arguments of Putnam and Burge push for similar conclusions both for general terms and for general term concepts. And some internalists have even accepted the externalists’ allegations as to which objects their theories must claim are represented by concepts. For example, recall from Chapter 1 that some internalists (such as Crane and Segal) have suggested that Burge’s arthritis patient, in the actual scenario, possesses an idiosyncratic concept which applies *not* to arthritis (uniquely), but to some rheumatoid ailment that occurs both in the joints and bones. Actual Alf, then, possesses a concept, THARTHRTIS, which picks out a *different* object to that which is picked out by the expert concept, ARTHRITIS. The externalist intuition is that this is false: both Alf and the experts are talking about the same object. For the externalist, this is because they share the same concept. Indeed, externalists will claim that subjects can routinely talk about the same objects as the experts in their community despite possessing all kinds of false beliefs as to the nature of those objects. Internalists who endorse a Crane-style reinterpretation strategy, on the other hand, must apparently claim that these subjects in fact speak, and think, of different objects. On Holism, it seems this might be the case whenever subjects have beliefs as to the proper application of concepts which differ from the beliefs of experts – for Holism claims that all such beliefs will affect the meaning of a term. This result is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, as stressed above, it seems implausible that subjects really are representing different objects in all cases in which they possess

non-standard (and even significantly non-standard) understanding of a word or concept. Secondly, and more importantly for our purposes, it seems that this would present a serious obstacle to communication. The result will be that any speaker with deviant beliefs as to the application of a concept will be talking about a different object to that which the experts (and others) in her community speak of with the same word-forms. This might not be problematic in cases such as the first very first example in Section 2 when only a rough match in extension is required for success. But for singular term concepts this would be disastrous. At best, speakers would be required to hold an enormous number of profiles on the concepts of their interlocutors. But I think the situation is even worse than this; for it seems that there are many cases in which we simply would not become aware of a speaker's misconceptions and thus we would quite often be talking about different objects without realising. If this is the case, the Holist View of Communicative Success would have to posit a far greater amount of communicative *failure* than it seems appropriate to posit.

Fortunately, due to reasons I hinted at in Section 1, I do not think that the Holist is forced to accept this problematic picture of singular reference. Recall that I earlier mentioned that Holism does *not* entail that the object represented by a subject's concept is just whatever object satisfies all of her beliefs as to a concept's application. Rather, I think that some of her beliefs will be overriding in this regard. In what follows, I will argue that the internalist is not forced to choose between semantic externalism and a reinterpretation strategy like Crane's in the case of general terms. Nor is she forced to choose between an externalist theory of the reference of singular terms (and the objects of thought) and an implausible version of descriptivism. I will argue that a thoroughgoing internalist, and even a Holist, can claim that subjects with idiosyncratic concepts can yet be thinking and talking about the same objects as each other, and as the experts in their community.

Section 4: Towards a solution

My strategy will be to demonstrate that it is evident in our inferential practices that we take certain inferences and beliefs to be non-negotiable when it comes to determining which objects are represented by our thoughts and utterances. I will argue that the object of a subject's thought is picked-out, not by being the object (or objects) which satisfy *all* the properties which that object is thought to have by the subject, but by certain crucial inferences and beliefs which the subject is disposed to hold fixed in light of conflicts discovered through reasoning or through the gaining of new beliefs. It will turn out that internalists about mental content can *agree* with externalists as to which objects are represented with their thoughts and utterances. The fact that internalists can accommodate externalist intuitions about reference is nothing new. Descriptivists about reference such as Jackson, and deflationists such as Field, have already pointed out that internalists are capable of dealing with these externalist intuitions. However, the majority of philosophers aren't convinced. Most are persuaded by the arguments of Kripke, Putnam and Burge. As such, it will be worth examining how their arguments work and, in particular, how they can be extended to apply to mental content. My strategy here will be simply to apply the same, or similar, arguments to thought content to achieve the corollary result. Once I have shown how subjects with different concepts can represent the same objects, I will argue that this approach can even be used to demonstrate that microphysical duplicates can represent *different* objects. The arguments in this chapter, if successful, will undermine the support from Twin Earth-style thought experiments that content externalism is thought to enjoy.

In the following, I will focus on adapting an argument from Field (1994). But I will also bolster this argument with some comments from Jackson (1998, 2007). Field argues that Kripkean intuitions which are popularly thought to support a causal theory of reference can be reconstrued as consistent with a deflationary theory of reference. I will first present Field's argument, and then adapt his strategy in two ways: firstly, I will extend it to apply to the objects of singular term concepts. And, secondly, I will argue that we can use Burgean intuitions about deference to motivate

an internalism about general-term concepts which respects certain intuitions which have been thought to support social externalism. The result of my argument will be that Holism can endorse an account of the determination of the application-conditions of concepts (and thus the truth-conditions of contents) which allows that subjects with divergent idiosyncratic concepts can yet be thinking and talking about the *same* objects – even when either a different object, or *no* object, uniquely satisfies all their beliefs as to its properties (given equal weight).

4.1 Field's Argument

Field's argument is concerned with the reference of proper names. He argues that certain of the motivations which Kripke cites as supporting a causal theory of reference are consistent with a deflationary theory. Field's argument focuses on defusing Kripke's semantic argument in particular, although, as I will argue below, it also works against the modal argument. As noted in Chapter 1, Kripke's semantic argument employs the following example to motivate a causal theory of reference for proper names over its descriptivist competitors.²⁵⁶ According to a very simple descriptivist theory, the name 'Gödel' ought to refer to whichever person uniquely fits the description 'the prover of the incompleteness theorem'.²⁵⁷ Kripke presents a thought experiment in which we discover the following fact, (F):

- F) The incompleteness theorem was proved by a man baptized "Schmidt" and who never called himself anything other than "Schmidt"; a certain person who called himself "Gödel" and got a job under that name at the Institute for Advanced Study stole the proof from him.²⁵⁸

Kripke thinks it is most natural to say that, *contra* descriptivism, we refer to Gödel, even when we are wrong about his having proved the incompleteness theorem: that is, even when he does not satisfy the relevant associated description.²⁵⁹ Kripke's

²⁵⁶ See Kripke (1980) Lecture 2.

²⁵⁷ This particular version of descriptivism is too naïve to be plausible (and it is not the version which Kripke targets), but it will do for our purposes.

²⁵⁸ Kripke (1908) 84

²⁵⁹ Kripke (1980) 84

arguments have been very successful due to the fact that most people seem to share this intuition. This is supposed to support the causal theory of reference. This is the thesis that names refer to whomsoever they are appropriately causally related to – to the person who was baptised with the name, not (necessarily) to the person who is picked out by any associated description(s).²⁶⁰

It should be noted that one way to solve the present problem for the Holist would be to appeal to a causal theory of reference (or alternative externalist theory such as Fodor's 1987 or Millikan's 1984) in order to guarantee that our two subjects really are talking about the same objects. This would be to abandon a pure internalism about content and endorse a two-factor theory. This option is indeed adopted by defenders of conceptual-role theories such as Block (1986), and for just the sorts of reasons that motivate the objection to Holism under consideration. However, I think we can use Field's treatment of Kripke's thought experiment to motivate a different solution to the present problem without invoking *anything* in addition to internal conceptual-role. Field (and Kripke) are primarily concerned with the reference of singular terms rather than with the objects of thought, but I think we can transpose Field's insight from a theory about the reference of expressions in a language to a theory about the application-conditions of concepts. In the next section I will present Field's approach before turning to my adaptation of it.

4.1.1 Field's deflationary theory of reference

Field (1994) advocates a deflationary account of the reference of proper names. On Field's view, there is no more to reference than what is given in a disquotation schema for reference. He presents the schema for singular terms as follows: "If *b* exists then "b" refers to *b* and nothing else; if *b* doesn't exist then "b" doesn't refer to anything."²⁶¹ However, Field notes that, if we adopt the deflationary theory, there is a curious question as to how to make sense of the intuitions which support various competing theories of reference. He writes,

²⁶⁰ See Kripke (1980) 91

²⁶¹ Field (1994) 261

One qualm that one might reasonably have about the deflationist perspective is that a lot of work that has gone into the theory of reference in recent years seems to be onto something, and it seems at first hard to explain just what it could be onto if truth conditions play no central role in the theory of meaning. After all, if truth conditions play no central role, reference can hardly play a central role: whatever importance reference has surely derives from its contribution to truth conditions.²⁶²

Field thinks that we can make sense of our intuitions about reference without the need to invoke any substantial reference relation between expressions (or uses of expressions) and objects. He argues that we can take Kripke's observations about our linguistic intuitions to show merely that subjects regard (F),

- F) The incompleteness theorem was proved by a man baptized "Schmidt" and who never called himself anything other than "Schmidt"; a certain person who called himself "Gödel" and got a job under that name at the Institute for advanced Study stole the proof from him.

as grounds for *inferring* (3),²⁶³

- 3) Gödel didn't prove the incompleteness theorem

rather than inferring the descriptivist (4),

- 4) The man we call 'Gödel' was actually baptised as 'Schmidt' and never called himself 'Gödel'.²⁶⁴

But, Field argues, this could be considered simply a description of the *inferential practices* of individuals, no genuine relation need be invoked. As Field explains,

I think that the deflationist can make sense of Kripke's observations. On the deflationist viewpoint, though, *the observations aren't at the most basic level*

²⁶² Ibid

²⁶³ Ibid, 26ff

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 261

about reference but about our inferential practice. That is, what Kripke's example really shows is that we would regard the claim (F) as *grounds for inferring* "Gödel didn't prove the incompleteness theorem" rather than as grounds for inferring "Gödel was baptized as 'Schmidt' and never called himself 'Gödel'".²⁶⁵

Field suggests that reference comes in indirectly: we can *indirectly* infer (5) from (F),

5) "Gödel" doesn't refer to the man that proved the incompleteness theorem.

But this is explained, not by a causal theory of reference, but by the fact that we can infer (6) from (F),

6) Gödel isn't the man that proved the incompleteness theorem.

and then "semantically ascend" to produce (5).²⁶⁶

Thus Field thinks that Kripke's thought experiment can be construed merely as evidence that speakers tend to treat certain beliefs about the properties of objects as non-negotiable. As Field writes, "[I]t is just part of our inferential procedure to regard claims of roughly the form "The dominant causal source of our beliefs involving 'b' is b" as pretty much indefeasible."²⁶⁷ What he means by this is that we are, on the whole, disposed to treat the belief that an expression, 'b', refers to whichever object is the dominant causal source of tokenings of 'b' as non-negotiable. Alternatively, the relevant belief might be, "The object appropriately causally related to tokenings of 'b'," or perhaps even, "The object named 'b',"²⁶⁸ or it may be a combination of descriptions which are taken to be indefeasible. Which beliefs are treated as indefeasible can vary from speaker to speaker, and from expression to expression.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 262

²⁶⁶ Ibid

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 261

²⁶⁸ See, Kneale (1962) for an example of this 'metalinguistic' descriptivism.

Importantly, the particular semantic considerations which are taken to support the causal theory of reference – those which constitute the ‘semantic problem’ for descriptivist theories – are precisely those which motivate the claim that speakers have the inferential tendencies that Field identifies. The very fact that we agree with Kripke demonstrates that, as Field claims, we are disposed to infer (3) from (F) rather than (4). To deny that people reason this way is to also deny that we have this particular motivation for the causal theory of reference. Thus, we have this semantic motivation for the causal theory only insofar as we have reason to believe that (in many cases, at least) people are disposed to reason in the way characteristic of Kripke’s thought experiment. Field’s approach can also account for those who do not share Kripke’s intuitions by appeal to the same machinery: those with typically descriptivist intuitions just take a different belief to be non-negotiable with respect to reference – they have different inferential practices. Furthermore, we needn’t even think that these inferential tendencies are explicitly reflected upon by subjects providing their practices demonstrate such tendencies. After all, Kripke’s argument relies on the fact that subjects demonstrate such tendencies, not that they hold explicit beliefs as to the referents of proper names. As such, there isn’t any great epistemic burden placed on subjects by this kind of approach.²⁶⁹

4.1.2 Jackson’s descriptivist approach

Jackson makes some similar points in defence of his descriptive theory of reference. Jackson argues that when we test speakers’ intuitions about possible cases – those that are taken to support various externalist theses about meaning – we should simply take ourselves to be learning what the relevant identifying descriptions actually are for those speakers.²⁷⁰ Here Jackson is specifically responding to the semantic problem – to critics who claim that normal speakers are rarely in possession of *any* uniquely identifying description, let alone one which identifies the (intuitively) correct object. He writes,

²⁶⁹ A common objection to traditional descriptivist theories is that they place a large epistemic burden on speakers. See, for example, Devitt and Sterelny (1999, 54ff).

²⁷⁰ See also Kroon (1987).

If you say enough about any particular possible world, speakers can say what, if anything, words like ‘water’, ‘London’, ‘quark’, and so on refer to in that possible world. (This does not mean that there is always a definite answer: sometimes saying what ‘London’ refers to in a certain possible world will amount to saying that it is indeterminate what if anything it refers to in this world.) Our ability to answer questions about what various words refer to in various possible worlds, it should be emphasised, is common ground with critics of the description theory. The critics’ writings are full of descriptions (*descriptions*) of possible worlds and claims about what refers, or fails to refer, to what in these possible worlds. Indeed, their impact has derived precisely from the intuitive plausibility of many of their claims about what refers, or fails to refer, to what in various possible worlds. But if speakers can say what refers to what when various possible worlds are described to them, description theorists can identify the property associated in their minds with, for example, the word ‘water’: it is the disjunction of the properties that guide the speakers in each particular possible world when they say which stuff, if any, in each world counts as water. This disjunction is in their minds in the sense that they can deliver the answer for each possible world when it is described in sufficient detail, but is implicit in the sense that the pattern that brings the various disjuncts together as part of the, possibly highly complex, disjunction may be one they cannot state.²⁷¹

Jackson’s point is that it is actually quite easy to identify the descriptions which will uniquely and correctly identify the referents of proper names. In fact, externalist arguments *rely* on the fact that such descriptions are available to individual speakers. It is common ground between all parties to the debate that speakers can discern which objects are picked out by expressions in possible scenarios. Thus, parties on all sides of the debate should agree both that, as Jackson claims, speakers are in possession of implicit identifying descriptions and that, as Field claims, competent speakers have particular inferential practices with proper names which single out these descriptions as indefeasible. As Jackson stresses, once we allow that speakers *can* refer by description, it is hard to escape the result that how speakers refer with any given expression is dependent upon their dispositions – nothing more is required to explain how they refer to the (intuitively) correct object. As Jackson points out, Kripke allows that we *could* refer by description. Kripke writes, “There’s nothing really preventing it. You can just stick to that determination. If that’s what you do, then if Schmidt discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic you *do* refer to him

²⁷¹ Jackson (1998) 212

when you say ‘Gödel did such and such’.”²⁷² But, as Jackson argues, that we *could* have referred by description with a particular expression (but don’t) suggests that we must have made a choice – perhaps an implicit one – about how to use the name.²⁷³ But, if we did make such a choice, there must be some disposition that we have to employ the name in the way that we do rather than in some alternative way. And we can appeal to this disposition to determine the reference of the name. The various thought experiments touted as objections to descriptivism are really just ways to garner empirical evidence as to *which* reference-determining descriptions subjects are disposed to endorse.²⁷⁴ And, of course, these descriptions can differ from subject to subject and even in the same subject over time. Thus, this kind of response is well-equipped to explain intuitions which pull us in different directions when it comes to theories of reference.

Given the above, I think that Kripke’s semantic argument – considered apart from the rest of his critique – can show *only* that we have the dispositions and inferential practices which are identified by Jackson and Field. As such, we can use these supposedly externalist intuitions to motivate a Field-style deflationism, or a form of descriptivism which claims that the description relevant to determining the referent of a proper name, for a subject, is whichever description (or descriptions) her inferential practices demonstrate to be non-negotiable. On such a theory, subjects can succeed in referring by description to Gödel despite believing in any number of false associated descriptions providing they display the inferential tendencies that Field identifies. Such a theory would be roughly of the kind that Jackson advocates: we can discover which associated properties subjects take to be essential to a given term by presenting them with possible cases and noting which inferences they are disposed to make. The Kripkean semantic intuitions, by themselves, are *equally* well-explained by all three theses. Thus Kripke’s semantic argument will not decide between the causal theory, the deflationary theory, and the descriptivist theory.

²⁷² Kripke (1980) 91

²⁷³ Jackson (2007) 18

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 19

4.1.3 Kripke's remaining objections

Of course, there is more to Kripke's critique of descriptivism than his semantic argument. And there are also further objections pushed by other authors.²⁷⁵ There is not space in this project to provide a complete defence of descriptivist (or deflationist) theories of reference.²⁷⁶ However, I will say a few words about how the Holist might respond to Kripke's other lines of argument.²⁷⁷ Given that part of purpose of this chapter is to explain how the Holist can agree with externalist intuitions as to which objects are represented with expressions and concepts, it is important that we also meet Kripke's modal argument. The modal argument, recall, stressed that names are rigid designators, but definite descriptions are not.²⁷⁸ Rigid designators, recall, are expressions which designate the *same* object with respect to every possible world in which that object exists (where which object this is is settled by the term's reference in the actual world). If Kripke is right, then the Holist would not be able provide the (intuitively) correct extensions for singular terms, for descriptions allegedly pick out *different* objects in different possible worlds. Fortunately, if Field's defence works against Kripke's semantic argument, it should also work against the modal argument. Just as above, we can agree with Kripke that names are rigid designators, but claim that we have reason to believe this only insofar as we have reason to believe that subjects have certain inferential practices with proper names. That is, the descriptions which determine the referents of names are *rigidified* descriptions. The rigidification strategy, as a defence of descriptivism, has been discussed by a number of authors.²⁷⁹ And the present approach, I think, provides a strong motivation for accepting it. The reason for this is that, once again, Kripke's evidence for the claim that names in natural language are rigid designators is simply garnered by asking us to consider our intuitions about what objects are referred to by names with respect to other possible worlds. As such, our intuitions to the effect that names rigidly designate merely indicate that we have certain inferential practices with proper names such that the belief which is non-negotiable

²⁷⁵ See, especially, Soames (1998) and (2005).

²⁷⁶ For defences of descriptivism see Searle, (1958) and Jackson (1997, 1998).

²⁷⁷ Note that the descriptivist and the deflationist will not face all the same objections.

²⁷⁸ See Kripke, 1980, Lecture I.

²⁷⁹ See, for example, Stanley (1997), Jackson (1998), Salmon (1982), and Philip Pettit (2004).

with respect to determining the referent of a name is something like “In all worlds in which ‘b’ refers, it refers to whatever object is the *actual* dominant causal source of tokenings of ‘b’.” Once again, it is only if we are disposed to treat such a belief to be non-negotiable that we would agree with Kripke that names are rigid designators in the first place. As such, the descriptivist can agree with Kripke as to the referents of singular terms even with respect to their reference across possible worlds.

What about the epistemic problem? This problem, recall, is that certain sentences which predicate meaning-giving descriptions of names should, allegedly, be knowable *a priori* if descriptivism is true. That is, if the descriptions give the meaning of proper names, subjects who understand the names should be able to know from reflection that, for example, Aristotle is the teacher of Alexander. This sentence should have the same epistemic status as ‘Aristotle is Aristotle’ (on the assumption that ‘the teacher of Alexander’ is a meaning-giving description). But, it is argued, they do not have same epistemic status: the latter is knowable *a priori* and the former is not. What can the Holist say in response to this objection? There is much more to say about this objection than I will say here. It touches on some further issues which are beyond the scope of this project to address. However, I will offer a few comments on the way in which the objection confronts Holism in particular. In fact, I think there is reason to believe that the Holist might be in quite a good position to respond the epistemic problem.

Firstly, consider that the Holist is not trying to give an account of *the* meaning of *the* name ‘Gödel’, considered as some element of a public and shareable language – for there is no such thing. Rather, she is interested in the meaning of, for example, ‘Gödel_A’: the meaning of ‘Gödel’, for a subject, A, in her idiolect.²⁸⁰ Further, consider that the Holist does not claim that ‘Gödel_A’ and (for example) ‘whatever object is the (actual) dominant causal source of tokenings of ‘Gödel_A’,’ are synonyms. Rather, at most, she claims that the description is *part of* the meaning of ‘Gödel_A’. As such, we should not expect these two expressions to make exactly the

²⁸⁰ Note that all not forms of descriptivism will claim this. Strawson (1959), for example, claims that identifying descriptions are determined by the *language community* rather than the individual. (1959, 151ff.)

same contribution towards the sentences in which they figure; nor should we expect subjects to treat two sentences which differ only with respect to which of these expressions they contain as epistemically equivalent. For the Holist, the inferences identified by Field only partially determine (or, perhaps, partially constitute) the concept or expression's meaning.

Secondly, there is reason to think that, on Holism, the rigidified descriptions which are (in cases of cooperative speakers) the determiners of reference will be knowable *a priori*. This is because all aspects of the meaning of a term are, in a sense, *a priori* knowable on Holism. Importantly, as will be familiar from Chapter 2, subjects cannot help but master the concepts they possess (and the corresponding words which express those concepts) – understanding perfectly tracks content. As such, it seems that, on Holism, we should expect subjects to be able to discern various aspects of the meanings of expressions at their disposal *a priori*. In effect, whatever it is that they understand to be the case *is* the case with respect to the correct application of their concepts and expressions.²⁸¹ If a subject, through *a priori* reflection, determines that “Gödel_A is the actual dominant causal source of tokenings of ‘Gödel_A’” is a non-negotiable element of the concept expressed by the name ‘Gödel_A’, then this is a non-negotiable element of the concept expressed by the name ‘Gödel_A’. If she did not discern this to be the case, then the expression *would not be* ‘Gödel_A’, but some different expression, ‘Gödel_B’ (which refers in a different way). Again, when presenting his various arguments Kripke asked us to determine, *a priori*, which objects various expressions referred to (although not *how* they referred). Holism claims that, for each subject, whatever answer she arrives at through *a priori* reflection is the right answer.

One last thing to note is that, although the reference-determining descriptions which we identified using Field's strategy are, of necessity, true of the object referred to, the Holist should be careful about what she says about the various other properties attributed to an object by a subject. On Holism, for any subject with the relevant inferential practices, it is necessary that, for example, ‘Gödel_A’ refers to whatever

²⁸¹ Although, recall, that they can still be said to *possess concepts* which are the wrong concepts to possess relative to the standards of the community.

object is the (actual) dominant causal source of tokenings of ‘Gödel_A’. However, it is *not* the case that, for example, it is part of the meaning of ‘Gödel_A’ that Gödel must have proved the incompleteness of arithmetic. As such, the Holist isn’t committed to the claim that this property of Gödel be *a priori* knowable. What is part of the meaning of the expression ‘Gödel_A’ (for a subject who believes that Gödel proved the incompleteness of arithmetic) is *not* that Gödel must have proved the incompleteness of arithmetic but, rather, that it is *defeasibly held true of him* that he did this. This latter aspect of the meaning of ‘Gödel_A’ is something that a subject can discern *a priori*. That is, it is not part of the meaning of ‘Gödel_A’ that Gödel proved the incompleteness of arithmetic; but it *is* part of the meaning of ‘Gödel_A’ that the concept expressed *represents* a particular object, Gödel, as having (in the actual world) proved the incompleteness of arithmetic. As Field’s argument demonstrates, cooperative subjects treat the claim that he proved the incompleteness of arithmetic as defeasible, whereas they treat the relevant reference-determining description as non-defeasible.

There is, of course, much more to say about the plausibility of descriptivist and deflationist theories of reference. But I will not undertake a full defence of either view here. My aim in this chapter is primarily just to provide a strategy which will allow the Holist to agree with the externalist as to the extensions of concepts. It should be borne in mind that this strategy may engender some (though not all) of the problems which face descriptivist and/or deflationist theories of reference. For ease of exposition, in what follows I will talk largely in terms of the deflationary theory. When I talk of subjects representing objects, I will mean this in the deflationary sense. However, everything I say below can be endorsed by someone who believes in substantial intentional relations between thoughts and their objects.

4.2 From the referents of words to the objects of thought

Armed with Field’s deflationary interpretation of Kripke’s observations, I think that we can now begin to answer the objection introduced in Section 3 above. We should take the application-conditions of a concept to be determined by those beliefs about

the object of thought which a subject would hold fixed in light of conflicting information about the properties of the object in question. I will begin by showing how this applies to the objects of singular term concepts and then move on to considering how this strategy can be applied to general term concepts. To return to our Gordon Ramsey example, the approach can be applied as follows. Recall that the subject from the example believes that there is some object such that it is called ‘Gordon Ramsey’ and is a famous chef and violinist. The present approach claims that we can still maintain that this subject is talking about Gordon Ramsey despite her false beliefs. This is because she is disposed to infer (7) if she finds out that Gordon Ramsey is not a famous violinist.

7) Gordon Ramsey is not a famous violinist.

She would *not* infer (8),

8) There is no such person as Gordon Ramsey.²⁸²

I think this shows that she did not take all the properties which she attributed to the object she calls ‘Gordon Ramsey’ as collaboratively responsible for determining the extension of her concept. Imagine that our subject is told that Gordon Ramsey is not a famous chef. Once again, she will infer (9) rather than (8),

9) Gordon Ramsey is not a famous chef.

So which beliefs are essential to determining the extensions of concepts? As above, it depends on the dispositions of the individual speaker. But, with respect to cooperative speaker, I think something about the Kripkean intuition is quite right: in the case of proper name concepts, the belief we do not give up is the belief that our concept picks out whichever object is appropriately causally related to our tokening of the concept in thought. But, as Field has shown, we can construe this merely as a

²⁸² Or, perhaps, ‘There is no such person as Gordon Ramsey in the actual world’.

fact about our inferential practices with proper names and the concepts which are expressed by those proper names.

What we needed to do to solve the present problem was to demonstrate that subjects can be thinking and talking about the same object despite one or both of them possessing false beliefs as to its properties, and I take it that Field's deflationary view of reference (transposed into a thesis about the objects of thought) secures this result. It, in effect, does all the work of an inflationary theory of reference vis-à-vis identifying the objects of thought, but does so without invoking anything over and above the inferential practices of the individual. And, just as in the case of reference, we needn't even think that such inferential tendencies are explicitly reflected upon by a subject providing her inferential practices demonstrate such tendencies.

Once again, although we can use Kripkean observations to support a deflationary theory of intentionality, we can also use these observations to support an internally-determined, inflationary intentional relation between thoughts and their objects. This would be the mental analogue of Jackson's descriptivist theory. On such a view, the belief relevant to determining the extension of a subject's concept is just whichever belief is identified by the subject's inferential practices as being non-negotiable. Given our actual linguistic practices, this will for most subjects be of the form, 'Concept, C, applies to whichever object is the actual dominant causal source of mental tokenings of C.' This view about the objects of thought, then, has the very same structure as the internalist views of the reference of words introduced above.

Section 5: Deference

In the previous sections, I adapted Field's argument to apply, not just to the reference of singular terms, but also to the concepts expressed by these terms. I will now argue that a Field-style strategy can be applied to the social externalist phenomenon of deference to motivate a thorough-going internalism about the determination of the objects of thought which will secure a similar result for general term concepts.

Just as with Kripke's examples, we can take certain kinds of evidence used to support social externalism – for example, the fact that subjects are disposed to accept correction – not as evidence that they somehow think thoughts which involve a community concept, but merely as evidence that they represent the same objects as others in their linguistic community despite not sharing their concepts.²⁸³ On this proposal, each subject will possess an idiosyncratic concept – this much is a consequence of Holism – but these idiosyncratic concepts may be concepts which pick out the same objects as the experts' concepts. Just as above, the approach can be given either a deflationary or an inflationary spin.

Burge offers data which is supposed to support social externalism. He writes,

The subject's willingness to submit his statement and belief to the arbitration of an authority suggests a willingness to have his words taken in the normal way – regardless of mistaken associations with the word. Typically, the subject will regard recourse to a dictionary, and to the rest of us, as at once a check on his usage and his belief. When the verdict goes against him, he will not usually plead that we have simply misunderstood his views. This sort of behavior suggests that [...] we can say that in a sense our man meant by 'arthritis' arthritis.²⁸⁴

However, if we apply the Field-style strategy, we can reconstrue this data, not as evidence that subjects somehow think thoughts which involve community concepts, but merely as evidence that they are thinking about the same objects as others in their community. We can say that the object represented by a subject's concept will be determined by certain non-negotiable, or indefeasible, beliefs as to its application, where the disposition to treat these beliefs as non-negotiable will be manifest in the subject's inferential practices. As I will show, on this internalist approach, the fact that Alf is disposed to accept correction as to the application of his ARTHRITIS_{ALF} concept is simply grounds for thinking that the belief that is non-negotiable with respect to the application of this concept is that ARTHRITIS_{ALF} IS WHATEVER THE

²⁸³ The externalist claim is not that *only* type-identical concepts will represent the same objects, but just that idiosyncratic concepts will *typically* not represent the same objects.

²⁸⁴ Burge (1979) 102

EXPERTS CALL 'ARTHRITIS'.²⁸⁵ Whatever other beliefs he holds as to the properties of arthritis, if they conflict with his non-negotiable belief, he will infer that these properties are not properties of arthritis rather than relinquish this non-negotiable belief. In particular, he will relinquish the belief that he has arthritis in his thigh. To see this, let us return to Burge's example.

Before speaking to his doctor, Alf believes both THAT ARTHRITIS_{ALF} CAN OCCUR IN THE THIGH and THAT ARTHRITIS_{ALF} IS WHAT THE EXPERTS CALL 'ARTHRITIS'.²⁸⁶ When Alf is corrected by his doctor, he will relinquish one of these beliefs, for no object in the actual world satisfies both of these descriptions. As Burge identifies, he will relinquish the belief that he has arthritis in his thigh. Burge thinks that the fact that Alf accepts correction from his doctor with respect to the application of his concept is reason to think that Alf is employing the same concept as his doctor. However, if we employ Field's strategy, we can construe Alf's actions as merely an indication that Alf treats his doctor's utterance of (10),

10) Arthritis does not occur in the thigh.

As grounds for *inferring* (11),

11) I do not have arthritis in my thigh.

Rather than (12),

12) Arthritis (the disease which afflicts my joints and bones) is not the disease which the experts call 'arthritis'.

He *would* infer (12) if he thought that the object picked out by ARTHRITIS_{ALF} *must* have the property of being a disease that can occur in the joints *and* bones. In this

²⁸⁵ As a competent language user, he will be disposed to accept correction from experts in his 'home' language community, rather than from any language community he happens to be in. Similarly, we may wish to rigidify at least some of the reference-determining descriptions for general terms.

²⁸⁶ The weaker claim that Alf would assent to both these attributions would be sufficient for my argument.

case, he would take the belief that $ARTHRITIS_{ALF}$ is what the experts call ‘arthritis’ to be *inessential* to his concept and would relinquish it in the face of (10). The reason he accepts correction is indeed because he took himself to be thinking (and talking) about the same thing as the experts, but this doesn’t require that he *shares* their concepts. It is enough that his concept applies to the same objects as theirs. And this fact can be secured purely by appeal to Alf’s inferential practices as manifest in his inference from (10) to (11) (and in his rejection of the inference from (10) to (12)). I submit that *any* subject who possesses this kind of disposition with respect to the application of a concept is a subject who represents the same object(s) as the experts in her community with her concept.

Just as I earlier claimed that Kripke’s semantic (and modal) arguments don’t show anything more than that we have certain inferential practices with regards to sentences containing singular terms, Burge’s argument, too, cannot show anything stronger than that we have certain inferential practices with thoughts containing general term concepts (and sentences containing general terms). Further argument is needed to establish the very radical conclusion that subjects think thoughts which are constitutively dependent on their language community rather than that they merely possess concepts which, oftentimes, share extensions with the concepts of others in their community. And, just as before, we have a choice between an inflationary and deflationary theory of intentionality. If we wish to endorse an inflationary intentional relation between thoughts and their objects, this relation can be determined internally: the belief relevant to determining the extension of a subject’s concept is just whichever belief is identified by the subject’s inferential practices as being non-negotiable. As such, a subject can hold any number of false beliefs as to the properties of this object and yet succeed in thinking about it providing she possesses the relevant inferential tendencies. In short, much of what Burge says about the *dispositions* of subjects is true. Indeed, most cooperative subjects will be disposed to behave this way with respect to the application-conditions of many of their concepts. With respect to general term concepts, those of us who do not possess full linguistic competence are disposed to hold beliefs of roughly the form “CONCEPT C APPLIES TO WHICHEVER OBJECT THE EXPERTS TALK ABOUT WITH TOKENINGS OF ‘C’”, as essential

to the application-conditions of the concept. The experts, of course, hold different identifying beliefs which will involve non-deferential descriptions. Jackson, in his defence of descriptivism about reference, also argues that descriptions of this form are excellent candidates for identifying descriptions. In this vein he writes,

The cases offered to support the claim about ignorance of individuating properties all seem to me to overlook obvious candidates to be the needed individuating properties. Hilary Putnam claims that he does not know what separates beeches from elms but insists that he succeeds in referring to beeches when he says, say, that he does not know how beeches differ from elms. I agree that he does refer to beeches, but point out that he does know how they differ from elms: only they are called 'beeches' by the experts in his language community.²⁸⁷

It should now be clear that this solution not only demonstrates that idiosyncratic our concepts *can* be co-extensional, but that this co-extensionality will be exactly as widespread on internalism as is concept-sharing on social externalism. The reason for this is that the dispositions that I appealed to in my solution are precisely those which are supposed to motivate social externalism. As such, any case in which social externalism would posit a shared concept is a case in which my internalist can posit co-extensionality of distinct idiosyncratic concepts. Whereas on social externalism, certain practices – for example, the disposition to defer, or to accept correction – are utilised as part of the story of how content is individuated, on our internalist theory, the fact that we are disposed to accept correction from experts can be explained simply by the utility of having certain inferential practices. For example, our communicative practices will be far more efficient if we are, on the whole, talking *about* the same things with our utterances. (By comparison, as we have seen in Chapter 3, sharing content is *not* of practical use to us when it comes to communicative success). Similarly, talking about the same objects allows us to divide our epistemic labour when it comes to learning about these objects and building bodies of knowledge.²⁸⁸ Our concepts tend to be co-extensional, not because they are *shared*, but because it is useful for us to be talking about the same things

²⁸⁷ Jackson (1998) 209

²⁸⁸ Cf. Field (1994) 263

with our utterances of the same word-forms (and thinking about the same things with the concepts expressed by these word-forms).

Section 6: Differences between microphysical duplicates

We have seen how internalism can maintain that two subjects who possess *different* concepts can yet be thinking (and talking) about the same objects. However, what should this approach say about Alf and counterfactual-Alf? Burge holds that these two subjects possess different concepts with different extensions. Indeed, this is the crux of his argument against internalism. I too wish to claim this, for my aim in this chapter is to show that internalists can *agree* with externalists as to the extensions of concepts. But Alf and counterfactual-Alf are microphysical duplicates, so how, on internalism, can it be that Alf and counterfactual-Alf are thinking about different things? In this section, I will demonstrate how we can use the present strategy to show that Alf and counterfactual-Alf do indeed possess different concepts with different extensions (henceforth, I will refer to Alf in the counterfactual world using the name ‘Calf’²⁸⁹). It will turn out that my internalist approach to determining the extensions of Alf and Calf’s respective arthritis concepts presents us with an instance of the internalist’s so-called problem of ‘indexical thought’. However, as we will see, this problem can be easily met. I will adapt an argument from Pelczar (2009) to show how this can be done. In what follows, I will first introduce the problem of indexical thought and Pelczar’s solution. He argues that the internalist can meet this challenge by appealing to differences in the intrinsic properties of microphysical duplicates. I will then demonstrate how the internalist method for determining thought content for microphysical duplicates presents us with an instance of the problem of indexical thought. As such, it can be dealt with in the very same way. Differences in Alf and Calf’s non-negotiable beliefs will determine differences in the application-conditions

²⁸⁹ The reason I rename him is because I will be talking about Alf and Calf’s respective self-referential beliefs. From counterfactual-Alf’s point of view, he is himself actual and not counterfactual. As such, talking about counterfactual-Alf referring to counterfactual-Alf with self-referential beliefs could get confusing: the object he refers to is not counterfactual from his perspective, so it could seem misleading to label it ‘counterfactual-Alf’. It might avoid confusion to imagine the two subjects to inhabit spatially distant parts of the same world: Alf on Earth and Calf on Twin Earth.

and extensions of their respective arthritis concepts which must also reduce to differences in their intrinsic properties.

By an ‘indexical thought’ I will mean any thought which is expressed by an utterance containing an indexical expression. Here I am following Pelczar’s use of terminology. It is plausible that it is only expressions of a language which can be genuinely indexical: thought contents themselves cannot contain unresolved elements. The phrase ‘indexical thought’ is just shorthand for thoughts which would be expressed using indexical words. It is not meant to suggest that the concepts expressed by these words are also indexical. Such thoughts are supposed to cause problems for the content internalist. The objection goes as follows. Suppose, as many internalists claim, that microphysical duplicates are identical with respect to thought content. They must then be identical with respect to thought content which is expressed with indexicals such as in ‘I am hungry’. But clearly microphysical duplicates express *different* thoughts with these utterances. As Pelczar writes (of Putnam’s Twin-subjects), “[W]hen Oscar says ‘I’m hungry!’ he means something that is true iff Oscar is hungry, whereas when Toscar utters the same words sincerely, he intends something that is true iff Toscar is hungry.”²⁹⁰ Thus, if the internalist must claim that microphysical duplicates share their indexical thoughts, then content internalism is false. A similar line of argument can be found in Putnam. He writes, of indexical words (although he does not extend the argument to thought content),

For these (indexical) words no one has ever suggested the traditional theory that ‘intension determines extension’. To take our Twin Earth example: if I have a *Doppelgänger* on Twin Earth, then when I think, ‘I have a headache’, *he* thinks ‘I have a headache’. But the extension of the particular token of ‘I’ in his verbalized thought is himself [...], while the extension of the token of ‘I’ in *my* verbalized thought is *me* [...]. So the same word, ‘I’, has two different extensions in two different idiolects [...].²⁹¹

The problem for the internalist, with respect to thought content, is that there appears to be an obvious difference in the extension of a concept for two speakers but, *ex hypothesi*, no internal difference between them. Pelczar (2009) argues that, although

²⁹⁰ Pelczar (2009) 99

²⁹¹ Putnam (1975a) 151

we should accept that microphysical duplicates do not share their indexical thoughts, it can be shown that this difference cannot be explained by differences in their external environments. He argues that microphysical duplicates differ in their intrinsic properties and that differences in the content of their indexical thoughts must reduce to these differences in intrinsic properties. Thus, internalism is not threatened providing it rejects the thesis that microphysical duplicates must be identical with respect to thought content.

Following Pelczar, I will understand an intrinsic property to be any property which a thing has, and could have, even if it were the only contingently existing thing.²⁹² These are properties of an individual which do not depend on the existence of any objects external to that individual, but which are also not shared by any microphysical duplicates of that individual. That such properties exist should be uncontroversial. To see that Alf and Calf possess different intrinsic properties consider that Alf, for example, stands in an intrinsic relation to *Alf's* nose that Calf does not stand in (although Calf does stand in an intrinsic relation to a qualitatively exactly similar object – Calf's nose).²⁹³ The relation that Alf stands in to his own nose is one that is intrinsic to him. It does not depend on any externally existing object. Nonetheless, this property is not one which is shared by his duplicates. Microphysical duplicates, then, do not share all their intrinsic properties.

Now consider the indexical thoughts of microphysical duplicates, such as their self-referential beliefs. These are the beliefs that a subject would express with utterances containing indexicals such as 'I', 'my', etc. Pelczar argues that differences in the contents of the self-referential beliefs of microphysical duplicates do not depend in any way on differences in their environments. His claim is that, "a person's success at referring to himself does not—or at any rate need not— depend on anything

²⁹² See Pelczar (2009) 95. There is much debate as to the proper characterisation of intrinsic properties (See, for example, Lewis, 1983, Sider, 1993). For my purposes what is important is the existence of properties of an individual which do not depend on the existence of any objects external to that individual, but which are also not shared by any microphysical duplicate of that individual. If one objects to labelling these properties 'intrinsic properties' this will not affect the argument.

²⁹³ Example adapted from Pelczar (2009) 96.

besides his intrinsic properties.”²⁹⁴ To argue for this, Pelczar demonstrates that, when referring to themselves, two microphysical duplicates can be in exactly the same external environments and yet the truth-conditions of their respective self-referential utterances and beliefs will still be *different*.²⁹⁵ If Alf utters ‘I am hungry’, his utterance (and the belief it expresses) will be made true only by the state of affairs obtaining that Alf is hungry. It will not be made true by any facts about Alf’s microphysical duplicates (although, any microphysical duplicate of Alf will also be hungry). This will be so even if Alf’s microphysical duplicates are embedded in the exact same physical and social environment as Alf. We can place them in the very same world, and this will still be so. But if Alf and Calf differ in the content of their respective self-referential beliefs even when there is no difference in their external environment, this difference must reduce to differences in their intrinsic properties, for there simply are no other differences between them that we could appeal to in order to explain this difference in content.²⁹⁶ Even a social externalist should accept this claim. To reject it, they must claim that two subjects who are both microphysical duplicates *and* inhabit exactly similar social and physical environments must entertain self-referential beliefs with the very same content. But this is to simply endorse the problematic claim that the internalist was accused of being lumbered with in the first place. And this, apart from being implausible, would be to abandon the argument from indexical thought. As Pelczar has shown, the internalist need not claim that microphysical duplicates share their indexical thoughts. And the externalist needn’t claim this either providing she is willing to admit that it is differences in two subjects’ intrinsic properties which are responsible for the difference in indexical thought content after all. I will now show how similar considerations demonstrate that Alf and Calf possess *different* arthritis concepts.

As we have seen, an internalist can claim that no matter what changes we make to Alf’s linguistic community, if Alf remains internally the same, the truth-conditions of Alf’s self-referential beliefs won’t change. Importantly, the truth-conditions of Alf’s

²⁹⁴ Pelczar (2009) 100

²⁹⁵ Ibid

²⁹⁶ Pelczar notes that an alternative would be to claim that it is just a brute fact about a subject that she refers to herself with her self-referential beliefs. But this too would be an internalist solution to the problem (2009, 100).

self-referential beliefs will always remain *different* from those of Calf's beliefs. Now consider Alf and Calf's respective arthritis concepts: ARTHIRITIS_{ALF} and ARTHRITIS_{CALF}. Given the Field-style method for determining the extensions of subjects' concepts, the two Alfs each possess a non-negotiable belief as to the application-conditions of their respective arthritis concepts which they might express with an utterance of (13),

13) Arthritis is whatever the experts in my community call 'arthritis'.

But because of the indexical, 'my', involved, (13) expresses a *different content* in Alf's mouth as it does in Calf's mouth: the two subjects think different thoughts with different truth-conditions. When Alf utters a token of (13), the indexical, 'my', refers to Alf. As such, the description which determines the extension of his ARTHIRITIS_{ALF} concept picks-out whichever object is referred to by the relevant experts in *his* language community. No other object will satisfy this description. But when Calf utters a token of (13), 'my' refers to Calf, and thus the description which determines the extension of his ARTHRITIS_{CALF} concept picks-out whichever object is referred to by the experts in his own *distinct* language community. The objects which satisfy these two descriptions are different. But this is just the alleged 'problem' of indexical thought introduced above: Alf and Calf are microphysical duplicates, and yet their indexical thoughts have different contents. And, as we have seen, accounting for this difference is not a problem for internalism after all. Crucially, just as above, we can show that this difference is not explained by differences in the external environments of the two subjects. We can place Alf and Calf in exactly similar social and physical environments and the truth-conditions of their respective beliefs will remain unchanged. That is, they will remain *different from each other* because they each involve a self-referential component: Alf's thought content will always involve reference to Alf alone, whereas Calf's thought content will always involve reference to Calf alone. In fact, we can completely remove the social and physical environment and this difference between them will remain.²⁹⁷ Thus, the difference in their thought contents is not explained by differences in their environments as externalism would

²⁹⁷ If it is possible for two qualitatively exactly similar objects to be co-located yet not numerically identical, we could even co-locate Alf and his (no longer counterfactual) microphysical duplicates and the truth-conditions of their respective self-referential beliefs will remain different.

require. The difference, then, must reduce to differences in their intrinsic properties for there is nothing else that this difference *could* reduce to given that their environments are the same. Because of their respective self-referential beliefs, Alf is only disposed to accept correction based on facts about *Alf's* language community, whereas Calf is only disposed to accept correction based on facts about *Calf's* language community. Alf is not disposed to infer *anything* about what 'arthritis' means in *his* community from facts about some counterfactual community.

Note that the claim here is not that Alf's arthritis concept is an indexical.²⁹⁸ The claim is merely that the description which fixes the extension of his concept contains a self-referential component (expressed using an indexical) which determines that Alf is thinking about his own language community rather than the community of his microphysical duplicate. The extension of Alf's arthritis concept does not vary with context. The approach here is just a familiar descriptivist one. Alf and Calf's respective arthritis concepts have different extensions for the same reasons that the description 'The biggest fish in the sea' would express different concepts and pick out different objects in their respective worlds. Alf would be interested in which fish is biggest in *his* world, in *his* sea. And this is a different object to the one that Calf is interested in.²⁹⁹

A similar account is presented in Searle (1983), although Searle does not argue for it in the same way. He presents his account in response to Putnam's charge that microphysical duplicates can have water concepts with different extensions. Searle's account claims that we can account for this difference in extension by appealing to a self-referential component involved in the initial baptism of the substance itself. He writes (of Oscar and Twin Oscar), "Though they have type-identical visual experiences in the situation where "water" is for each identified, they do not have type-identical Intentional contents. On the contrary, their Intentional contents can be

²⁹⁸ There are indexical approaches to the meanings of certain terms such as Putnam's (1975a). Putnam is concerned with the meanings of expressions in a language rather than thought contents, but one can imagine a corollary indexical theory of mental content. For critiques of Putnam's approach see Crane (1991) and Burge (1982).

²⁹⁹ Of course, Alf and Calf could be interested in the biggest possible fish, but we can stipulate that, in this example, they are engaging in the very common practice of restricting quantification to which ever world they happen to be in.

different because each Intentional content is causally self-referential [...].”³⁰⁰ What he means by this is that two Twin subjects, when naming water and XYZ with the word-form “water” (respectively), give definitions of what it is to be water which involve indexicals. Specifically, these indexicals refer to certain visual experiences of the subject. The description which determines the reference of “water” in each world is one which picks out whichever substance is responsible for causing the particular visual experience in that world. Searle writes,

The indexical definitions given by Jones on earth of “water” can be analyzed as follows: “water” is defined indexically as whatever is identical in structure with the stuff causing *this* visual experience, whatever that structure is. And the analysis for twin Jones on twin earth is: “water” is defined indexically as whatever is identical in structure with the stuff causing *this* visual experience, whatever that structure is. Thus, in each case we have type-identical experiences, type-identical utterances, but in fact in each case something different is meant. That is, in each case the conditions of satisfaction established by the mental content (in the head) is different because of the causal self-referentiality of perceptual experiences.³⁰¹

In giving his account, Searle is concerned with the initial baptism of a new substance with a name. His account proceeds by appeal to the self-referentiality of perceptual experiences. My own account was less concerned with explaining the introduction of new terms into a language, and more concerned with how inexpert doppelgängers can succeed in possessing concepts which are coextensive, *not with each other's concepts*, but with the concepts of experts in their respective language communities. To explain this, I appealed to the self-referentiality of the non-negotiable descriptions entertained (more or less implicitly) by subjects who are disposed to accept correction, or ‘defer’ – in the internalist sense – to more expert subjects. Both approaches claim that internalism is consistent with the claim that microphysical duplicates can *differ* in their thought contents. This last section, then, demonstrates that on the present approach content internalism must be stated, not in terms of the properties *shared* by microphysical duplicates, but as a thesis which claims that a subject’s intentional properties are reducible to her intrinsic properties.

³⁰⁰ Searle (1983) 207

³⁰¹ Ibid, 208

Section 7: Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced a further distinction between dimensions of conceptual variability which is relevant to communicative success. This is a distinction between conceptual-role and application-conditions. I then introduced some examples which demonstrated how differences in similarity between two concepts along these two dimensions can be more or less important to communicative success depending on the communicative aims of interlocutors. Once I had introduced these examples, I presented an objection to the Holist View of Communicative Success. The problem was that communication with singular terms appeared to require preservation of reference. And, as is familiar from the externalist arguments of Kripke, Putnam and Burge, internalists appear to struggle when it comes to accounting for widespread co-reference and co-extensionality of idiosyncratic expressions and concepts. In response to the objection, I argued that a content internalist need not uphold a revisionary account of the extensions of subjects' concepts and the reference of her words. The Holist can agree with social externalism's claims as to the extensions of concepts and expressions whilst denying that mental content depends on anything outside of the individual. To show this, I adapted an argument from Field (with some help from Jackson). Field argues that our observations about reference are really just observations about our inferential practices with sentences containing proper names. Our inferential practices indicate that certain beliefs are treated as non-negotiable when it comes to identifying the referents of singular terms. The non-negotiable beliefs pick out the (intuitively) correct referents for singular terms, but *without* appeal to anything external to the individual. When we apply this approach to the objects of thought, the result is a method for discerning which beliefs are non-negotiable with respect to the determination of the extensions of concepts. My approach can claim that subjects within the same community represent the same objects as each other despite possessing idiosyncratic concepts. Furthermore, it can agree with Burge that microphysical duplicates do not share thought content whilst resisting the externalist conclusion: differences between the thought contents of

microphysical duplicates reduce to differences in their intrinsic properties. A consequence of my approach is that internalism should be stated as the thesis that differences in content reduce to differences in the intrinsic properties of subjects and *not* as a view which claims that microphysical duplicates share thought content. In this chapter, my aim was to demonstrate that the Holist can agree with externalists as to which objects are represented by thoughts and utterances. As such, they can allow that reference is preserved in communication which involves singular term concepts. In the next chapter, we will see how this approach can be used to underpin a similar content view of knowledge through testimony. That is, the Holist can endorse a view which claims that subjects can gain knowledge that P from testimony that Q.

Chapter 6: Holism and testimony

If my arguments have been successful thus far, I have shown that Holism can endorse a plausible account of communicative success. In fact, its account of communicative success appears to be significantly more attractive than that available to sociolectical theories of content. Sociolectical theories must *choose* between an account of communicative success which offers plausible diagnoses as to the success of communicative attempts, on the one hand, and an account which allows that communicative success should be measured in terms of a Content Relation, on the other. Holism does not face this choice. However, I have not yet shown that Holism's account of communicative success can be used to underpin a tenable account of testimonial knowledge exchange. Perhaps when it comes to communicative success 'close enough' is good enough, but testimonial exchanges might determine a more demanding context. Perhaps the testimonial context does indeed require sameness of content. *Prima facie*, this looks pretty plausible: one might think that *surely* when a speaker testifies that P then, if the hearer can come to know anything at all through this testimony, it is that P, and not some merely similar content. In debates in the epistemology of testimony it is typically stipulated that in a 'good' case of a testimonial exchange, the content grasped by the hearer is the very same content as that attested to by the speaker. As we have seen, the Holist cannot endorse this stipulation. As such, if she wishes to maintain that there is such a thing as knowledge through testimony, she *must* endorse an account upon which testimonial exchanges can result in a hearer gaining knowledge even when the content grasped by the hearer is not the content of the speaker's testimony, P, but some similar (yet distinct) content, P*. I will call this the 'Similar Content Account of Knowledge through Testimony' ('SimTest', for short). It is this account which I will develop and defend in this chapter.

There is reason to think that the stipulation of sameness of content cannot be dispensed with. If this is so then SimTest will be untenable. And, if SimTest is untenable, then Holism is in trouble once again. Whereas sociolectical theories can provide sameness of content in the testimonial context, Holism cannot do so: Holism

must endorse SimTest. And if Holism cannot uphold a plausible account of testimonial knowledge acquisition this would constitute a serious objection to the theory. It is, presumably, required of a theory of communicative success that it can underpin a plausible account of testimony. There are even those like Evans (1982) who claim that communication is *essentially* a means of exchanging knowledge.³⁰² As such, we would have reason to reconsider the plausibility of sociolectical accounts of communicative success. Sociolectical accounts may look bad at explaining mere communicative success, but if they are the only accounts which can underpin exchange of knowledge through testimony, this would be a significant mark in their favour. Goldberg, in his (2007) book, ‘Anti-Individualism’, argues that theories on the model of SimTest are epistemically problematic. There are two kinds of problem which Goldberg identifies. The first is a problem for SimTest itself: Goldberg argues that SimTest cannot uphold an attractive account of epistemic reliance – where epistemic reliance is thought to be an essential feature of knowledge through testimony. Instead, Goldberg argues, it must posit a revised notion of epistemic reliance which fails to capture certain epistemic features thought to be distinctive of testimonial exchanges. And there are several further problems which result from adoption of this revised account of epistemic reliance. The second kind of problem concerns the plausibility of combining SimTest with content internalism. Goldberg argues that, if combined with content internalism, SimTest must claim that knowledge is rarely, if ever, gained through testimony.

In this chapter I will argue that, contrary to appearances, neither SimTest, nor internalism, need suffer either of these kinds of problem. Given the arguments of Chapter 5, my response to both these worries will not be surprising. With regards to the first problem, I will argue that the cluster of problems pertaining to epistemic reliance only afflicts a version of SimTest which claims that knowledge can be gained through testimony even when the content recovered by the hearer represents a merely similar *state of affairs*. I will argue that SimTest should claim instead that knowledge through testimony requires that the content proffered by the speaker and grasped by the hearer be similar enough that they represent the *same* state of affairs.

³⁰² Evans (1982) 310

That is, the content grasped by the hearer must have the same truth-conditions as the content expressed by the speaker. In response to the second problem, I will show how an internalist who posits mere similarity of content can endorse this version of SimTest by appeal to the method of determining the application-conditions of idiosyncratic contents advocated in Chapter 5.

The chapter will proceed as follows. In Section 1, I will introduce what is meant by a ‘testimonial exchange’. In Section 2, I will present two competing accounts of the semantic condition on the success of a testimonial exchange. These will be the Same Content View of Knowledge through Testimony (‘SamTest’), and the Similar Content View of Knowledge through Testimony (‘SimTest’). In Section 3, I will present the first collection of objections which Goldberg levels against SimTest and some additional, related, problems. In Section 4, I will show how SimTest can be amended to avoid these problems. In Section 5, I shall present Goldberg’s objection that an internalist cannot sensibly endorse SimTest, and I will show how the Holist can deal with this objection by appeal to the machinery set up in the previous chapter. Finally, in Section 6, I will end with some remarks as to the demands placed on interlocutors by the testimonial context. It will turn out that the testimonial context needn’t be thought of as being particularly demanding after all.

Section 1: Testimony and knowledge through testimony

Testimony is thought to be a vital source of knowledge.³⁰³ An enormous number of our beliefs about the world are gained through the testimony of others. Many of the beliefs we hold could *only* have been gained through testimony, at least in practice. For example, if we wish to find out information about certain aspects of past events, our only available source of information is the spoken or written accounts of others; these accounts are links in a chain leading back to an observation of the event itself. It is indisputable that we form an enormous number of beliefs through the testimony

³⁰³ This is not to say that testimony is a basic or irreducible source of knowledge. I wish to remain neutral as to the debate between reductionists and anti-reductionists about testimony.

of others, and it is widely believed that a large number of these beliefs amount to knowledge.

There are many ways in which a hearer can gain knowledge as a result of a testimonial exchange. My interest in this chapter is restricted primarily to knowledge that is gained *through* testimony.³⁰⁴ Knowledge through testimony is not just any knowledge that a hearer might gain as a result of hearing a speaker's testimony. We might say that it is knowledge that is gained through (a) accepting the *content* of the testimony proffered and (b) *accepting* the content of the testimony proffered. The emphasis in (a) is intended to highlight that the content attested to plays a direct role in the exchange of testimonial knowledge. Knowledge through testimony cannot be gained merely via observation of non-semantic features of the speaker's utterance. As Lackey writes, "[I]t must be based on the *content* of the proposition to which a speaker testifies rather than entirely on features *about* the speaker's testimony, e.g., how it was testified to, where it was testified to, and so on."³⁰⁵ Similarly, knowledge through testimony is not something which can be gained via inferences made by the hearer from the content proffered to some further content. The emphasis in (b) is intended to highlight the role of acceptance in knowledge through testimony. When a hearer accepts a piece of testimony, she does so on the basis of its having been attested to by the speaker.³⁰⁶ She does not accept it based purely on any *non-testimonial* justification that she has for its truth (although she may have such justification). Acceptance of a piece of testimony is a matter of the hearer relying on the *speaker's* justification for the truth of the content attested to rather than a matter of her acquiring her own, non-testimonial, justification.³⁰⁷ As such, the hearer is putting herself in an epistemically vulnerable position: she allows herself to be *epistemically reliant* on the testifier. In accepting a piece of testimony, the hearer is relying on the speaker to have gotten things right – to have represented the world in

³⁰⁴ This distinction between knowledge through testimony and knowledge from testimony is from Audi (1997).

³⁰⁵ Lackey (1999) 476

³⁰⁶ Although, perhaps not solely on this basis. She may also need positive reasons to trust the speaker, or to think that the content of the testimony is plausible.

³⁰⁷ If the testimonial chain is longer than two people, the speaker may not herself possess non-testimonial justification, but may be epistemically reliant on a further speaker who does so, and so on. I discuss this in more detail in Section 3.

the right way – and to possess sufficient warrant/justification for the belief she expresses, or statement she expresses it with. It is thought to be distinctive of knowledge through testimony that it involves this epistemic reliance. As Goldberg writes, “In casting knowledge as involving belief formed *on the basis of* a content’s having been attested, the proposed characterisation highlights the element of the hearer’s *epistemic reliance* on her source speaker.”³⁰⁸ As a result, the epistemic properties of the hearer’s testimonial belief will be at least partially dependent on the epistemic properties of the speaker’s testimony.

Knowledge *from* testimony, on the other hand, is any knowledge which is gained as a result of a testimonial exchange, but which is not gained directly through acceptance of the content proffered. As such, it does not involve the epistemic reliance of the hearer on her source speaker. To gain mere knowledge from testimony, the hearer need not rely on the speaker to have expressed a belief (or produced a statement) which has any particular epistemic properties. And, as such, the epistemic properties of the hearer’s testimonial belief do not depend on the epistemic properties of the testimony proffered. The justification that the hearer has for her belief does not include, or depend on, the justification that the speaker has for her testimony: it must have a different, non-testimonial, source. The hearer’s belief from testimony may be true, justified, etc. even when the speaker’s testimony is false, unjustified, etc.

To illustrate the difference between the two, Goldberg offers the following examples. In the first, which is an example of mere knowledge *from* testimony, we imagine a doctor, Henrietta, who comes to know that it is a sunny day based on her observations of reports by her patient, Slobodan.³⁰⁹ Henrietta has observed a correlation between Slobodan’s utterances of ‘I am in a good mood today’, and its being a sunny day. Given this correlation, Henrietta can come to know that it is a sunny day from observing Slobodan’s report even when she has not been outside to see the weather for herself. Goldberg explains,

³⁰⁸ Goldberg (2007) 16. Goldberg uses the expressions ‘knowledge through testimony’ and ‘testimonial knowledge’ interchangeably. I will do the same.

³⁰⁹ Goldberg (2007) 32

[H]er knowledge that it is sunny today is based on the empirical generalisation, which she has confirmed through careful observation of Slobodan, that he reports being in a good mood only on sunny days. She has confirmed this generalisation with numerous positive instances in a variety of otherwise very different circumstances and has encountered no negative instances.³¹⁰

Goldberg thinks that, even if Henrietta can gain knowledge from such exchanges, it will not be knowledge *through* testimony that she has gained. For, in this case, Henrietta can be completely indifferent to Slobodan's epistemic perspective on the content he proffers. Goldberg identifies that Henrietta's knowledge THAT IT IS SUNNY epistemically depends only on (a), the correctness of the empirical generalisation which connects Slobodan's utterances of 'I am in a good mood today' with the state of affairs obtaining that it is a sunny day and (b), her correctly identifying a given report of Slobodan's as falling under this generalisation.³¹¹ Goldberg explains,

The result is that the total knowledge-relevant support for her belief that it is sunny does not outstrip the support she has for the relevant generalisation and for her characterisation of Slobodan's act as falling under this generalisation.³¹²

In particular, Henrietta's belief, and its status as knowledge, does not depend on the epistemic properties of the content of Slobodan's report. In this case, Henrietta is epistemically self-reliant. Goldberg could have set up the example such that Slobodan is lying every time he reports being in a good mood, and the appropriateness of Henrietta's forming a belief based on her evidence would remain just so long as the correlation between Slobodan's reports and the state of the weather remained.³¹³ Providing Slobodan makes this report only when it is in fact sunny, Henrietta can gain knowledge that it is sunny outside regardless of the truth of Slobodan's utterance and regardless of whether he has any justification or warrant for it. The epistemic properties of the belief that she forms are not dependant on the

³¹⁰ Ibid

³¹¹ Ibid

³¹² Ibid, 33

³¹³ The correlation is between Slobodan's *reports* and the state of the weather, not between Slobodan's *beliefs* and the state of the weather. Although a similar example could be set up using Slobodan's beliefs instead of his mere reports and the point would still hold.

epistemic properties of Slobodan's report. Her knowledge, then, was formed as a result of Slobodan's testimony, but it is not knowledge *through* testimony.

In contrast, Goldberg provides an example of knowledge *through* testimony.³¹⁴ In this example, we imagine a different doctor, Hallie, who observes the testimony of her patient, Steve. Steve performs an utterance of 'It is a sunny day today'. In this case, Hallie (assuming other things go according to plan) can come to know that it is a sunny day by *accepting* Steve's testimony. In this second example, Hallie is not indifferent to Steve's epistemic perspective. She is relying on him to have testified truly and to be justified/warranted in his belief (or statement). As such, unlike in the previous example, the justification/warrant that Hallie has for her testimonial belief outstrips the evidence she herself could cite in justification of the content of this belief. As Goldberg explains,

The total knowledge-relevant epistemic support enjoyed by Hallie's belief that it is sunny *is not exhausted by* the support she has for any relevant inductive generalisations brought to bear in evaluating the credibility of this piece of testimony, together with the support she has for describing the testimony as falling under those generalisations. In particular, there remains the epistemic support Steve himself had for his testimony – support on whose adequacy Hallie was relying.³¹⁵

In the second example, Hallie is thus epistemically relying on Steve, and the epistemic properties of her testimonial belief are, at least partially, dependent on the epistemic properties of his testimony. Epistemic reliance is taken to be *distinctive* of a testimonial exchange. As Goldberg writes,

[W]hat is distinctive of cases of knowledge through speech is precisely the element of epistemic reliance: in aiming to acquire knowledge through *S*'s testimony, *H* is relying on that testimony to have the epistemic features that, in virtue of its being a case of testimony, it ought to have.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Goldberg (2007) 32ff

³¹⁵ Goldberg (2007) 32-33. Goldberg notes that this point should be accepted by reductionists and anti-reductionists alike. If reductionism is true, the hearer may require further justification for her testimonial belief (e.g., to the effect that the speaker is a reliable testifier), but there is still an important source of justification for her testimonial belief which lies outside of her cognitive economy.

³¹⁶ Goldberg (2007) 16

In what follows, I will treat the presence of epistemic reliance as a precondition for something's counting as a testimonial exchange in the first place, rather than as a direct condition on the *success* of an exchange.³¹⁷ For the purposes of this chapter, I will stipulate that a 'testimonial exchange' is an event which results in the hearer forming a *belief* through testimony. A *successful* testimonial exchange is one which results in a hearer forming *knowledge through testimony*. The event involves an act on the part of both the speaker and the hearer.³¹⁸ The speaker's role in the exchange is to perform a speech act which has content which represents some state of affairs and which presents this content as being true. The hearer's role in the exchange is to accept the testimony, where this involves her forming a mental representation of the content of the speaker's utterance and taking an attitude of belief towards the content she recovers. In accepting the testimony of the speaker, the hearer is relying on the speaker both to have represented the world in the right way, and to possess sufficient warrant/justification for so doing.

The above is intended as a (partial) characterisation of what is distinctive of a testimonial exchange. If the hearer is not epistemically relying on the speaker in the way outlined above, then the exchange is not a testimonial exchange, let alone a successful one.³¹⁹ As we will see, it is this feature of knowledge through testimony that SimTest is alleged to struggle to maintain. An event with the above features will result in the hearer forming a *belief* through testimony. For the hearer to gain knowledge through testimony, the testimonial exchange must be successful. However, *if* it is to be successful, certain further conditions must be met. There are various additional epistemic conditions which one might think must be met in order for an event with the above structure to constitute a successful testimonial exchange. For example, a dominant view in the epistemology of testimony is that the speaker in

³¹⁷ I do not assume that epistemic reliance exhaustively characterises a testimonial exchange. Some might require that the speaker intends to inform the hearer of some fact, or that she intends to offer her utterance as evidence for some fact. See, for example, Graham (1997)

³¹⁸ One can of course also gain testimony from written communication. Although I ignore written communication in this paper, I take what is said about verbal communication to be equally applicable to its written counterpart.

³¹⁹ As Goldberg stresses, this reliance can be 'qualified' in that the hearer may on occasion need to repair the testimony if the speaker lacks sufficient justification (or perhaps even belief). Epistemic reliance is consistent with the denial of transmission. See Goldberg (2007) 20ff.

a testimonial exchange must express her own knowledge with her testimonial utterance.³²⁰ Many believe that there are also various constraints which must be placed on the hearer in a testimonial exchange – for example, that she possess a capacity for discerning reliable, or trustworthy, testifiers from unreliable testifiers;³²¹ or that she be able to rule out defeaters for the truth of, or justification for, the content attested to.³²² A primary motivation for introducing many of these conditions is to rule-out a knowledge-undermining element of accidentality from being present in a successful testimonial exchange. It is thought that, if the hearer could easily have formed the belief that she did, in the way that she did, when the belief is false, then her belief will not amount to knowledge. Most think that, in a successful testimonial exchange, a hearer's testimonial belief must not only be true, but must be non-accidentally so.

Philosophers who work on testimony are primarily concerned with which epistemic conditions must be satisfied in order for the beliefs that a hearer forms through accepting testimony to amount to knowledge. They debate the conditions under which a hearer's testimonial belief is justified or warranted, and they debate the nature of this justification or warrant. To make this task easier, epistemologists commonly keep the semantic conditions fixed. My aim in this chapter is to do the opposite. My interest is not, primarily, over which epistemic conditions are essential to the success of a testimonial exchange. Rather, my interest is in whether a particular thesis as to the *semantic* features of a testimonial exchange (SimTest) impacts upon the epistemic features of the exchange. As such, I wish to work with a characterisation of the epistemic dimension of testimonial success which is neutral enough to be acceptable to most who are interested in the subject. My thesis is that one's choice between two particular semantic constraints on testimony – SamTest and SimTest – is orthogonal to these epistemic issues.³²³ In this chapter, I will remain neutral as to which epistemic conditions are required for the *success* of a testimonial

³²⁰ See, for example, Cooper and Fricker (1987), Audi (1997), Coady (1992). Not all accept the belief view. Lackey, for example, rejects this view in favour of what she calls the 'Statement View of Testimony'. See Lackey (2008).

³²¹ See, for example, Fricker (1994) and Goldberg (2007).

³²² Different kinds of defeaters are discussed in Pollock (1986) and Lackey (2006).

³²³ This is not to say that *all* semantic theories have no impact on these epistemic issues.

exchange, although, as mentioned above, I will be assuming that, in order to be a candidate for a successful testimonial exchange, the exchange must involve the epistemic reliance of the hearer on the speaker. In formulating competing views as to the semantic dimension of testimony, I will include a clause which abbreviates the various epistemic conditions (whatever these may be) on the success of a testimonial exchange. With these epistemic considerations bracketed, it will be easier to focus on the viability of the semantic constraint with which I will be concerned in this chapter. I now turn to two competing options for this semantic constraint.

Section 2: Two semantic conditions on testimonial knowledge exchange

2.1 The Same Content View of Knowledge through Testimony

It is typical for epistemologists who work on testimony to talk as if, in a successful testimonial exchange, the hearer forms a belief in the very content attested to by the speaker. For example, Lackey writes, “In explaining how we acquire knowledge via the testimony of others, we are interested in offering an account of how hearers can come to know that p through a speaker’s statement that p .”³²⁴ Also, Fricker writes, “[T]here must be a proposition which the teller intends by her action to present as true, and this must be identical with the one grasped by her audience as so presented, and accepted by her.”³²⁵ For many who work on testimony this is simply a stipulation. However, Goldberg has recently argued for the necessity of a same content condition on testimonial knowledge exchange.³²⁶ Goldberg offers the following characterisation of the basic structure of a successful testimonial exchange:

Successful Communication: S asserts the proposition that p , and on the basis of recognising this and relying on S ’s say-so (under conditions in which she is entitled to do so), H thereby acquires the knowledge that p (where p is the propositional content of H ’s knowledge).³²⁷

³²⁴ Lackey (1999) 488

³²⁵ Fricker (2006) 229

³²⁶ Fricker also argues that there must be a shared language if there is to be *widespread* exchange of testimonial knowledge (2006, 229).

³²⁷ Goldberg (2007) 41

Goldberg endorses something like the following principle for testimonial knowledge which specifies the necessity of an identity relation between the content proffered by the speaker and that grasped by the hearer. I present this as follows:

Necessity of Sameness of Content Testimony: A testimonial exchange will succeed only if the content of the hearer's testimonial belief is the same as the content of the speaker's testimony.

Based on this principle, we can construct the 'Same Content View of Knowledge through Testimony' ('SamTest'). This view states necessary and sufficient conditions on knowledge through testimony by incorporating a clause which abbreviates the various epistemic constraints on a successful testimonial exchange mentioned in Section 2 above.

Same Content View of Knowledge through Testimony (SamTest): A testimonial exchange will succeed iff (a) the epistemic conditions on knowledge through testimony are satisfied and (b) the content of the hearer's testimonial belief is the same as the content of the speaker's testimony.

SamTest has it that a hearer cannot come to know that *P* *through* testimony unless the content of the speaker's testimony was that *P*. (Although, she may come to know that *P* *from* testimony, when *P* was not attested to.)³²⁸

In Chapter 2, I explained that sociolectical views of content can easily endorse a Same Content View of communicative success. Such accounts of content can also easily endorse views like SamTest, and for the same reasons: sociolectical theories

³²⁸ SamTest is a slight simplification. Firstly, perhaps a hearer can come to know that *Q* from testimony that *P* if *Q* is pragmatically implicated by *P* (although the process by which this implicature is recovered may require recovery of the exact content attested to). Secondly, some think that a hearer can come to know that *Q* from testimony that *P* if *Q* is 'conveyed' by *P* (this can be so even when *P* is false). This phenomenon can be dealt with by altering SamTest such that it claims that the content grasped by the hearer must be identical to a content which was 'presented as true' by the speaker. See Goldberg (2001). In this chapter I will ignore these amendments to SamTest as neither of these modifications will affect the present debate.

claim that concepts are very widely shared and thus any condition which requires sameness of content will be easily and often satisfied. Although sociolectical theories allow that subjects *can* possess idiosyncratic concepts, these theories typically claim that subjects possess relatively few of them. In fact, the possession of idiosyncratic concepts would explain why knowledge exchange sometimes fails for semantic reasons on SamTest: a hearer can misunderstand the content of the speaker's testimony by grasping a different content to that which was expressed. She will do this if she maps a lexical item in the utterance to her idiosyncratic concept rather than the sociolectical concept expressed by the speaker. In such cases, the resultant testimonial belief, even if true, will be so only accidentally. As such, it will not amount to knowledge. As Goldberg writes, "[M]isunderstanding testimony is a way of introducing a knowledge-undermining element of luck into the process of belief-formation."³²⁹

In this chapter, I will not be concerned with whether SamTest is a plausible view of testimony. My interest is purely in whether SimTest is defensible. This is because SimTest is the only option available to my Holist. For the same reasons that Holism should not endorse the Same Content View of communicative success, it should also not endorse SamTest. This is because Holism entails that the semantic condition stated by SamTest will *never* be satisfied and, as such, Holism would have to claim that knowledge is never gained through testimony. This result, even if it can be ameliorated, would be a serious cost of the view. As such, this chapter is devoted to demonstrating both that SimTest is a plausible view of knowledge through testimony and that Holism can sensibly endorse SimTest. In the next few sections, I first present the version of SimTest which is criticised by Goldberg. I will then present a collection of problems which supposedly face the account. I will then demonstrate how a slight amendment to the account will avoid these worries, and show how a Holist can endorse this amended account whilst maintaining that the success of testimonial exchanges is a widespread occurrence. As mentioned above, given my argument in Chapter 5, I expect that the reader will have anticipated how I will argue in this chapter. However, it will be worth taking the time to see just why Goldberg's

³²⁹ Goldberg (2007) 28

objections, although perhaps fatal to one version of SimTest, will be easily avoided by the Holist who endorses a version of SimTest based on the Holist View of Communicative Success.

2.2 The Similar Content Account of Knowledge through Testimony

The position which I will defend in this chapter is an account of testimony which claims that knowledge can be gained *through* testimony even when the content of the testimony recovered by the hearer is not the content of the testimony proffered by the speaker, P, but some similar, yet distinct, content, P*. The account I defend is thus one which endorses the following principle.

Necessity of Similarity of Content Testimony: A testimonial exchange will succeed only if the content of the hearer's testimonial belief is similar to the content of the speaker's testimony.

As with SamTest, I will state the view of testimony based on this principle by abbreviating the various epistemic constraints which must be satisfied for the exchange to count as an 'epistemically good' case of a testimonial exchange.

Similar Content View of Knowledge through Testimony (SimTest): A testimonial exchange will succeed iff (a) the epistemic conditions on knowledge through testimony are satisfied and (b) the content of the hearer's testimonial belief is similar to the content of the speaker's testimony.

The semantic condition stated by SimTest will be satisfied if the content proffered by the speaker and recovered by the hearer are identical: that is, if the content of both is that P. However, SimTest is weaker than SamTest in that it allows that the recovery of a similar content to P would be sufficient for the success of the testimonial exchange (assuming the various epistemic constraints are met).³³⁰ In this statement of

³³⁰ Exchanges on the model of SimTest are not captured by the amendments to SamTest mentioned in the earlier footnote. SimTest allows that a hearer can come to know that P* from testimony that P even when P* is neither implicated nor conveyed by P.

SimTest, the appeal to similarity is left vague. In the previous two chapters, I explained how different contexts of communicative exchanges might require different degrees of similarity between the contents grasped by the hearer and expressed by the speaker. And, in the beginning of this chapter, I worried that the testimonial context might be a context which is simply too demanding for Holism to cope with. The nature of the similarity required by the testimonial context will become clear in later sections where I present my solution to the epistemic problems which certain versions of SimTest face.

In the above, I have suggested why Holist theories of content in particular should endorse SimTest over SamTest. However, it is worth noting that Goldberg has argued that internalists – of *all* stripes – cannot sensibly endorse SamTest.³³¹ For the purposes of this chapter, I am going to grant that Goldberg is right about the implausibility of combining content internalism with SamTest. I will be defending theories which eschew SamTest in favour of SimTest. My thesis is that *even if* a theory precludes that content is shared between subjects, that theory can nonetheless maintain an epistemically attractive theory of testimony. As such, the arguments in this chapter should be of interest to content internalists in general, not just those who endorse Holism in particular. Goldberg also argues that SimTest is untenable. It is this claim which I will dispute. In what follows, I will present a collection of problems which supposedly afflict SimTest (and the combination of SimTest and internalism) as a result of its semantic constraint. I will present two broad problems in this regard. The first problem concerns epistemic reliance and the nature of SimTest’s testimonial chains; the second problem concerns the difficulty of achieving sufficient similarity of content on internalism. I will argue that we can amend SimTest to avoid the first of these problems. This amendment might appear to exacerbate the second problem: the revised formulation of SimTest calls for a degree of similarity of content which might appear to be too demanding for the internalist to meet. However, by appeal to machinery set up in Chapter 5, I will demonstrate that content internalism (and even Holism) can endorse accounts of testimony which

³³¹ Goldberg (2007) Chapter 2

facilitate exactly the same amount of knowledge through testimony as their externalist rivals.

Section 3: Problems for SimTest

3.1 Epistemic reliance

Goldberg considers a proposal on the model of SimTest. He calls this the ‘close enough proposal’. I will use the terms ‘SimTest’ and ‘the close enough proposal’ interchangeably to refer to the view. This proposal claims that, “[T]he sort of understanding involved in testimonial knowledge does not require recovery of the very content attested to; close enough is good enough, epistemically speaking.”³³² He considers that such a theory might be supported by the claim that the belief in this ‘close enough’ content is likely to be true if the content of the testimony proffered is reliable.³³³ After presenting this account, Goldberg offers a number of objections to it. The first of Goldberg’s objections concerns the notion of epistemic reliance which was earlier introduced as distinctive of knowledge through testimony. He argues that the close enough proposal cannot hold onto this notion of epistemic reliance. But, if this is so, it is not clear that the kind of knowledge that the close enough proposal affords us is really knowledge through testimony.

Epistemic reliance, recall, involves the hearer relying on the speaker both to have represented the world correctly with her utterance, and to possess appropriate warrant/justification for the belief she expresses or statement she expresses it with. The speaker must have non-accidentally gotten things right. The problem for SimTest identified by Goldberg is that it is hard to see how a hearer can be said to be ‘epistemically relying’ on a speaker’s say-so when the hearer herself has not correctly represented the content of that say-so. As Goldberg explains,

³³² Ibid, 45

³³³ Ibid, 44

To rely epistemically on a speaker's say-so is a matter of relying on her to have reliably gotten things right. But the notion of 'getting things right' is a semantic/representational notion: it is a matter of representing things as they are.³³⁴

On the 'close enough' model, the hearer is not forming her belief through acceptance of the speaker's representation of how the world is for, in close enough cases, the hearer has not grasped this. Rather, she has grasped something merely similar: the content she grasps might represent a merely similar state of affairs. Thus, Goldberg thinks we should wonder in what sense the hearer really is relying epistemically on the speaker's say-so at all. At best, the hearer is relying on the likelihood of the truth of the content she grasps, P*, given that P* is similar to the content proffered by the speaker, P.

Goldberg considers that the defender of the close enough proposal might attempt to provide a revised characterisation of epistemic reliance according to which a hearer can be said to be epistemically reliant on the speaker providing that the hearer grasps a content which is 'close enough' to the content proffered by the speaker, where the content grasped by the hearer is *likely* to be true given the reliability of the testimony proffered (and its similarity to the content recovered). He writes,

([O]ne might suppose) this process yields beliefs that are reliable enough to be candidates for testimonial knowledge. This is because in that case the process [...] will map observed speech onto contents that have an increased likelihood of truth, given the reliability of the speech act observed – even in cases in which the reliability of the speech act observed is a reliability regarding the truth of a *different content*, than what was yielded in the comprehension process.³³⁵

Unfortunately for SimTest, Goldberg identifies that there are problems with this revised notion of epistemic reliance. I will present some of these now.

Problem 1: The responsibility of the testifier

³³⁴ Goldberg (2007) 46

³³⁵ Ibid, 47

A first problem that Goldberg identifies is that, if we adopt the revised notion of epistemic reliance, we lose the feature of knowledge through testimony whereby hearers can regard speakers as possessing sufficient justification/warrant for their (the hearers') testimonial beliefs. As Goldberg writes,

[B]eliefs grounded in epistemic reliance have a feature whereby the hearer, in virtue of her comprehension of the content attested, is *ipso facto* entitled to regard the speaker as having a sufficiently high degree of knowledge-relevant warrant for her (the hearer's) belief.³³⁶

Goldberg suggests that the kind of testimonial belief which SimTest countenances does not have this feature. No matter how similar the content of the hearer's belief is to the content of the speaker's testimony, it is *not* what the speaker attested to. And so the hearer cannot regard the speaker as being in an epistemically privileged position with respect to the content of her (the hearer's) testimonial belief.³³⁷ The speaker only possesses warrant/justification for a similar content.

A result of this is that the epistemic support which the hearer has for her testimonial belief goes beyond the epistemic support provided by the speaker's testimony (and also beyond any further support provided by the justification the hearer possesses for believing the speaker to be a reliable testifier etc.). The hearer is relying on the further fact that her testimonial belief is likely to be true, given the reliability of the testimony proffered. As Goldberg explains,

In that case, these reasons function as part of the epistemic support for the hearer's belief in the 'near enough' content, clearly going beyond the support provided by the testimony itself (as well as the support provided by the hearer's reasons for accepting that testimony). For this reason, it is unclear whether 'near enough comprehension', even assuming that it gives rise to reliable belief, underwrites a kind of reliable belief involving the sort of warrant-expansion characteristic of testimonial belief.³³⁸

This in itself might not seem so bad. After all, we had already conceded that we must endorse a different notion of epistemic reliance to the one endorsed by SamTest. As

³³⁶ Ibid, 49

³³⁷ Ibid

³³⁸ Ibid, 49

such, it is not surprising that this replacement notion does not possess all the features of the original. However, I think we can draw out two further related problems that result from this initial issue which may be harder to embrace. These are the following. The hearer cannot (a) ‘pass the buck’ with respect to the justification of her testimonial belief or (b) blame the speaker if her testimonial belief should turn out to be false, or unjustified or unwarranted. I turn to each of these now.

Problem 1a: Buck-passing

Goldberg (2006) argues that knowledge through testimony is distinctive in that it is epistemically appropriate for hearers to pass the buck with respect to justification for their testimonial beliefs. In this paper, he is not concerned with arguing against content internalism or SimTest, but what he says about buck-passing can be used to put further pressure on the proposal attacked in his (2007). Goldberg argues that it is part of our conception of testimonial knowledge that if a hearer, who has formed a testimonial belief based on the testimony of a speaker, is challenged as to the truth of, or justification for, this belief, she may first exhaust her own justification for this belief (citing reasons for trusting the testifier, for example). But if the challenger presses her, it is epistemically appropriate for her to pass the buck to the testifier who possesses further epistemic support for the belief’s content. As Goldberg explains,

If the belief was acquired on the basis of another’s testimony [...] a subject has *not* exhausted the epistemically appropriate moves available to her, once she has exhausted her justification for the belief. On the contrary, when the knowledge is testimonial knowledge, even after the subject has exhausted her justification for the belief, there remains the ‘move of last resort’, whereby she passes the epistemic buck onto her interlocutor.³³⁹

This phenomenon is also highlighted by McMyler:

We naturally justify our claims to know based on testimony by citing an authority, and when we do so and are challenged, we naturally feel entitled to defer these challenges back to the authority.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Goldberg (2006) 137

³⁴⁰ McMyler (2007) 525

However, this practice appears only to make sense on the assumption of SamTest's picture of epistemic reliance. For, on the version of SimTest currently under discussion, if a speaker who gained a testimonial belief that P^* from testimony that P is asked to provide justification for P^* it would be epistemically inappropriate for her to pass the justificatory buck to the testifier. For the testifier never testified that P^* , and did not ever present herself as being in an epistemically privileged position with respect to P^* . In fact, it is possible that the testifier believes that P^* is false.

Problem 1b: Blame

A related worry is that it appears that there are cases in which it would not be epistemically appropriate for a hearer to blame the testifier if her testimonial belief turns out to be false, or unjustified. On SamTest, we can construct examples such as the following. Suppose a speaker, Sal, gained a testimonial belief that P from a further speaker, Ben. However, suppose that the content of Sal's testimonial belief is false. Now suppose that Sal, unaware of the unreliability of his testimonial belief, testifies that P to a hearer, Hannah. Hannah accepts Sal's testimony, but later finds it to be false. If SamTest is true, Hannah may complain that Sal gave false testimony and that it is Sal that is to blame for her false belief. Similarly, Sal can also shift the blame. He can say that he was told by Ben that P and thus Ben must shoulder at least some of the blame for the falsity of the content (although Sal may also be partially responsible). Equally, if Ben gained the testimony from a further source, he too can shift the blame, and so on. Ultimate responsibility for the testimony seems to lie with the original testifier in the chain whose responsibility it is to possess sufficient non-testimonial justification/warrant for the content she attests to. Each subsequent link in a testimonial chain will be (at least partially) epistemically reliant on the initial testifier. Similarly, the epistemic properties of the testimonial beliefs of any subsequent link in a chain will be (at least partially) dependent upon the epistemic properties of the testimony proffered by the initial testifier.³⁴¹

³⁴¹ This is not to say that subsequent links actually possess the same kind of justification as the initial testifier. But, at the very least, the testimonial justification that they do possess is in some sense dependent on this non-testimonial justification.

There may be *some* sense in which we can preserve a notion of appropriate blame on the close enough proposal. For, if Sal offers false testimony, we might think that (a), he is to be blamed *qua* assertor but also that (b), Hannah's testimonial belief is then *likely* to be false and, as such, Hannah has been put in a position in which she was likely to form a false belief as a result of Sal's testimony. However, there are also examples possible on the close enough proposal in which hearers can gain beliefs allegedly *through* testimony which are false, but in which the testifier shoulders no blame whatsoever. Consider a case in which Ben offers reliable testimony that P_1 , and Sal gains a testimonial belief that P_2 from this testimony, and P_2 happens to be false (even though similar to P_1). Sal cannot hold Ben responsible for his false testimonial belief. The testimony that Ben proffered was true and, we can stipulate, reliably so.

Problem 2: Testimonial chains

A second kind of epistemic problem with testimony on the model of SimTest concerns the properties of SimTest's testimonial chains. There are at least two problems in this regard.

Problem 2a: Instability

The first problem is that SimTest's testimonial chains become much more unstable than SamTest's. For any chain which comprises exchanges which involve grasp of merely similar contents, even assuming that each new link in the chain is *likely* to be true given the truth of the previous link, there is always a chance that each new testimonial belief will be false. Of course, only those exchanges which result in true testimonial beliefs will count as knowledge through testimony on SimTest, but the point is that the chain is easily broken for semantic reasons. In this vein, we might further worry whether it really is the case that a content which is similar to the content proffered really is likely to be true in virtue of this similarity. Consider that, if SimTest is to maintain that anything near the amount of knowledge thought to be

gained through testimony is actually so gained, it must be the case that the vast majority of exchanges are indeed cases in which the similar content grasped by the hearer is true.

Problem 2b: Large shifts in content

A second, and rather strange, problem encountered by SimTest is that two distant links in a testimonial chain could, in principle, represent wildly different states of affairs.³⁴² To see this, consider that, even if each testimonial exchange is successful (that is, if each newly formed testimonial belief is true and meets the standards for knowledge), if each subject in the testimonial chain recovers a slightly different content to the previous one, then after a number of successive exchanges, the content grasped by some link in the chain might be completely different to the content attested to by the testifier from whom the chain originated. For example, we can start with a piece of testimony which represents the state of affairs that there is a red squirrel in the garden and it seems in principle possible for successive exchanges to shift this content such that, at the end of the chain, a completely different state of affairs is represented, such as the state of affairs that there is a brown bear in the basement. This might not often happen, but it is surely possible given that successive minor shifts in content (and the state of affairs that is represented) can add up to a very large shift indeed. And there is nothing in SimTest that would prevent it. SimTest, if it endorses the revised notion of epistemic reliance, appears to allow that there is nothing wrong with these testimonial chains. But this seems absurd. This objection highlights the awkwardness of SimTest's revised account of epistemic reliance. As mentioned above, on a traditional account of epistemic reliance, testimonial chains have a feature whereby ultimate responsibility for the non-testimonial justification/warrant for the testimony lies with the original testifier in the chain such that each subsequent link is partially epistemically reliant on this initial testifier. Similarly, the epistemic properties enjoyed by each belief are dependent on the epistemic properties of the initial testifier's belief. This is clearly not so on SimTest: the first link in a testimonial exchange cannot be held responsible for a

³⁴² This was pointed out by Jesper Kallestrup in conversation.

piece of testimony which represents a *completely* different state of affairs to that which she initially represented in her testimony. Nor need there be any interesting epistemic or semantic relationships between their respective beliefs. It is the revised notion of epistemic reliance that is responsible for these problematic features of SimTest's testimonial chains. SimTest allows that beliefs with merely similar contents can be properly classed as testimonial beliefs providing they are sufficiently similar in content to be likely to be true. And all these apparently innocuous minor shifts can add up to one that is large and obviously problematic.

Now, SimTest does not have to claim that a speaker and hearer at the far ends of such a chain stand in a relation of epistemic reliance. We could revise the account in light of this problem so that it instead claims that epistemic reliance can only occur between individual links, or perhaps small groups of links providing that the content between them is similar to some specified degree. In fact, I think that the version of SimTest under discussion must claim this in order to maintain some shred of plausibility. Consider, for example, the belief you have that David Hume was a Scotsman. If SimTest allows that testimonial chains can survive large shifts in content, then it must also allow that this belief of yours could, in principle, have been the product of a testimonial chain which originates in a person's testimony to the effect that Napoleon was a Frenchman. And, worse, that your belief is *epistemically reliant* on this person's testimony. I think this account would do too much violence to our intuitive idea of what it is to be a testimonial chain. Your knowledge that David Hume is a Scotsman, if it is a link in a testimonial chain, is a link in a chain which originates in some person reporting on the nationality of David Hume, and nothing else. Similarly, for some testimonial belief to be epistemically reliant on another, it is surely necessary that there is *some* interesting epistemic and semantic relationship between the two beliefs. It cannot be that there is merely some fortuitous causal relationship.

SimTest will try to claim, then, that testimonial chains are broken when the content grasped by some hearer strays too far from the content initially expressed by some prior link in the chain. Underlying this individuation of testimonial chains would be

the claim that epistemic reliance requires some relation of semantic closeness between a new testimonial belief and any prior links in the chain. As such, what might appear to be a single testimonial chain might turn out to be several smaller, overlapping chains. Perhaps this revised notion of epistemic reliance doesn't look completely indefensible. However, I think we can put a final nail in the coffin. One consequence of SimTest's picture of testimonial chains is the following: one can *generate* knowledge through testimony of some content, P, even when *no* subject has *any* non-testimonial warrant or justification for the truth of P whatsoever. In fact, the state of affairs that P represents might not have been observed or even imagined by any subject prior to P becoming an item of testimonial knowledge. This knowledge can be generated, *from nowhere*, simply as a result of the shifting content of testimonial chains. Note that this is a different issue to the question of whether some transmission thesis holds of testimony.³⁴³ In the transmission debate, the discussion concerns whether some epistemic properties can be generated in the testimonial belief of a hearer when they were not also present in the testimony of the speaker. But the present problem is not that epistemic properties are generated in some already-grasped content. Rather, the problem is that the content itself, *and* its status as knowledge, are both generated in the hearer when no subject has witnessed the obtaining of the state of affairs that that content represents. To see this, consider again an example from earlier. Suppose that a speaker, upon witnessing a red squirrel in her garden, testifies to a hearer with the utterance 'There is a red squirrel in the garden.' Now suppose that this initiates a chain (or a series of chains, as suggested above) in which each link shifts the content grasped slightly with each testimonial event. Some subsequent link eventually grasps the content that there is a brown bear in the basement as a result of successive minor shifts. Now suppose that this content is true. SimTest, it seems, must class this as a piece of testimonial knowledge. But there is no non-testimonial justification for it. It is epistemically groundless. Note that the response to the problem of long chains above will not help us here: even if we claim that this content lies at the end of a much smaller chain, SimTest must still claim that it counts as testimonial knowledge. This is because each smaller chain takes us from some piece of knowledge to a distinct, yet sufficiently similar, one via

³⁴³ For careful discussion of the literature on transmission, see Lackey (2008),

testimonial exchanges. But once we have shifted the content slightly, we can use this new knowledge to start a new chain. Thus it seems that positing smaller chains in cases of shifting contents does little to alleviate the implausibility of SimTest's account. There seems to be no way to quarantine the damage done by small shifts in content. If SimTest endorses the revised notion of epistemic reliance, it must endorse these small shifts, and the problems that come with them.

I think this last objection, (2b), is extremely damaging. There is a weaker and a stronger form of the objection from epistemic reliance now on the table. The weaker form just says that SimTest must endorse an unattractive notion of epistemic reliance which fails to cohere with several popular theses as to the characteristics of testimonial exchanges. One might think that this is a bullet that SimTest could bite. The stronger form of the objection claims that the revised notion of epistemic reliance is not really epistemic reliance at all. As such, SimTest *cannot* claim that certain exchanges exhibit epistemic reliance: any exchange in which a *merely* similar content is grasped by the hearer will fail to exhibit epistemic reliance. And whichever exchanges do not exhibit epistemic reliance will not count as testimonial exchanges after all.

Suppose that the stronger form of the objection succeeds. If one were to combine SimTest with social externalism, it may still be the case that some exchanges count as testimonial exchanges. Many exchanges in which the same content is shared between speaker and hearer will do this: such exchanges satisfy Necessity of Similarity of Content Testimony and may also exhibit (the traditional notion of) epistemic reliance. Of course, if it appears to be the case that the *only* exchanges which exhibit epistemic reliance are those in which content is shared we would have good reason to claim that SimTest is too weak, and that SamTest is the proper characterisation of testimonial knowledge. If we endorse the stronger form of the objection from epistemic reliance, the result for Holism is fairly devastating. The reason for this is that all exchanges on Holism are exchanges in which a hearer recovers only a merely similar content to that proffered by the speaker. But, given the strong objection from epistemic reliance, it will turn out that *none* of these

exchanges exhibit epistemic reliance after all. As such, no exchange on Holism can be classified as a testimonial exchange. If this is so, Holism must claim that there is no such thing as knowledge through testimony. Rather, Holism can at best countenance mere knowledge *from* testimony. This would be to just admit that SimTest has failed. For it was introduced to salvage knowledge *through* testimony in the face of the claim that only SamTest could facilitate it. Thus, if the strong objection succeeds, it may appear that a theory cannot underpin knowledge through testimony without positing shared content after all.

Unfortunately for SimTest, I think the combination of the above objections weighs in favour of the stronger reading of the objection. A chain of knowledge through testimony should originate in some testifier who possesses some non-testimonial justification for the content entertained by each link in the chain. This knowledge cannot just spring from the chain itself and claim to be testimonial knowledge. If we accept the strong objection, then SimTest is left in the following predicament. SimTest, when combined with Holism, provides a defective account of knowledge through testimony. I assumed at the outset that a testimonial exchange (that is, one which is capable of resulting in knowledge *through* testimony) *must* exhibit epistemic reliance (and, I hope, consideration of what theories might look like without this assumption will serve to increase the assumption's plausibility), but we have seen that SimTest cannot uphold epistemic reliance. As such, on the combination of Holism and SimTest, there will be *no* exchanges which are genuine testimonial exchanges. And if there are no testimonial exchanges, there are no testimonial exchanges which are *successful*. But knowledge through testimony can only be gained through *successful testimonial exchanges*. As such, the Holist must deny that there is such a thing as knowledge through testimony. The conditions (both semantic and epistemic) on the success of an exchange, then, are irrelevant, for there are no testimonial exchanges which could be evaluated for success. As such, SimTest can, at best, afford us mere knowledge *from* testimony.

It is possible that we can ameliorate the knowledge-from-testimony approach. But I will not pursue this option here, as I think it can be argued that Holism need not

endorse Goldberg's 'close enough' version of SimTest. Things are not as bleak as they seem. The reason for this is that it is not the case that the Holist is committed to the revised notion of epistemic reliance. I will present a revised version of SimTest which can uphold the traditional notion of epistemic reliance and, as such, need not claim that there is no such thing as genuine testimonial exchanges.

Section 4: Amending SimTest

Given the above cluster of objections, the outlook for SimTest (and those theories of content which must endorse it) looks grim. It looks like the picture of testimony enjoyed by the proposal simply jettisons certain features thought to be distinctive of knowledge through testimony. The remaining picture looks to border on the absurd: the 'testimonial chains', if they can be so-called, countenance the generation of testimonial knowledge in contents which possess *no* non-testimonial justification.

Fortunately, I think these apparent problems all follow from an assumption which SimTest need not endorse. This is the assumption that merely similar contents must represent distinct states of affairs (and, similarly, that merely similar concepts must represent distinct objects or sets of objects). This assumption is implicit in Goldberg's presentation of the 'close enough' proposal. Goldberg states the view in the following way, "so long as the hearer's belief is a belief in a content that is 'close enough' to what was actually said, then the belief in that 'close enough' content will likely be true."³⁴⁴ That this content is only likely to be true suggests that it represents a distinct state of affairs. For if it represented the same state of affairs it would be *guaranteed* to be true given the truth of the testimony proffered. In what follows, I will first show how rejecting the assumption enables SimTest to uphold a traditional account of epistemic reliance. However, doing so might appear to render the account unavailable to internalist views, including Holism. I will then go on to argue we can use the machinery set up in Chapter 5 to show how an internalist can endorse this

³⁴⁴ Goldberg (2007) 45

revised version of SimTest without having to maintain that knowledge through testimony is a rare phenomenon.

To avoid having to endorse the revised notion of epistemic reliance, we should simply amend SimTest in the following way:

Revised SimTest (RSimTest): A testimonial exchange will succeed iff (a) the epistemic conditions on knowledge through testimony are satisfied and (b) the content of the testimony proffered by the speaker and recovered by the hearer are similar to the degree that they represent the same state of affairs.

On Revised SimTest (henceforth, just 'RSimTest'), it is easy to see how certain of the above problems will disappear. This is because RSimTest will be in a position to maintain the traditional notion of epistemic reliance which SamTest endorses. RSimTest, although it allows that a hearer can recover a merely similar content, requires that the hearer's testimonial belief represent the very same state of affairs as that which is represented by the speaker's testimony. Because of this, the content grasped by the hearer is no longer merely *likely* to be true given the reliability of the testimony, but *guaranteed* to be true. As such, the hearer need no longer rely on any additional epistemic support for her testimonial belief over and above what is required on SamTest. In forming her testimonial belief, she is relying on the speaker to have testified to a content which represents a particular state of affairs as obtaining, and to possess sufficient justification/warrant for her belief that this state of affairs obtains (and perhaps some additional justification or warrant for believing the testifier to be reliable etc). Nothing more is needed. So, for example, if a speaker utters (1),

(1) There is a red squirrel in the garden.

RSimTest requires that the hearer form a mental representation of the content of the speaker's utterance which has the very same truth-conditions as (1). As we have seen

in previous chapters, and as I will reiterate later on, Holism allows that there is a fine spectrum of contents that are capable of doing this.

Now that we have recaptured the traditional notion of epistemic reliance, the worries introduced earlier do not arise for RSimTest. Consider the first problem: that of the epistemic responsibility of the speaker. Given that the testimonial belief that the hearer forms represents the very same state of affairs as that which is represented in the speaker's testimony, the hearer can rely on the speaker's justification/warrant for believing that this state of affairs obtains. Crucially, the hearer can properly regard the speaker as being in an epistemically privileged position with regard to the truth of the content she (the hearer) grasps, for the two contents are true in all and only the same situations. And, because the speaker is now properly responsible for the epistemic properties of the hearer's belief, we no longer suffer the related problems of buck-passing and blame. The hearer can indeed pass the justificatory buck to the speaker, deferring to her authority regarding justification for the content of her testimonial belief. Equally, should the testimony be unreliable, the speaker will be (at least partially) to blame for testifying to a content that was either false or unjustified/unwarranted.

Lastly, consider the second problem of testimonial chains. It should also be clear to see why this is no longer problematic. In each exchange, success demands that the hearer grasp a content which represents the very same state of affairs as that which was represented by the speaker. And, given this, there can be no small shifts in the state of affairs which is represented by each link in a testimonial chain. Furthermore, any subsequent hearer in a testimonial chain will be epistemically reliant on the very first speaker in the chain who possesses non-testimonial justification/warrant for the testimonial belief, for it is the very same state of affairs which is represented by all links in the chain. Whatever non-testimonial justification/warrant the initial testifier has for believing that a particular state of affairs obtains will *also* underpin the justification/warrant of the relevant testimonial beliefs of subsequent links in the chain. It is this initial testifier's justification/warrant that subsequent links are relying on. As mentioned before, one need not claim that subsequent links in the testimonial

chain possess the very same non-testimonial justification as the initial testifier. But, rather, the fact that each subsequent link possesses testimonial justification is, in some way, dependent on the non-testimonial justification of the initial testifier. It was the absence of this feature which proved especially problematic for the initial formulation of SimTest.

Section 5: An outlying problem

In his criticism of the close enough proposal, Goldberg advances an additional argument which is not avoided by the amendment to SimTest introduced above. This argument is not aimed against SimTest itself but, rather, is aimed at the plausibility of combining SimTest with internalism. As we will see, endorsing RSimTest might appear to make this problem worse.

Goldberg's original objection (aimed at SimTest rather than RSimTest) runs as follows.³⁴⁵ Suppose that it is granted that the content of a hearer's testimonial belief is likely to be true if it is similar to the content of the testimony proffered. Even granting this, Goldberg thinks that, on internalism, our beliefs are simply *not* often even similar enough to facilitate knowledge exchange. I noted in Chapter 3 that Goldberg argues that the internalist cannot provide sameness of content between speaker and hearer. To this end he writes,

Once a theorist shelves the hypothesis of public linguistic norms, the resources available to the theory, in its attempt to explain how individual hearers systematically attain a reliable comprehension of the words of their (apparent) co-linguals, are too meagre to account for the sort of comprehension that we suppose goes on all the time in our ordinary, everyday interactions with our linguistic peers.³⁴⁶

But Goldberg thinks similar considerations suggest that the internalist will not be able to provide sufficient similarity either. Consider that, on externalism, our dispositions to employ terms can be quite diverse whilst we still succeed in talking

³⁴⁵ Goldberg (2007) 48. See also 56ff for a related point.

³⁴⁶ Goldberg (2007) 79

(and thinking) about the same objects. On many internalist theories, by contrast, differences between the dispositions of subjects to employ a given term are taken to determine quite significant differences in content. This is essentially the line taken by those to adopt the reinterpretation strategy in opposition to Burge's social externalism: subjects who are disposed to apply concepts in significantly different ways are subjects who employ different concepts.

To take an example, consider what an advocate of the reinterpretation strategy might say about Alf and his doctor. Suppose Alf's doctor utters "William Musgrave published on arthritis is 1715." Alf, according to certain internalists, comes to form a belief with an idiosyncratic arthritis concept. We could paraphrase Alf's testimonial belief as follows: WILLIAM MUSGRAVE PUBLISHED ON A DISEASE OF THE JOINTS AND BONES IN 1715. But this belief is false. Some internalists may wish to claim that Alf's testimonial belief was not similar enough to the testimony proffered and that this explains the failure of knowledge exchange. The problem is that it seems plausible that Alf can gain knowledge from his doctor's testimony despite his idiosyncrasies. Such examples, it seems, will be widespread on certain forms of internalism. As such, the combination of such internalist views with SimTest results in a picture of testimony upon which we must posit a greater number of *failures* of knowledge exchange. In contrast, the combination of SamTest and various externalist theories can underpin a picture upon which knowledge is far more easily and often gained through testimony. Such theories can claim that testimonial knowledge exchange can easily survive the false beliefs that subjects have as to the application-conditions of the concepts employed in the content of the testimony.

If RSimTest is tenable, then any theory which endorses it can maintain a perfectly traditional account of knowledge through testimony. However, at this point an obvious problem faces any would-be internalist defender of RSimTest. RSimTest now demands that two contents be so similar that they represent the very same state of affairs but, if Goldberg is right, we should already be concerned that internalists couldn't provide enough conceptual similarity to meet the less demanding formulation of SimTest with which we began. This same kind of problem was

pressed against SimTest in problem (2a) above. To belabour the point: if internalists are to offer an account of knowledge through testimony which will rival the externalist's account, it is not enough that it can maintain that it is *possible* for two subjects to satisfy RSimTest. Rather, it must be the case that subjects *often* satisfy RSimTest. Otherwise internalism will not be able to underpin the widespread success of our testimonial exchanges. If it cannot do this then it is not much better off than the combination of SamTest and internalism rejected earlier on: it will have to claim that knowledge through testimony is rarely, if ever, achieved.

What is needed, then, is a principled mechanism for determining *widespread* co-reference of idiosyncratic concepts. Fortunately, I think we already have the resources to handle this issue. For, as I argued in the previous chapter, an internalist can claim that subjects with divergent idiosyncratic concepts can still succeed in representing the same things with these concepts. I argued that an internalist can claim that, when it comes to determining the object represented by a concept, this object is picked-out, not by being the object which satisfies *all* the properties which that object is thought to have by the subject, but by certain crucial beliefs which the subject is disposed to hold fixed in the face of conflicting information. Distinct idiosyncratic concepts can apply to *the same* objects and, because of this, two merely similar contents, P and P* (comprised of these idiosyncratic concepts), can represent the *same* state of affairs. This strategy affords us the result that semantically diverse concepts may apply to the same objects providing that subjects share certain dispositions. What is crucial for present purposes is the following. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that co-reference of idiosyncratic concepts, on Holism, will be near enough *exactly* as widespread as is concept-sharing on social externalism. This is because the dispositions that I appealed to in my argument were exactly the same dispositions that a social externalist must appeal to in order to make her argument. As such, any case in which social externalism would posit shared meaning is a case in which my internalist can posit co-reference. Given this, RSimTest will be easily and often satisfied on Holism. Thus the Holist can endorse RSimTest without having to maintain that knowledge through testimony is a rarer phenomenon than it is on externalism. Testimonial chains are not easily broken for semantic reasons on

Holism, because the dispositions needed to secure co-reference (and thus shared truth-conditions) are extremely widely shared.

Section 6: The demands of the testimonial context

At the beginning of this chapter, I considered that the context determined by a testimonial exchange might be particularly demanding. Initially, the worry was that, even if one is persuaded that communication can succeed when content is merely similar, one might still think that for knowledge to be gained through testimony only sameness of content will do. However, given the above approach, it appears that this is not so after all. The speaker and hearer can diverge quite widely with respect to the conceptual-role of the respective contents testified to and recovered; and yet they can still succeed in exchanging knowledge. One consequence of the above approach, then, is that interlocutors can succeed in exchanging testimonial knowledge whilst communicating quite *unsuccessfully*, given the success *simpliciter* scale introduced in the previous chapter. That is, what appears to be required for testimonial knowledge exchange is that the hearer gets the truth-conditions of the speaker's attitude correct. But, providing this is so, the content she grasps can be quite different in conceptual-role to that of the content the speaker expressed.

It should be stressed that this non-demanding approach to testimonial knowledge acquisition is not unique to the Holist's account. It perfectly parallels the line taken by Goldberg in his social externalist account. According to this account, testimonial knowledge is 'thin' in the sense that it requires very little linguistic understanding of the content proffered. So long as the correct content is grasped, two subjects can quite wildly diverge in their understanding of that content. Indeed, this was a motivation for the account: it allowed that testimonial knowledge was very easily acquired. Similarly, the Holist can claim that testimonial knowledge is 'thin' in that one can gain knowledge from an exchange despite grasping only a roughly similar content to that expressed by the speaker (which, for the Holist, amounts to having only a roughly similar understanding), providing that content has the right truth-

conditions. So, both views of mental content can claim that testimonial knowledge can be exchanged between subjects despite both subjects understanding the content(s) in divergent and/or incorrect ways. It is just that, for the Holist, this difference in understanding amounts to a difference in content.

Section 7: Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented and defended an account of knowledge through testimony based on the similar content approach to communication developed in Chapters 4 and 5. I began by describing what it is that epistemologists are interested in when they discuss knowledge that is distinctively testimonial. Testimonial knowledge is knowledge that is gained as a result of *accepting* the testimony of the speaker. In accepting a piece of testimony, a hearer renders herself epistemically reliant on the testifier. And the epistemic properties of her testimonial belief are epistemically dependent on the epistemic properties of the testimony. With this set up in place, I presented the default view of knowledge through testimony, SamTest, which claims that knowledge through testimony requires that the content grasped by the hearer must be the very same content as that attested to by the speaker. I then presented SimTest, which claims instead that mere similarity of content would be sufficient for success in the testimonial context. I considered a collection of objections to SimTest. Several of these were from Goldberg. The combined force of these objections was extremely damaging to SimTest. However, I then demonstrated how SimTest could be easily reformulated to avoid the objections. Finally, using the strategy developed in Chapter 5, I showed how an internalist could claim that the revised version of SimTest ('RSimTest') could be sensibly endorsed by the Holist (and other internalists). We began with the worry that the testimonial context might be too demanding for the Holist to cope with. However, it turns out that knowledge through testimony is actually not very demanding: a subject can acquire knowledge through testimony despite not communicating very successfully at all.

Conclusion

This project concerned the way in which considerations pertaining to communicative success impact upon the plausibility of theories of mental content. It was not my aim to provide a complete theory of communication, nor was it my aim to argue for, or fully defend, any theory of content. The main purpose of the project was to defend one particular theory of content from one particular objection. The theory was Holism, and the objection was the claim that Holism cannot provide a plausible account of communicative success. This aim might seem quite a modest one. However, I hope that over the course of the previous six chapters I have shown that the consequences of my defence extend beyond the tenability of Holism. I will have shown that Holism is not only defensible, but that it actually offers us an extremely attractive picture of communicative success. In fact, if my arguments have been successful, it is actually Holism's competitors which face the serious problems explaining communication. If this is true, it is an interesting result for a number of reasons. In this concluding chapter, I will first briefly summarize the project. And I will then explain what I take to be the most important consequences of the success of my arguments.

I began in Chapter 1 by introducing the mental content debate and locating Holism within this debate. I presented the pro-externalist arguments of Kripke, Putnam and Burge and explained how these arguments had divided authors into three camps: content internalism, content externalism and two-factor theories. Lastly, I presented Holism as a combination of three theses: (a) content internalism, (b) conceptual-role semantics, and (c) holism about conceptual-role. Holism is distinctive in that it claims that no two subjects can share thought content or mean the same things by their utterances of the same word-forms.

In Chapter 2, I introduced the Objection from Communication. This objection claims that sharing content is necessary for communicative success. As Holism entails that subjects never share thought content, this would mean that it must claim that communication never succeeds. I also explained that there are weaker versions of

this objection which are also very damaging to Holism. After introducing the objection, I went on to consider what the options are for constructing a theory of communicative success, and how these might affect the plausibility of theories of mental content, such that we might assess the objection. The two kinds of condition on communicative success which are directly relevant to the present project are the Content Relation and the Understanding Requirement. I identified two ways of specifying the Content Relation (as well as an intermediary position) and four different ways of specifying the Understanding Requirement. I explained that there are different ways in which these theses can be mixed and matched to yield different theories of communicative success. These theses featured heavily in my argument in Chapter 3. In addition to these conditions, I identified and set aside so-called ‘Theory-Neutral’ conditions; these are conditions on communicative success that are not directly relevant to one’s choice of a theory of mental content.

In Chapter 3, I argued that, on the assumption of social externalism, it is both necessary and sufficient for communicative success that (alongside satisfaction of the Theory-Neutral conditions) the hearer’s subject-sensitive understanding on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker’s subject-sensitive understanding on the content she expressed. This argument served a dual purpose. The first was to motivate the claim that cognitive perspective (and, with it, SS-understanding) must play a central role in an account of communicative success. The second was to present a dilemma for the social externalist. If my argument succeeds, the social externalist will be on the first horn the dilemma. On this horn, the social externalist has to reject the Content Relations. She must claim that the relationship between the content grasped by the hearer and expressed by the speaker is irrelevant to communicative success – the contents of interlocutors need not even be similar. However, the social externalist cannot simply reject my argument without incurring a different kind of cost. If she rejects the argument, she will end up on the second horn of the dilemma. On the second horn, she must endorse an account of communicative success which gives highly implausible diagnoses as to the success and failure of communicative exchanges. The resultant account divorces communicative success from the *aims* of communication. One consequence of my argument in this chapter

was that we lose motivation for the Objection from Communication levelled against Holism. My argument claimed that even views which can posit shared content should reject the idea that sharing content is relevant to communicative success. As such, there is little reason to think that Holism must endorse an account of communicative success which requires shared content. This argument, especially when considered alongside the plausibility of my positive account in Chapter 4, should be sufficient to silence the Objection from Communication.

In Chapter 4, I presented my positive account. I called this the ‘Holist View of Communicative Success’. The basic idea of the account is that communication succeeds to the degree that content (or understanding) is similar across subjects. The account contained two measures of communicative success. The first, I called ‘success *simpliciter*’. This measured the overall success of the communicative attempt considered independently of the context of utterance. The second measure I called ‘success relative to a context’. This measured the success of an exchange relative to the particular context, where this context is set by the communicative aims of interlocutors. The greater the degree of success *simpliciter*, the fewer contexts there are in which communication can fail. After presenting this account, I considered a famous objection from Fodor and Lepore. This is the objection that there is no workable criterion for conceptual similarity available to the Holist. I argued that the Holist can provide a criterion for similarity of meaning by appeal to concepts’ connections to various non-semantic elements of the networks of which they are parts. This response prompted a complication of the initial account of communicative success to take into account the various dimensions along which conceptual-role can vary. I suggested that different contexts might require similarity along different dimensions of conceptual variability.

In Chapter 5, I introduced another distinction amongst dimensions of conceptual variability which is relevant to communicative success. This is a distinction between conceptual-role and application-conditions. As many authors have suggested, it seems plausible that getting the reference right is necessary for communicative success with singular terms – or, at the very least, it is often required. This led us to a

further objection to the Holist View of Communicative Success. This objection claimed that Holism (along with various other internalist views of content) cannot provide application-conditions or extensions for concepts which will secure widespread success in communication with singular terms and singular term concepts. The reason for this is that such views appear to be committed to ascribing idiosyncratic application-conditions to many of a subject's concepts. In response to this objection, I argued that we can adapt arguments employed in defence of certain theories of reference (which face similar kinds of objections) to provide a response for the content internalist. By adapting arguments from Jackson and Field, I argued that it is evident in a subject's inferential practices that the objects that she takes her concepts to apply to are the very same objects as those which the externalists claim they apply to. As such, an internalist can agree with externalists as to the extensions of concepts without appealing to anything external to the subject to fix a concept's reference or extension.

In Chapter 6, I considered one final objection to the Holist View of Communicative Success. This objection claimed that the Holist cannot use her account to underpin a plausible account of knowledge through testimony. The suggestion was that the testimonial context required sameness of content, and this was something that the Holist could not provide. The Holist must instead endorse a Similar Content View of Knowledge through Testimony. Initially, it looked like this account was in serious trouble. I presented a collection of objections which centred around the idea that the Holist's account could not endorse a traditional notion of epistemic reliance; and I also considered the objection that, even if a similar content account is tenable, an internalist could not sensibly endorse it. Several of these objections were from Goldberg. In response to the objections, I argued that these problems all disappear once we reject a particular assumption. This was the assumption that Holism must claim that merely similar concepts must have merely similar application-conditions and extensions. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, this is not the case: on Holism, concepts can be quite dissimilar and yet still be co-extensive. Once this assumption is dropped, I argued that the Holist can endorse the traditional account of epistemic reliance, and she can maintain that testimonial knowledge exchange is just

as widespread on Holism as it is on externalist theories of content which appeal to sameness of content.

If my arguments across these chapters have been successful, we will have arrived at a number of interesting conclusions. In the remainder of this final chapter, I will outline what I take to be the most important consequences of the project.

The first aspect of my project which I will draw attention to here is the following. My argument from Chapter 3, especially when coupled with the plausibility of my positive account, constitutes a novel objection to externalist theories of content individuation (and also any internalist theory which tries to posit shared content). This aspect of the project has the greatest impact on the broader philosophical landscape. Externalist theories of content are extremely popular, but there are an increasing number of pressing objections being launched against these views. I see my project as a contribution towards this effort, and towards increasing the perceived tenability of content internalism. Externalism now faces a whole host of difficulties. It is alleged to struggle to explain privileged access, mental causation, subjective rationality, and now communicative success. This growing list should worry the externalist. Recall, from Chapter 1, that I gave a summary of the kinds of phenomena mental content was *supposed* to explain. There is really only one significant item left on this list for externalism to brandish as a mark in its favour: externalism is supposedly the only kind of theory which gets the truth-conditions of contents (and application-conditions of concepts) right. However, in Chapter 5, I argued that this simply isn't true. There is much work which has been undertaken in the philosophy of language to argue that internalist theories of reference can agree with their competitors as to the referents of words. And, I argued, we can appeal to the very same kinds of arguments to motivate the claim that content internalists can agree with externalists as to the application-conditions of concepts. But, if this is the case, this seriously undermines the classic motivation for externalism. For all its popularity, it appears to be a thesis which faces several serious objections and yet enjoys no strong motivation.

A second consequence of the project concerns the nature of testimony. This result, too, should be of interest beyond the debate surrounding Holism. As mentioned in Chapter 6, it is usually just stipulated in debates surrounding testimonial knowledge exchange that the content grasped by the hearer must be the very same content as that expressed by the speaker. Indeed, it seems that, even upon reflection, it is plausible that testimonial exchanges must be content preserving. However, if my arguments are successful, I have shown that there is an alternative account of the semantic dimension of testimony on offer. This account claims that a subject can gain knowledge that P from testimony that Q , providing Q and P have the same truth-conditions. The plausibility of this account is vital to the Holist's project. However, I think this kind of account might also be attractive to externalist theories of content. For, on externalism as well, two distinct contents can have the same truth-conditions. As such, I think some version of my similar content account might be adopted by parties on all sides of the mental content debate.

A third interesting result of the project concerns the relationship between communal languages and communicative success. I think it seems natural to think that being able to posit a communal language (or shared content) should put one in a good position to explain communicative success; one might even go further and think that it is necessary for communicative success that the hearer grasp the very content that was expressed by the speaker. What my argument in Chapter 3 demonstrates is that this could not be further from the truth. In fact, sharing content with an interlocutor is, at best, irrelevant to communicative success; and views which posit shared content face a serious dilemma. The reason for this is that theories of content, in pursuit of their communal languages, must allow that content and cognitive perspective (and, with it, SS-understanding) can come apart. This is because cognitive perspective, as I have characterised it, is not something which is shared by subjects. Cognitive perspective is idiosyncratic: the dispositions which subjects have to employ a given concept or expression will always vary (although in some cases only slightly). As I argued, once a theory allows that a subject's cognitive perspective can come apart from mental content, it should give up on the hope of claiming that mental content facilitates communicative success. And, if it tries to

maintain one of the Content Relations, it will have to maintain implausible diagnoses as to the success of communicative attempts. Surprisingly, it is certain theories which can only posit mere similarity of content which are best placed to explain communicative success. This brings me to the last issue that I will emphasise in this chapter.

Finally, and most important to the particular aims of this project, I have shown that Holism, far from being incapable of explaining communicative success, is actually capable of underpinning an extremely plausible account. To show this, I argued for the central role of similarity of cognitive perspective in an account of communicative success. The reason that coordination of cognitive perspectives is so important is that communication has practical aims, and it is only the coordination of cognitive perspectives that is relevant when it comes to attempting to satisfy these aims. All theories of content can incorporate cognitive perspective into their accounts of communicative success. However, only theories like Holism, which claim that mental content tracks cognitive perspective, can hold this alongside the claim that communicative success is measured in terms of a relation between the mental contents of interlocutors. The Holist's account appeals to mere similarity of content. But, as I argued, a plausible Similar Content View for the Holist can be developed and defended. The aim of this project was to defend Holism from the charge that it could not explain communicative success. I hope I have given reason for thinking that Holism is not just defensible in this regard, but that it actually offers one of the most plausible accounts of communicative success available to theories of mental content.

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Glossary

Act Understanding:

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer's act of understanding is such that the hearer selects an interpretation of the content expressed by the speaker by (a) mapping the lexical items which comprise the speaker's utterance onto concepts in her own idiolect, (b) combining these to form a content based on her grasp of the utterance's compositional structure, and (c) taking into account relevant background and contextual information which determine pragmatic implicatures and enrichments of the content.

(159)

Cognitive Perspective:

The way in which a subject is disposed to employ content in her cognitive economy. This includes how she cognizes the following:

- (a) the inferential relations between contents;
- (b) the conceptual relations which the comprised concepts bear to other concepts in her cognitive economy;
- (c) the way in which the objects which those concepts apply to are represented; and
- (d) the way in which the states of affairs which are represented by the content are represented.

(84)

Conservative View of Communicative Success ('CVC'):

A communicative attempt will succeed iff (a) the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied, (b) the content of the terminal state of the hearer is the same as the content of the initial state of the speaker, and (c) the hearer correctly SS-Understands the content of the speaker's utterance to some specified degree (where this requires that the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content communicated is correct relative to standards set by her community).

(106)

Content Identity:

For any two non-identical speakers, S1 and S2, there is some concept, C, such that S1 and S2 share C.

(170)

Content Relation:

A communicative attempt will succeed only if some particular relation holds between the content of the terminal state of the hearer and the content of the initial state of the speaker.

(62)

Content Similarity:

Although no two concepts possessed by non-identical speakers, S1 and S2, are identical, any two concepts, C1 in S1 and C2 in S2, can be compared for similarity.

(170)

Content Understanding:

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer correctly understands the content she grasps.

(82)

CVC:

See entry for 'Conservative View of Communicative Success'

Fully-Traditional View:

Any view of communicative success which claims that coordination of cognitive perspectives is *never* relevant to communicative success.

(103)

Holism:

- A) Content internalism: for any subject, the content of her thoughts and concepts is individuated solely by factors *intrinsic* to that subject.
- B) Conceptual-role semantics: the content of a thought or concept for a subject is fully determined (or constituted) by that content or concept's conceptual-role in the subject's cognitive economy. Conceptual-role is determined by a content or concept's *causal* relations to other contents or concepts in that subject's cognitive economy, and includes relations to sensory inputs, behavioural outputs, imaginings, memories, etc.
- C) Holism about conceptual-role: the content of a thought or concept for a subject is determined (or constituted) by that content or concept's causal relations to *all* other contents or concepts in that subject's cognitive economy (including its relations to sensory inputs, behavioural outputs, imaginings, memories etc.).

(46)

Holist View of Communicative Success:

The combination of Necessity of Theory-Neutral Conditions, Act Understanding, Average Success *Simpliciter*, Success *Simpliciter* Dimension, and Similar Content Threshold Dimension.

(204)

Instability Thesis:

Instability Thesis: Any change, however minute, in a subject's web of attitudes will determine a change in all concepts and contents within that web.

(48)

Liberal View of Communicative Success ('LVC'):

A communicative attempt will succeed iff (a), the Theory-Neutral Conditions are satisfied, (b) the content of the terminal state of the hearer is the same as the content of the initial state of the speaker, and (c), the hearer correctly SI-Understands the content of the speaker's utterance (where a hearer can achieve this correct understanding by reliance on the public linguistic norms).

(104)

LVC:

See entry for 'Liberal View of Communicative Success'

Necessity of Sameness of Content ('SamConN'):

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the content of the terminal state of the hearer is the same as the content of the initial state of the speaker.

(66)

Necessity of Sameness of Content Testimony:

A testimonial exchange will succeed only if the content of the hearer's testimonial belief is the same as the content of the speaker's testimony.

(259)

Necessity of Similarity of Cognitive Perspective:

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

(128)

Necessity of Similarity of Content ('SimCons'):

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the content of the terminal state of the hearer is similar to the content of the initial state of the speaker.

(67)

Necessity of Similarity of Content Testimony:

A testimonial exchange will succeed only if the content of the hearer's testimonial belief is similar to the content of the speaker's testimony.

(261)

Necessity of Subject-Sensitive Content Understanding:

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer possesses the correct cognitive perspective on the content she grasps (where standards for correctness are set by the language community).

(107)

Necessity of Subject-Insensitive Understanding ('SI-UnderstandingN'):

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer correctly SI-Understands the content of the speaker's utterance (where a hearer can achieve this correct understanding by reliance on public linguistic norms).

(104)

Necessity of Theory-Neutral conditions:

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied.

(204)

Revised SimTest ('RSimTest'):

A testimonial exchange will succeed iff (a) the epistemic conditions on knowledge through testimony are satisfied and (b) the content of the testimony proffered by the speaker and recovered by the hearer are similar to the degree that they represent the same state of affairs.

(275)

RSimTest:

See entry for 'Revised SimTest'

SamConN:

See entry for 'Necessity of Sameness of Content'.

Same Content View of Knowledge through Testimony ('SamTest'):

A testimonial exchange will succeed iff (a) the epistemic conditions on knowledge through testimony are satisfied and (b) the content of the hearer's testimonial belief is the same as the content of the speaker's testimony.

(258)

Same Content View

Any view of communicative success which claims that sameness of content is at least *sometimes* required for success.

(53)

SamTest:

See entry for 'Same Content View of Knowledge through Testimony'

Semi-Traditional View:

Any view of communicative success which claims that coordination of cognitive perspective is sometimes, but not always, relevant to communicative success.

(103)

Shared Understanding:

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer understands the content she grasps in a way which is the same as, or similar to, the way in which the speaker understands the content she expressed.

(82)

SimConN:

See entry for 'Necessity of Similarity of Content'.

Similar Content Threshold Dimension:

(Providing that (a) the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied and (b) content is grasped via a process of Act Understanding) Communication succeeds relative to a context iff the content grasped by the hearer and expressed by the speaker are similar along dimensions of conceptual variability, d_1 - d_n , to degrees n_1 - n_n respectively. Both the dimensions of conceptual variability, d_1 - d_n , relevant to success and the degrees of similarity, n_1 - n_n , along these dimensions required for success are determined by the context of communication.

(205)

Similar Content View

Any view of communicative success which claims that mere similarity of content is necessary for communicative success (and sameness of content is *never* required).

(53)

Similar Content View of Knowledge through Testimony ('SimTest'):

A testimonial exchange will succeed iff (a) the epistemic conditions on knowledge through testimony are satisfied and (b) the content of the hearer's testimonial belief is similar to the content of the speaker's testimony.

(261)

Similarity of Cognitive Perspective:

A communicative exchange will succeed iff (a), the Theory-Neutral conditions are satisfied and (b), the hearer's cognitive perspective on the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's cognitive perspective on the content she expressed.

(101)

SimTest:

See entry for 'Similar Content View of Knowledge through Testimony'

SI-Understanding:

See entry for 'Subject-Insensitive Understanding'

SI-UnderstandingN:

See entry for 'Necessity of Subject-Insensitive Understanding'

SS-Understanding:

See entry for 'Subject-Sensitive Understanding'

Subject-Insensitive Understanding ('SI-Understanding'):

The kind of understanding relevant to communicative success is understanding which is individuated by the language community (and, as such, is not sensitive to the cognitive perspective of the subject).

(89)

Subject-Sensitive Understanding ('SS-Understanding'):

The kind of understanding relevant to communicative success is understanding which tracks the cognitive perspective of the subject.

(84)

Subject-Sensitive Shared Understanding Requirement:

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer's SS-Understanding of the content she grasps is similar to the speaker's SS-Understanding of the content she expressed.

(97)

Success *Simpliciter* Dimension:

Communication succeeds with respect to some dimension of conceptual-role to the degree that the content grasped by the hearer is similar along that dimension of conceptual-role to the content expressed by the speaker.

(205)

Theory-Neutral conditions:

Conditions on communicative success which do not affect the plausibility of endorsing any particular theory of mental content.

(97)

Traditional View:

Any view of communicative success which rejects Similarity of Cognitive Perspective.

(103)

Understanding Requirement:

A communicative attempt will succeed only if the hearer understands the speaker.

(71)