

Anti-Individualism and Knowledge

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1

Anti-Individualism

In this chapter, I set out distinctions that are crucial for the rest of the book. Although the chapter is designed to be accessible to those unfamiliar with anti-individualism, the terminology established will also be useful to those familiar with the position. In sections 1 through 6, I contrast anti-individualism and individualism, distinguishing three anti-individualist claims, namely, that a subject's thoughts are partly individuated by the natural kinds in her environment ("natural kind anti-individualism"); that a subject's thoughts are partly individuated by the particular objects in her environment ("singular anti-individualism"); and that a subject's thoughts are partly individuated by the linguistic practices of her community ("social anti-individualism"). I make two further distinctions between anti-individualist accounts, between those that accept or reject the idea that a subject may suffer an illusion of thought, and between those that accept or reject the notion of Fregean sense. I use the expression "the illusion version of anti-individualism" for anti-individualist views that accept the possibility of illusions of thought, and "Fregean anti-individualism" for anti-individualist views that accept Fregean sense. I then elucidate the notion of a priori knowledge used throughout

the book (sec. 7). I end the chapter by sketching the main lines of argument and conclusions of the book.

1 Content and the Environment

Suppose that you and I are discussing how a mutual friend, Sally, will vote in the upcoming government elections. You point out that Sally wants better state school provision but thinks that the Tories have a poor record on public services. I add that, although many might be put off Labour by high taxes, Sally would welcome higher taxes to pay for better education. We agree that she'll likely vote Labour. Our prediction of her action is based on our views about what Sally believes and wants, or, in philosophical jargon, on the content of her beliefs and desires. In specifying the content of Sally's beliefs and desires, we specify the way she takes the world to be and the way she would like the world to be. More generally, belief and desire are just two examples of a larger class of states—the "propositional attitudes"—that can be construed as composed of an attitude, such as hope, fear, or doubt, and a propositional content, such as that which is hoped, feared, or doubted. For example, a subject might believe that her tax bill will rise, fear that it will rise, doubt that it will rise, or hope that it will rise. In specifying what a subject wants, hopes, fears, expects, doubts, and so on, we specify the content of those attitudes. As the example of Sally illustrates, the content of a subject's propositional attitudes is used in the prediction of her action. In addition, content is used in explaining action. If, as expected, Sally does vote Labour, we may explain this fact by citing her relevant propositional attitudes.

The contents of a subject's propositional attitudes are causally related to her environment. For example, the move-

ment of a cyclist across the road may, via perception, affect my beliefs about the location and velocity of objects in my path. Otherwise, I would hardly be a safe driver. In general, the fact that the content of our attitudes is causally affected by the world enables us to engage effectively with the world. While accepting this, one might also think that types of mental state are to be identified with types of internal state of the subject herself, such as brain states. On this view, the environment may cause a subject to be in a certain type of inner state and hence a certain type of mental state, even though it is inessential to being in that type of mental state. As long as the subject is in, say, the relevant type of brain state, she would have the relevant type of mental state, regardless of what caused her to be in that type of brain state, whether a state of the world, the actions of a neuroscientist, or a Cartesian demon. A range of other views about the nature of mental states makes the environment inessential to being in a certain mental state, for example, behaviorism and functionalism. According to behaviorism, being in a certain type of mental state is a matter of being disposed to make certain bodily movements. According to some versions of functionalism, being in a certain mental state is a matter of having a state that plays a certain role in one's mental economy, that is, one that is disposed to be caused by certain kinds of sensory stimulation and certain other mental states, and that is disposed to cause certain patterns of bodily movement and certain other mental states.¹

The above conception of the relation of content and the environment is an individualistic one. Like individualists, anti-individualists hold that content is causally affected by the environment. But, in addition, they hold that there is a more intimate connection between the contents of a subject's thoughts and her environment. We can explain the

difference between individualism and anti-individualism by using the intuitive distinction between two types of property—relational and nonrelational or intrinsic properties. The property of being taller than the Eiffel Tower, older than the Rosetta Stone, or being a descendant of the Queen are clearly relational properties, properties whose possession by an object requires the existence of other objects to which the first object stands in certain relations. By contrast, nonrelational or intrinsic properties are those that can be possessed independently of the existence of other objects and events. An example of an intrinsic property is the property of having a certain microstructural constitution. Individualists hold that a subject's thought contents are wholly individuated by her intrinsic properties.² On this view, any two subjects who are identical in all their intrinsic properties also have the same thought contents. Anti-individualists hold, by contrast, that the contents of a subject's propositional attitudes are partly individuated by her environment. They support this view by arguing that two subjects who are identical in all their intrinsic properties, but who are in different environments, might have different thought contents.³ We might rephrase the distinction between anti-individualism and individualism by using the notion of supervenience. One family of properties *A* supervenes on another *B* if and only if two objects cannot differ in their *A*-properties without differing in their *B*-properties. Individualists claim that thought content supervenes on intrinsic properties, whereas anti-individualists deny this.

The classic arguments for anti-individualism are Twin Earth arguments of the kind first suggested in Putnam (1975a). Here, we consider a subject in the same intrinsic state, but in two different environments. It is argued that she plausibly has different thoughts in the two environments.

Since the only difference between the two situations is an environmental difference, it is concluded that a subject's thoughts are partly individuated by the environment. Before looking at the details of such Twin Earth arguments, it is useful to have in mind a distinction between two ways in which a subject can think about, or refer to, particular objects and kinds.

Suppose there has been a series of burglaries in the shops on the High Street. Although we have no idea who is responsible for the various crimes, the evidence points to a single culprit. I might think about the supposed culprit via the description, or general condition, 'the person responsible for the High Street burglaries', where the referent of this description is the unique person, if any, who is responsible for these burglaries. For example, I might think that the person responsible for the High Street burglaries is clever. In such a case, we may say that I (attempt to) *think of a certain object via a description*. Notice that when a subject thinks of an object by description, the content of her thought seems independent of the particular object referred to by the description. Consider the counterfactual situation in which Lightfinger, the actual perpetrator of the crime, does not commit the burglaries, but her rival, Crowbar-Jane, commits a set of burglaries identical except for the perpetrator. In that case, my thought that the person responsible for the High Street burglaries is clever would have the same content as in the actual situation, but it would be about a different person. Similarly, in the counterfactual situation in which no single individual is responsible for the set of burglaries, my thought would have the same content, but would fail to refer to anyone.

Although we sometimes think about individuals by description, it has been argued that such cases are unusual.⁴

According to the *nondescriptive model*, a subject can think of an object not via a description, but rather in virtue of standing in some real relation to that object. For example, suppose that I am looking at an apple, a , and I think that that apple is red. Given that I am looking at the particular apple, a , my thought refers to that apple. It seems implausible that I refer to apple a via a description. A descriptive thought component of the form, the F , refers to the unique object, if any, that is F . But it is hard to formulate a description that is both uniquely satisfied by apple a and plausibly the means by which I think of a . Such descriptions as ‘the red apple’ are not uniquely satisfied by a . Other descriptions, such as ‘the red apple that is on that table’ may be uniquely satisfied by a , but they embed demonstrative reference to further objects, and the question arises whether or not I think of these further objects by description. An alternative suggestion is that I think of a via the description ‘the apple I am currently looking at’. But it is unclear that the concept of looking at something is available to all subjects who are capable of perceptual demonstrative thoughts about objects. For example, is it clear that small children capable of thinking about the particular objects they are seeing have the concept of looking at something? Even for those subjects for whom such a sophisticated thought is available, is it plausible that the original perceptual demonstrative thought involves this level of complexity and so should be treated as equivalent to it? These sorts of considerations have motivated the view that perceiving an object may enable me to refer to it otherwise than by a description.

Singular thoughts that are based on a capacity to recognize a particular object may provide a different type of example of nondescriptive thought. Suppose that I attend a party and talk briefly to an interesting woman. As a result

of the encounter, I form the ability to recognize the woman in question. This recognitional capacity enables me to think about the woman even in her absence. For example, I might think that that woman is intelligent. However, it seems implausible that this recognition-based thought involves a descriptive way of thinking of the woman. Suppose that I forget at which party I met the woman and have no other piece of information that uniquely identifies her. For example, I might know only that she lives in Bristol. Although I can recognize her, I might be unable to give a description of her appearance that applies to her uniquely. The terms in which we can describe other subjects (she has blue eyes, brown hair, etc.) usually fail to pick out one unique individual. We are usually much better at recognizing previously presented objects than recalling their features when they are not present. Thus, it might be argued that recognition-based thoughts involve a nondescriptive way of thinking about objects (Evans 1982).

The resulting nondescriptive picture of reference is very different from the descriptive view, according to which thought connects with the objects it is about via a description. On the descriptive view, the singular component of a thought consists in a description, the *F*, where the object referred to is the object that uniquely fits the description *F*. The subject has the same thought regardless of which object, if any, fits the description. On the nondescriptive view, a subject's thoughts connect with their objects not via a description but more directly in virtue of the relation in which the subject stands to those objects. On this view, the singular component of the thought is not equivalent to a description that remains constant whatever the state of the world. Rather, the content of the singular component of the thought is individuated partly by the object it is about. Thus,

if the subject were counterfactually related to a different object, she would think a different thought. Consider again the example of a subject who sees an apple, *a*, and thinks that that apple is red. The nondescriptivist conceives of the subject's thought as containing two parts, a singular component whose content is at least partly individuated by the apple, if any, she is looking at, and a predicative component corresponding to the expression 'is red'. If the subject is looking at apple *a*, then the content of the singular component is individuated partly by the apple *a*. But, if the subject were looking at a different apple, *b*, then her thought would be individuated partly by the apple *b*. As we will see later, nondescriptivists disagree about whether the content of the singular component of the subject's thought is individuated wholly by the object it is about, or whether it contains some other component as well that reflects the way in which the subject thinks of the object.

These two models of reference can be used to illuminate the debate between anti-individualists and individualists. We will see that individualists can use the descriptive model of thought to resist local anti-individualist claims. For instance, they can resist the claim that one's thoughts are individuated partly by the natural kinds in one's environment by arguing that one thinks descriptively of natural kinds. Of course, even if correct, this view would not establish the truth of individualism. The concepts used in the description may be individuated by some feature of the environment, and anti-individualism may be plausible for some other type of thought. So, the debate between anti-individualists and individualists and the debate over the correct account of reference do not line up straightforwardly. Nevertheless, the appeal to the descriptive model of thought is one way in which an individualist may resist particular

anti-individualist claims, and this is how we will consider the model.

Anti-individualists differ over what conditions are sufficient for a subject to have a thought of a certain type. For example, some have argued that a certain type of causal relation between subject and object is sufficient for a subject to have thoughts about that object (see, e.g., Kripke 1980; Devitt 1980; Fodor 1987). Others argue that a richer set of conditions is required for a subject to have a thought about an object. For example, Evans (1982) argues that a subject can think about an object only if she knows which object is in question, where this amounts to having the ability to distinguish that object from all other things. With this point in mind, the following arguments for anti-individualism aim to describe a subject in a set of conditions sufficiently rich that a range of anti-individualists with divergent views about the conditions sufficient for thought can agree that the subject has the relevant type of thought.

2 Natural Kind Anti-Individualism

According to *natural kind anti-individualism*, a subject's thought contents are individuated partly by the natural kinds in her environment. Paradigmatic examples of natural kinds are chemical substances and biological kinds. Natural kinds are individuated by their fundamental properties, as described by correct scientific theory (Putnam 1975a,b,c; Kripke 1980). It is both necessary and sufficient for an item to be a member of a natural kind that it have the relevant fundamental properties. By contrast, having a certain appearance is neither necessary nor sufficient for membership of a natural kind. For example, it is not sufficient for an item to be made of diamond that it look like diamond, and an

animal might be a tiger even if, since it is albino, it lacks the characteristic striped appearance of tigers. There is debate about what kinds are natural kinds, and whether ordinary terms name natural kinds (Zemach 1976; Dupré 1981; Platts 1983; Segal 2000). However, the Twin Earth argument needs only the plausible claim that some ordinary terms, minimally at least one, name a natural kind. I will set up the Twin Earth argument using the standard example of 'water'. Any who question whether 'water' names a natural kind can substitute an alternative example.

Consider an Earth subject Sally at a time when no one knew the correct chemical description of water. Despite this, Sally and her fellows had the term 'water', which they regularly applied to water. At this stage, Sally and her fellows recognized water by its appearance and behavior. However, suppose they held that what makes a sample water is not that it looks and tastes a certain way, but its fundamental, although as yet undiscovered, nature. They intended that the term 'water' express a concept that applies on the basis of these as yet unknown fundamental properties, not on the basis of its appearance. In fact, as we know now, water is H_2O . In virtue of these facts, anti-individualists argue that the concept Sally expresses by 'water' applies to all and only water, that is, H_2O , even though Sally and her community are ignorant of water's correct chemical description.

Now suppose, counterfactually, that instead of being brought up on Earth, Sally was brought up on Twin Earth. Twin Earth is stipulated to be just like Earth, except that wherever there is water on Earth, there is a different substance, twater, on Twin Earth. Twater is stipulated to be a substance that looks, tastes, and behaves just like water but is not water since it has a different chemical formula, XYZ.

On Twin Earth, it is twater that is drunk, comes out of taps, flows in rivers, falls as rain, and to which the term 'water' is applied. In the twin scenario, Sally has exactly the same history of intrinsic or nonrelational states. Thus, for instance, at any time, Sally has exactly the same microstructure; her body performs the same movements, she has the same patterns of stimulation on her retinas, and so on. Further, it seems that Sally would be in subjectively indistinguishable states in the actual and twin situations, for the only difference between the two situations is in the fundamental nature of the stuff called 'water', something of which Sally is ignorant. Nonetheless, natural kind anti-individualists argue that, in the twin situation, the concept Sally expresses by 'water' applies to all and only twater. Thus, they say, Sally has different thoughts in the two situations: in the actual situation, her thoughts involve the concept water, which applies to all and only H_2O ; in the twin situation her thoughts involve the different concept twater, which applies to all and only XYZ. Since the only difference between the two situations is in the fundamental nature of the stuff called 'water', natural kind anti-individualists conclude that a subject's thoughts are not individuated wholly by her intrinsic states, but are instead individuated partly by the natural kinds in her environment. (In presenting the argument, I have ignored the fact that Sally's body is largely made up of water. This doesn't significantly affect the debate for, instead, we could have used a natural kind that is not found in human bodies.)

An individualist might try to reply to this argument by arguing that the concept Sally expresses by 'water' is equivalent to a definite description. As we saw above, when a subject thinks about an object or kind by description, her thoughts are independent of the nature of the object or kind,

if any, that fits the description. Of course, even if it could be shown that Sally does think of water via some description, this would not establish the truth of individualism. For, it could be that Sally can entertain that description only in virtue of being in the kind of environment she is in. However, if successful, this response at least would show that the content of the thoughts Sally expresses with 'water' are not individuated partly by the nature of the watery stuff in her environment. Consider the suggestion that the concept Sally expresses by 'water' is equivalent to a definite description. The individualist cannot claim that 'water' expresses a description such as 'the stuff that is colorless, clear, tasteless, and falls from skies'; by hypothesis, Sally and her fellows hold that the concept they express with 'water' applies on the basis of fundamental properties, and not just to anything that looks and behaves like water. Further, it cannot be claimed that 'water' expresses the description 'the stuff that has composition H_2O ', for it is part of the example that Sally and her fellows are ignorant of the correct chemical description of water.

A final suggestion might be that 'water' expresses the description 'the stuff that is actually tasteless, colorless, and falls from skies around here' (Davies and Humberstone 1980). This description does not involve any theoretical knowledge that Sally and her fellows are stipulated to lack. In addition, it has the intuitively plausible result that, in the actual situation in which Sally is brought up on Earth, 'water' refers to all and only H_2O ; but if, counterfactually, she had been brought up on Twin Earth where the lakes and rivers contain XYZ, then 'water' would have referred to all and only XYZ. However, it is implausible that subjects generally think of natural kinds even by descriptions that embed the term 'actually'. Surely we would accept that a

community that regularly applies a term to instances of a kind, and has the ability to recognize instances of that kind, has a concept of that kind even if the descriptions they offer of the kind are largely incorrect (Putnam 1975c; Kripke 1980). For example, suppose that a community can recognize instances of a type of bird common in its surroundings and applies a term to instances that type. Surely the concept they express by the relevant term can apply to all and only members of that type even if they have many incorrect beliefs about the bird's way of life. (Note that even if members of the community can recognize instances of this bird type on the basis of its appearance, they may be unable to formulate a description of its appearance that applies uniquely to that kind. As we saw earlier, a subject may have the ability to recognize a particular individual or kind of thing even if the descriptions she would offer of its appearance fail to pick it out uniquely.) If it is generally implausible that subjects think of natural kinds by descriptions embedding 'actually', then individualists cannot provide a general response to Twin Earth arguments for natural kind anti-individualism by suggesting that subjects think of natural kinds in this way.

3 Singular Anti-Individualism

According to *singular anti-individualism*, a subject's thought contents are individuated partly by the particular objects that are in her environment (see, e.g., Perry 1979; Kripke 1980; Evans 1982; Peacocke 1983; McDowell 1986; Salmon 1986; Soames 1987; Kaplan 1989). Suppose that, in the actual situation, Sally is looking at a certain apple, *a*, and she thinks that that apple is red. In this situation, her thought refers to the particular apple, *a*, she is looking at, and its truth value

turns on the state of that apple, *a*, and whether it is red. Now consider a counterfactual situation in which everything is the same, but Sally is looking at a distinct apple, *b*, which looks just like *a*. In the counterfactual situation, Sally has exactly the same history of intrinsic, or nonrelational, states. For instance, at any time, Sally has exactly the same microstructure, her body performs the same bodily movements, she has the same patterns of stimulation on her retinas, and so on. However, in virtue of the fact that she is looking at the different apple *b*, her thought refers to *b*, and it is *b*'s state on which the truth value of her thought depends.

Note that if Sally were thinking about the apple by description in the two situations, then, although her thought refers to different apples in the two situations, she would have the same thought content in the two situations. For instance, if she thought of each apple under the description 'the apple I am now looking at', then in each situation she would think the thought that the apple she is now looking at is red. Of course, even if all perceptual demonstrative thoughts were understood on this model, this would not establish individualism even about perceptual demonstrative thoughts. It might be that Sally can entertain the relevant descriptive component only because she is in a certain kind of environment. But, if defensible, this understanding of perceptual demonstrative thought would show at least that a perceptual demonstrative thought is not individuated by the particular object it is about. However, as we saw earlier (sec. 1), the descriptive understanding of perceptual demonstrative thought is implausible.

On the alternative view that Sally thinks of the apple she is seeing nondescriptively, she has different thoughts in the two situations. Now, it is part of the set up that the only

difference between the actual and counterfactual situations is in which apple Sally is seeing. Thus, singular anti-individualists conclude that a subject's thoughts are not individuated wholly by her intrinsic states, but are instead individuated partly by the objects in her environment. I have sketched the argument for singular anti-individualism using an example of a perceptual demonstrative thought, but the argument could be made by using any example in which the subject plausibly thinks of an object nondescriptively.

4 Illusions of Thought

In our discussion of natural kind and singular anti-individualism, we have considered twin cases in which the counterfactual situation involves a different object or kind than the actual situation. However, there is a different possibility: that there is no suitable object or kind in the counterfactual situation for the subject to refer to. I will call such cases *no-reference cases*.

One type of no-reference case occurs when a subject suffers a perceptual illusion. For instance, a subject who takes herself to be seeing and thinking about an object may instead be suffering an illusion of seeing such an object. A different example is provided by the Dry Earth scenario in which the inhabitants suffer an illusion of there being lakes and rivers full of a watery liquid (Boghossian 1997, p. 170). In the second type of no-reference case, the subject does not suffer a perceptual illusion, but rather takes herself to have encountered a single object or kind when in fact she has confused several similar objects or kinds. For instance, on "Motley Earth," there are lakes and rivers full of watery liquid, but this liquid is composed of a motley collection of

several different natural kinds that the inhabitants confuse for one natural kind.

There are two different views about no-reference cases available to an anti-individualist. First, she could argue that in a no-reference case, the subject thinks about the putative object via a description. For example, it might be suggested that when Sally suffers an illusion of seeing an apple, she thinks that the apple she seems to see is red. In the situation in which there is no dominant natural kind in the stuff called 'water', it might be suggested that Sally thinks that the clear, colorless, liquid called 'water' is wet. Even if Sally thinks a descriptive thought in the no-reference case, this does not entail that she thinks a descriptive thought when things go well, for example, when she does see an apple. So, this understanding of the no-reference case may be adopted by an anti-individualist. Alternatively, the anti-individualist could argue that when there is no suitable object or kind to refer to, the subject fails to think any determinate thought (see Evans 1982; McDowell 1986; Boghossian 1997). For instance, although it may seem to her just as if she is seeing an apple and thinking about it, in fact she is not. Instead, she suffers an illusion of thought. On this view, successful thought sometimes requires there to be a suitable object or kind in the environment so that, when there is no such object or kind, the subject fails to think a thought of the relevant kind at all. I will call an anti-individualism that takes the first of these two options the *descriptive version* of anti-individualism, and an anti-individualism that takes the second the *illusion version* of anti-individualism. It is controversial which of these two views is correct and, in particular, whether a subject can suffer an illusion of thought. I will not attempt to settle this issue here. In the rest of the

book, I will consider both illusion and descriptive versions of singular and natural kind anti-individualism.

5 Social Anti-Individualism

According to *social anti-individualism*, a subject's thoughts are individuated partly by the practice of her linguistic community. This form of anti-individualism can be supported by Burge's famous arthritis thought experiment (Burge 1979). Suppose that Sally has suffered arthritis for a number of years. She has been to see her doctor about it on a number of occasions, and she holds various attitudes she would express with the word 'arthritis', such as the attitudes she would express by saying 'I have arthritis in my ankles', 'Arthritis is painful and debilitating', and 'Arthritis is common among the elderly'. In addition, she also has the attitude she would express by saying, 'I fear my arthritis has spread to my thigh'. This attitude indicates that Sally incompletely understands 'arthritis', for, by definition, 'arthritis' applies only to problems of the joints. Despite this, Burge argues, Sally has the concept arthritis. Thus, by her utterance, 'I fear my arthritis has spread to my thigh', she expresses the fear that her arthritis has spread to her thigh. Burge supports this interpretation by saying that it would be natural to report her thoughts in this way, despite her incomplete understanding.

Now consider a counterfactual situation in which Sally is brought up in a different linguistic community in which 'arthritis' has a different definition. Whereas in the actual situation, 'arthritis' is defined to apply to rheumatoid ailments of the joints, in the counterfactual situation, it is defined to apply to rheumatoid ailments of the joints and

thighs. Thus, in the counterfactual situation, the term 'arthritis' expresses a different concept, call it 'tharthritus', which applies to rheumatoid ailments of joints and thighs. Despite these environmental differences, Sally is stipulated to have precisely the same history of intrinsic states in the counterfactual situation as she has in the actual situation. At any time, Sally has exactly the same microstructure, she performs the same bodily movements, she has the same patterns of stimulation on her retinas, and so on. As before, she has a number of attitudes that she would express with the term 'arthritis', including the fear she would express with 'I fear that my arthritis has spread to my thigh'. Burge argues that, in the counterfactual situation, Sally lacks the concept arthritis and instead has the concept tharthritus. In support of this interpretation, Burge points out that Sally herself would explain 'arthritis' by saying that it is a rheumatoid condition that occurs in joints and thighs. In addition, experts in the counterfactual community would explain 'arthritis' in this way. Since the only difference between the actual and counterfactual situation is in the way 'arthritis' is defined, Burge concludes that a subject's thoughts are not individuated wholly by her intrinsic states, but are instead individuated partly by the linguistic practices of her community. Unlike the other arguments for anti-individualism, Burge's thought experiment turns on the question of whether a subject can have a concept that she incompletely understands. As a result, Burge's thought experiment applies to a much wider range of terms—terms for natural kinds, and terms for other kinds, as well as verbs, abstract nouns, adjectives, and so on (Burge 1979, p. 79).

Burge's attribution of the concept tharthritus to the subject in the counterfactual situation is relatively uncontroversial. After all, everything seems to point to Sally's having this

concept—both the way she would explicate the term herself and her community's linguistic practice. But should we accept that in the actual situation, Sally has the concept arthritis? Although the practice of her linguistic community might support this, the way she herself would explicate the concept seems to count against this attribution. Should we say, perhaps, instead, that in both the actual and counterfactual situations, she has the concept tharthritis?

Burge rejects this individualist conclusion, by appeal both to what others would say about Sally and to what Sally herself would say. Burge argues that it is extremely common for a subject to incompletely understand a term. Furthermore, we routinely ascribe concepts to subjects even despite their incomplete understanding of the relevant term, and we regard them as sharing beliefs with others who fully understand the term. We are happy to do so even when we know of the subject's incomplete understanding (Burge 1979, esp. pp. 79–82, 89–94). Moreover, it seems that the patient herself defers to sources of authority in her linguistic community for the application conditions of the concept she expresses with the term 'arthritis'. Suppose that she visits her doctor and says, 'I'm afraid that my arthritis has spread to my thigh'. The doctor reassures Sally, saying that, by definition, arthritis cannot occur in thighs. It seems likely that Sally would respond with relief, regarding her earlier fear as false, and would go on to ask what might be wrong with her thigh.

This response suggests that it is the public concept arthritis that figures in her belief, not some idiosyncratic concept defined by her own views. If, as Burge suggests, her belief involves the concept arthritis, then her belief is indeed false as a matter of the definition of the concept. However, if her belief had instead involved the concept tharthritis, then her

belief might be true, despite what the doctor says about arthritis, for the concept tharthritis is defined so that it applies to rheumatoid problems of the joints and thighs. But, it seems unlikely that Sally would reply to the doctor by saying that although she accepts what the doctor says about the public word ‘arthritis’, her own belief about what is wrong with her thigh might still be true, since it involves a different concept that does apply to problems of the thighs (ibid., pp. 94–95).

6 Fregean and Non-Fregean Anti-Individualism

We have seen that there is a variety of anti-individualist claims, varying in both the type of thought held to be individuated partly by the environment and in the environmental factors in terms of which those thoughts are individuated. A last difference between anti-individualist positions concerns whether they attempt to combine anti-individualism with the notion of Fregean sense. I will use *Fregean anti-individualism* for the view that combines anti-individualism and Fregean sense, and *non-Fregean anti-individualism* for an anti-individualism that rejects Fregean sense.

Frege famously distinguished between the object, or referent, of a thought, and the way the subject thinks of the object. To take a classic example, assume that an early astronomer makes observations of the planet Venus in both the morning and evening but incorrectly takes the morning and evening observations to be of different stars. She coins two terms—‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’—for what she regards as these two distinct stars, one visible in the evening and one in the morning. Although she assents to ‘Hesperus is visible in the evening’, she denies the truth of ‘Phospho-

rus is visible in the evening'. Further, she fails to put Hesperus and Phosphorus thoughts together in inference. For example, she fails to put together the beliefs she would express by 'Hesperus is visible now' and 'It is important to make as many observations of Phosphorus as possible' to draw the conclusion she would express by 'I should observe Hesperus now'. She would find it informative if told, 'Hesperus is Phosphorus'. Frege explained such examples by claiming that the astronomer thinks of a single object, Venus, in two different ways, or via two different senses.

One could take Frege as suggesting that the subject has two different descriptive ways of thinking of Venus. Thus, for example, the thoughts she would express with 'Hesperus' should be cashed out as thoughts involving some such descriptive component as the star that is visible in the evening and . . . ; whereas the thoughts she would express with 'Phosphorus' should be cashed out as involving a different descriptive component, such as the star that is visible in the morning, and. . . . On this understanding of sense, one cannot combine the idea that the subject thinks about an object, say, Venus, in a particular way with the anti-individualist claim that the subject's thoughts are individuated partly by the particular object she is thinking about, here Venus.

However, we need not understand Fregean sense in this descriptive way. Instead, it has been suggested that a sense should be thought of as a way of thinking about an object that would not be available to be thought in the absence of the object (Evans 1982; McDowell 1986). Prima facie, it seems that one can combine this different understanding of the notion of sense with anti-individualism. For example, consider a subject looking at a particular cat and thinking

the perceptual demonstrative thought that that cat is sleepy. On the Evans–McDowell view, the demonstrative component of this thought is not exhausted by the particular cat, Tabby, being referred to. Instead, its content is given by the object thought about, Tabby, and an object-dependent sense or way of thinking about Tabby. To say that this sense is object-dependent is just to say that it would not be available to be thought in the absence of Tabby. Thus, on the view that senses are object-dependent, one can combine the view that a subject thinks about an object, x , via a particular sense with the claim that the subject's thoughts are individuated partly by the object, x , that she is thinking about. This second way of understanding Fregean senses might seem highly attractive, appearing to offer us a picture of reference to objects that combines the insights of anti-individualism and the benefits of a Fregean notion of sense. For now, I will leave it open whether it is possible to combine anti-individualism and Fregean sense in this way. However, I will reexamine this issue in chapter 6.

7 A Priori and Empirical

In the rest of the book I consider the epistemic consequences of anti-individualism and, in particular, its consequences for a priori knowledge. It may be useful to explain my use of “a priori” here. The distinction between a priori and empirical truths is an epistemic distinction between the ways in which they can be known. A priori propositions are those that can be known independently of perceptual experience. They include mathematical and logical truths as well as certain definitional truths, such as the propositions that bachelors are unmarried and that red is a color. By contrast,

certain propositions cannot be known independently of perceptual experience and are termed *empirical*. These include such propositions as that water is H_2O and my fridge contains two carrots. Correspondingly, a subject knows a proposition a priori if she knows it independently of perceptual experience, whereas she knows it empirically if her knowledge is dependent on perceptual experience.

Notice that a proposition may be known a priori even if it contains a concept that can be acquired only empirically. For instance, some argue that one cannot have the concept red without suitable red experiences. Even if this is correct, someone with the concept can know a priori that red is a color. Even if certain experiences are required to have the concept red, they play no role in the justification of the proposition that red is a color. To deal with the point about empirically acquired concepts, we might say that a proposition is known a priori if it is known without justificatory reliance on perceptual experience. This leaves it open whether the relevant concepts are acquired empirically.

There is wide agreement that the a priori includes mathematical, logical, and certain definitional truths. However, there is disagreement about how far the notion of the a priori extends beyond these core examples. The scope of the a priori depends on how we construe perceptual experience. Perceptual experience could be taken to include only perceptual experience of the external world, or perceptual experience of the external world and the thinker's own bodily states and events, or any conscious state or event, whether perception or conscious thinking (Boghossian and Peacocke 2000, pp. 2–3). These different construals of perceptual experience generate different understandings of the a priori. On the widest construal of the a priori, a subject can have a

priori knowledge of her own bodily states and conscious thoughts. For example, she could know a priori that she is in pain and that she thinks that today is Tuesday, for neither need be based on perceptual experience of the external world. On an intermediate construal, she cannot know a priori that she is in pain, but she can have a priori knowledge of conscious thoughts. On the narrowest construal, even her knowledge of her own conscious thoughts is regarded as empirical. Here, I follow many others in taking the moderate position, which allows that a subject can have a priori knowledge of her own conscious thoughts (see, e.g., McKinsey 1991; Boghossian 1997; Warfield 1998; Sawyer 1999; McLaughlin 2000. Others label self-knowledge “nonempirical,” including Burge 1988; Davies 1998; Wright 2000).

Although the moderate view is widely accepted, not all endorse it. However, the issues raised in the following chapters are independent of this use of “a priori.” To take one example, the first part of the book focuses on whether anti-individualism is incompatible with the claim that a subject can have a priori knowledge of her thought contents. We could restate this putative problem for anti-individualism as follows. According to anti-individualism, what a subject thinks depends on her environment and, in particular, on such facts as the chemical composition of substances and the linguistic practice of her community. This suggests that anti-individualism has the counterintuitive result that a subject can know her own thought contents only by investigating the chemical composition of substances and the linguistic practice of her community. Whether or not one terms a subject’s knowledge of her own thoughts “a priori,” it is surely implausible that such knowledge requires chemical and linguistic investigation.

8 Outline of the Book

Many have argued that anti-individualism has radical consequences for our knowledge of mind and world and our ability to reason. I investigate whether anti-individualism has such radical consequences in a discussion that weaves together central topics in the philosophy of mind and epistemology. The discussion is divided into three main parts. The book starts with an examination of whether anti-individualism is compatible with the claim that a subject can have a priori knowledge of her thought contents. The second part investigates whether anti-individualism undermines the idea that we are rational subjects. The issues raised concerning rationality turn out to be central to the question of whether anti-individualism is compatible with Fregean sense. In the last part, I discuss whether anti-individualism provides a novel and a priori route to knowledge of the external world. Throughout the book, I include discussion of two versions of anti-individualism that often receive little attention in the literature on these topics: the illusion version of anti-individualism and Fregean anti-individualism.

According to anti-individualism, a subject's thought contents are individuated partly by a variety of features of her environment, such as the fundamental nature of natural kinds in her environment, the particular objects in her environment, and the linguistic practices of her community. This might suggest that, if anti-individualism were true, then a subject could know her thought contents only by using empirical information about her environment and those features of it that partly individuate her thoughts. But, it seems grossly implausible to suppose that to know that I think, say, that water is wet, I need to investigate the chemical

composition of the stuff in lakes and rivers, or that to know that I think, say, that arthritis is painful, I need to investigate how medical experts in my community would define 'arthritis'. Indeed, most anti-individualists accept that it would be a serious objection to anti-individualism if it were incompatible with the claim that a subject can have a priori knowledge of her thought contents.

Chapters 2 through 4 discuss two central arguments for incompatibility that I call the *discrimination* and *illusion* arguments, of which only the first has received widespread attention in the literature. The discrimination argument exploits the intuitive link between knowledge and discriminative abilities. We would deny that a subject knows by vision that she is looking at a robin if she cannot visually distinguish the actual situation from an alternative situation in which she is instead looking at another common bird. Similarly, the incompatibilist argues that a subject cannot know a priori that she is thinking, say, that water is wet, when it is a result of anti-individualism that there is an alternative situation in which she lacks this thought that she cannot a priori distinguish from the actual situation. While the discrimination argument applies to all versions of anti-individualism, the illusion argument applies to only the illusion version of anti-individualism. According to the illusion argument, the illusion version of anti-individualism undermines a subject's ability to have a priori knowledge of her thought contents since it allows that a subject may suffer an illusion of thought. For instance, how can a subject know a priori that she thinks, say, that that is a cat, if there is an alternative situation in which she suffers an illusion of thinking about a cat?

There is a certain standard response to the discrimination argument made by those who defend the compatibility of

anti-individualism and a priori knowledge of thought contents (*compatibilists* for short). They standardly accept that it is a consequence of anti-individualism that a subject cannot a priori distinguish the actual situation from a counterfactual situation in which she lacks the thought she actually has. Further, they accept that the alternative situation is sometimes relevant and thus potentially undermines knowledge. However, they argue that the alternative situation does not undermine a subject's a priori knowledge of her thought contents, since it does not threaten her reliability about her thought contents. In general, they argue that even if anti-individualism is true, subjects are reliable about their thought contents without using empirical information.

However, it is not clear how this response answers the discrimination argument, according to which knowledge requires discrimination and anti-individualism undermines a subject's ability to a priori distinguish the actual situation from alternative situations in which she lacks the thought she actually has. *Prima facie*, the compatibilist could answer this argument by showing either that anti-individualism does not undermine a subject's discriminative abilities, or that knowledge requires only reliability and not discriminative abilities. I argue that the compatibilist's (correct) point, that anti-individualism does not threaten a subject's reliability about her thought contents, does not show that it does not threaten her discriminative abilities. Instead, perhaps, the point about reliability is best seen as part of the second type of response. However, I argue that, so far, compatibilists have not provided compelling arguments that knowledge requires only reliability and not discriminative abilities. In the absence of such arguments, it is worth investigating responses to the discrimination argument that might be successful even if knowledge turns out to require

discriminative abilities. Such responses would finesse the issue of the requirements for knowledge and could be used both by those who hold that knowledge requires discriminative abilities and those who hold that it requires only reliability.

In chapter 3, I examine whether an anti-individualist could respond to the discrimination argument by building a discrimination requirement into her account of thought. Suppose that knowledge in fact requires discriminative abilities. Nonetheless, the anti-individualist might hope to meet the discrimination requirement for knowledge by building a discrimination requirement into the account of the conditions required for thought. I investigate this strategy by considering Evans's anti-individualist account according to which a subject can have a thought about an object or a kind only if she can distinguish that object or kind from others. I conclude that this strategy is ultimately unsuccessful.

In chapter 4, I develop and defend a different response using the notion of a relevant alternative. I argue that, with one exception, the alternative situations used in the discrimination argument are not normally relevant. Thus, whether knowledge turns out to require discriminative abilities or only reliable belief, these alternative situations do not normally undermine knowledge. The notion of a relevant alternative also provides a response to the illusion argument. I argue that it is hard to answer the illusion argument by focusing on reliability. There are several epistemologically relevant notions of reliability, including local and global reliability. I argue that the illusion version of anti-individualism may threaten global reliability if not local reliability. Instead, I suggest that the possibility of suffering an illusion of thought is not normally relevant.

In chapter 5 I turn to the question of whether anti-individualism undermines the idea that we are rational subjects. According to anti-individualism, a subject's thought contents are individuated partly by the environment. As a result, many have argued that anti-individualism threatens transparency: the claim that a subject can realize a priori whether two thoughts or thought constituents have the same or different contents. If sameness of content is not transparent, then a subject may fail to make simple valid inferences and may fail to notice simple inconsistencies between her beliefs. If difference of content is not transparent, then a subject may make simple invalid inferences. Thus, anti-individualism undermines the concept of a rational agent as one who, at least in simple cases, would not have contradictory beliefs or make invalid inferences or fail to make simple valid inferences. I extend the established literature on this topic by discussing not only non-Fregean anti-individualism but also Fregean anti-individualism. I argue that only non-Fregean anti-individualism is incompatible with transparency of sameness, although both Fregean and non-Fregean varieties of anti-individualism are incompatible with transparency of difference. While I agree that anti-individualism of both Fregean and non-Fregean versions undermines transparency, I argue that this is not a threat to rationality properly understood.

The arguments of chapter 5 lead to the discussion in chapter 6 of whether or not anti-individualism is compatible with Fregean sense. Some have supposed that anti-individualism is incompatible with Fregean sense, but prominent anti-individualists, such as Evans, McDowell, and Peacocke, have developed a sophisticated notion of object-dependent sense that overcomes the standard

arguments for incompatibility. Fregeans argue that sense is required to provide a psychological explanation of informative identity judgments, inferences, and belief ascriptions, and to avoid attributing contradictory beliefs to subjects. If anti-individualism were compatible with sense, this would enable the anti-individualist to take advantage of the Fregean explanation of these phenomena. However, I provide new arguments that anti-individualism is in tension with even the sophisticated notion of Fregean sense. I argue that the classic Fregean arguments for sense depend on two key assumptions, the transparency of sameness of content and a related conception of rationality. Further, I argue that it is hard to motivate these key assumptions if one accepts anti-individualism. If one cannot combine anti-individualism with Fregean sense, then there is a stark choice between anti-individualism and the Fregean approach to psychological explanation.

Chapters 7 and 8 examine whether anti-individualism provides a novel and a priori route to knowledge of the world. Suppose, as I have suggested, that anti-individualists can answer the discrimination and illusion arguments for the incompatibility of anti-individualism and the claim that a subject can have a priori knowledge of her thought contents. According to anti-individualism, what thoughts a subject has depends on the environment. So, if anti-individualism is true, a subject might be able to use the philosophical arguments for anti-individualism to gain a priori knowledge that her having a certain thought entails that her environment is some way. Combining this knowledge with her a priori knowledge of her thought contents, she could gain a priori knowledge of her environment. On this basis, some have argued that anti-individualism can provide a new and powerful answer to skeptics who deny that we can have knowl-

edge of the external world. Others have argued that it is absurd to suppose that anyone could gain substantive knowledge of her environment merely by reflecting on her thoughts and a bit of philosophy. They have taken the result to be a *reductio* of the claim that anti-individualism is compatible with a priori knowledge of one's thought contents. On either understanding, it would be an interesting and important result if anti-individualism did allow subjects to gain a priori knowledge of the nature of the world.

In chapter 7, I consider but reject one response suggested by Wright and Davies. They argue that even if a subject has a priori knowledge of her thought contents and that her thought contents entail some fact about her environment, she cannot thereby gain a priori knowledge of her environment. They claim that, although warrant and knowledge normally transmit across valid inferences, they fail to transmit across a certain subset of valid inferences, including the relevant inference. I reject Davies's and Wright's arguments for a limitation on the transmission of warrant by considering the nature of warrant and justification. Instead, I suggest a different reason to reject the claim that a subject could use anti-individualism and a priori knowledge of her thought contents to gain a priori knowledge of her environment. I argue (in chap. 8) that even if anti-individualism is true, there are no a priori knowable entailments from thought to the world from which a subject could gain a priori knowledge of her environment. It turns out that a priori knowledge of the relevant entailments requires a type of knowledge that anti-individualists deny we have: a priori knowledge of whether or not one is having a thought, of what type one's thought is, or of how to correctly explicate one's thought. If that is right, then anti-individualism

fails to provide a novel a priori route to knowledge of the world.

The conclusion of the book is that anti-individualism does not have the kind of radical epistemic consequences suggested by many. Certainly, anti-individualism provides a new source of mistakes about the logical properties of thoughts. And this undermines the idea that one can combine anti-individualism with Fregean sense. However, anti-individualism's potential threat to a priori knowledge of one's own thought contents can be largely defused by appeal to the epistemological notion of a relevant alternative. In addition, on a proper understanding of rationality, anti-individualism does not undermine the notion that we are rational subjects. Last, anti-individualism does not provide a new a priori route to knowledge of the world. Many would agree that anti-individualism lacks the radical epistemic consequences it is commonly suggested to have. However, I support this conclusion by a range of new arguments that link central issues in the philosophy of mind, such as rationality, psychological explanation, and the nature of thought, with the epistemological literature on knowledge, warrant, justification, and reliability.