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A FALSE DILEMMA FOR ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM

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§I. INTRODUCTION

Conceived very broadly, anti-individualism is a negative thesis.¹ According to anti-individualism, a specification of an individual's physical and phenomenological states and non-intentionally characterized functionalistic and dispositional properties is insufficient for a specification of many of the individual's mental states. A more specific, positive version of anti-individualism holds that the natures of many of mental states are partly but constitutively determined by patterns of relations which hold between the individual and the wider physical and/or social reality.

It is often presupposed that an anti-individualist about representational mental states must choose between two accounts of no-reference cases. One option is said to be an "illusion of thought" version according to which the subject in a no-reference case fails to think a first-order thought but rather has the illusion of having one. The other is a "descriptive" version according to which one thinks an empty thought via a description.

While this presupposition is not uncommon, it rarely surfaces in an explicit manner. Often, it is visible only when a theorist argues directly from the falsity of one of the two views to the truth of the other.

However, Jessica Brown's recent work on anti-individualism clearly illustrates the presupposition. Hence, her treatment of the issue may serve to structure the discussion. However, the aim of the discussion is entirely general. Arguments for two conclusions about the nature of anti-individualism will be set forth. First, the choice between the illusion and descriptive version of anti-individualism is a *dilemma*. Each version of anti-individualism is prone to problems. Second, the choice is a *false dilemma*. There is another, less problematic, anti-individualistic account of reference failure.

§II. ON LEAVING OUT WHAT ANTI-INDIVIDUALISM IS LIKE

Why think that an anti-individualist must choose between two unattractive accounts of reference failure? A clear articulation of what will be argued to be a false dilemma for anti-individualism may be found in Jessica Brown's treatment of no-reference cases. Consequently, her treatment may serve as a concrete point of departure for the general investigation. In introducing the topic of reference failure, Brown plainly assumes that "There are two different views about no-reference cases available to an anti-individualist" (Brown 2004, p. 16). The first of the two views is a 'descriptive version.'

This is the view that “in a no-reference case, the subject thinks about the putative object via a description” (ibid.). Since the cases in question involve purported reference to a particular object or a natural kind, the view requires that *the subject's* thought has the form of a (definite) description.

The other candidate anti-individualist account of no-reference cases is ‘the illusion version’ according to which “the subject fails to think a thought of the relevant kind at all” (Brown 2004, p. 16). According to the ‘illusion version,’ a subject in a no-reference case “takes herself to be thinking a thought when she is not” (ibid., p. 114). The illusion version of anti-individualism entails what may be labeled ‘the doctrine of ontological dependence.’ According to this doctrine, the existence of a singular thought with a determinate content entails that the object (or kind) which the thought is about exists or has existed in the individual’s environment. Thus, some thoughts are said to be object-dependent (or kind-dependent).

The distinction between these two versions of anti-individualism is an important one. But Brown’s presentation, and subsequent discussion, of it suggests that the anti-individualist is rationally committed to a choice between these two accounts of no-reference cases. That is, Brown does not consider a *non-descriptivist* anti-individualist who denies that thoughts are object (or kind) dependent.

This is peculiar insofar as anti-individualism as originally developed by Tyler Burge rejects *both* descriptivism *and* the doctrine of ontological dependence. Burge provides a number of examples which he takes to show that an individual may acquire, possess, and use a concept which she understands incompletely. Someone who thinks that a contract must be written and signed simply has a false belief about *contracts*. This view is not consistent with descriptivism about concepts (Burge 1979, *passim*). Elsewhere Burge makes it quite explicit that he rejects

the doctrine of ontological dependence: “it is logically possible for an individual to have beliefs involving the concept of water (aluminum, and so on), even though there exists no water” (Burge 2007a, pp. 96–97). Many, perhaps most, anti-individualists subscribe to this much of the original version of the theory. For example, a recent anti-individualist account of empty thought components which rejects both descriptivism and the doctrine of ontological dependence is provided by Sanford Goldberg (Goldberg 2006).

Thus, Brown appears to *leave out* the original and continuously prominent version of anti-individualism.² The issue is of general significance. If the choice between the descriptivist and the illusion versions of anti-individualism is indeed mandatory, a major revision of anti-individualistic philosophy of mind is rationally required. Interestingly, Brown does not take the allegedly mandatory choice for the anti-individualist to be a dilemma. Rather, she defends each version against epistemological objections: “In the rest of the book, I will consider both illusion and descriptive versions of singular and natural kind anti-individualism” (Brown 2004, pp. 17).

Burge’s defense in the epistemological realm will not be the subject of the subsequent discussion. Rather, it will be argued that there are general, non-epistemological reasons to reject the illusion version and the descriptive version of anti-individualism. These arguments are part of a general investigation pertaining to the nature of anti-individualism. The investigation may begin by briefly considering an alternative anti-individualist account of no-references. It seems that an anti-individualist may subscribe to a ‘false first-order thought’-account of no-reference cases. The false thought view, (FT), may be characterized as follows:

(FT): In many no-reference cases, the subject is having a false first-order thought (with determinate content).

While (FT) will be advocated over the illusion version and the descriptive version, it is important to be aware of its scope and limits. For example, it may be that in some cases, an empty thought lacks a truth value. The quantification ‘many’ in (FT) indicates that such cases, if any, are plausibly exceptions to the rule that in no-reference cases, the subject entertains a false first-order thought. There are further reasons for quantifying (FT) by ‘many’ rather than ‘every.’ For example, it is natural to regard the thought ‘unicorns do not exist’ as true. But this hardly compromises the spirit of (FT). Plausibly, the thought is true because it is a first-order thought with a determinate content.

Moreover, thoughts that involve demonstrative or indexical components raise distinctive sets of problems. Consider, for example, perceptual beliefs which plausibly contain a demonstrative ‘that’-component. Burge and others have argued that perceptual beliefs, such as ‘that object is round,’ require a contextual application for their completion (Burge 1977, Segal 1989). Considered in the abstract, as unapplied, such thoughts lack a determinate content and, hence, a truth-value. It is not clear how to treat such thoughts when they fail to refer in the context of application. For example, it is unclear how to account for the contextually applied non-referring empty thoughts such as the hallucinatory thought ‘that elephant is pink’ or the perceptual belief ‘that pool of water is deep’ in an illusory environment. However, it is doubtful that anti-individualism is inconsistent with the view that such contextually applied thoughts are false.

In the forthcoming discussion, these complex matters will largely be set aside. Some no-reference cases, such as those involving empty demonstrative thoughts, may well

require special treatment. However, such special kinds of treatments may plausibly be regarded as supplementary to (FT) rather than as principles competing with the account. The formulation of (FT) allows for such supplementation.

A central difference between (FT) and the illusion version of anti-individualism is this: Whereas the illusion version of anti-individualism entails a version of the doctrine of ontological dependence, (FT) does not. Does the rejection of the illusion version in favor of (FT) commit the anti-individualist to descriptivism about empty concepts? It will be argued that, fortunately, it does not.

A non-descriptivist anti-individualist may take the position that a thought about an object or a natural kind can fail to refer and still have determinate content. For example, an anti-individualist may uphold the view that ‘ether is common’ is false. According to one version of this view, Sally may be prone to a perceptual illusion that there is a red apple. If so, she may think ‘that apple is red.’ In doing so, she has a thought with determinate content. The thought is in singular form. That is, it purports to refer to a particular object. Moreover, the anti-individualist may argue that the empty thought is of the same kind or type as a true, and hence referring, perceptual thought ‘that apple is red.’ That is, the anti-individualist may be a *common factor theorist* about singular thought.

One consideration which indicates that the choice between the descriptive version and the illusion version is *not* mandatory is this: A Twin-Earth argument for anti-individualism appears to be as plausible for empty, non-descriptive concepts as it does for referring concepts. To see this, consider the internalistically specified twins, Annika and Twin-Annika, living on Earth and Twin-Earth, respectively. On Earth, the scientists subscribe to a theory according to which phlogiston is a substance which plays a role in combustion, but not in corrosion.

On Twin-Earth, the accepted theory has it that phlogiston plays a role in corrosion, but not combustion. Of course, both theories are mistaken. There is no substance of the relevant kind on either Earth or Twin-Earth. Annika acquires the concept of phlogiston without coming to possess any description of it (perhaps apart from the belief that it is a substance of scientific interest). A similar story may be told about Twin-Annika. An anti-individualist may argue from this set-up that Annika and Twin-Annika have acquired distinct concepts of phlogiston. Importantly, such an argument typically relies on the assumption that the subjects do not think about the substance ‘via a description’ but rather defer to the established use in their community (Burge 1979). Such a Twin-Earth argument concludes some empty, non-descriptive concepts are anti-individualistically individuated. This conclusion is incompatible with both the illusion version and the descriptive version. So, it seems that the choice between the illusion and descriptive accounts of no-reference cases is *not* mandatory for the anti-individualist. Consequently, the reasons for upholding these versions of anti-individualism should be critically scrutinized.

§III. AGAINST ILLUSIONS OF THOUGHT

The illusion version is the view that a subject in a no-reference case takes herself to be thinking a thought even though she is not (Brown 2004, Evans 1982, McDowell 1986). As mentioned, the view sets forth an ontological requirement on having a thought with a determinate content: Successful reference to the object or natural kind in question.

For orientation, it is worth noting that the illusion version is intimately associated with a radical version of anti-individualism often called ‘disjunctivism.’ This is the view that there is no type of mental state (of any explanatory relevance) in common between any of the following cases: (i) a case in which Sally sees an apple, A, (ii) a case in which

Sally sees a different, but indiscriminable, apple, B, (iii) a no-reference case in which Sally is prone to an optical illusion of an apple and (iv) a no-reference case in which Sally, say due to a drug, is prone to a hallucination of an apple. So, according to the disjunctivist, one succeeds in thinking a thought about an apple, only if there is an apple present. Thus, the doctrine of ontological dependence is entailed by disjunctivism. Although the illusion version is not straightforwardly entailed by disjunctivism, it seems to be called for. For how else could a disjunctivist account for the fact that there is, from a first-person perspective, an appearance of a thought with determinate content in a no-reference case? So, if the illusion version is implausible, it appears that disjunctivism is also in trouble.³

A core assumption of the illusion version is that the individual in a no-reference case wrongly *takes herself* to think a thought. But it is far from obvious how the notion of “taking” should be understood. However, the range of available answers may be constrained by noting that individuals in no-reference cases often continue to engage in theoretical and practical reasoning. Since reasoning is propositional, the “taking” in question must consist in a propositional attitude. It is a familiar fact that non-propositional states cannot stand in logical relations to propositional attitudes.⁴

In consequence, the illusion version cannot consist in the view that the agent in a no-reference case lacks a first-order thought but retains the phenomenal content normally associated with it.⁵ For phenomenal content—the way it is like to think a thought—is not propositional.⁶ Although we may reason about phenomenal states, those states do not themselves enter into the reasoning. Only propositional attitudes do. Hence, the ‘taking’ essential to the illusion version must be accounted for in terms of a propositional attitude.

In consequence, a species of the illusion version according to which an illusion of

a thought consists in a false second-order thought will be considered. Such illusion of thought theory, (IT), may be formulated as follows:

(IT): In a no-reference case, the subject does not have a first-order thought (with determinate content). Rather she is having an illusory (hence false) second-order thought that she is having a first-order thought.

While (IT) provides a more tangible target theory, it is still not quite clear what the ‘taking’ consists in. In particular, the content of the illusory second-order thought remains to be specified. There are a number of possible specifications of which two will be considered.

The second-order thought may be said to have some sort of existentially quantified content. For example, ‘there is a thought with this-and-that content.’ However, such a view would be prone to a vicious regress problem. Recall that according to the illusion version, there are no first-order thoughts in no-reference cases. Hence, according to the illusion version, the relevant second-order thoughts themselves exemplify a no-reference case. That is, if *there is no referent* of the second-order thought (i.e., no first-order thought), then given the illusion version of no-reference cases, there is no second-order thought with determinate content. But, if so, an explanation of the phenomenon of an apparent thought in terms of a (false) third-order thought would also be an instance of a no-reference case. And so on without end.

However, the regress may be stopped by a different specification of the content of the second-order thought according to which it contains egocentric indexing elements. For instance, ‘I think that yetis are dangerous.’ Since the thinker exists, this thought is non-empty. It merely ascribes some false property, that of having a certain thought, to the thinker.⁷ On this account, no regress arises.

This way of understanding the notion of “taking oneself to think a thought” renders it reasonably clear what is meant by the “taking” in question. It is also compatible with Brown’s characterization that in a no-reference case “the subject fails to think a thought *of the relevant kind* at all” (Brown 2004, p. 16, my italics) Moreover, the view according to which one thinks a false second-order thought about one’s own mind is not prone to the problems to which other species of the illusion version are prone. So, it seems appropriate to make it the target of criticism. However, many of the problems which will be raised for it will apply *mutatis mutandis* to alternative versions.

The illusion version, in *all* its forms, involves the view that the subject in a no-reference case fails to have a first-order thought with determinate content. This core assumption is unattractive for a number of reasons. Contrast, for example, the two thoughts which Sally might entertain:

- (i) There are unicorns in Kashmir.
- (ii) There are gnomes in Kashmir.

In each case, it seems that Sally is thinking something. Something false to be sure—but nevertheless something determinate. Intuitively, the thought that there are unicorns in Kashmir is very different from the thought that there are gnomes (or yetis or dragons) in Kashmir. That those thoughts are different is as solid an intuition about thoughts as is available to a philosopher of mind. If it cannot be regarded as data, then there is very little which can be regarded as data about thoughts.

Furthermore, it seems clear that Sally might infer from ‘there are unicorns in Kashmir’ to ‘there is something in Kashmir.’ But according to the illusion-of-thought version under consideration, the reasoning should be represented as follows: ‘I think that there are unicorns in Kashmir,’ ‘so, there is something in Kashmir.’ So, according to the view

under consideration, the reasoning should be regarded as invalid or, at least, as enthymematic. This is not a very charitable conception of Sally's thinking.

Moreover, it seems that a theorist who denies that the apparent thoughts differ would stand little chance of explaining the relationship between thought and action. Someone who believed (i) might well go to Kashmir—of all places—in search of the unicorns. Someone who believed (ii), but not (i), would probably not. Or at least, she would, *ceteris paribus*, not be rational in doing so.⁸ So, an anti-individualist account of thought-individuation must make sense of the apparent difference between (i) and (ii).

But on the illusion-of-thought view characterized by (IT), the apparent difference between (i) and (ii) is hard to make sense of. If Sally fails to think anything determinate in each case, how is the apparent difference between (i) and (ii) to be explained? And how is Sally's trip to Kashmir to be explained? The theorist subscribing to the illusion version characterized by (IT) would have to say that the seeming difference between (i) and (ii) is to be explained in virtue of the fact that Sally entertains two distinct second-order attitudes. Likewise, her journey to Kashmir is to be explained by the fact that she mistakenly thinks that she believes that there are unicorns in Kashmir.

Such an account seems strained beyond the breaking point for a number of reasons. First of all, it is not plausible to assume that one has a second-order attitude in every no-reference case. Sally may experience an illusion of an apple at the table. It seems quite clear that Sally's "taking it" that there is an apple on the table may consist in mental representations at many levels. It may be propositional or not. It may be conscious or not. In each case, it seems implausible that just because Sally's (possibly unconscious) doxastic representation 'there is an apple on the table' is non-referential, it involves a second-order attitude.

Indeed, it is unclear how an unconscious sub-propositional representation could be the subject of a second-order attitude.⁹

There is another reason why it is implausible that a simple empirical mistake—about what is on the table—amounts to a complex mistake about one's own mental states. Young children and higher animals are sufficiently sophisticated to engage in basic reasoning. But they are not sophisticated enough to have second-order thoughts.¹⁰ Nevertheless, they may clearly be subjects in no-reference cases. For example, they may be prone to perceptual illusions. The proponent of the illusion version must reject this possibility. However, we often explain the behavior of young children and higher animals by reference to their non-referential attitudes. A chimp will pursue an illusion of a banana. We explain this by ascribing to it the belief that there is a banana.

So, the (IT) theorist owes us a principled psychological explanation of why Sally fails to have a thought in the non-referential case when she succeeds in having a thought or representation in the veridical case. It seems that in many cases there are no differences, which are relevant for psychological explanation, between the type of cognitive processes that are operative in the veridical and no-reference cases. Importantly, this fact is not altered by the anti-individualistic assumption that those process types, and the mental state types they result in, are in part determined by patterns of relations holding between the individual and her normal environment. So, there is no characteristically anti-individualist reason to think that there is a radical difference in the psychological profile of someone prone to an apple illusion and someone who entertains a true apple-belief.¹¹

Moreover, it is not clear that the illusion-of-thought theorist may consistently accept that Sally has a first-order desire to find the unicorns despite being unable to have a first-order thought about unicorns. One would

think that all propositional attitudes should have similar individuation-conditions. If so, it seems that the advocate of the illusion version must make plausible the idea of second-order desires. Indeed, she must make plausible the view that it is always second-order attitudes which are involved in psychological explanation of no-reference cases. To illustrate the difficulties with this approach, consider how the proponent of the illusion version can make sense of the child's fear of the infamous monster under the bed. By appeal to the idea that he believes that he fears a monster? By appeal to the idea that he fears that he fears a monster? It is far more natural to say that the child fears, although mistakenly, *a monster*.

Most of these worries challenge the plausibility of the sort of psychological explanation which is available to a proponent of the illusion version. Many of these worries should be equally worrisome for a disjunctivist. Nevertheless, the proponents of the illusion version (and disjunctivism) have done little to counter the worries regarding psychological explanation.

But the problems for the illusion version go well beyond psychological explanation. It seems, moreover, that the view is incapable of accounting for the intuitive difference in content of any two second-order attitudes which are posited in order to explain away the appearance of first-order thoughts. According to a prominent anti-individualist account of beliefs about one's own mind, the content of a second-order attitude is partly determined by the content of the first-order attitude which it is about (Burge 1988, Heil 1988). But, according to the radical assumption, there is no first-order thought with any determinate content in a non-reference case. So, this natural account of second-order thought-individuation is unavailable to the illusion version.

Recall that present aim is to motivate the claim that the (FT) version should not be left out. This preceding discussion has not

considered every conceivable species of the illusion version of anti-individualism. Perhaps, some illusion-theorists have not had second-order thoughts in mind. However, given the problems with alternative conceptions of 'taking oneself to think a thought,' it is far from clear what they have had in mind. Consequently, a clear version of the illusion version of anti-individualism has been the subject of the present criticism. That said, some principled problems which any illusion-of-thought theorist must confront have been indicated.

The central problem is that the illusion version, in *all* its forms, entails a strikingly problematic view about the *nature of the mistake* which is made by the subject in a no-reference case. According to the illusion version, an individual in a no-reference case is radically mistaken about the nature of her own mind rather than about the nature of the world.¹² This is a very odd way to conceive of the situation. The phenomena which have been called to attention challenge this conception. A subject in a no-reference case will continue to make certain practical and theoretical inferences about the world and continue with world-directed action. In many cases, the best explanation of this is that the subject holds a false belief about the world.

These challenges to the illusion version of anti-individualism (many of which also apply to the motivating view: Disjunctivism) may not be conclusive. But in the absence of cogent answers to them, they weigh heavily against the illusion version (and against disjunctivism). Fortunately, an anti-individualist can reject (IT), and similar views, in favor of (FT). And, indeed, many anti-individualists do. It should therefore be considered whether such a rejection entails any commitment to descriptivism.

§IV. AGAINST DESCRIPTIVISM

The investigation may begin by noting that anti-individualists are typically very liberal

with respect to concept acquisition and possession. One reason for this liberalism is that one might acquire a concept by fantasizing or theorizing or by picking it up by deference in a linguistic community where it is expressed by a common (or singular) name. Such liberalism is integral to the original strand of anti-individualism. Indeed, it plays a central role in some of the arguments for it (Burge 1979). Moreover, as argued in §II, an anti-individualist can provide a version of a Twin Earth argument which concludes that an individual can think empty non-descriptive thoughts.

Descriptivism about concepts comes in many forms. According to a prominent version of the view, a thinker possesses a concept only if she associates with it a definite description of the kind of thing falling under the concept. The view is said to resolve the problem about empty thoughts because it does not require that the definite description be ‘proper’ in David Kaplan’s sense of succeeding in referring uniquely (Kaplan 1970).

It is important to note that descriptivism involves the view that the structure of the subject’s thought is descriptive. It is not merely the claim that some description or property is associated with the concept. Brown’s formulation of the descriptive version provides a good characterization of this general feature of it. She characterizes the descriptive version to be the view that “in a no-reference case, the subject thinks about the putative object via a description” (Brown 2004, p. 16).

However, any substantive version of descriptivism may be comfortably rejected by an anti-individualist who denies (IT). It is perfectly consistent with such a version of anti-individualism that one can have a non-descriptive thought in singular form. Consider, for example, the false thought ‘the vase is pretty’—although there is no vase. Similarly, descriptivism about non-referential *concepts* may be the view that a subject

possesses such a concept only if ‘the subject thinks about the putative kind or property via a description.’ If so, the view may be rejected by the anti-individualist who rejects the ‘illusion version’ and embraces something like (FT). Consider, for example, the case in which Sally acquires an empty concept by deference to the customary use of the word which expresses the concept. It seems clear that such deference does *not* require that she entertains a description whenever she thinks a thought involving the concept. And it seems plausible that she need not associate a definite description with the concept in order to think with it.

A further question about the descriptivism in question pertains to its scope. It is a much stronger claim to suppose that all concepts are descriptive than to suppose that only empty concepts are descriptive. Advocates of the descriptive version are often elusive on this issue. But Brown takes a clear stand: “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” (Brown 2004, p. 16)

The point about entailment is well made and taken. Yet it might be thought that descriptivism about empty concepts is *plausible* only if descriptivism about concepts is generally plausible. One reason to think so is that referring and empty concepts may be acquired in relevantly similar ways. The mode of concept-acquisition in, say, a case of a referring natural kind concept may be relevantly similar to the mode of concept-acquisition in a no-reference case involving an empty natural kind concept. For example, it seems that Jimmy could acquire the concepts of oxygen and phlogiston in manners which are relevantly similar. His teacher might tell him that oxygen exists on Earth (without providing any description). But his evil twin teacher might tell him that phlogiston exists on Earth (also without providing any description). But if Jimmy acquires a non-descriptive

concept in the oxygen case, then it is hard to see what grounds the view that he acquires a descriptive concept in the phlogiston case. If two concepts are acquired, understood and used in relevantly similar ways, it seems implausible that they differ with respect to whether they are descriptive. So, in lieu of an argument that *all* concepts are descriptive, descriptivism about empty concepts appears to be ungrounded. Conversely, someone who thinks that descriptivism is a required position in no-reference cases but not in normal cases owes an account of wherein the difference lies.¹³

There may be an interesting wrinkle here. Perhaps a plausible, but much weaker, version of descriptivism is available. According to this view, an empty concept must be associated with some description by *someone* in the community in which the concept is used and expressed by, say, a natural kind term. This is because it is hard to see how an empty empirical concept could otherwise ‘get off the ground’ by the normal means. Hence, according to a ‘weak descriptivism,’ an empty concept must be launched by a description. Perhaps this account has some plausibility for certain empty theoretical concepts. But we should be cautious about extrapolating from such cases to the conjecture that all empty concepts are launched by descriptions. At least three reasons to doubt such a conjecture are worth mentioning briefly.¹⁴

First, it seems to be perfectly possible that a subject may have an empty color(shade)-concept. But color-concepts are hardly descriptive.

Second, it is not clear that concepts such as ‘yeti’ or ‘gnome’ are descriptive. Even though someone who believes in yetis and gnomes associates certain properties with them, such associations need not amount to definite descriptions.

Third, the view is not even generally plausible for the best candidate, namely, empty scientific kind terms such as ‘phlogiston’

and ‘ether.’ Even though a scientist believes that some definite description is true of the alleged referent, she hardly thinks that the referent is ‘whatever meets the description.’ Rather, a good scientist should recognize the possibility of discoveries which are contrary to the description which she takes to pick out the alleged natural kind.

So, the view that *some* empty natural kind concepts are descriptive in the weak sense that they were introduced by a description is less objectionable. But even if such a view were accepted by the anti-individualist who rejects (IT), it would not commit her to any substantive version of descriptivism: Even if an empty concept, C, must be associated with a definite description, D, by someone at some time, it is not the case that a particular *subject* who thinks a thought involving C thinks via D.

It is widely accepted that although a concept has been launched by a definite description, this fact does not impose any special constraint on an individual thinker’s acquisition and use of it. In particular, the thinker need not think the description in order to acquire and subsequently possess the concept. Nor is he ipso facto thinking via the initial description whenever he utilizes the concept in thought. Once the descriptive concept is ‘off the ground,’ it works just like a normal non-descriptive concept. In this connection, it should be reemphasized that the relevant strand of descriptivism is a view about the structure of a subject’s thought when her thinking involves an empty concept.

An (FT)-style anti-individualist account of no-reference cases appears to be entirely compatible with the denial of the ‘descriptive version’ even if the existence of descriptive concepts is accepted. As mentioned, anti-individualists typically do reject substantive versions of descriptivism. And this is not a mere fluke. Rather, it is an integral aspect of an important strand of anti-individualism that there is an important distinction to be

drawn between concept-possession and concept-mastery. It is one of the cornerstones of anti-individualism that the social and environmental conditions relevant for an individual's concept-possession often go well beyond her own cognitive grasp of the concept. As mentioned, the contention that such social and environmental conditions are concept-individuating would lose one of its central motivations if there were no such discrepancy. Indeed, one of the important upshots of anti-individualism is that an individual can acquire, possess and make use of a concept even though the individual does not associate it with a proper definite description. For this reason, anti-individualism is often understood as an extension to the philosophy of mind of the anti-descriptivist revolution in the philosophy of language.¹⁵ Moreover, there is good introspective evidence to the effect that for most concepts, normal thinkers do *not* associate anything more than a few, often inessential, or mistaken, properties with a concept. (Of course, as far as introspective evidence goes, one can only speak for oneself. But if the testimonial evidence from Hilary Putnam (Putnam 1974) and others is to be trusted, the phenomenon of incomplete understanding is widespread.) Furthermore, higher animals and young children may possess concepts, at least basic perceptual ones. But they hardly associate any descriptions with them. If so, it is implausible that an animal or young child who is prone to a perceptual illusion is 'thinking via a description.'

These phenomena lend weight to anti-descriptivism about concepts in general. As mentioned, the 'description version' may be weakened considerably. Yet there is a limit to how much it can be weakened and remain a 'description version.' A "descriptivism" which merely requires that the thinker typically associates a few contingent properties with a given concept is hardly worthy of its name. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that anti-individualists who reject

the illusion version may also reject the descriptive version. Indeed, reflections on the motivation for anti-individualism suggest that anti-individualists *should* reject any substantive descriptivism.

§VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It has been argued that the choice between 'the illusion version' and 'the description version' regarding no-reference cases constitutes a false dilemma for the anti-individualist. It constitutes a *dilemma* for two reasons: First, each of the two versions of anti-individualism is prone to serious problems. Second, each of the two versions is in internal conflict with fundamental tenets of anti-individualism.

The choice makes for a *false* dilemma because it is by no means mandatory. There is a prominent version of anti-individualism, indeed the original version, according to which a thinker simply thinks a false first-order thought in many no-reference cases. Of course, this version of anti-individualism should be developed to include a principled account of no-reference cases. No such account has been developed here. It has merely been argued that such an anti-individualistic account of no-reference cases is more promising than the illusion and descriptive versions. It may be worthwhile to conclude with an extremely rough gesture towards the epistemological significance of the issue.

Brown sums up what might well be regarded as the fundamental mistake underlying the false dilemma: "whichever view is correct, in the no-reference situation, the subject lacks the thought she has in the actual situation" (Brown 2004, p. 116). The (FT)-version of anti-individualism is fundamentally different from the descriptive and illusion versions in this regard. As mentioned, it is compatible with a *common factor view*. This is, very roughly, the view that an individual may entertain two beliefs which are of the same representational nature or type although only one of them is successfully referring.

The fact that an anti-individualistic account of no-reference cases is compatible with such a common factor view is epistemologically important. For whether an individual is warranted in a particular belief depends, in part, on its general representational nature or type. This, in turn, is partly because the epistemic status of a given belief partly depends on the nature of the cognitive processes and competencies which help type-identify it. If so, it is reasonable to hypothesize that a common factor view may contribute to an account of warranted non-referring belief.

Indeed, it is important for a general account of fallible warrant that successfully referring beliefs may be of the same kind or type as beliefs which ‘misfire.’ In many no-reference cases, an individual in epistemically abnormal circumstances holds a non-referring belief which is of a truth-conducive nature. However, since the circumstances are abnormal, they may not bear on the general nature or type of the belief. If so, the truth-conducive nature of the non-referring belief may partly explain why it is warranted despite failing to

refer. If so, it may be conjectured that an anti-individualistic version of a common factor view may contribute to a principled account of warranted non-referring belief. However, such a putative epistemological corollary requires much development and argument. In consequence, it is left as a conjecture.

However, the conclusion within the philosophy of mind—that the allegedly mandatory choice between the illusion and descriptive versions is a false dilemma—is very important in its own right. If it is true, we should develop the original version of anti-individualism to account for no-reference cases rather than revise it dramatically. Moreover, it is important to realize that each of the alternative versions is subject to principled problems. Finally, if the epistemological conjecture is true, it is no less important for understanding anti-individualism’s epistemological implications. In consequence, it should be investigated how the version of anti-individualism which the false dilemma leaves out bears on epistemological issues (and vice versa).

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NOTES

1. I owe thanks to Tyler Burge, Martin Davies, Sanford Goldberg, Mark Greenberg, Peter Ludlow, and the participants of a Danish Epistemology Network workshop at The University of Copenhagen. I owe special thanks to Jessica Brown and very special thanks to Julie Brummer. The paper is dedicated to Alberte.
2. Brown has noted, in conversation, that her intention is not to *rule* out other versions of anti-individualism. Nevertheless, by *leaving* out other versions of the discussion, she strongly suggests that the choice between the illusion version and the descriptive version is mandatory.
Interestingly, it is also common to presuppose that a Fregean anti-individualist is committed to the unattractive view that Fregean senses are either object-dependent or descriptive (Brown 2004, Evans 1982, McDowell 1984, McDowell 1986). This related misconception will not be addressed on this occasion.
3. It is hardly a coincidence that advocates of the illusion version, such as Evans (1982) and McDowell (1986), are also among the main proponents of disjunctivism.
4. See, for example, Davidson 1989.
5. This may be the strategy of McCulloch 1988.

6. Even philosophers who think that phenomenal content is representational agree (see, e.g., Tye 1995).

7. It is not entirely clear why one would uphold the illusion view for the *object* of a thought and reject it for the *property*. The illusion-of-thought theorists owe a principled explanation for this asymmetry.

8. Likewise the empty thought-components appear to play the same syntactical and compositional roles as referring thought-components. To wit: (iii) ‘unicorns are fond of virgins’ and (iv) ‘virgins are fond of unicorns’ appear to have distinct, hence determinate, contents. The unicorn-hunter who believes (iii) may think of it as a reason to bring a virgin along to Kashmir (as bait). Someone who believes (iv), but not (iii) does not have this reason available.

A caveat: One could, perhaps inspired by Saul Kripke, object that the example is problematic because it is of the essence of unicorns—a creature of myth—that they do not exist. This objection could be dealt with by substituting the unicorns with some postulated—non-mythical—species, such as the yetis (Kripke 1980, pp. 23–24, 156–158).

9. This is too strong as stated. Of course, one could generate a second-order belief about one’s unconscious mental states by third-person methods—by observing one’s own behavior, by asking one’s shrink, etc.

10. Empirical studies indicate that primates and young children do not have a substantive concept of belief. Such subjects are unable to pass varieties of the so-called ‘false belief test.’ For a useful survey and meta-analysis, see Wellman, Cross and Watson 2001.

11. Some have taken such considerations about psychological explanation to speak in favor of individualism. Gabriel Segal, for example, has argued from the existence of empty concepts to the conclusion that “the thesis that natural-kind concepts are world-dependent is false” (Segal 2000, p. 56). This view is shared by the version of anti-individualism which is promoted here. This is recognized by Segal. He is perfectly explicit that the arguments *only* apply to versions of anti-individualism which uphold some strong doctrine of ontological dependence of natural kind concepts. In particular, he is clear that the arguments do not compromise versions of anti-individualism which “see more general relations to the environment as essential” (Segal 2000, p. 57). Given this recognition, the arguments based on reference failure do not in and off themselves speak in favor of individualism. These arguments clearly leave room a theory which is perfectly anti-individualistic despite the fact that it rejects the doctrine of ontological dependence. For a related criticism, see Hunter 2003, pp. 732–733.

As mentioned, Segal recognizes all this. Indeed, this is why he provides a number of *further* arguments, which do *not* involve no-reference cases, to compromise weaker versions of anti-individualism. Alas, a discussion of these arguments falls outside the scope of the present discussion.

12. It is, of course, not denied that the worldly mistake may be the source of a mistake about one’s own mental states. For example, Sally might have a false second-order thought ‘I just had a true belief that a table is red’ in an illusion case in which there is no table. But, as the case exemplifies, the mistake about the worldly facts is the primary one. It explains the putative mistake about mental facts.

13. Interestingly, Peter Ludlow has motivated the view that there is a syntactical difference between referring and empty concepts. “The thesis may be radical, but I suggest that the externalist has good grounds for asserting that the syntactic states of a system can be and often are determined by environmental circumstances” (Ludlow 2002). The ‘radical’ thesis pertains to no-reference cases: “The idea would be that a single physical system might have a syntactically simple representation for a name like ‘Socrates’ in some environments—by hypothesis those where Socrates existed—and a more complex representation in other environments—those worlds where he did not exist” (Ludlow 2002).

An anti-individualist should regard this idea as ‘radical’ because it appears to be at odds with an essential assumption of a Twin Earth argument. This is the assumption that all Earthian’s and the Twin Earthian’s internally specified states are type-identical. For syntactically type-distinct states are not

internally type-identical. So, if Ludlow's suggestion is right, there will not be any case in which an Earthian's and a Dry Earthian's respective thoughts are semantically type-distinct although they are syntactically (and hence internally) type-identical. Consequently, it seems that Ludlow's suggestion undermines the basis for an anti-individualistic account of no-reference cases. That is a real worry. The purpose of this footnote is to call attention to it rather than to settle it.

14. Thanks to Tyler Burge for pressing the first and third issue.

15. This comment only speaks to the historical development. No claim is made regarding whether the anti-descriptivist stance in philosophy of language or mind is philosophically more fundamental.

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