

--from *Times Literary Supplement* no. 5336 (2005): 26.

### Anti-Individualism and Knowledge – Jessica Brown

Traditionally, Anglophone philosophers have assumed that the identity of a thought is determined wholly by the subject's intrinsic states--e.g., her brain states. In the 1970's, this traditional view (lately called 'individualism' or 'internalism') was challenged by Hilary Putnam and Tyler Burge, who argued that the contents of one's beliefs, desires, intentions are partly determined by one's physical, social and/or linguistic environment. The question is not whether the environment causes one to think what one does. Rather, the question is one of the identity of thoughts: In virtue of what is a thought the particular thought that it is? According to Putnam and Burge, the answer lies partly in the environment. What makes the belief expressed by 'water is wet' the belief that it is depends on the presence of H<sub>2</sub>O in the environment, not just on the believer's internal states. The view that thoughts are individuated in part by environmental factors has come to be called 'anti-individualism' or 'externalism'.

For the past thirty years, anti-individualism has been hotly contested—especially with respect to untoward consequences that it is alleged to have. For example, we seem to know a priori (without any empirical investigation of the environment) what we believe: we seem to have "privileged access" to the contents of our own minds. If I believe that water is wet, then—putting aside self-deception—I can know a priori that I believe that water is wet. However, if anti-individualism is correct, then it seems that I cannot know the identity of my belief without empirical investigation. Since the content of my belief depends on what my environment is like, it seems I must know about my environment in order to know the content of my belief. If so, then anti-individualism has the consequence that either we do not have privileged access to our own minds or such privileged access brings with it a priori knowledge of the environment. Neither alternative is plausible. So, the anti-individualist seems caught in a dilemma.

In this clear and well-informed book, Jessica Brown's arguments may be seen as a defense of anti-individualism against such a dilemma, as well as against other objections. Brown offers a novel account of a priori knowledge of our own thoughts that is compatible with anti-individualism. Her account depends on her understanding of the nature of knowledge as requiring discriminative abilities, as opposed to mere reliability in forming true beliefs about one's thoughts. But if Brown succeeds in avoiding one horn of the dilemma, the other horn still looms: A priori knowledge of beliefs whose contents

are determined partly by our environment seems to imply that we can deduce truths about the environment merely by considering our own minds. Brown argues persuasively that anti-individualism does not have such a consequence. She concludes both that anti-individualism is compatible with our having a priori knowledge of our own thoughts, and that such a priori knowledge does not have the radical epistemic consequences that some have feared or hoped for.

Anyone interested in the current state of thinking about these topics should read this book. It is an excellent one-volume defense of anti-individualism that takes account of much of the philosophical literature and critically discusses a wide range of issues—e.g., rationality, reliabilism, warrant. The book may be read profitably by students and others unfamiliar with the state of play. My one complaint about Brown's writing is that her previews and summaries—admittedly helpful to newcomers—are abundant to the point of distraction. Nevertheless, Anti-individualism and Knowledge is an important contribution to both epistemology and philosophy of mind.

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