First-Person Externalism

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Ever since the 1970's, philosophers of mind have engaged in a lively discussion of Externalism. Externalism is the metaphysical thesis that the contents of one's thoughts are determined partly by empirical features of one's environment.   Externalism appears to clash with another plausible thesis—the epistemological thesis that one can have knowledge of one's own thoughts, without evidence or empirical investigation. Many have argued that the conjunction of these theses is incompatible. I have argued elsewhere for their compatibility.[1] Here I'll just assume that they are compatible and explore some consequences of conjoining a particular externalist thesis about the contents of thoughts (Social Externalism) with a particular thesis about self-knowledge (First-Person Authority).

First, I formulate Social Externalism as a thesis that has very broad application and then formulate First-Person Authority as a thesis that has somewhat less broad application. I call the conjunction of these two theses 'First-Person Externalism'. I argue that First-Person Externalism is philosophically rich and suggest that it delivers us from two philosophical snares: the threat of solipisism and the threat of global skepticism.

I. Social Externalism

Externalism, as I construe it, is a thesis about the conditions under which a person has a particular thought. Thoughts are individuated by propositional content that is canonically expressed by 'that'-clauses.   The identity of a thought depends on its content: Thought T is the thought that

it is partly in virtue of having the content that it has. Externalism is the thesis that the contents of a person's thoughts, and hence the identity of one's thoughts, depends in part on features of one's environment.

It would make no sense to ask: Under what conditions does a particular thought have the content that it has?   Something's being a particular thought presupposes that it has a particular content—the content that makes it the thought that it is. What concerns me is this: Under what conditions does someone have a particular thought—i.e., a thought with a particular content.   The thesis about those conditions—the thesis of Social Externalism—that I endorse is this:

> (SE) The identity of many of a person's thoughts is determined (in part) by social and linguistic practices of that person's community.

It is important to notice that what is at issue is not the attribution of thoughts, but the having of thoughts. There is a good deal of latitude in how to attribute thoughts for the benefit of various listeners. (E.g., in front of Sally's child, you might report to a learned friend Sally's negative opinion of the President by saying, "Sally believes that 43 is pusillanimous"—even though Sally has never heard the word 'pusillanimous' and would not recognize the President as '43'.) Some attributions, however, indicate the thoughts that thinkers have in terms they recognize. These are attributions expressible by sentences to which a thinker would assent. Call such attributions of thoughts that the thinker really has 'canonical attributions.' Only canonical attributions are relevant here.

Let the word 'thoughts' refer to any mental states with propositional content—beliefs, hopes, fears, desires, intentions and so on, and let 'concepts' refer to the items constitutive of propositional contents. (I'll disregard here the possibility that there are singular propositions that

contain individuals.) Then we can say that thoughts contain or are made up by concepts.   For example, the thought that foxes are plentiful contains two concepts—the concept *foxes* and the concept *plentiful*.   The term 'concept' in my usage does not carry much theoretical weight.   I am simply using the term in order to identify constituents of thoughts, the items that make up the contents of thoughts and determine the identity of thoughts. Canonical attributions of thoughts contain concepts that the thinker actually has.

In order to have a thought containing a particular concept, one must have the concept. To have a particular concept, one must be able to apply it correctly (much of the time). (Even empty concepts like *unicorn* may be applied correctly—in linguistic contexts in which mythical beasts are being considered, or in pictorial contexts of drawings of small horses with horns on their foreheads.) Concepts have conditions of application: a concept definitely applies to some things and definitely does not apply to other things. Complete mastery of application conditions is not required in order to have a concept.[2]   Indeed, we have many, many thoughts made up of concepts of which we have only limited understanding: you may believe that black holes exert enormous gravitational pull, or that Bach wrote a lot of cantatas without complete mastery of the concept *black hole* or the concept *cantata*.   So, one may have a concept (and hence thoughts containing that concept) without complete mastery of the application conditions of the concept.   Now, letting 'S' range over thinkers, say:

> S has a concept C if and only if (i) S is able to apply C correctly in a significant range of cases; and (ii) S has some (perhaps partial) understanding of C's conditions and consequences of application.

Of course, the extent of the significant range of correct application of C and the degree and kinds of understanding required are both vague, but

I'll try to use examples that are not controversial. The kind of understanding required to have a concept may be descriptive; it may include knowledge of features shared by typical things to which the concept applies. It may also include knowing what follows from the application of the concept, so that thoughts containing the concept may be used in reasoning. It is this (perhaps partial) understanding that distinguishes having a concept from merely being able to discriminate or classify.

Call the concepts contained in thoughts to which Social Externalism applies 'SE-concepts'. Then:

> Concept C is <u>an SE-concept</u> if and only if: For any thinker S, if S has a concept C, then holding constant S's physical history and physical internal states, if S had been in a community with relevantly different social and/or linguistic practices, S would have failed to have C,

where a person's physical history includes all the nonintentional interactions that a person has with physical entities in the environment, and physical internal states are nonintentional states (like brain states).[3] So, a concept C is an SE-concept just in case: whether or not someone has the concept C depends in part on the social or linguistic practices of her community.

Now we can see how the concepts that one has are related to Social Externalism (SE). (SE) is a thesis about the contents of one's thoughts. A thinker's thoughts are individuated by their contents; the contents of a thinker's thoughts are limited by the concepts that the thinker has. So, a thinker has a thought with a certain content only if the thinker has the concepts that make up the content (in the sense defined above). Then: Social Externalism is the thesis that many of our thoughts are SE-thoughts —where a thought is an SE-thought if and only if it contains an SE-concept,

and a concept is an SE-concept if and only if whether or not someone has it depends on social and linguistic practices.

Most people, I suspect, are prepared to regard social, political, and legal concepts as SE-concepts. However, the scope of Social Externalism is far broader than just the thoughts containing the obviously SE-concepts.

Sometimes, it is erroneously assumed that Social Externalism applies only to thoughts involving concepts that the thinker partially misunderstands. But Tyler Burge made clear that "communal practice is a factor...in fixing the contents of my attitudes, even in cases where I fully understand the content."[4] Or again: "[E]ven those propositional attitudes not infected by incomplete understanding depend for their content on social factors that are independent of the individual, asocially and non-intentionally described. For if the social environment had been appropriately different, the contents of those attitudes would have been different."[5]

Let me illustrate with a case of someone with full understanding of a concept that is not intuitively a social concept, but which turns out to be an SE-concept: Consider a term like 'mountain'. To see that 'mountain' expresses an SE-concept, consider an alternative linguistic community that has a word that sounds like 'mountain' but does not distinguish between mountains and small hills. Application conditions of the alternative community's concept expressed by a word that sounds like 'mountain' are different from those of our concept *mountain*.

Then, the person who makes no mistake about the concept *mountain* in our community, and believes that many mountains are rocky would not have that belief in the alternative linguistic community that uses what sounds like 'mountain' to refer to small hills as well as to mountains. The person in the alternative community would utter what sounds like

'Many mountains are rocky,' but would not thereby express a belief that many mountains are rocky. In the alternative community, the belief so expressed contains a concept that applies to small hills. Since the English word 'mountain' does not apply to small hills, we should translate from the alternative community without using our word 'mountain'. The concept that we express by 'mountain' has different application conditions from the concept that inhabitants of the alternative community express by what sounds like 'mountain' but isn't. The concepts so expressed in the two communities are distinct. The person—without any internal difference or difference in physical history—would have different beliefs if brought up in the alternative community. Such beliefs are thoughts to which Social Externalism is applicable. The concept *mountain*, though not an intuitively social concept, is nevertheless as SE-concept.

Even natural-kind concepts turn out to be SE-concepts. Dolphins are families of mammals, and sharks are families of fish. Dolphins and sharks are of different natural kinds. I now want to argue that the concept *dolphin* and the concept *shark* are SE-concepts, despite the fact that they are natural-kind concepts. Holding fixed a person's physical history and internal physical states, her concepts may vary simply by changing the social and linguistic practices of his community. The learner acquires the concept *shark* rather than *dolphin* only because the community uses a particular word to refer to sharks and not to dolphins. When a person acquires a concept by learning a word, the concept so acquired is the concept of whatever the community uses the word to apply to.[6] Hence, social and linguistic practices by which concepts are acquired must be individuated broadly (i.e., in part by the community's applying a concept to one kind of thing rather than another); and the practices by which one acquires the concept *dolphin* are distinct from those by which one acquires the concept *shark*.

To see this, consider someone, call her 'Jo', who lives in a community where there are a lot of dolphins (say, bottlenose dolphins)—and no sharks and no word or concept that applies to sharks. But Jo speaks the local language and knows a lot about dolphins. She knows that dolphins swim in the sea, and are sizable creatures with prominent dorsal fins. Jo has never seen any dolphins, nor been in physical contact in any way with dolphins. But she has learned about dolphins from books and classmates in school. Jo has the concept *dolphin* in the sense specified: (i) Jo is able to apply the concept *dolphin* correctly in a significant range of cases (indeed if he were to come across a dolphin while swimming, he might well infer that it was a dolphin); and (ii) Jo has some (perhaps partial) understanding of the application conditions of *dolphin.* So, Jo has the concept *dolphin*.

Now suppose that Jo had grown up in an alternative community, where there were no dolphins, but a lot of sharks (say, dusky sharks—*C. obscurus*). In the alternative community, Jo speaks the local language and knows a lot about sharks. She knows that sharks swim in the sea, and are sizable creatures with prominent dorsal fins. Jo has never seen any sharks, nor been in physical contact in any way with a shark. But she has learned about sharks from books and classmates in school. In the alternative community, suppose that Jo had exactly the same physical interactions with exactly the same people and other things that she had in the actual community. Whatever the word was for dolphins in the actual community had a homynym used in the same way to designate sharks in the alternative community that had no dolphins. If Jo had been brought up in the alternative community, she would not have had the concept *dolphin* at all. Rather, she would have had a different concept—*shark*. But in the alternative community, Jo would refer to sharks by what sounded like the same word that, in the original community, she used to refer to dolphins.

The concept *shark* is a different concept from the concept *dolphin*. The two concepts have entirely different application conditions. Now,

varying only Jo's community, we can vary which concept he has--*dolphin* or *shark*--without changing any of her internal states or any of the people or things that she had interactions with or any of the nonintentional ways that she interacted with them. She did not even have any false beliefs about the application conditions of either of the concepts *dolphin* or *shark*; she had no false beliefs about the biological families of either since she had no beliefs about biological families at all—any more than children who think shark-thoughts do. So, *dolphin* and *shark* are natural-kind concept that satisfy the definition of an SE-concept.

Let me entertain an objection: "What the dolphin/shark story shows is only that natural-kind externalism holds," the objection goes. "The difference between Jo's having the concept *dolphin* and her having the concept *shark* does not depend on linguistic practices at all; it only depends on the difference of natural-kinds. Social and linguistic practice is irrelevant to which concept Jo has."

In the story as told, Joe would not have either concept *dolphin* or *shark* except for the social and linguistic practices of the two communities. She has never had any interaction with either dolphins or sharks; indeed, the existence of samples of a natural kind is never enough for someone to have the concept of the kind. Social and linguistic practice is the required intermediary for having concepts of natural kinds at all.

One may press the objection: "The social and linguistic aspects of acquisition of the concept *shark* (or *dolphin*) are more or less accidental features in the story as told.   Suppose that someone—call her 'Lonely Jo'—was the only human being on an island surrounded by sharks and other fish, but no dolphins. Then, couldn't she acquire the concept *shark* without social or linguistic help? If she could, then we seem to have a contradiction: *Shark* is an SE-concept according to the original story, and *shark* is not an SE-concept according to the story of Lonely Jo."

I believe that this objection is deeply misguided. Lonely Jo could not acquire the concept *shark* without social or linguistic help. No one has a concept unless there is a difference between her applying it correctly and applying it incorrectly. In the absence of a community, there is nothing that could make it correct to apply Lonely Jo's putative concept to sharks as opposed to hammerhead sharks or sharks-or-porpoises. There is nothing in Lonely Jo's environment that would make it incorrect to apply her putative concept to porpoises, or to refrain from applying it to sand sharks. Lonely Jo's mere acquaintance with sharks along with other sea creatures can hardly give her the concept *shark*. There are 350 species of sharks that are radically dissimilar in appearance from one another.[7] Some sharks have anal fins; others don't. Some sharks have flat raylike bodies; others don't; and so on. Sharks range in size from a few centimeters to (perhaps) 18 meters long.[8] Lonely Jo's putative concept does not have an extension that Lonely Joe could be right or wrong about.

"Ah," the objector may continue, "*shark* is a natural-kind concept; so its extension is given by the members of that natural kind, and membership in such a natural kind is independent of social or linguistic practices."

Of course, I agree that membership in such a natural kind is independent of social or linguistic practices; but this point is irrelevant. The question does not concern membership in a natural kind; it concerns the acquisition of a natural-kind concept, *shark*. What fixes the extension of a putative concept of a person in isolation, a person without a natural language like English? In the absence of a language, what would make it the case that any of Lonely Jo's mental events or vocalizations expressed the concept *shark*--as opposed to *hammerhead shark*, *sand shark*, *fish* or myriad other natural kinds to which a particular shark belongs? In virtue of what would any of Lonely Jo's thoughts contain the concept *shark*--as opposed to *hammerhead shark* or any of the alternatives?[9]

People may suppose that Lonely Jo can make the relevant distinctions simply by intending to use marks or sounds in a certain way. But that won't do for two reasons: (1) Without a public language, she lacks the descriptive resources to settle on *which* natural kind he intends to refer to—hammerhead shark, or any member of the 350 species of shark, or generally to fish. Ostensive definition, even if it were possible for Lonely Jo, would not settle the issue of the extension of the (putative) concept. (2) Lonely Jo cannot have any intention about referring to a particular natural kind at all without already having a concept *natural kind*—an abstract concept far more difficult to acquire than that of *shark* or *fish*.   It is not as if Lonely Jo has a rich inner life in which she can notice how things seem to her and then inquire into how they really are. We know very little about the character of Lonely Jo's inner life, but it is just a Cartesian fantasy to suppose it resembles ours. (I have more to say about this point later.)

Contrast Lonely Jo with those of us in linguistic communities, as in the original example of Jo. With the mediation of social and linguistic practices, a person can acquire natural kind concepts like *shark* even if she does not have the concept *natural kind*. But without the mediation of social and linguistic practices, there is no fact of the matter about whether a person's sound or mark expresses a concept with the extension of *shark*. Hence, whether or not someone *has* a certain natural-kind concept depends on a linguistic community, from which it follows that natural-kind concepts are SE-concepts.

Again, I grant that the concepts *shark* and *dolphin* are underlined individuated independently of linguistic or social practices. But Social Externalism, as I have formulated it, is not concerned with how concepts are individuated, but rather with the conditions under which a person has a certain concept (and thoughts containing it).[10] The fact that a concept is individuated independently of linguistic and social practices is irrelevant to whether it is an SE-concept. A concept is an SE-concept if one's having it

depends on linguistic or social practices, regardless of how the concept is individuated.   And the having of concepts is important because the range of thoughts that one can entertain is limited by the concepts that one has.

Of course, the '*dolphin*/*shark*' example is a slight variation on Burge's old story. I tell it again to emphasize that it is not just intuitively social concepts like *passport* or *president* that are SE-concepts, but also natural-kind concepts like *dolphin* or *shark* are SE-concepts as well.[11] So, the range of Social Externalism is vast.

II. First-Person Authority

The term 'self-knowledge' covers quite a broad territory, and there is a good deal of self-knowledge over which we have no special authority: I know many facts about myself—my social security number and where I was born—but I am in no privileged position with respect to these things. My knowledge of these facts depends on the evidence that I have. The concern here is with cases of self-knowledge that are not based on any evidence. It is over these cases that we have First-Person Authority. The thesis that I am calling 'First-Person Authority' is this:

> (FPA) A person typically has knowledge of the contents of her own present thoughts without evidence or empirical investigation.

Our knowledge of our own present thoughts is immediate, noninferential, non-observational; it is first-personal knowledge "from the inside," so to speak. We know what we think in a way differently from the way we know anything else.[12]   Any full account of first-person authority will have to go into such vexing matters.   Fortunately, all that is needed for purposes here is the characterization of first-person authority as nonempirical knowledge of the contents of our own present thoughts.   So, let me just make a few comments about how I intend (FPA) to be understood.

First and most important, claims to first-person authority are defeasible. So, *pace* Descartes, particular claims to first-person authority are not infallible. Our beliefs about our thoughts are subject to correction. We typically know what we believe, fear, hope, desire and intend; but we can be (and routinely are) corrected by others—friends, therapists, confessors. The more morally and personally significant our thoughts, the more likely that our claims to know them are mistaken. E.g., we are more likely to be mistaken about our beliefs about our own temperament ("What? I am not an angry person!") than about our less-emotionally-charged beliefs about mundane matters such as whether parking meter has expired.

Most prominently, our claims to first-person authority are defeated by self-deception. E.g., one may sincerely and comprehendingly say, "I am afraid that I'm going to be interrupted this afternoon," when in fact her friends know that she is eager to be interrupted and to have an excuse to stop working for the day. And there is ample empirical evidence that people are unreliable in their reports of their own reasoning processes.[13]

In any particular instance, First-Person Authority is merely presumptive; it is the "default position" in everday cases—like our knowing the contents of our standing attitudes and of thoughts of which we are currently conscious. To doubt someone's first-person pronouncements about her own thoughts, one needs some special reason. However, there are numerous defeating conditions for claims to first-person authority. So, first-person authority about one's own thoughts is extensive, but particular claims to first-person authority are defeasible.

Second, in order to have First-Person Authority over one's thoughts, one must meet several conditions:

(i) One must have conscious thoughts—thoughts to which one has conscious access—over which to exercise first-person authority.

(ii) One must have a first-person perspective in order to recognize thoughts as her own. (In *Persons and Bodies*, I argued that first-person perspectives are what distinguish persons from all other kinds of beings.)[14] First-person knowledge of one's own thoughts requires that one be able to recognize her thoughts as her own.   She must be able to attribute them to herself without using any third-person device (like name or description) to identify herself.

(iii) One must have concepts of relevant propositional attitudes.   In order to <u>know</u> that one believes, desires, intends, hopes, or fears something, one must have concepts of believing, desiring, intending, hoping or fearing. In order to have a belief about one's belief that such-and-such, one must be able to entertain the thought, "I believe that I believe that such-and-such." And in order to have that thought (with the second occurrence of 'believe' in the content clause), one must have a concept of belief.

I believe that these conditions for First-Person Authority can be satisfied only by language-users. Each of the requirements (i) – (iii) supports this claim.

> Argument from conscious access (condition (i)): The thoughts over which I have First-Person Authority are thoughts that I know that I have (by definition).   Thoughts that I know that I have are thoughts to which I have conscious access, and I have conscious access only to thoughts formulated in a language that I understand.   Thoughts expressed in Mentalese, if there is such a language independent of natural language, are not formulated in a language that I understand.   The thoughts to which I have conscious access are formulated in a natural language, like English. Thus, the first condition for First-Person Authority is satisfied only by language-users.

This argument does not imply that a being must have language in order to have any thoughts.   Beings without language may have a limited number of thoughts (about their immediate environment and how it serves their needs). Higher primates may well have evolved an innate store of concepts, grounded in the environmental features of their ancestors. But such a store would be very meagre. Human infants (who have yet to acquire a natural language) seem to discriminate quality spaces. So, perhaps in a rudimentary way, nonlinguistic beings have simple thoughts— e.g., "Predator approaching from there" or "Food is that way." But nonlinguistic beings do not have thoughts about their thoughts, or beliefs about their beliefs. They have no First-Person Authority.

> Argument from first-person perspective (condition (ii)): In order to have First-Person Authority, one must be able to think of thoughts as one's own.   To think of a thought as one's own requires a robust first-person perspective that only language-users have.   Non-language-using animals and human infants have rudimentary first-person perspectives, but the robust first-person perspectives required for thinking thoughts like "I know that I believe that such-and-such" develops with the use of language.[15]

> Argument from concepts *know* and *believe* (condition (iii)): Although non-language-using animals have conscious access to the environment, they do not have conscious access to their thoughts about the environment. Condition (iii) requires that those with First-Person Authority have concepts like *know*, *believe*, etc. They must be able to entertain thoughts like *I know that I believe that there is food over there*.   Although I think that Donald Davidson was mistaken to hold that in order to have a belief, one must have a concept of belief, he was correct to hold that in order to have a <u>concept</u> of belief, one

14

must have a language.[16] It is difficult to see how, in the absence of a language, one could acquire concepts like *know* or *believe*.

To sum up: First-Person Authority is defeasible, and anyone who has it meets several conditions: She is conscious; she has a first-person perspective, and she has concepts of believing, desiring and any other attitudes over which she has first-person authority. Since only language-users satisfy all (or even any of) these conditions, only language-users have First-Person Authority.

III. First-Person Externalism

First-Person Externalism is the conjunction of (SE) and (FPA):

(SE) Many of a person's thoughts are determined (in part) by social and linguistic practices of the person's community.

(FPA) A person typically has knowledge of the contents of her own thoughts without evidence or empirical investigation.

Now I want to explore consequences of First-Person Externalism to two venerable philosophical issues: solipsism and global skepticism.

Solipsism. Solipsism is sometimes thought of as the metaphysical thesis that I am the only thing that exists. No great philosopher has ever endorsed solipsism, but the question to be asked here is this: What can be said about solipsism from a First-Person Externalist point of view?

It may seem that, obviously, if First-Person Externalism is correct, then solipsism is ipso facto incorrect. But that is not so unless someone has a thought over which one has first-person authority and to which Social Externalism applies. So, I need to show that we have thoughts such that our having them entails that solipsism is false. That is, I need to present a

thought (1) to which Social Externalism applies, and (2) over which the thinker has first-person authority.

Consider the thought that Descartes expressed in the *First Meditation* by (what is translated as), "I am sitting in front of the fire in my dressing gown." Call this thought of Descartes 'thought T'. (1) Social Externalism applies to thought T: Anyone who can have a thought with the content expressed by "I am sitting in front of the fire in my dressing gown" has the concept *dressing gown*. *Dressing gown* is an SE-Concept. If Descartes had been brought up in a community with relevantly different linguistic and social practices, then—holding constant his physical history and internal physical states—Descartes would not have had the concept *dressing gown*. Suppose that Descartes' community had no concept of *dressing gown*, but instead applied a homynym of 'dressing gown' only to garments made of silk. If Descartes had been raised in the alternative community, then, without any physical internal differences in him and without any physical differences in his interactions, he would not have had the concept *dressing gown*. Instead, he would have had a different concept that he (and his alternative community) expressed by what sounds like 'dressing gown.' So, Descartes' thought T is an SE-thought, and Social Externalism applies to it.

(2) Descartes had first-person authority over thought T: Thought T was a thought that Descartes was presently having, and none of the standard defeating conditions for first-person authority (self-deception, wishful thinking) were in play. Indeed, his full attention was directed toward thought T. Someone may object: "We are not justified in supposing that Descartes really had first-person authority over thought T. Perhaps he only seemed to be having thought T, without really having it." The objection misfires. If Descartes can have either the thought "I seem to have a thought that contains the concept *dressing gown*" or the thought "I have a thought that seems to contain the concept *dressing gown*," then he must

have the concept *dressing gown*. The concepts that a thinker must have in order to <u>seem to</u> have a particular thought are the same concepts that she must have in order actually to have that thought. The important point here is that, when it comes to the contents of our thoughts, 'is' is both metaphysically and epistemologically prior to 'seems'. The thoughts that we seem to have are dependent on the thoughts that we are actually able to have. Hence, it is possible for it to seem to Descartes that he* is having the thought T <u>only if</u> it is also possible for him really to have that thought. So, Descartes' first-person authority applies to his having thought T.

So, now we have a simple argument to the anti-solipsistic conclusion:

(1) It seems to Descartes that he* is having thought T.

(2) If it seems to Descartes that he* is having thought T, then he has all the concepts need to have thought T.

(3) If Descartes has all the concepts needed to have thought T, then he is not alone in the universe. (*dressing gown* is an SE-concept)

(4) Descartes is not alone in the universe.

So, by First-Person Authority, Descartes knows that he* has the thought expressed by "I am sitting in front of the fire in my dressing gown." And by Social Externalism, no one who can have thought expressed by "I am sitting in front of the fire in my dressing gown" is alone in the universe. So, the very premise that Descartes used to raise the spectre of solipsism itself precludes solipsism. So, First-Person Externalists need not worry about solipsism.

Moreover, given First-Person Externalism, solipsism not only fails to be true, but is self-defeating. For if solipsism were true, I could not even formulate the thesis of solipsism itself. I could not have any first-person thought (such as that I alone exist) unless I had a robust first-person

perspective—unless, that is, I could think of myself as myself in the distinctly first-person way. And there is no robust first-person perspective without numerous intentional attitudes whose contents contain empirical SE-concepts. So, for the same reason that I could not have the concept *dressing gown* without interactions with others, I could not have the robust first-person concept that allows me to conceive of myself as myself without interactions with others. And if I could not conceive of myself as myself, I could not have the thought, *I am alone in the universe*.   So, if anyone can have the thought *I am alone in the universe*, she has a robust first-person perspective, and is guaranteed not to be alone in the universe.

First-Person Externalism indicates what is wrong with the view that we first acquire concepts and then, in a separate step, learn to apply them to things "outside" of ourselves—via inference, or analogy. Such a view rests on a false Cartesian presupposition—namely that our inner lives are ontologically and epistemically independent of the world we live in.   If I have thoughts, I must have concepts. And I could not have the concepts that I have if I were alone in the universe. To acquire concepts is to acquire knowledge about the world.

To sum up: If I can formulate the thought that I am alone in the universe, then I am not really alone in the universe. Similarly, if I can formulate the thought that I seem to be alone in the universe, then I am not really alone in the universe. Hence, solipsism is self-defeating.   Now let's turn to a First-Person Externalist treatment of Skepticism.

Global Skepticism. Various forms of skepticism—from Descartes' in the *First Meditation*, to the contemporary 'brain-in-a-vat' case—have the following as an assumption:

(S) The world could be drastically different from the way I take it to be and my experience be no different from the way that it actually is.

Then, the general worry is this: How can I rule out the hypothesis that there exists nothing but my mind and an Evil Genius, who puts all my thoughts in my mind? Or how can I rule out the hypothesis that there exists nothing but my brain, a vat and a supercomputer arranged so that my brain is in the vat and hooked up to the supercomputer, which stimulates my brain in the ways that make me think that there are other people, trees, automobiles and all the other things that I take to populate the earth?

You can guess my answer. These skeptical hypotheses are ruled out by my having the inner life that I have. What it is like for me "inside" entails that I have concepts, many of which are SE-concepts. And my having SE-concepts entails that the skeptical hypotheses are false. By (FPA) I know that I have the thoughts that I seem to have. And since I could not have those very thoughts if I were alone in the world, or a brain in a vat, my having the thoughts that I seem to have guarantees that I am in a world populated with other people and things.

Let me put it another way: I believe that First-Person Externalism implies that (S) is false and thus provides a decisive nonskeptical response to the skeptical questions. If 'experience' is used in its ordinary English sense—as in the experience of sky-diving or of going to a restaurant or of making good grades in school or of enjoying a sunny day—then (S) is obviously false. If the world were drastically different from the way that I take it to be—if there were no restaurants, good grades, schools or sunny days—I would not have the same experiences that I have. So, if there is any hope of (S)'s being true, 'experience' must be used in some nonordinary (technical) way--perhaps as 'narrow experience'. Say that

19

(N) An experience e is <u>narrow</u> if and only if: having e locally
supervenes on one's brain states, without regard to the way the
world outside of one's brain is, or ever has been.[17]

That is, an experience is narrow only if the (past and present) environment and whatever is in it are irrelevant to whether someone has the experience. A narrow experience supervenes on the intrinsic states of the experiencer. Suppose the term 'experience' in (S) is understood as narrow experience.

What sort of thing would a narrow experience be? Although I am suspicious (indeed, downright leery) of speculations based on bizarre thought experiments, I don't know how we can answer this question (and hence understand (N)) without appealing to imaginary examples far removed from anything familiar to us. So here goes. Perhaps narrow experience is what you and your molecular duplicate in an Evil-Genius-world have in common when you experience going to a restaurant and your duplicate experiences what seems to her like going to a restaurant.   But your duplicate in the Evil-Genius-world could <u>not</u> have any experience described by 'what seems to her like going to a restaurant'. Experiencing what seems to be going to a restaurant is parasitical on experiencing going to a restaurant: Nothing could seem like going to a restaurant to someone who did not have the concept *restaurant*--an SE-concept. And nothing could have the SE-concept *restaurant* in a world without other people. So, your molecular duplicate in an Evil-Genius-world does not have any experience of seeming to go to a restaurant. So, seeming to go to a restaurant is not an experience that you and your molecular duplicate in the Evil-Genius-world share. Since you and your molecular duplicate have all the same brain states, but you have an experience that she does not have, that experience is not narrow.

Someone may be tempted to object: "Sure, the ordinary concept *restaurant* cannot help individuate a narrow experience, but we can sheer

off the external world from the ordinary concept *restaurant* and end up with a narrow concept that is just like the ordinary concept but without the external world. The narrow concept is what you and your duplicate have in common."   This will not do. In the first place, the putative narrow concept *restaurant* is defined in terms of the ordinary concept *restaurant*, which is an SE concept. Hence, the reasoning of the objector still presupposes that skepticism is false. In the second place, there are problems with the notion of 'sheering off'. You can't just sheer off the external world from a concept and still have a concept left (even a narrow one).[18]

I cannot think of any experience that satisfies (N), with the possible exception of "raw feels." But even with a raw feel, I generally realize that I'm experiencing one (say, a headache). My Evil-Genius-world duplicate would lack the concept *headache*, and hence although she would have a headache, she could not (as I would) know of her headache that it was a headache. By hypothesis, her brain would be behaving exactly as mine, but the same kind of neural activity that in my brain constituted my knowing that I had a headache would not constitute my twin's knowing anything. The reason is that she is not properly hooked up to the world and its linguistic communities.

We have no reason to suppose that my molecular duplicate in an Evil-Genius-world would have anything like the kind of inner life that I have. She couldn't have any thoughts containing SE-concepts. When I wake up at night and think, "I have too many appointments tomorrow," my twin wakes up and her brain whirrs around just like mine; but she has no thought about too many appointments. *Appointments* is an SE-concept.   Does she have some kind of narrow experience? Although I have no idea how to find out, I doubt that she has any experience except for raw feels. I am confident that the experience (if she has any at all) of my molecular duplicate is not like mine. She is not thinking about too many appointments.[19] My molecular duplicate, disconnected from a world and linguistic community, would be

like a steering wheel disconnected from a car. The activity of the disconnected steering wheel is different from its activity when it guides the car—even if the motion of the physical particles in the steering wheel in both cases is the same.   There is a lot that molecular duplicates fail to have in common.

Moreover, if there were a duplicate in an Evil-Genius-world, and if she did have narrow experiences, she would never have any First-Person Authority over any of them; she couldn't even know of any narrow experience that she had had it. Why not? Because to know of an experience that one had had it requires that one have a robust first-person perspective and a first-person perspective depends on having nonnarrow experiences. Since the experiences of my molecular duplicate in an Evil-Genius-world are all narrow, she does not have a first-person perspective—any more than she has the SE-concepts 'appointments' or 'headache'.   Not only would she not know of any (narrow) experience that she had had it, she would have no experience that she could reflect on, or regret, or look forward to.   Her inner life, to the extent to which she had one at all, would be quite unlike mine—even though her neural activity would be of the same sorts as mine.[20]   This view does not deny supervenience; it only denies narrow mind-brain supervenience—as any kind of externalism does.

To sum up: On the one hand, if (S) applies to ordinary experiences that one may be aware of having (or that one may reflect on, or look forward to, or regret), then (S) is false. If you were in an Evil-Genuis world, your inner life (if you existed at all) would be vastly different from what it is now—impoverished, perhaps to the vanishing point. On the other hand, if (S) applies to narrow experiences individuated by (N), then at best (S) is near-vacuous (since there seem to be no narrow experiences with the possible exception of raw feels); in that case, (S) construed narrowly would be philosophically useless and irrelevant to issues of skepticism.

IV. Conclusion

Let me conclude with a perhaps surprising consequence of First-Person Externalism. If First-Person Externalism is correct, then the notion of a person's molecular duplicate in an Evil-Genius world is an unfortunate conceit (despite its prevalence in the literature on skepticism). If First-Person Externalism is correct, then it is metaphysically impossible for there to be a molecular duplicate of me in an Evil-Genius-world. A molecular duplicate of my body, yes. But a molecular duplicate of my body—detached from a world, from a social and linguistic community—is far from a duplicate of me. Without interactions with people and objects, that molecular duplicate would have no first-person perspective. Indeed, on my view of persons, in the absence of a first-person perspective, there is no person at all. My molecular duplicate in an Evil-Genius world would not even be a person. What is needed for an entity to be a person is not a soul, but a world with people in it.[21]

[1] "Social Externalism and First-Person Authority," presented at a conference on Mental Causation, Externalism, and Self-Knowledge at the University of Tübingen, 13-15 October, 2005.

[2] Tyler Burge, "Individualism and the Mental," *Studies in Metaphysics, Midwest Studies in Philosophy IV*, Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., Howard K. Wettstein, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 73-121.

[3] Say that x (an entity, property, thought, anything) is intentional iff either x is a propositional attitude or the existence or occurrence of x implies that there exist beings with propositional attitudes. In terminology that I use elsewhere, I call things that satisfy this condition 'intention-dependent', or ID entities, properties, etc.

[4] Tyler Burge, "Individualism and the Mental," *Studies in Metaphysics, Midwest Studies in Philosophy IV*, Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., Howard K. Wettstein, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), p. 85. (73-121)

[5] Burge, "Individualism and the Mental," pp. 84-5.

[6] Sometimes the community defers to experts, as we do for the concepts *uranium* and *elm*.

[7] Various species of sharks have good sense of smell (they may detect a single drop of blood dissolved in a million gallons of water. They can sense minute electrical disturbances, and they have excellent eyesight. They have cartilaginous skeletons. From "Sharks and How They Live" copyright 1995 Oceanic Research Group, Inc. http://www.oceanicresearch.org/sharkspt.html. Accessed 1/13/06.

[8] Some sharks with raylike bodies have elongated, sawlike snouts; others with raylike bodies have short, un-sawlike snouts. Some sharks have 6 or 7 gill slits and one dorsal fin; others have 5 gill slits and 2 dorsal fins. Some sharks have dorsal fin spines; others have no fin spines. Of the sharks without fin spines, some have mouths behind their eyes, and others have mouths well in front of their eyes. The whale shark (Rhiniodon typus) is the world's largest fish. *Sharks*, John D. Stevens, editor (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1987): 18-35.

[9] I have been influenced by Kripke here. In virtue of what would a person, considered in isolation, mean addition rather than "quaddition" by '+'? See Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Natural Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982)

[10] If complete mastery of individuating conditions of a concept were required to have a concept, most of us would be woefully short of concepts—and hence of thoughts. Indeed, I think that Wittgenstein's discussion of rule-following has given us reason to be skittish about the idea of the totality of application conditions of a concept.

[11] Indeed, in "Social Externalism and First-Person Authority," I gave an argument that the concept *red* is also an SE-concept.

[12] Our first-person authority is rooted in our being rational agents. See See Richard Moran, *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)., for development of this idea.

[13] E.g., see Nisbett, R.E. and Wilson, T., "Telling More Than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes," *Psychological Review* 84 (1977): 231-259; Nisbett, R.E. and Ross L., *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (London: Prentice Hall,1980): Ch. 10.

[14] See my *Persons and Bodies*: *A Constitution View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): Ch. 3.

[15] See my "When Does a Person Begin?" *Social Philosophy & Policy* 22 (2005): 25-48.

[16] Donald Davidson, "Thought and Talk," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984): 155-170.

[17] I formulate (N) this way because I want experiences to count as narrow only if they are entirely independent of the way the world is or ever has been. (I revised (N) in response to a question raised by Timothy Paul at the Henle Conference: Suppose that a normal English speaker were put into a Matrix-like machine. It may seem that her previous acquisition of concepts would allow her to have narrow experiences in the machine. Since my concern here is with global skepticism, I wanted narrow experiences to be independent of the physical, linguistic and social environment altogether.)

[18] There are also problems with this use of the term 'the external world', but I'll overlook them here.

[19] "Ah," an objector may insist, "suppose that when you woke up, you <u>asserted</u> (perhaps to your sleeping partner), "I have too many appointments tomorrow." Then, your twin would assert that too."   No; that misses the point. The duplicate may emit molecularly identical noises, but she would not assert any such thing. Nor would it seem to her that she was asserting that she* had too many appointments. Her noises would be like a parrot's not expressing any such thoughts.

[20] Indeed, the notion of my molecular duplicate in an Evil-Genius world is a conceit. If my view of persons is correct, then it is metaphysically impossible for there to be a molecular duplicate of me in an Evil-Genius-world. A molecular duplicate of my body, yes. But without interactions with people and objects, that being could have no first-person perspective; and in the absence of a first-person perspective, there is no person. But I'll put this stronger and more controversial conclusion aside.