

Externalism, Physicalism, Statues, and Hunks

Forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*

Bryan Frances
Fordham University

Abstract:

Content externalism is the dominant view in the philosophy of mind. Content essentialism, the thesis that thought tokens have their contents essentially, is also popular. And many externalists are supporters of such essentialism. However, endorsing the conjunction of those views either (i) commits one to a counterintuitive view of the underlying physical nature of thought tokens or (ii) commits one to a slightly different but still counterintuitive view of the relation of thought tokens to physical tokens as well as a rejection of realist physicalism. In this essay I reveal the problem and articulate and adjudicate among the possible solutions. I will end up rejecting content essentialism.

Physicalism for our actual thought particulars is almost universally agreed to be true. Many theorists admit that non-physical properties and particulars are possible; property dualists think that there are properties that are actually non-physical in some sense; and there are a few qualia enthusiasts who hold that there are non-physical qualia tokens. But when it comes to *actual thought particulars*, virtually everyone outside of the camp of theists toes the physicalist line. There may be ghosts, gods, and goblins everywhere, but with respect to human thought tokens, we are physicalists.

Given this generally sanctioned physicalist view, the widespread acceptance of content externalism—the thesis that some of us could have had distinct non-indexical, *de dicto* ascribed belief contents without any difference or distinction in our internal physical makeup throughout any part of our life—is surprising. For Tyler Burge (1979, 1992, 1993) has argued that externalism calls out for the actual existence of non-physical propositional attitude particulars—given, that is, the truth of content essentialism, the thesis that thought tokens have their contents necessarily. This latter thesis is widely endorsed in the philosophy of mind, by such leaders as Burge of course and Jerry Fodor (1990). But despite the thousands of pages devoted to investigating externalism, almost everyone has overlooked the presumptive incompatibility among the three popular theses, externalism, content

essentialism, and physicalism for actual thought tokens.¹ Very roughly, the problem is this. Suppose that you actually have a belief token (temporal particular) B with water content (e.g., the content that water is clear). If physicalism is true, then B = P, where P is some physical particular. In the counterfactual twater world you are physically identical to how you are in the actual world. So you have P there. Since B = P, you have B there. If content essentialism is true, then in that twater world B has the water content. But according to externalism it doesn't have that content. Contradiction. The problem is more complicated than what is suggested by that argument, but the upshot will be the following:

Endorsing the conjunction of externalism and content essentialism either (i) commits one to a counterintuitive view of the underlying physical nature of thought tokens or (ii) commits one to a slightly different but still counterintuitive view of the relation of thought tokens to physical tokens as well as a rejection of realist physicalism.

What these two counterintuitive views are will be addressed below. Burge is committed to (ii), the rejection of physicalism. However, I will argue in part that this dualist response is insufficiently motivated, since (i) is more attractive than (ii). Be that as it may, the primary question investigated in this essay is, 'What should an externalist say about content essentialism?' My purpose is to reveal the philosophical problem, work out the contending positions, derive their strengths and weaknesses, and offer a more direct evaluation of content essentialism. I will be advocating its rejection.

1. The Tension Among Physicalism, Externalism, and Content Essentialism

¹ Some people besides Burge have made the connection, at least to some extent: Cynthia MacDonald 1990, Mark Rowlands 1992, and John Gibbons 1993. However, none of them has pursued the issue far enough to see the possible positions and the corresponding costs and benefits, especially with regard to the underlying physical nature of thought.

Suppose that in the actual world Alf has a friend who concludes that walleye get bigger than sauger, these being two North American game fish. This friend passes this opinion on to Alf. Therefore, in this world Alf comes to believe that walleye get bigger than sauger, and he expresses that belief with the sentence ‘Walleye get bigger than sauger.’ Now consider a counterfactual situation that retains both fish, down to the last detail. The only relevant linguistic difference in the two worlds is that in the counterfactual situation walleye are called ‘sauger’ and sauger are called ‘walleye’: the terms have switched meanings. Thus, when someone utters ‘Walleye get bigger than sauger’ in the actual world she says that walleye get bigger than sauger; but in the counterfactual history when someone utters that physical string she says that sauger get bigger than walleye. In the counterfactual scenario Alf’s friend has come to the reverse conclusion that sauger get bigger than walleye—though of course she expresses that opinion with ‘Walleye get bigger than sauger.’ In this counterfactual world Alf acquires his opinion on the two fish from this person in the same way as in the actual world. So in the counterfactual world Alf ends up uttering ‘Walleye get bigger than sauger’—*just as he did in the actual world*. Thus, he actually believes that walleye get bigger than sauger whereas he counterfactually believes that sauger get bigger than walleye. He apparently has distinct belief contents across worlds. And there need not be an interesting intrinsic physical difference in Alf across worlds (during any part of his life) given that among other things he utters, sees, and hears all the same word-forms and he doesn’t physically encounter either fish.

By saying that Alf is *atomically identical in the actual and counterfactual worlds*, I mean he is composed of the very same atomic tokens in each world and they have all the same atomic and subatomic properties and relations (that don’t go beyond his skin) in each world. By a *token* I will always mean an individual, non-repeatable, nominalistically acceptable, *particular* thing, such as one’s appendix. You have your appendix and I have mine; these are two appendices, located in different places, no matter how similar they are. Analogously, even though my sister and I both realized that P, she had her 2-second long realization token at noon while I had my 3-second long realization token at 1pm. Presumably, each of our realization tokens was some short-lived wholly

physical biochemical event in our brains; or so the (realist) physicalist thinks.

We can compare propositional attitude tokens to sunburn tokens (Donald Davidson 1987). If Fred and Martha both have sunburn on their left forearms, then there are *two* sunburn tokens, T_F and T_M . T_F has the property of being a sunburn. If T_F has that property contingently, then in another possible world Fred may have acquired T_F caused not by the sun but by other means. So T_F exists in a possible world without having the property of being a sunburn. If essentialism were true for sunburns and sunburnhood, then T_F couldn't exist unless it had sunburnhood.²

In this essay I am interested in just the consequences of externalistic anti-supervenience, so I won't stop to evaluate the arguments for externalism. Here are the initial premises of the argument we need to examine.

Externalism:

1. Alf is atomically identical in W_1 (the actual world) and W_2 (a counterfactual world from an externalist thought experiment).
2. In W_1 Alf believes that walleye get bigger than sauger (so it has content C_{WS}); in that world he has belief token B_{WS} and in W_1 B_{WS} has content C_{WS} .³
3. In W_2 Alf believes that sauger get bigger than walleye; in that world he has token B_{SW} and in W_2 B_{SW} has content C_{SW} .

² Here I'm just assuming, without any argument whatsoever, that a physical particular exists in two possible worlds (so it's not that it exists in one world and its numerically distinct counterpart exists in the other world). So I'm ignoring counterpart theory and David Lewis's (1986) genuine modal realism. On his theory the problem described in this essay doesn't even seem to arise.

³ It is much more plausible to focus on other propositional attitudes if one's focus is on tokens. E.g., a sudden realization that P. Merely for the sake of using the standard example of a propositional attitude I will usually stick with belief.

Content Essentialism:

4. If in W_1 Alf has token B_{WS} and B_{WS} has, in W_1 , content C_{WS} , then if Alf has B_{WS} in W_2 , B_{WS} has C_{WS} in W_2 .⁴

Now continue the argument so that the conflict between the conjunction of these four premises, on the one hand, and physicalism, on the other, is perfectly clear:

5. By (2) & (4), if Alf has token B_{WS} in W_2 then B_{WS} has C_{WS} in W_2 .
6. Suppose, for reductio, that Alf has token B_{WS} in W_2 .
7. By (5) & (6) token B_{WS} has C_{WS} in W_2 .
8. If Alf has token B_{WS} in W_2 (that's (6)) and B_{WS} has C_{WS} in W_2 (that's (7)), then in W_2 Alf believes that walleye get bigger than sauger.
9. So by (6)-(8), in W_2 Alf believes that walleye get bigger than sauger.
10. Thus, by (3) and (9) in W_2 Alf believes that walleye get bigger than sauger *and* that sauger get bigger than walleye. The same reasoning establishes that he has those beliefs in W_1 .
11. But that's just wrong. People may have contradictory beliefs, but it's crazy to think that Alf has those two "reversed" beliefs. Alf isn't in a Lois Lane scenario ('Lois believes Superman flies,' 'Lois believes Kent doesn't fly') or anything remotely like that.
12. So the supposition in (6) is wrong; (6) is false; Alf does not have token B_{WS} in W_2 .
(And since by (3) he has B_{SW} in W_2 , $B_{SW} \neq B_{WS}$.)

⁴ This premise is most straightforwardly motivated by the principle that *every* propositional attitude token has the same content in every world in which it exists. But of course there may be counterexamples to that very general principle that don't suggest the falsehood of (4) (e.g., perhaps *de re* beliefs or other oddities). So one must be careful with counterexamples to content essentialism.

13. Obviously, if Alf does not have token B_{WS} in W_2 (that's (12)), then B_{WS} doesn't exist in W_2 (there is no reason to think it must exist in W_2 and yet not be Alf's token!).
14. So, by (2), (12), and (13) token B_{WS} exists in W_1 but not in W_2 .
15. If Alf is atomically identical in W_1 and W_2 , then every wholly physical token that is a part of Alf's body in W_1 exists in W_2 .
16. By (1) & (15) every wholly physical token part of Alf's body in W_1 exists in W_2 .
17. Thus, by (14) & (16) token B_{WS} isn't a wholly physical token part of Alf's body in W_1 .
18. But if B_{WS} is a wholly physical token in W_1 , then of course it's a wholly physical token *part of Alf's body* in W_1 . The only way B_{WS} exists in W_1 is as a belief token of Alf's. And where else would Alf have a wholly physical belief token but in his own body? (David Chalmers & Andy Clark 1998 argue that one *could*, if the circumstances are just strange enough, have attitude tokens in some kind of artificial memory device literally outside one's body. But even if they're right, Alf is not in that kind of situation at all.)⁵
19. Thus, by (2), (17), and (18) token B_{WS} is in W_1 —which is the actual world—but is not a wholly physical token in W_1 (and the same reasoning holds for B_{SW} in W_2).

The conclusion (19) of this valid argument obviously entails that physicalism for *actual* particulars is false—and not because of the existence of ghosts, gods, or qualia tokens but because of the existence of our everyday thoughts.⁶ Thus, the argument seems to show that you can't adopt externalism,

⁵ Content externalists hold that belief *contents* don't *supervene* on one's intrinsic physical properties; this is very different from saying that belief *tokens* are *composed* of token entities outside the believer's body. More on this point below.

⁶ I do mean 'actual': 'Alf' is a fictional name for myself, as several years ago I was in Alf's situation exactly.

content essentialism, *and* physicalism. The challenge for someone who wants all three theses, as many do, is to see if there is a way to wiggle out of this argument, to see whether one can accept the truth of (1)-(4)—that’s content essentialism and externalism—and yet deny (19)—that’s anti-physicalism—by denying one of the premises that validly led us from (1)-(4) to (19). Call the person who wants to endorse *physicalism*, *externalism*, and *content essentialism* *the pecenik* (pronounced the same as ‘peacenik’; an externalist who wants to make peace among externalists, physicalists, and content essentialists).

The argument doesn’t purport to show that the conjunction of content essentialism and externalism is *logically inconsistent* with physicalism. There is no such inconsistency. The valid argument goes from the conjunction of widely endorsed theses EX and ES (content externalism and content essentialism), plus some other premises O (namely, (8), (11), (13), (15), and (18)), to the negation of P (P is physicalism, as (19) obviously entails $\neg P$ regardless of how we understand P):

EX & ES & O entail $\neg P$.

So I’m not arguing this way:

EX & ES entail $\neg P$

Although there is no *logical* conflict among externalism, essentialism, and physicalism, there is conflict nonetheless. The conflict is captured by the premises in (5)-(18), not a definition of physicalism. The argument (1)-(19) is valid and the conclusion obviously and logically inconsistent with physicalism; so if one thinks that there really is no conflict among externalism, essentialism, and physicalism, then obviously one must find some falsehood in (5)-(18). That simply amounts to being a pecenik. Of course, one can (as I have done) mount an argument involving a notion (such as being physical) without employing a definition of that notion! Again, (19) clearly entails the negation of physicalism, no matter *how* one understands physicalism.

Can peceniks find a false premise in (5)-(18)? It won't be easy. By creatively experimenting with the externalist thought experiments one sees that there need not be any physical difference (in physical properties) or physical distinction (in physical tokens) across worlds anywhere near the protagonist in either space or time; instead, the differences in attitude contents get traced to differences in the remote past—even hundreds of millions of years. Suppose that paleontologist Pam discovered a variety of fossilized imprints of what were dinosaurs. These Ediacara dinosaurs were later discovered to date from over 200 million years ago. Pam studies the fossils for several years and consciously thinks, on some occasion, “Ediacara had big feet.” In another possible world there were no Ediacara but Twediacara instead. In that otherwise physically identical world Pam thinks that Twediacara had big feet (if we tell the story in the standard externalist way).⁷

Now apply (1)-(19) to the Ediacara dinosaur thought experiment. The only premises up for grabs (assuming, with the pecenik, the truth of (1)-(4)) are (15) and (18) (since (8), (11), and (13) are obviously true). Thus, the pecenik has reject either (15) or (18). That amounts to endorsing one of the following.

- (a) There is some *wholly physical* token *part of* Pam's body in W_E (the Ediacara world) that does not exist in W_T (the Twediacara world) even though her body is atomically token identical in W_E and W_T (that's the rejection of (15) applied to the dinosaur story).
- (b) Although B_E (her Ediacara belief token) isn't a wholly physical token part of her *body* in W_E , it is a *wholly physical* token in W_E (that's the rejection of (18) applied to the dinosaur story). Since at least *some* portion of wholly physical token B_E has to be a part of her body in W_E (otherwise it could hardly be *her* wholly physical belief token in W_E), it must be constituted by wholly physical parts of her body *plus* some other

⁷ The preceding story is modified from a similar, roughly true, story suggested to me by Bernard Kobes for a different purpose.

wholly physical parts. As mentioned in (18), although Chalmers and Clark may have shown that one can have wholly physical attitude tokens wholly outside one's body (so there is no overlap between the token and the body), these are highly peculiar cases that obviously don't apply to Pam (or Alf).

Let me elaborate on the dinosaur thought experiment. In world W_E 200 million years ago there were these Ediacara dinosaurs running around. Accordingly, 200 million years ago in world W_T there were Twediacara running around. So there were real physical differences in the worlds back then. But let's suppose that in each world the (small) dinosaurs in question never ventured out of a 1000 square mile area. Then 200 million years ago in each world a small meteor smashed into that area instantly destroying everything in it and much of the surrounding area. Just a few dinosaur footprints (or other imprints) were preserved outside the blast zone. This happened in both W_E and W_T . The footprints that survived the meteor were token identical in the two worlds; after all, the dinosaurs had very similar feet. After that time, the two worlds were physically token identical for 200 million years. As long as I stay within the bounds of physical possibility, there is nothing problematic about this. And we need not use a fictional kind of dinosaur. Choose two real and similar kinds of dinosaurs (like I used walleye and sauger fish). In world W_E have just one kind; in world W_T have the other kind. By using two real kinds of dinosaurs we needn't worry that there is just one kind of dinosaur that shows up in each world (like some philosophers have complained that XYZ might just be another kind of water).⁸

Then 21st century paleontologist Pam discovers the footprints and after some investigation comes to think 'Ediacara had big feet.' In world W_E she had a thought token with one thought content and in world W_T she had a thought token with a different thought content; that's externalism, which we're simply assuming is true in order to follow up on its interesting consequences. If content

⁸ In fact, we could have *both* dinosaurs in *each* world, just like in the walleye-sauger thought experiment. Recall, though, that we're merely assuming the truth of externalism.

essentialism, externalism, and physicalism are true, then either (a) or (b) is true.

If option (b) is right, then B_E (her Ediacara belief token) isn't wholly constituted by parts of her body and yet it is a wholly physical entity. Thus, it must have some wholly physical parts outside of her body. But that is ridiculous. What would the other physical parts of her belief token be? Dinosaur parts from 200 million years ago? Her belief token is partly composed of dinosaurs? The unstated because perfectly obvious assumption among philosophers (physicalists and otherwise) has been that occurrent thought particulars, if wholly physical, are exhaustively composed of atomic particulars *in one's body* (modulo the Chalmers & Clark point mentioned in (18)), and atomic particulars in long-dead dinosaurs just don't count. Just because contents *supervene on* more than what's in the body is no reason to get excited and think that they are *composed of* token things outside one's body such as dinosaurs. Supervenience relations between sets of properties aren't composition relations between tokens. We can safely set (b) aside as a non-starter. If you disagree, then you can be a pecenik but only by endorsing an exceedingly counterintuitive metaphysics of thought.

So (a) is the best choice for the pecenik: there is some physical token part of Pam's body in W_E (that's belief B_E) that doesn't exist in W_T even though her body in W_E and W_T is atomically identical. According to (a) tokens B_E and B_T have the exact same atomic composition, formation, and environment—because they are composed of atomic tokens in Pam's body, which is atomically identical in W_E and W_T —and yet are mysteriously non-identical in virtue of some events from 200 million years ago. That is, *after a 200 million year period of perfect physical (and non-physical) token identity between W_E and W_T there arose a wholly physical token distinction between W_E and W_T directly due to the difference between the dinosaurs from 200 million years ago.* And all the physical laws and other principles are the same in the two worlds; physics is the same, chemistry is the same, biology is the same. In fact, even all the psychological laws are the same. I hope you're like me in thinking that this consequence—call it *Ugly Consequence₁*—is pretty counterintuitive. What would *cause* Pam to have different *wholly physical* tokens in her head in the two worlds after the two worlds had been token identical for 200 million years? It's this lack of a plausible cause that is fishy.

The pecenik has to accept Ugly Consequence₁. But she isn't the only one who has to accept

an ugly consequence. The dualist—who accepts (1)-(19)—denies that the thought tokens are wholly physical, but he accepts content essentialism, so he has *Ugly Consequence₂*: *after a 200 million year period of perfect token identity—physical and non-physical—between W_E and W_T , there arose a non-physical token distinction between W_E and W_T directly due to the wholly physical difference between the dinosaurs from 200 million years ago.* This is just about as ugly as *Ugly Consequence₁*.

I see one way the peacenik and dualist can try to avoid having to endorse the ugly consequences. In W_E some Ediacara dinosaur left footprint or other fossilized imprint F_E ; in W_T we have footprint token F_T ; Pam discovers F_E in W_E and she discovers F_T in W_T . One can argue that *being an Ediacara footprint* is an essential property of F_E ; so F_E isn't F_T even though F_T and F_E are atomically identical. Thus, the two worlds aren't physically token identical for 200 million years: they have different physical tokens in them during that time period. And Pam's perception of them caused distinct thought tokens in her mind (B_E and B_T).

I can't adequately rebut this option until I've set out the peacenik and dualist views in more detail. I'll return to the objection in §3.

It might look as though the externalist-physicalist has an easy way out of the predicament captured by (1)-(19), one that doesn't involve accepting either of the ugly consequences just noted. In the 1980s and part of the 1990s some theorists argued that propositional attitude tokens have essential contents, but the contents in question aren't typically given by 'that'-clauses as standard externalists think. The 'that'-clause or *linguistic* contents are had by the tokens contingently; it is their supervenient or "narrow" *mental* contents that tokens have essentially (e.g., such a view can be motivated via the arguments in Gabriel Segal 2000; Brian Loar 1987a, 1987b, 1988a, 1988b; Colin McGinn 1982; Fodor 1987, 1991; Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit 1988, 1993). These theorists concluded that the thought experiments show that Alf has distinct linguistic contents across worlds—in just one world he believes that walleye get bigger than sauger—but they prove nothing regarding the tokens' mental contents. Thus, we pass on wide content essentialism in favor of narrow content essentialism. Problem solved; and we didn't have to accept any ugly metaphysical consequences or pass on physicalism. Champagne for everyone.

The main problem with this dual content view has been exposed in many places: we simply don't have good evidence for another kind of content-like property that does the work narrow content is supposed to perform (e.g., have truth conditions and be psychologically explanatory).⁹ But matters have recently changed because Chalmers (2003) has what strikes me anyway as a genuinely new and promising narrow content theory. The difficulties raised in this essay for the peceniks and dualists might constitute an indirect argument for narrow content. But even if there is such a thing as narrow content, there are considerations, to be evaluated below, from which one might conclude that linguistic 'that'-clause content is essential to propositional attitude tokens. For the remainder of the essay, I will simply assume that there is no narrow content, while not forgetting this way out for the externalist-physicalist.

Thus, externalists (who accept (1)-(3) and don't buy narrow content theory) have no choice but to accept exactly one of the following positions:

- Accept (4)-(19), which includes content essentialism, thereby giving up physicalism;
- Reject content essentialism, (4);
- Accept content essentialism and reject (15), thereby opting for (a). In particular, if you're a pecenik, then you *must* endorse (a).

In the next section I elaborate on these options. In subsequent sections I will evaluate them.

2. Our Three Options: Dualism, Naturalism, Hyper-Pluralist PECE

⁹ For some of these arguments against an alternative type of content-like property see Burge 1986; Joseph Owens 1987, 1990, 1992; Bryan Frances 1999; Robert Stalnaker 1990; Fred Adams 1993; Adams and Aizawa 1994; Adams, Drebusenko, Fuller, and Stecker 1990; and Adams and Fuller 1992.

There is an interesting way to try to make (a) palatable so we can be peceniks even in the face of Ugly Consequence₁. One might attempt to offer a model of how the wholly physical thought tokens could be distinct across worlds even though their wholly physical atomic parts are not distinct across worlds (thereby offering a model as to how (15) might be false). Perhaps mental tokens are related to chunks or pluralities of atomic tokens as statues are related to hunks of clay or pluralities of bits of clay. It is commonly thought that statues are distinct from the hunks of clay (or gold, etc.) that constitute them. (A primary reason being that a statue cannot survive changes in makeup as well as the hunk of matter that materially coincides with it.) For convenience, pretend that occurrent propositional attitude thought tokens (e.g., a sudden realization that P) are like rocks in one's head, constituted by atoms in the brain (or atomic events or processes; it won't matter). Now consider the following claims (which are just claims, not constituting any argument).

20. Pam's actual Ediacara thought token B_E is wholly composed of some brain atoms which collectively make up brain chunk C.¹⁰
21. Pam's counterfactual Twediacara thought token B_T is wholly composed of those very same atoms (arranged in the very same way) that collectively make up the very same brain chunk C.
22. B_E isn't C; although the actual thought token might (epistemically) be materially coincident with a chunk of brain atoms, it's definitely distinct from it.
23. B_T isn't C; although the counterfactual thought token might (epistemically) be materially coincident with that very same chunk of brain atoms, it's definitely distinct from it.
24. B_E isn't B_T .

¹⁰ I'm assuming that if B_E is made of atomic entities, these entities are in Pam's body (brain, for convenience). Chunk C might be the "fusion" of those brain entities, in the philosophical sense of 'fusion'.

Let's get straight on the relations among these five claims.¹¹ If one rejects (24)—so one holds that $B_E = B_T$ —then one must reject (12), which when applied to paleontologist Pam is the claim that she does not have token B_E in W_T even though she has B_T in W_T . Here's why: if (12) is right, that is, if she has B_T but not B_E in W_T , then of course B_E isn't B_T . But that is just (24). That is, (24) is just a consequence of (12). Thus, since content essentialism and externalism have (12) as a consequence, the conjunction of content essentialism and externalism requires (24). Thus, since the peacenik and the dualist accept externalism and content essentialism, they accept (24) (which weds them both to their respective ugly consequences). Next point: if both (22) and (23) were false, then (24) would be false. So both the dualist and the peacenik have to say that at least one of (22) and (23) is true. But I assume that (22) and (23) stand or fall together. So, the dualist and the peacenik have to hold that each of (22)-(24) is true.¹² My penultimate assumption: (20) and (21) have the same truth-value. My last assumption: (20) is true if and only if dualism (for actual propositional attitude particulars) is false; this holds for the analogous (21) as well. So rejecting dualism and endorsing (20) and (21) are equivalent.

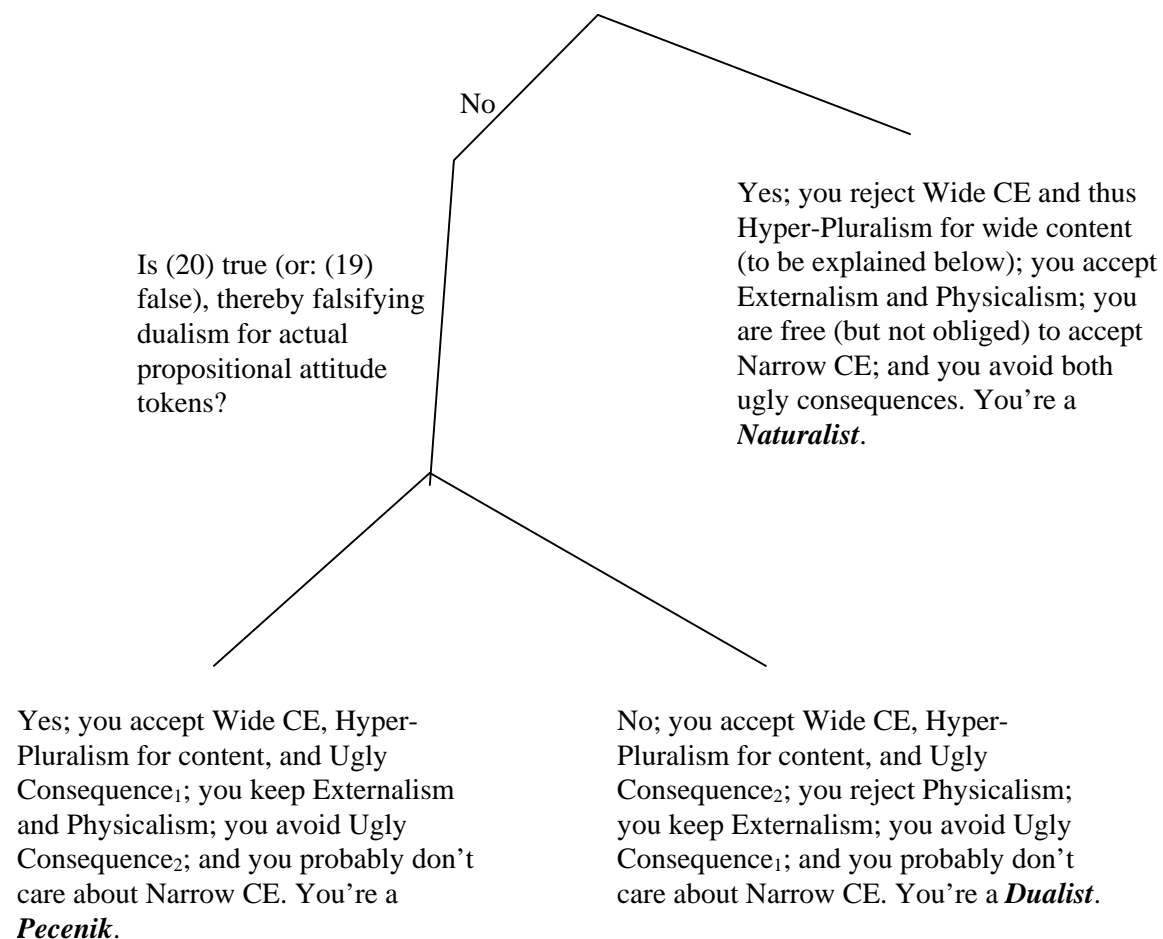
Of course one could be a physicalist and reject (20). Clearly, the rejection of (20) is nothing like a definition of dualism. One might think that there are no propositional attitude tokens. But I'm ignoring those views. Alternatively, one might think that those tokens exist and are physical but are not composed of brain tokens. I suspect that such a view isn't very plausible. In any case, I need a title for people who reject (20) and (21) and 'dualist' seems at least roughly accurate in the sense that most philosophers who would reject (20) and (21) will be dualists. If you disagree, then construe my use of 'dualist' as 'someone who thinks (20) and (21) are false'.

¹¹ I apologize for the complexity, but this is one of those philosophical problems that doesn't benefit from informality or anything else less than rigor.

¹² Furthermore, the arguments that Burge and the peacenik put forward support (22) and (23) if they support (24).

My task in the remainder of this essay is to evaluate the three externalist positions. The *dualist* accepts (22)-(24) (as well as (1)-(19)) and denies (20) and (21). The *hyper-pluralist pecenik* accepts (20)-(24) (and (1)-(14), while denying (15)). The use of ‘hyper-pluralist’ will be explained below. The *naturalist* denies (24) (thereby rejecting content essentialism, as described in the previous paragraph) and affirms (20) and (21) (thereby accepting physicalism). (Her position on (22) and (23) will be discussed at the end of §5.) We can adjudicate among the three views by focusing on (20) and (24) alone, as the remaining three claims (21)-(23) are superfluous for this purpose (see tree diagram).

Is (24) false, thereby falsifying Wide Content Essentialism (Wide CE)?



For the most part, the dualist and the pecenik agree: the only things that divide them are their slightly different ugly consequences and their opinions on physicalism, which is tantamount to (20). My task is to adjudicate among these three positions by evaluating (20) and (24).

3. The Argument by Analogy for Content Essentialism, Part One

I know of two reasonably good arguments for (24), which as I argued above is for externalists tantamount to content essentialism. One is Burge's, to be considered in §5. The other is an argument by analogy and the focus of this and the next section. But before I get to the analogy argument I want to dispense with two inadequate but perhaps initially tempting arguments for content essentialism.

First, one can insist that a thought token is simply identical to the event of someone's thinking on an occasion.¹³ There is literally no distinction between the thought token and the instance of thinking. Furthermore, and this is the crucial thesis T, if (i) in one possible world particular A is nothing over and above an instantiation of grasping content property X (A = Pam's grasping the content X that Ediacara are great), (ii) in another possible world particular B is nothing over and above an instantiation of grasping content property Y (B = Pam's grasping the content Y that Twediacara are great), and (iii) nothing can have both X and Y in a world, then $A \neq B$. However, I fail to see why we should buy *this* notion of instantiation. One can simply *define* 'instantiation' in such a way that T comes out true. But then we need quite an argument that thought tokens are "instantiations" in this special sense. I know of no compelling reason to think thought tokens are such instantiations, so that T applies to them. This attempt to defend content essentialism is not persuasive, at least not in my judgment. Such essentialism might be true, of course, but it's not *this* easy to defend it.

It would of course be a confusion to think it's simply obvious that since the Ediacara and Twediacara content properties are incompatible, the corresponding thought tokens B_E and B_T must be distinct. In one world person P is sitting and in another world person Q is standing; even though those are incompatible properties P and Q might be identical.¹⁴ The person who denies content essentialism

¹³ Thanks to Bernard Kobes for suggesting I treat this argument.

¹⁴ Andrew McGonigal reminds me that a genuine modal realist will disagree, and is not the victim of any elementary confusion, but I'm simply setting aside that theory.

is not implying that a token can have both contents simultaneously in one world. We may, if we like, admit that no token can have, in one possible world, both contents (at the same time or, stronger, at different times). In questioning content essentialism we are questioning the principle that a token with one content cannot, in *another* possible world, lack that content.

Here is the second inconclusive argument. Someone (not me!) might say that if thought tokens don't have their contents essentially, then one could believe that P in one world, not believe that P in another world, and yet have the very same belief in both worlds.¹⁵ But if in one situation you believe that P and in another you don't, then given that there are no troubling indexical or otherwise odd elements how could you possibly have the same beliefs—including *the belief that P*—in both situations?

But that *reductio* for content essentialism is crucially ambiguous. It is compelling if 'belief' means *belief type*; the intuition is that a distinction in content makes for a distinction in belief type. A belief type is just the combination of a content and the attitude of belief (as opposed to doubt, say). But we need the argument for content essentialism to have 'belief' mean *belief token*; and when construed that way my intuitions just fade out. As far as I have determined, the intuition about types is the only fairly obvious self-evident truth that might be taken to support content essentialism, but of course it does not support it. It would indeed be *so* convenient if we could just quickly discover a priori, through a simple argument, whether content essentialism is true, and thus not have to slog through the considerations of this paper. I'm not saying that a priori insight isn't up to the task. But if it is, the discovery isn't going to be quick and easy.

Let's move on to the argument by analogy. Consider the following five claims, which are analogous to (20)-(24):

¹⁵ All I'm saying is that if content essentialism is false, then a belief token could have one content in one world, a different content in a second world, and in that second world might still be a belief (instead of a fear, say). But it *need* not be a belief in the second world, if the necessity of propositional attitude stance (e.g., belief, fear, hope, etc.) fails.

25. Actual statue S_1 is made of atoms which make up clay hunk H.¹⁶
26. Counterfactual statue S_2 is made of those very same atoms (arranged in the very same way) that make up the very same clay hunk H.
27. S_1 isn't H; the statue is materially coincident with but distinct from the hunk of clay atoms.
28. S_2 isn't H.
29. S_1 isn't S_2 .¹⁷

If we can come up with a decent argument for (25)-(29), then perhaps it will be relatively painless to accept (24), as (20)-(24) are analogous to (25)-(29). And remember, rejecting (24) forces the externalist to reject (12) and therefore reject content essentialism (that's why (24) is tantamount to content essentialism, at least for externalists).

Obviously, if you think that statues and materially coincident hunks are identical, so you're a *monist* (sometimes called *anti-constitutionalist* or *constitution-as-identity advocate* or even *one-thinger*), then you can't endorse this argument by analogy based on (25)-(29) because you'll reject each of (27)-(29). Thus, if you're a content essentialist who wants to use an argument by analogy based on (25)-(29), then you can't be a monist about statues. Since loads of philosophers are monists about statues and much else, none of them can endorse content essentialism on the basis of an argument by analogy with statues. Monists about statues must, on pain of inconsistency, either reject externalism, reject content essentialism, or argue that contents are relevantly different from the

¹⁶ I am not assuming or denying that hunks of clay are fusions, as certain metaphysicians use 'fusion'. 'Hunk' is an ordinary, non-stipulative, term of English and as a consequence any thesis regarding persistence conditions for, or other relevant facts about, hunks will not be true by philosophical stipulation.

¹⁷ These aren't intended to constitute an argument; it's just a list of claims.

property of being a statue. This makes sense. If you're a monist, then you don't think that being a statue, for instance, is an essential property of statues. So it isn't too surprising if you also think contents aren't essential properties of propositional attitude tokens either.

But of course some ontologists reject monism, perhaps the most famous being David Wiggins (1968 and 1980). These philosophers say that the statue is a material object coincident with but distinct from the hunk of clay. I want to meet the peacenik and dualist half way: I'll allow that there are excellent reasons for being a pluralist about statues; I'll also assume that pluralism is a genuinely coherent and explanatory view. These are no small assumptions (see, e.g., Eric Olson 2001)! For the most part, I'll be arguing that even if there are such reasons for such a view, they don't support content essentialism.

The pluralist view about statues is usually motivated by a Leibniz's Law argument, as follows. At 7am I started digging in the ground gathering bits of clay. By noon I had made a hunk of clay Blob that was just a hunk sitting on my table. Then by 1pm I had molded it into Rover, an ordinary statue of a dog, without wasting even one piece of clay or making many significant changes (lucky for me Blob was close to being dog-shaped to begin with). Then at 2pm I smashed it flat as a pancake, although it was still in one piece. To some ears, each of the following sounds true.

30. At noon Blob existed; at noon Rover did not exist (yet).
31. At 2pm Blob was flat as a pancake; at 2pm Rover wasn't flat as a pancake (as he didn't survive the flattening).
32. I made Rover in an hour (from 12 to 1); I didn't make Blob in an hour (it took from 7 to 12).
33. Rover is valuable; Blob isn't valuable. (In order to make the latter plausible, pretend that Blob is made of cheap materials so that if Rover were squashed people wouldn't pay much for the clay.)

34. I admire Rover's eyes; I don't admire Blob's eyes (presumably because Blob doesn't even have eyes).¹⁸

If any of these were indeed true but seemed to have an opaque context (akin to 'convinced that P' or 'persuasively demonstrated that P'), then one would be foolish to accept the inference to the conclusion that Rover \neq Blob (on the basis of (30)-(34) anyway). But we have reason for thinking that at least some of those contexts are transparent. So the inference to pluralism is a good one; the Leibniz's Law argument for the non-identity of Rover and Blob is good, albeit inconclusive.

However, even if that argument is conclusive, which of course it isn't, it doesn't offer decent support for the content essentialist's crucial (24): all it gets us is (25)-(28); it doesn't do anything to justify (29), the claim analogous to (24):

25. Actual statue S_1 is made of atoms that make up clay hunk H.
26. Counterfactual statue S_2 is made of those very same atoms that make up the very same clay hunk H.
27. S_1 isn't H; the statue is materially coincident with but distinct from the hunk of clay atoms.
28. S_2 isn't H.
29. S_1 isn't S_2 .

Here's why. Remember that the content essentialist (as either dualist or pecenik) wants to argue that two thought tokens, in different possible worlds, are non-identical in virtue of having non-identical contents. The analogous statue situation would be two statues, in different worlds, that are distinct. We don't need what (25)-(28) give us, the distinctness of a statue from its hunk; or, rather, that's not *enough*. Even if the metaphysical pluralists are right that statues are distinct from the hunks they are

¹⁸ (33) and (34) come from Kit Fine 2003.

so intimately related to, it is a *further* step to (29). The content essentialist who wants to use an argument by analogy for content essentialism needs distinctness between *statues* (claim (29)), not just distinctness between a statue and a hunk (claims (27) and (28)).

Now we see why the pecenik (or dualist, who also accepts (24)) has to be a *hyper-pluralist* about content, and not just any old pluralist about content. The pluralist about statues accepts (25)-(28) in virtue of the strength of the standard Leibniz's Law arguments. But she need not go as far as the hyper-pluralist, who by definition accepts (29) as well, since the standard Leibniz's Law arguments don't justify (29) even if they justify (27) and (28). The same holds for the content case: the content essentialist who wants to argue for (24) by mounting an argument by analogy focusing on statues can't *just* argue for pluralism for statues. Instead, she has to hold that in the statue scenario there are statues S_1 and S_2 that in worlds 1 and 2 are statues with the very same atomic makeup, environment, and local history but which have distinct necessary properties. This isn't just pluralism; this is pluralism on steroids, hyper-pluralism.

So, the content essentialist could well do with a new Leibniz's Law argument, one that gets us (29). Here it is. Suppose S_1 is a bust of Socrates. Is there a possible world in which S_1 exists, it's atomically unchanged, it's a statue, and yet it's a bust not of Socrates but of Socrates' brother? I'm guessing that many people who think there are non-trivial essentialist properties will answer negatively.¹⁹ The point is even more convincing if we consider portraits instead of statues: a portrait of David Hume surely could not have been a portrait of his brother or anyone else. Not only is *being a statue* essential to any statue, *being a statue of X* is essential to any statue of X; analogously, not only is being a portrait essential to any portrait, being a portrait of X is essential to any portrait of X. The fusion of the paint and the canvas has neither property essentially. Or so a hyper-pluralist might argue.

Now if having content P is analogous to being a portrait or statue of X, then it looks as though

¹⁹ The point isn't trivial. In most cases being F is not an essential property of anything that is F; being head of department isn't an essential property of those people who are heads of departments.

just as (29) is true, so S_1 isn't S_2 , (24) is true as well: B_E isn't B_T . That is, B_E isn't B_T for the same reason that an actual portrait of David Hume is not identical with a counterfactual portrait of Hume's brother, no matter that the two portraits are made of the very same matter, have virtually the very same history, have the very same ordinary physical properties, etc. That's the argument by analogy for (24) (which, you'll recall, the externalist needs to endorse in order to endorse content essentialism).

In the next section I will evaluate this argument by analogy. But first I need to fulfill a promise made near the end of §1. At this point I have developed the materials needed to adequately discuss the only possible way the pecenik and dualist can avoid the ugly consequences mentioned in §1. Recall that in W_E some Ediacara dinosaur left footprint F_E ; in W_T we have footprint token F_T . One can argue that *being an Ediacara footprint* is an essential property of F_E ; so F_E isn't F_T . Thus, contrary to the two ugly consequences the two worlds aren't physically token identical for 200 million years: they have distinct physical tokens in them during that time period. Note that it won't do to argue that F_E has as a matter of necessity the property of being a footprint; that would be mere pluralism for footprints (footprints are like statues) and wouldn't distinguish F_E from F_T . No, in order to avoid the ugly consequences we need to endorse *hyper-pluralism* for footprints: F_E has as a matter of necessity both *being a footprint* and *being of Ediacara*.

I don't know if hyper-pluralism is plausible for footprints. But in any case, we can change the example somewhat to avoid that problem. Suppose Pam is the only person to study the footprints. She writes copiously about them and dies without telling anyone of her research. The footprints are destroyed, as are all casts of them. Two hundred years later her writings are discovered and the scientific community starts having Ediacara thoughts (or Twedicara thoughts, in the counterfactual world). In this case it looks as though there is a two hundred year period of complete physical token identity in W_T and W_E (provided the destruction is done appropriately). So the ugly consequences come back to haunt the pecenik and dualist—unless we want to claim that Pam's word tokens, written on scraps of paper or saved on computer disc, are distinct across worlds. We might adopt a hyper-pluralism for word tokens. This might not be as crazy as it sounds. David Kaplan (1990, 118) flirts

with it, wondering whether our word ‘Hesperus’ could have been a name for Alpha Centuri. If not, then presumably when Pam writes ‘E,’ ‘d,’ ‘i,’ ‘a,’ ‘c,’ ‘a,’ ‘r,’ ‘a’ she writes distinct words in the two worlds. Kaplan suggests that these words are not physical objects; he says, “they are objects of the created realm, created by language makers” (1990, 117). (Perhaps they are on an ontological par with fictional people, places, and the like.)

I have trouble with this hyper-essentialism about the words saved on Pam’s computer. Suppose Pam never used a name of the dinosaur that left the footprints she studied. Instead, she just used descriptions, pronouns, and the like. Then two hundred years later in both worlds the scientists who discover her writings come up with ‘Ediacara.’ In this case I can’t imagine there is any reason for thinking that her words are distinct across worlds (I don’t think Kaplan would disagree). So we can fashion a thought experiment so there is an arbitrarily long period of token identity across worlds. Thus, it doesn’t look as though there will be an escape from the ugly consequences. In addition, we are about to see that there are some good reasons for rejecting hyper-pluralism even for statues (let alone footprints and words).

4. The Argument by Analogy for Content Essentialism, Part Two

What follows is a series of arguments, pro and con, regarding the quality of the argument by analogy for content essentialism.

I begin with an objection to the argument by analogy. A vending machine that dispenses Cokes—a Coke machine—could have been atomically identical and yet have been a Pepsi machine.²⁰ And a statue or painting that expresses joy could have been atomically identical and yet express some other emotion.²¹ If having content P is like being a Coke machine or expressing joy, then it looks as

²⁰ The example is inspired by a similar one in Daniel Dennett 1987. More on his view below.

²¹ What emotion is expressed depends on the cognitive makeup and history of the viewers, the creator, and subject depicted. A statue of Hitler comforting children expresses different emotions in a world

though (24) and content essentialism is false, as those properties aren't essential to thought tokens.

(Remember: if externalism and content essentialism are true then (24) is true.) *Hence, the viability of the argument by analogy for content essentialism rests on whether having content P is like being a portrait of X (essential property) or whether it is like being expressive of joy/being a Coke machine (non-essential property).*

Here is a reason for thinking that having the content that P is like being a portrait of X, thereby supporting (24) and content essentialism. Consider externalism for beliefs about *objects*, and not natural kinds. In the actual world I believe that Moses had big feet; in the counterfactual world I don't have that belief because in Moses' place Schmoses did all the famous things Moses did and had Moses' name, fame, and Kripkean chain. In fact, counterfactual Schmoses and actual Moses are alike as you please, but they are clearly two people (use your philosophical story telling skills here; e.g., in the counterfactual world Moses dies as an infant and Schmoses is his younger and extremely similar brother). According to externalism I have different belief contents in the two worlds; and according to content essentialism, I have distinct belief tokens in the two worlds. And it will undoubtedly be noted that believing that X had big feet is much more like being a portrait of X than it is like being expressive of joy, as both believing X had big feet and being a portrait of X seem to be referentially dependent on the existence of X. Thus, since (i) content essentialism is very attractive for *being a portrait of X*, (ii) content essentialism is almost as attractive for *believing that* object X had big feet as it is for being a portrait of X (so it follows from (i) and (ii) that content essentialism is very attractive for object-dependent beliefs), and (iii) content essentialism for beliefs in natural kinds is on a par with content essentialism for beliefs in objects, we might as well accept it for beliefs in kinds if we're going to accept it for portraits. Thus, the content that Ediacara were F is essential; so (24) and content essentialism are true.

This is the place to bring up a consideration that may have crossed some readers' minds, one that casts doubt on the argument for (24) and content essentialism in the previous paragraph.

in which he was a saint. The point could be made with other examples!

Externalism says that *de dicto*-ascribed contents are much more like *de re*-ascribed contents than we had thought. If my uses of ‘Moses’ had come from Schmoses instead of Moses, then my belief ascribed by ‘Moses had big feet’ would have had a different content. That makes it seem like a *de re* belief content, as it tracks the object of the belief. This isn’t to say that *de dicto* beliefs are really *de re* beliefs; it’s just to note that the externalist thinks there are strong similarities between the two. I suppose everyone agrees that *de re* beliefs—the mental state tokens, not the contents—don’t have their *de re* contents essentially. To use one of Burge’s own (1982) examples, if in the actual world I believe of apple 1 that it’s ripe whereas in the counterfactual world I believe of a distinct apple 2 that it’s ripe (the apples looking identical), there is no reason to think my *de re* attitude tokens are distinct even though their contents are distinct. Burge the content essentialist agrees with this view: those *de re* belief tokens are identical in those worlds even though they are about different apples and hence have different contents.

But now it is easy to be puzzled. The content essentialists say to us that believing that Ediacara had big feet is just like being a portrait of X; and since the latter is essential to portraits, the former is essential to thought tokens. Then they tell us that believing that Ediacara had big feet is similar to a *de re* belief and the latter doesn’t have its content essentially. But why should we accept the Ediacara-portrait analogy when it comes to content essentialism for *de dicto* beliefs? Why not instead accept the Ediacara-*de re* analogy and conclude that content essentialism is false for the Ediacara belief? It certainly looks as though these analogies are not strong enough to either support or refute content essentialism.

Here is an argument *against* (25)-(29), which would of course ruin the argument by analogy for (24) and content essentialism. It is reasonable to be a monist for statues on the grounds that, roughly put, a material object *gets to be* a statue in virtue of some people taking the appropriate “statue attitudes and actions” toward it. To say that X is a statue is to say very little about X and quite a bit about us. Thus, there is really little reason to think that statues are statues essentially: such essentialism would mean that the material things we have the statue attitudes and actions toward *had* to be the focus of such attitudes and actions in order to even exist, which is implausible. A similar

point holds for being a portrait of X: it isn't an essential property of the things that have it because the property really isn't focused on the material object but us. This is the bare bones of a monist argument motivated not by the desire to avoid material coincidence or essential properties but by a view regarding what it takes to be an artwork.

One might object that even if this monism-for-statues-and-portraits argument is reasonable, it can't be adjusted to mount a decent monism-for-thought-tokens argument. For a thought token doesn't get to be a thought token in virtue of our treating it a certain way, with the "thought attitudes and actions," as might be true for statues and portraits of X.

However, one can challenge the previous sentence. For instance, Dennett has argued for a response-dependence view of content.

What it is to be a true believer is to be an intentional system, a system whose behavior is reliably and voluminously predictable via the intentional strategy. ...[A]ll there is to really and truly believing that p (for any proposition p) is being an intentional system for which p occurs as a belief in the best (most predictive) interpretation (1987; 15, 29).

Those familiar with Dennett's writings know that they are not exactly easy to interpret. But if Dennett's right, then it seems unlikely that thought tokens have their contents essentially. Instead, X's having a content C is like being expressive of joy or being a Coke machine: it has more to do with how X is interpreted or treated than with how X is in itself. This makes one think that if Dennett is right, then content essentialism is false and naturalism is true. But on the other hand, if one is tempted to endorse Dennett's view, then one will be pretty suspicious of this whole essay, since all members of the debate assume something that is doubtful on Dennett's theory: the idea that if S just suddenly realized that P, then there is a particular realization *token* of S's that has the content that P.

Let's face it: although the preceding string of arguments regarding the quality of the argument by analogy are ones that we definitely need to consider and may be initially tempting, it turns out after evaluation that by themselves they don't settle anything. More forgivingly: they show that the

argument by analogy for being a pecenik or dualist isn't compelling. But although the argument by analogy is in the end unpersuasive, it does provide a useful *model* of how one can be a pecenik or dualist: adopt hyper-pluralism for content on the analogy of hyper-pluralism for being a statue of X. It also suggests the way to construct a *good* argument for content essentialism: find a case in which it is very plausible that hyper-pluralism holds for some property P that is "object-centered" like content and not "us-centered" like being a statue or portrait of X; then argue that since P is so similar to content properties, contents must be hyper-essential as well. If I had found a case that met all those conditions you'd be reading about it here.

5. Burge's Argument for Content Essentialism

I think that an externalist could be forgiven for thinking that rejecting content essentialism—and thus accepting naturalism—is the *obvious* best choice. Even so, Burge claims that he knows "of no plausible or even serious arguments against" content essentialism, its denial being "absurd" (1993, 110; cf 1979, 110-113). He believes that content essentialism is "self-evident", although this is no *easy* self-evidence.²² On the contrary, I think the main conclusion of §§1-4 above supplies us with a plausible if inconclusive argument against content essentialism: if content essentialism and externalism are true, then either (i) some kind of weird essentialism—hyper-pluralism—is true for contents, Ugly Consequence₁ is true, and physicalism is true; or (ii) hyper-pluralism is true for contents, physicalism is false for actual thought particulars, and Ugly Consequence₂ is true. *That's the upshot of my investigation thus far.* PECE is (i); dualism is (ii). Furthermore, we have another good argument against Burge: since (i) is more attractive than (ii), the externalist who finds content essentialism compelling need not go so far as Burge and reject physicalism. No externalist need reject physicalism *even if she finds content essentialism irresistible*; Burge's argument against physicalism is thereby defused. However, my main concern in the rest of the paper is not whether Burge is wrong

²² As Burge remarked in correspondence.

and PECE is better than dualism but whether content essentialism is true.

Burge's argument for content essentialism and therefore against naturalism proceeds as follows.²³ The system of intentional content attribution is, he claims,

the fundamental means for identifying intentional mental states and events in psychological explanation and in our self-attributions. In fact, we have no other systematic way. [The content system is] our only way of individuating intentional mental events that provides systematic understanding, description, and explanation of mental events and intentional activity. ...[S]uch content is the explanatory and identificatory centre of those events. We have little else to go on in talking about the causal powers and ontology of the mental. Systematic, informative, important explanatory schemes—like our mentalistic one—usually (there are special cases) make the strongest claim for providing individuating descriptions that indicate what is essential to the identities of individuals, particulars, or instances (1993, 110-111).

A premise of Burge's argument is that the content system provides the only way to generate systematic understanding, description, and explanation of intentional mental entities. For instance, we have no network of neurophysiological descriptions that performs these tasks. Then he claims that since we have seen that content is the *only* handle on thought tokens, those tokens must have those contents essentially. In order to support his essentialism he needs at the least a much stronger

²³ John Gibbons (1993) discusses some issues involved in adjudicating between content essentialism and physicalism but I assume was unable (due to publication date) to consider Burge's (1993) primary argument for such essentialism. Others have offered discussions of externalism vis-à-vis physicalism and content essentialism, but these are quite different from my own and none has uncovered the key role of essentialism, composition, and the ugly consequences; see Cynthia MacDonald 1990, William Seager 1992, Keith Butler 1996, Davidson 1987, Eric Sidel 1994, and Mark Rowlands 1992.

privilege premise: the content system will *always* be our *only* primary explanatory-descriptive system for understanding mental events and intentional activity. Otherwise, if our reliance on the content system is merely temporary until we come up with another highly useful system of description for propositional attitude tokens, why should we put so much essentialist stock in our current, perhaps scientifically immature, explanatory system?

I see little reason to accept the privilege premise. Why can't our exclusive reliance on content notions be temporary? Why should we think that we will never find other systems of predicates that are true of thought tokens and provide the resources for systematic explanation and understanding of mental states? Furthermore, even if no other system of predicates will ever quite do the job of the content system, that still doesn't mean that thought tokens have their contents essentially. The content essentialist may reasonably retain the idea—which is crucially different from but closely related to the privilege premise—that the primary means for providing systematic understanding of the *semantic* relations among attitude tokens will always be the content system. *But this entails nothing regarding the essential or individuating properties of attitude tokens.* I'll show how this is so with an analogy. It may be that the only way to get systematic understanding of the economic relations among forms of currency is by means of the system of economic predicates, but that doesn't mean that economic tokens such as dollar bills—the pieces of paper—have their economic properties essentially. Of course the dualist can argue that dollar bills aren't identical with the pieces of paper that compose them; he can be an essentialist about some economic properties. But now we are back to where we ended up with the first argument by analogy: if having the content that P is like being a portrait of X, then content essentialism is pretty reasonable (although we still have the monist's indiscernibility objection and ugly consequences), but if content is like being expressive of joy or being a Coke machine or *de re* belief, then contents are had contingently.

I admit that it isn't difficult to feel *some* initial attraction for the content essentialist's view. We have this wonderful set of predicates and concepts that buys us incredible explanatory and predictive power. These predicates or concepts form a coherent system. We know of virtually no other interesting properties had by content tokens. For any given thought token our only handle on it

is its content, its mode (belief, fear, et cetera), its time of occurrence, and its agent. Doesn't that suggest that content properties are essential?²⁴ But again, I don't see why we should accept the essentialism in many other cases, let alone the hyper-pluralism of the peccenik or dualist. I admit that it's odd that we don't have any uncontroversial knowledge of non-trivial properties had by content tokens that don't belong to the content system. That is a bit peculiar and should give one pause. But cognitive science is awfully young as sciences go.

Furthermore, *the naturalist need not reject all essential properties of thought tokens*. Perhaps a thought token could not have failed to be a thought. And perhaps a belief token could not have failed to be a belief, instead of a doubt or wish. Because of those essential properties the naturalist can *accept* pluralism with regard to thought tokens, (22) and (23) from before:

22. B_E isn't C; although the actual thought token might (epistemically) be materially coincident with a chunk of brain atoms (or processes or events), it's definitely distinct from it.
23. B_T isn't C; although the counterfactual thought token might (epistemically) be materially coincident with that very same chunk of brain atoms, it's definitely distinct from it.

She draws the line at wide content: since wide content has to do with highly contingent, even

²⁴ I am among many metaphysicians who suspect that time of occurrence is not essential. I had a conversation at 12:12pm with a colleague, but I could have had the very same conversation token five minutes later if a student had interrupted us. In fact, we could have had the conversation token in my office instead of the hallway. But we couldn't have had the same conversation token ten years earlier. The vagueness here can make one adopt any of all sorts of radically counterintuitive views. We just may be forced to take one; so essentialism about time of occurrence isn't crazy, even though it is counterintuitive.

accidental, relations to the environment, thought tokens don't have such contents essentially, even though they are thoughts essentially. She is then free to reject (24) and content essentialism. Of course she can reject all interesting essential properties, but my point here is that she doesn't have to in order to avoid content essentialism and its accompanying hazards.²⁵

References

- Adams, F.: 1993, 'Fodor's Modal Argument', *Philosophical Psychology* 6, 41-56.
- Adams, F. and Aizawa, K.: 1994, 'Fodorian Semantics', in Stich and Warfield (eds.), *Mental Representations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 223-242.
- Adams, F., Drebusenko, D., Fuller, G., and Stecker, R.: 1990, 'Narrow Content: Fodor's Folly', *Mind & Language* 5, 213-229.
- Adams, F. and Fuller, G.: 1992, 'Names, Contents, and Causes', *Mind & Language* 7, 205-221.
- Burge, T.: 1979, 'Individualism and the Mental', in French, Uehling, Jr., and Wettstein (eds) *Midwest Studies in Philosophy: Studies in Metaphysics*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 73-122.
- Burge, T.: 1982, 'Other Bodies', in Woodfield (ed) *Thought and Object*, Oxford University Press, New York, 97-120.
- Burge, T.: 1986, 'Individualism and Psychology', *The Philosophical Review* 95, 3-45.
- Burge, T.: 1989, 'Essentialism and Causation in Psychology', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 70, 303-322.
- Burge, T.: 1992, 'Philosophy of Language and Mind: 1950-1990', *Philosophical Review* 101, 3-51.

²⁵ Thanks to Tyler Burge, Bernard Kobes, Eugenio Lombardo, and Joseph Owens for enlightening conversations or correspondence on issues raised in this essay. Special thanks to Andrew McGonigal for suggesting several good points and providing comments that saved me from some embarrassing mistakes.

- Burge, T.: 1993, 'Mind-Body Causation and Explanatory Practice', in Heil and Mele (eds) *Mental Causation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 97-120.
- Burge, T.: 1995, 'Reply: Intentional Properties and Causation', in Macdonald and Macdonald (eds) *Philosophy of Psychology*, Basil Blackwell, Inc., Cambridge, MA, 226-235.
- Butler, K.: 1996, 'Content, Causal Powers, and Context', *Philosophy of Science* 63, 105-114.
- Chalmers, D.: 2003, 'The Nature of Narrow Content', *Philosophical Issues* 13, 46-66.
- Clark, A. and Chalmers, D.: 1998, 'The Extended Mind', *Analysis* 58, 10-23.
- Davidson, D.: 1987, 'Knowing One's Own Mind', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 60, 441-458.
- Dennett, D.: 1987, *The Intentional Stance*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Fine, K.: 2003, 'The Non-Identity of a Material Thing and Its Matter', *Mind* 112, 195-234.
- Fodor, J.: 1987, *Psychosemantics*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Fodor, J.: 1990, *A Theory of Content and Other Essays*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Fodor, J.: 1991, 'A Modal Argument for Narrow Content', *Journal of Philosophy* 88, 5-26.
- Frances, B.: 1999, 'On the Explanatory Deficiencies of Linguistic Content', *Philosophical Studies* 93, 45-75.
- Kaplan, D.: 1990, 'Words', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 64, 93-119.
- Kripke, S.: 1972/1980, *Naming and Necessity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Kripke, S.: 1979/1988, 'A Puzzle About Belief', in Margalit (ed) *Meaning and Use*, D. Reidel, Dordrecht, 239-83. Reprinted in Salmon and Soames (eds) *Propositions and Attitudes*, Oxford University Press, New York, 102-148.
- Gibbons, J.: 1993, 'Identity Without Supervenience', *Philosophical Studies* 70, 59-79.
- Jackson, F. and Pettit, P.: 1988, 'Functionalism and Broad Content', *Mind* 97, 381-400.
- Jackson, F. and Pettit, P.: 1993, 'Some Content is Narrow', in Heil and Mele (eds) *Mental Causation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 259-282.
- Lewis, D.: 1986, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Loar, B.: 1987a, 'Subjective Intentionality', *Philosophical Topics* 15, 89-124.

- Loar, B.: 1987b, 'Names in Thought', *Philosophical Studies* 51, 169-185.
- Loar, B.: 1988a, 'Social Content and Psychological Content', in Grimm and Merrill (eds) *Contents of Thought*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 99-109.
- Loar, B.: 1988b, 'Two Kinds of Content', in Grimm and Merrill (eds) *Contents of Thought*, University of Arizona Press, Tucson, 121-139.
- MacDonald, C.: 1990, 'Weak Externalism and Mind-Body Identity', *Mind* 99, 387-404.
- McGinn, C.: 1982, 'The Structure of Content', in Woodfield (ed) *Thought and Object*, Oxford University Press, New York, 207-258.
- Olson, E.: 2001, 'Material Coincidence and the Indiscernability Problem', *Philosophical Quarterly* 51, 337-355.
- Owens, J.: 1987, 'In Defense of a Different Doppelgänger', *The Philosophical Review* 96, 521-554
- Owens, J.: 1990, 'Cognitive Access and Semantic Puzzles', in Anderson and Owens (eds) *Propositional Attitudes*, CSLI Press, Palo Alto, CA, 147-174.
- Owens, J.: 1992, 'Psychophysical Supervenience: Its Epistemological Foundation', *Synthese* 90, 89-117.
- Owens, J.: 1993, 'Content, Causation, and Psychophysical Supervenience', *Philosophy of Science* 60, 242-261.
- Putnam, H.: 1975, 'The Meaning of 'Meaning'', in his *Mind, Language, and Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Rowlands, M.: 1992, 'Externalism and Token-Token Identity', *Philosophia* 22, 359-375.
- Saidel, E.: 1994, 'Content and Causal Powers', *Philosophy of Science* 61, 658-665.
- Seager, W.: 1992, 'Externalism and Token Identity', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42, 439-448.
- Stalnaker, R.: 1990, 'Narrow Content', in Anderson and Owens (eds) *Propositional Attitudes*, CSLI Press, Palo Alto, CA, 131-146.
- Wiggins, D.: 1968, 'On Being in the Same Place at the Same Time', *Philosophical Review* 77, 90-95.
- Wiggins, D.: 1980, *Sameness and Substance*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.