

# 15 Davidson and Forms of Anti-Individualism: Reply to Hahn

Martin Hahn's essay is a fresh and illuminating discussion of differences between my views and those of Donald Davidson on issues associated with anti-individualism. I think that Hahn is right to emphasize differences, and right about where most of the fundamental differences lie. In some places I cannot answer questions he raises about Davidson's views. I will try mainly to answer for my own. First, I want to make some general points about anti-individualism.

## I

Hahn is right to see the relevance of "Belief *De Re*" to my arguments for anti-individualism (Burge 1977, pp. 338–362). That article is the main conceptual forerunner in my work to "Individualism and the Mental" (1979) and "Other Bodies" (1982). Hahn is also right that I do not argue for or even advocate anti-individualism in "Belief *De Re*."

There are two theses in that article that are relevant to the development of anti-individualism. One is the thesis that having *de re* attitudes is necessary for having any propositional attitudes at all. Hence they are necessary for having *de dicto* attitudes.<sup>1</sup> This thesis hinges on the claim that for a creature to have propositional attitudes, with their attendant intentionality, it (or, I would now add, some progenitor) must engage in activity or enter into relations that connect those attitudes with their subject matter. This activity and these relations must not be merely relations of conceiving of the subject matter. Some must be nonconceptual, and some must even be nonintentional. Demonstrative applications of intentional types to individual objects are the primary sort of intentional but nonconceptual relations. Causal relations in ordinary perception are paradigmatic of relevant nonintentional relations in actual cognitive activity. But I indicated that they are not the only relevant relations. I avoided claiming that ordinary perception of objects in the physical world is metaphysically necessary for intentionality.

The key idea of this thesis is that the intentionality of *all* of an individual's conceptual states depends on further relations, including nonconceptual and even nonintentional relations, between *some* of the individual's states, on one hand, and entities that are referential objects of the intentional states, on the other. These relations underlie and make possible *de re* attitudes. *De re* attitudes make possible *de dicto* attitudes.<sup>2</sup> This is a completely general thesis that makes no commitment to what the subject matter of the *de re* attitudes has to be. The thesis makes no special mention of the environment beyond the individual's body.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Hahn overstates what I argued when he writes that for me "*De Re* beliefs are irreducibly relational (acts of application of a conceptual content to an object in the environment)" (p. 34). I think that they are, in a certain sense, irreducibly relational. I think that

perceptual relations to objects in an environment are paradigmatic in the actual circumstances in which human beings operate. But I did not maintain that *de re* attitudes necessarily involve relations to an environment beyond the individual, nor therefore that having propositional attitudes necessarily requires bearing *de re* relations to such an environment. Thus Hahn is somewhat misleading in his remarks on p. 52 of this volume. These remarks suggest that his explanation as to why “Belief *De Re*” does not involve commitment to anti-individualism is that anti-individualism is a thesis about only our *de dicto* attitudes. On this interpretation, a theory about *de re* attitudes would not even be relevant to anti-individualism. But my anti-individualism is a thesis about the individuation of both *de re* and *de dicto* attitudes.

The element of truth in Hahn’s remark is that I wanted to emphasize in “Individualism and the Mental” and “Other Bodies” two closely related points: First, I wanted to emphasize that anti-individualism is not merely the thesis that the environmental referents of *de re* attitudes play a role in individuating the attitudes *considered as relations to the environment*. I regarded this thesis, though in a certain sense anti-individualist, as almost trivial.

The thesis avoids triviality inasmuch as it presupposes that *de re* attitudes cannot be reduced to *de dicto* attitudes. But taking the relevant *de re* attitudes to be relations is, I think (and thought), trading on a somewhat contrived conception of propositional attitude. I think that the attitudes themselves (as opposed to our attribution of them, or relations between them and the environment) are states of the individual completely fixed by their intentional content, including the nonconceptual, applicational (or token-demonstrative) elements in the content. The attitudes bear relations to an environment but are not themselves relations to an environment.<sup>4</sup> These relations are not reducible to *de dicto* conceiving-of relations. The attitudes’ being *de re* lies in their being in certain referential relations through the *demonstrative* applications. The *de re* attitude itself is a mental state involving a nonconceptual demonstrative application token, or abstraction from a token. It is not itself a relation that includes the object. It is important to take the relation seriously. It enters into various psychological explanations. The state must, however, be distinguished from the relation for other psychological purposes and for many of the purposes of epistemology and theory of rationality. The *de re* relation is a success relation. It is to the incompletely conceptualized, demonstrative-involving mental state as veridical perception is to the perceptual state.

Second, I wanted to emphasize that anti-individualism applies to the *conceptual* elements in propositional attitudes, whether these be *de re* attitudes or *de dicto* attitudes. It was a much more substantial thesis that conceptual, standing, intentional aspects of the attitudes are nonindividually individuated than that the token-demonstrative elements are. (The associated but even weaker thesis that *de re* attitudes that are about objects

in the environment involve, insofar as they are *de re*, relations to the environment is virtually trivial.) So I highlighted the conceptual “*de dicto*” elements in attitudes, whether or not the whole attitude was *de re* or *de dicto*.

Thus, the reason that “Belief *De Re*” does not argue for or advocate anti-individualism is not because it makes a claim about *de re* attitudes, whereas anti-individualism is a thesis about only *de dicto* attitudes. The reason is that “Belief *De Re*” does not claim that any propositional attitudes are essentially individuated in terms of relations to an environment beyond the individual. It does not single out *de re* attitudes *about the environment*. And it does not specifically claim that the intentional components of mental states that are in fact *de re* are ever individuated in terms of relations to the environment. The relations that “Belief *De Re*” requires *de re* attitudes to have are relations between the attitudes and (usually nonintentional) objects of those attitudes—where no requirements are placed on the nature of the objects.

When I wrote “Belief *De Re*,” I did believe that mental states that involve *de re* applications to objects in the environment are partly individuated in terms of nonintentional relations, paradigmatically, causal-perceptual relations, to those objects. These relations support and help individuate the intentional but nonconceptual demonstrative applications. Applications to different actual objects count as different applications, whereas different application events that are anaphoric or otherwise tied together can count as the same application for purposes of logical form. This view is anti-individualist with respect to the *de re* intentional aspects of the *de re* attitudes—the demonstrative-like applications. Although this view is anti-individualist, it was not asserted or argued for in the article, though certain claims in the article do presuppose or entail it. The view is at most a relatively small and noncentral aspect of anti-individualism. Anti-individualism is most interesting in its claim about the individuation of *conceptual* elements in a wide range of propositional attitudes, both *de re* and *de dicto* attitudes. I did not make such a claim until “Individualism and the Mental.”

Whether the thesis of “Belief *De Re*” that all attitudes presuppose *de re* attitudes can be strengthened so as to require *de re* attitudes *about the environment* is an extremely difficult issue. The issue is close to those that have exercised philosophers at least since Kant’s “Refutation of Idealism” (Kant 1787 B274–279). Some philosophers, following Kant, have maintained that to have propositional attitudes about sensations and about mathematics, one must have attitudes about physical objects in the environment. I find this thesis plausible. I think that it is almost surely a deep truth about the psychology of human beings. But I am not satisfied with apriori arguments for it as a necessary truth. I find neither Kant’s “Refutation of Idealism” nor private language arguments with this sort of conclusion compelling as they stand. I have so far not myself argued for the view as an apriori, necessary truth.

The second thesis in “Belief *De Re*” relevant to anti-individualism is that *de re* attitudes are attitudes that are incompletely conceptualized. The attitudes essentially involve nonconceptual intentional elements, principally token-applications of demonstrative or indexical elements attached to concepts. They are associated with and supported by nonintentional relations between the individual and the objects referred to in *de re* attitudes. The thesis about incomplete conceptualization was a development of the points about reference brilliantly initiated by Kripke and Donnellan. The development consisted in associating those points with demonstrative elements in the logical form of thoughts, and in elaborating their points about linguistic reference in the context of individuating propositional attitudes.

These two theses of “Belief *De Re*” help explain, as Hahn notes, anti-individualism. It is natural to see the nature of empirical beliefs about objects in the environment as depending on *de re* beliefs about objects, not necessarily the same objects, in the environment. This is a specialization of the first thesis of “Belief *De Re*.” But the arguments for it are not to be found in that article. It is also natural to see the nonconceptual and even intentional relations between thinkings and referents of their representations, which are required by the second thesis, as helping to explain the specific content of *conceptual* elements in propositional attitudes. But again the arguments for this view are developed only later. Finally, the idea of the second thesis that a person can think and make reference to individual objects with incomplete mastery of conceptual methods that individuate the objects suggests the further point, developed only later, that a person can think with concepts that he incompletely understands. A person incompletely understands a concept he uses, in the relevant sense, if he cannot explicate it sufficiently thoroughly and accurately to fix, through those explications, essential features of the concept’s applications to kinds or properties.

## II

Hahn several times characterizes my anti-individualistic view as the claim that for a large class of propositional attitudes, the intentional contents of the attitudes, hence the attitudes themselves, are in part individuated by the nature of their referents or extensions. I want to enter two qualifications on this characterization.

First, anti-individualism is, as Hahn is aware, a thesis not primarily about concepts but about intentional mental states. It is about the constitutive or individuating conditions of propositional attitudes, perceptual states, the *having* of concepts, the applications of demonstratives, and so on. Anti-individualism is relevant to the nature of concepts themselves, but the arguments for anti-individualism all have to do with the individuation of

mental states, which are typed partly in terms of concepts. The view is intended to be compatible with a variety of accounts of the nature and ontology of concepts.<sup>5</sup> When one says that the view applies to lots of different kinds of empirical concepts, this should be taken as shorthand for saying that it applies to lots of different kinds of mental states typed, of course, by their intentional contents, including concepts.

Second, the remark that attitudes are individuated in part by the nature of their referents or extensions needs elaboration if it is not to be misleading. For most of the contents of attitudes I discuss, the concepts logically *determine* their extensions or referents, in the sense that a relevant given concept has one and only one extension or referent. Given the actual world, the concept *water* applies to one and only one extension, all the water (both small and large portions) that there is. Moreover, the concept *water* applies only to water in any *possible* circumstances. In my arguments I sometimes use this point by showing that under certain different circumstances, certain persons have different referents for the concepts in their attitudes, and hence have different attitudes. But the point that if referents are different for nonindexical intentional contents of propositional attitudes, the attitudes are different (and thus that referents play a role in the individuation of attitudes), is not itself an anti-individualist point. It is purely a “logical” point about intentional contents and reference.

Anti-individualism involves two further commitments. One is that a condition on the individuation of relevant intentional states is that the individuation presupposes a background of referential success. A representational state could not be what it is if it were not associated with the representational success of *some* relevantly associated representational states. That is, individuation of a representational state presupposes successful applications of relevantly associated intentional contents, or veridical representations containing relevantly associated contents. The associated contents are commonly the contents of the state, but they need not be. The possible sorts of association are various. This point about the role of successful reference and veridicality as a condition on individuation is a development of the adage that error presupposes a background of success.

The second further commitment of anti-individualism is that attitudes are in part individuated in terms of nonintentional relations—or relations partly individuated independently of *reference*—that the individual bears to objects, properties, or relations in the environment.

For individual attitudes, the account specifies particular kinds of entities in the environment. The nature of the nonindexical aspect of the attitude determines—in the sense explained above—the extension of that aspect of the attitude. So the attitude’s intentional, referential relation to the extension is not more basic than the attitude itself. The two go lock-step together. Certain objects, properties, relations bear a certain complex of nonintentional relations to the individual. Partly by virtue of standing in those relations, the

individual has attitudes with intentional contents that can include some of those entities in the attitudes' extensions. Anti-individualism is a view about how mental states are constitutively individuated. The individuation helps account *both* for what extensions the attitudes have and for what their intentional contents are. So one cannot appeal to the extension of the attitude *as such* in explaining how—or in citing a constraint on how—the attitude is individuated even though successful reference is a condition on any intentionality. The relations that the account appeals to are nonintentional relations between the individual and entities in the environment. These relations help (individually) establish relevant entities *as falling in the extensions or being referents of* the attitudes. Since relevant aspects of the attitudes determine extension and reference, the relations constrain the nature of the mental states.

I believe that the nonintentional relations that figure in the individuation of many intentional mental states cannot be specified in such a way as to produce a reductive explanation of their intentionality. Rather the presence of such relations is a metaphysically necessary constraint on intentionality and on the contents of particular sorts of attitudes—at least for reference and purported reference to objects in the environment cognized by empirical means.

Because of the enormously complex variety of ways in which intentional content and reference can be constrained by the individual's relations to an environment, I have tried to stay open and flexible in specification of the relevant relations. I do not, however, think that just any relations will do. The environment's being a certain way must somehow connect to the individual's being a certain way. An individual thinker's mere presence in an environment has little individuating relevance. I believe that most relations to future events are of little relevance.<sup>6</sup> It is clear that causal relations to past and present events play a large and central role. However, the ways that causal relations play a role in individuation are extremely complex.

Even in the individuation of perceptual states, the relations can be very indirect. For example, relevant causal relations can be between objects and ancestors of an individual's perceptual system, far back in the evolution of the system, rather than within the individual's learning experience. The relations are compatible, in some instances, with a predominance of "false positives." For example, the perceptual signal *predator there* may be caused, even in evolutionary history, more often by non-predators than by predators (see Burge 1996, note 11). Causal relations can go through other individuals in acquisition of concepts through interlocution. They can be mediated by empirical theory. They can be supported by imaginative projection from perceived instances of other kinds.

Hahn is certainly right (p. 51) that I do not hold that beliefs about cows *must* be the normal causal products of interaction with cows. Someone could have beliefs about cows without ever having interacted with one—if, for example, he or she constructed a correct

biological theory of cows and imagined what they would look like.<sup>7</sup> Such a theory would, of course, contain other notions that had more direct causal relations to their referents.

My reticence about talk of causal relations in discussions of anti-individualism has been motivated by an appreciation of the complexity of the matter and a determination to avoid reductionism. The exact details of relevant nonintentional relations interest me less than the broad categories of relations that play roles in constraining the individuation of various types of attitudes. My reticence does not stem from any doubt that causal relations are among—even central to—the nonintentional relations that connect the individual to an environment in such a way as to help individuate the individual's attitudes.

I also want to emphasize that relations to the environment are not the whole story about the individuation of attitudes or of meaning. Internal relations among attitudes—for example, inferential relations—also play a large role. I think that that role had been overemphasized in theories of meaning in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> That is not to say that mental content can be individuated purely in terms of relations to an environment. Having any belief requires mastering some inferential relationships involving it.

### III

Hahn raises some interesting issues about relations between Davidson's views and mine. I agree with Hahn in being unaware of a clear statement of an anti-individualist thesis in Davidson's writings prior to the 1980s. I also agree with Hahn that Davidson's later advocacy of the view derives from premises that I do not share and that have, I think, less appeal than the basis on which I (and with qualifications, Putnam) argued for the view.

In particular, Davidson's important and sound points about the role of distal stimulants as evidence for interpretation do not nearly suffice by themselves to establish anti-individualism.<sup>9</sup> Unless these points are conjoined with his interpretationism or with other strong premises, they do not yield any conclusion about the nature or constitution of propositional attitudes. The interpretationism—the idea that propositional attitudes like belief are constitutively dependent on relations to an interpreter—seems to me quite implausible. I do not find Davidson's arguments for this view compelling or even attractive.<sup>10</sup> It is certainly a relatively special philosophical position. There are many aspects of the view and its application, some of which Hahn probes, that I do not understand. I do believe that Davidson gives the empirical world an important role in his account of interpretation; and I am not sure that Hahn gives this role sufficient weight in his discussion. I leave these matters to others, however.

Whether and in what sense Davidson sees the kinds in the empirical world as dependent on us and our practices is another matter I am not clear about. I would certainly

oppose any such generalization about empirical kinds. As Hahn emphasizes, I do not believe that our activities of “carving” the world into similarity classes (see Hahn’s note 10) play any substantial role in constituting empirical natural kinds. Our language and concepts develop in ways that take account of differences and similarities we come to appreciate in the world. The idealism suggested by the carving metaphor, or by interpretationist accounts of natural kinds, plays no role in the sort of anti-individualism that I maintain. I agree with Hahn that such a view would, at the very least, attenuate the meaning of anti-individualism (or externalism) about the role of the physical world in individuating mental states.

Let us turn to Davidson’s Swampman case. The case involves many complexities and cannot be covered in a few words. I will not discuss whether Swampman could have thoughts at all. I will confine myself to the question of whether it could have thoughts about its physical environment. I stipulate that my discussion concerns Swampman at the moment that its synthesis is completed, but before it interacts with its environment. I believe that once Swampman interacts with objects in the world (through stimulation of sense organs or through operating on those objects), there begin to be the sorts of relations that support intentional content.<sup>11</sup>

Hahn is strictly speaking correct that my anti-individualism does not entail a position on the case. To claim that many mental states are individuated by relations between the individual and the environment is not by itself to say that Swampman lacks mental states, or even lacks any particular mental states.

On the other hand, as Hahn points out (in his note 11), it is hard to understand how a creature like Swampman (at least before it starts interacting with its environment) *could* have intentional content about that environment. The ‘could’ here is, in my view, not merely causal. It is metaphysical. Anti-individualism suggests a range of ways that an individual can have intentional content that makes reference to an environment. It suggests that intentional content is supported and made possible by a range of supplementary non-intentional relations between the individual and the environment.<sup>12</sup> Swampman seems to be in no relevant relations. Merely happening to be in an environment where it will chug along does not suffice to explain individuation of its (putative) intentional mental states. My version of anti-individualism is open-ended about what could count as relevant relations. Still, it seems to me that Swampman almost surely lacks any relevant relation. So I think that there is reason to deny that it is metaphysically possible that Swampman could share any of its counterpart’s thoughts *about the environment*, at least not until it starts interacting with the environment. Here I am inclined to agree with Davidson.

I believe that the range of possible things that Swampman’s supposed thoughts could be about, correlative to the range of possible environments that his physical dispositions could be adaptive to, is huge. Apart from the variety of natural-kind environments, there



are indefinitely many possible envatted environments and environments involving laboratory induced variances on the source of the same proximal stimulations. It is probably so huge and varied that there is no relevant determinate intentional content about an environment associated with those dispositions and physico-chemical structures. The mere fact that Swampman is synthesized by quantum accident *in* a certain environment is not sufficient to provide it with the sorts of relations to the environment that would make thoughts about that environment possible. Nor do I think that Swampman's future relations to the environment suffice—at the time of the synthesis, before there are causal interactions with an environment that might be referred to.<sup>13</sup> I see no other constraints that would associate Swampman's physical dispositions and chemical structures with referents in any one environment. If all this is correct, there is nothing in Swampman's physico-chemical structures and dispositions, taken in themselves, that makes them referentially relevant to the properties of the environment they are in, rather than to any number of other properties in other possible environments.<sup>14</sup>

So I believe that Hahn somewhat understates the relevance of my anti-individualism to the case. Although my central arguments do not deal with the case and do not entail a commitment on it, the natural lessons to be drawn from the arguments suggest, I think, that Swampman lacks any thoughts *about its environment*. Hahn is certainly right that my views stem from reflection on constraints on the having of propositional attitudes, not from reflection on the nature of interpretation.

Hahn is also right in conjecturing that learning plays no *essential* role in my view, although learning does play an important role in the *actual* determination of much of *our* intentional content. I think that there is no necessity that a thinker learn a language, or even have a language. There is no metaphysical impossibility in the idea that an individual's language and repertoire of beliefs could be entirely innate. An individual might have innate concepts or percepts about the environment. Some of *our* intentional content is innate. And I think it is an empirical fact, well established since the demise of behaviorism in psychology, that animals have propositional attitudes, but lack language.

However, even innate intentional content must be supported by relations other than referential relations to the subject matter. Swampman seems to lack any relevant supporting relations (see note 2). So Swampman at the time of its synthetic birth seems to lack relations that would allow *any* of its mental states to be about the specific environment that it happens to coalesce in. I think it *certain* that Swampman cannot share *all* of its chemical counterpart's empirical thoughts about the environment. Assuming that Swampman's chemical counterpart is not scientifically omniscient, there are some aspects of our environment that we can already, with certainty, know Swampman's physical structures are not necessarily uniquely correlated with—natural kinds, for example.

I want to caution against one line of interpretation in Hahn's discussion of the case. My anti-individualist arguments are not supposed to be applicable merely to beings "similar to us." There is no such parameter in the arguments. They are meant to provide insight into conditions for individuating certain sorts of mental states under certain conditions of limited background knowledge, full stop. Swampman is not exempt from necessary conditions on individuation by virtue of its being so unlike us. Mental states are not special to human beings. What matter are the specific ways that Swampman is unlike us in regard to relations relevant to individuating mental states.

The problem in dealing with Swampman is that the anti-individualist arguments are example-based and are somewhat open-ended about the most general anti-individualist principles of individuation. For Swampman to have thoughts about its environment, there must be nonintentional relations that help make such reference possible. I see no likely candidate relations. Still, there is no infallible guarantee that one has not overlooked some important relation that would connect Swampman to specific aspects of its environment so as to make intentional reference to those aspects comprehensible and nonmagical.

#### IV

Hahn emphasizes similarities in my and Davidson's social anti-individualisms (or externalisms). It is true that in each case individuation of at least some mental states is held to be dependent on relations the individual bears to other individual thinkers. But there are fundamental differences.

Hahn formulates the point of agreement thus: "in order to have thoughts or language we need other people whose perceptual and concept-forming abilities and dispositions are innately substantially similar to ours" (p. 54). This formulation is potentially misleading. It is insufficiently specific in the use of 'in order to' and 'need'. If the point is just that to learn language, we need relations to others, as a psychological necessity, then there is surely agreement. But this point is not anti-individualistic. If the point is that, as a constitutive matter, having thoughts or language is dependent on relations to other people, then although it constitutes a strong form of social anti-individualism, there is no agreement. Davidson holds this view. I reject it. Hahn recognizes this difference, but it is somewhat elided in his formulation of the point of agreement.

Both Davidson's and my social anti-individualisms are supported by apriori arguments. My conclusions are meant to be metaphysically necessary truths. Davidson's are supposed to be whatever approximation to metaphysical necessity he allows. The arguments and conclusions are, however, at different levels of generality. Davidson's conclusion is supposed to give constituent conditions on what it is to have language or thought. My con-

clusion gives constituent conditions on having certain particular types of thoughts, given that certain contingent parameters are fixed.

For example, I think that it is metaphysically contingent that an individual is dependent on others for his acquisition of words. Similarly, it is a contingent matter that an individual allows that norms governing the use of his words can be partly dependent on others' usage. It is a contingent matter that an individual lacks sufficient background knowledge to distinguish—by perceptual, explicational, or theoretical means—arthritis from other rheumatoidal diseases. The apriori argument has two conclusions. First, it is possible under these conditions to have a concept of arthritis and to think specifically about arthritis. Second, given that these contingent matters are in place, and given the particular type of notion arthritis is—for example, that it is nonindexical and not a natural kind notion—it is necessary in order to have a thought about arthritis that one be in certain relations to others who are in a better position to specify the disease.

I make similar arguments for a wide variety of other notions. But I do not take social relations to be constitutively necessary for having language or thought. So my apriori arguments for necessities of social anti-individualism presuppose that certain contingent parameters are fixed. The arguments are not as global as Davidson's.

Despite the fact that my arguments are more modest (and I think more concrete and solid) than Davidson's, he rejects them. One ground Davidson gives for rejection is that the incomplete understanding that they invoke—the inability to distinguish arthritis from other rheumatoidal diseases—is supposed to conflict with first-person authority (Davidson 1987, p. 449). Since the supposed conflict is never explained, and since, as Hahn notes, my approach to understanding first-person authority's compatibility with anti-individualism is similar, in broad outline, to Davidson's, I have been puzzled by this ground. I suspect that it rests on a failure to distinguish knowing what one's thoughts are in the sense of being able to understand them well enough to think them and self-attribute them, and knowing what one's thoughts are in the sense of being able to give correct explications of them.<sup>15</sup> Davidson's indiscriminate claim that on my view the relevant agents do not know what they mean and think suggests this conflation (Davidson 1987, p. 449). As I have argued in various places, we are authoritative about the former sort of understanding and about certain self-attributions that rely on that understanding; but we are not authoritative about explications. Incomplete understanding involves inability to provide full and correct conceptual explications. That is not a distinctively first-person ability. Although I believe that it can have a special type of apriori warrant, the warrant is not that of first-person authority.

Another ground Davidson gives for his rejection is the proposal of a different interpretation of the particular cases. Where I hold that a person could believe that arthritis occurs

in the thigh, Davidson maintains that any such interpretation of a person's belief could not be right. He appeals to holism about belief and the uncontroversial point that such a person would associate arthritis with different background beliefs and inferences from someone who knows that arthritis can occur only in joints. He maintains that the error is a metalinguistic one about the dictionary meaning of the word 'arthritis'.

I do not, as Davidson charged, insist that "we are bound to give a person's words the meaning they have in his linguistic community" (Davidson 1987, p. 449). Rather, my account is based on details particular to the case. I tried to build into the case various facts that make the metalinguistic move unacceptable. Davidson does not discuss these. Moreover, the generalized appeal to holism to support rejection of the arthritis case seems to me vague and ineffectual. Much of the import of the work of Kripke, Donnellan, and Putnam has been that in establishing meaning and reference of a term (and by extension, the reference of concepts in thought), inferential connections and background knowledge are not the only factors and are sometimes not decisive. Often there are person-world relations that play a large role, even when the person is ignorant or mistaken about the referent. The arthritis case is such a case.

I continue to believe that the doctor and patient can share beliefs like the belief that arthritis is a painful disease, and thus can share a concept of arthritis. They can do this even though the patient is mistaken about some fundamental features of arthritis and has vastly less background knowledge than the doctor. I believe that there is a complex network of principles, with many escape clauses, that carry a bias in favor of preservation of meaning and concepts between people in the same community who communicate with one another. I have developed this position in a series of papers about interlocution.<sup>16</sup> There remains a great deal to be done if we are to understand the phenomenon in depth.

The main thrust of the original social anti-individualist thought experiments does not, however, depend on my view that there are principles governing communication that defeasibly enforce a bias toward preservation of conceptual content and that can override differences in explication and conception associated with the concepts. Although I claimed that the doctor and patient share a notion of arthritis, the outcome of the thought experiments does not depend on this claim. As Hahn points out, I argue in a later article that thought experiments work on the mere assumption of shared reference.

The doctor and the patient need only have concepts that apply to arthritis. The doctor might well have a different concept of arthritis by virtue of his or her superior background knowledge. It is enough that they share a reference to arthritis. The idea that people can share a reference while differing widely in their background knowledge and assumptions about the referent is fundamental to the work of Kripke, Donnellan, and Putnam. I regard it as well established. People allow the referents or extensions of their concepts and words to be partly dependent on chains that pass through other people.

The thought experiment can make use of this phenomenon to ensure that the patient relies on others to help determine the referent of the concept expressed in the patient's idiolect by the patient's term 'arthritis'. I do not think the doctor and patient *have* to fail to share any concept of arthritis. But even if the patient's concept were to differ from any concept of arthritis that the doctor has, we can safely assume that there are cases where the referent is preserved. Then we conceive of another circumstance in which a physically similar patient is connected through another communal network to a different syndrome of diseases—perhaps all rheumatoidal ailments. Since the relevant concepts are, or can be, nonindexical, the difference in referents in the two circumstances entails that the respective patients have different concepts about these referents. So they have different beliefs with different conceptual contents. The differences clearly depend on differences in their respective social circumstances, external to their physical make-ups, considered individually. These differences in social circumstances ultimately connect the individuals with different diseases or groups of disease-instances. The different social networks connecting the patients to different syndromes of disease necessitate that the patients have different beliefs with different conceptual contents.<sup>17</sup>

This argument depends on the contingent fact that the patients are ignorant of certain facts. It depends on the contingent fact that they have nonindexical concepts for the relevant diseases. It depends on the contingent fact that the patients rely, perhaps intentionally, on others for the fixing of the referents of their concepts. Social interdependence is a deep and pervasive but, I think, contingent fact about language users and thinkers. I do not see it as a metaphysical necessity for language or thought. Given that social interdependence is assumed to be in place, however, the argument claims a priori that under the circumstances it is necessary that the respective patients have different thoughts.

Thus it seems to me that Davidson's social anti-individualism is at least as different from mine as his physical anti-individualism is from mine. What we have in common is an appreciation of ways in which individuals are dependent on matters outside them for many of their thoughts. The structure of this dependence still invites exploration.

## Notes

1. The latter thesis is initially stated: If a creature lacks *de re* attitudes, we would not attribute any attitudes at all (Burge 1977, p. 347). Hahn is correct in pointing to the oddity of the formulation in terms of attribution. The intent is that having *de re* attitudes is necessary not just for attributing attitudes to a creature, but for its *having* propositional attitudes—as subsequent discussion (e.g., *ibid.*, p. 348) indicates. My misleading formulation is a product of excessive focus on language and on attribution through language. I believe that this is the residue of my initial entry into these issues through a fairly compartmentalized view of the philosophy of language. There are numerous passages in the paper that constitute the beginning of my shifting my focus to the nature of the attitudes expressed or attributed by the language, rather than the language used in making the attributions. But this and a few subsequent articles still involve some awkward straddling of the distinction. As Hahn recognizes, I was not maintaining the Davidsonian interpretationist view (that is, the view that an interpreter's interpretation

helps constitute the linguistic and mental content of the creature being interpreted). But the formulations indicate Quine–Davidson influence in considering matters from the standpoint of an interpreter.

2. On this view, even innate structures come to be intentional only by being triggered when the individual engages in *some* demonstrative-like relations to *some* referential objects. But I think that a somewhat less committed position would serve my primary purposes. One might allow that an individual could have innate structures with intentionality even before these structures are triggered through activity of or in the individual, but maintain that the intentionality of the innate structures is possible only because it is appropriately connected to prior *de re* attitudes by others. For example, God's *de re* attitudes in fashioning the innate structures (on a traditional rationalist line) could play this role. Or the individual's evolutionary ancestors' *de re* relations in the evolution of the individual's innate perceptual and other categories could play this role. In both cases the *de re* relations would help give the innate structures their intentionality and help determine their specific referential characteristics by helping to give them a certain function in relation to the relevant subject matter. Then the less committed thesis would be that in order for a creature to have any attitudes at all, the creature's attitudes must presuppose and be appropriately connected to *de re* attitudes—either by that individual or by individuals on whom the creature's attitude-structures depend.

3. I explicitly included sensations and mathematical objects as possible objects of *de re* attitudes. See my (1977), pp. 352–353, 361–362.

4. This is why I said above that *de re* attitudes are “in a certain sense” irreducibly relational. To be *de re*, an attitude must be in relation to an object that it is about. But on my view, the attitudes that are in fact *de re*, are not relations. What makes *de re* attitudes irreducible to *de dicto* attitudes, where we are considering the attitudes themselves, is not their bearing relations to the *res*. It is their being not completely conceptual. They involve irreducibly applicational or token-demonstrative elements. Some attitudes that are not *de re*, in the sense that they fail to be about an object, are irreducible to *de dicto* attitudes for the same reason. Although they fail to pick out an object, they are irreducibly demonstrative or applicational. So, for example, a demonstrative thought applied under an illusion, where no object is referred to, is just as irreducibly *non-de dicto*, because it is not completely conceptualized, as a *de re* thought. The key distinction on my view is between what is standing, sayable, or conceptual content and what is involved in showing or demonstrating or applying the standing content on particular occasions.

5. I think of concepts as abstract entities. But for purposes of my arguments, it is not crucial that one think of concepts this way. The term ‘concept’ marks a place for individuating aspects of propositional attitudes. The aspects are the formally distinguishable aspects of the abilities associated with propositional attitudes—abilities like recognition and inference. To type and explain these abilities, one must speak of such formal aspects. For example, one must link a belief that humans are mortal with a belief that Socrates is human. The concept *human* marks something common to these two attitudes that ties them together in inference. The thought experiments are compatible with just about any ontological (or anti-ontological) position on concepts. I do think it appropriate to quantify over concepts and take them as objects of reference. And I have views about the ontologies of various types of concepts. These views are, in some cases, related to my anti-individualism. But these positions are not presupposed in the anti-individualist thought experiments.

6. I mean by this that the mere fact that one will interact with an object in the future is of little individuating relevance. But intentions, beliefs, desires that are involved in making objects (such as artifacts) might be partly individuated in terms of the objects made, especially with regard to *de re* applications in the intendings.

7. I made this sort of point with respect to beliefs about water, in my (1982), note 18.

8. I believe that Davidson overrates them, as will emerge below.

9. These points, which constituted a break with Quine on stimulus meaning, are of great importance. They certainly influenced my nascent thinking about these matters. But Davidson's explanations of externalism and his arguments that it is true seem sometimes to present this point about evidence for interpreting attitudes as sufficient for the externalism. This leads him, I think, to underrate the role of counterfactuals in establishing a thesis about the nature and constitution of the attitudes. See Davidson (1987, p. 450).

10. This is not to say that Davidson's account of the nature of interpretation is unattractive. I think that his contributions in understanding radical interpretation are brilliant and in many fundamental respects true. It is the further view that mental states are constituted by a relation to an interpreter that I regard as mistaken.

11. I leave open how quickly such relations become “normal” and begin to make content possible. In some cases, I conjecture, relevant relations are established through a single instance of interaction. How content spreads through the cognitive system is a matter I will not try to adjudicate. Since it is not a central case and may involve fuzzy boundaries, I am not sure that it is important to have a definite view about the matter.

12. The view of “Belief *De Re*” also requires that to have intentional content, the individual must bear some nonintentional relations to a subject matter. Swampman appears to bear no relevant relations to its *environment*. Whether there are some *de re* relations to some other subject matter that might make possible some content would depend partly on a fuller description of the case.

13. On relations to the future, see my (1998b).

14. This argument from the variety of possible matches is important in my reasoning. If I were persuaded that Swampman’s physical structures and dispositions were uniquely fitted to *some* aspects of his environment—so that no metaphysically possible substitute for those aspects would make any sense of its chemical structures and responses—then I would think it worth considering whether, despite the lack of historical connection to the environment, the physical structures had the function of responding to just such environmental aspects. But even this argument would be a difficult one to make. I doubt that function is ascribable to chemical as opposed to biological structures. And it is debatable whether Swampman has any biological functions, at the time of its synthesis, in relation to its environment. Moreover, the notion of function, or some related notion, would have to be motivated as applied to this product of accidental synthesis. All this aside, as noted in the text, it seems to me very doubtful that there is a metaphysically necessary unique fit between Swampman’s physical structures and any aspect of the objective environment. It seems to me that *any* environmental property that is perceivable has possible lookalikes that are indiscernible (under sufficiently odd but metaphysically possible circumstances) given the actual dispositions of a given nonomniscient individual. These are complex matters, however. Although I am strongly inclined to think that Swampman can have no thoughts about its empirical surroundings (until it opens its “eyes” and starts interacting with those surroundings), the matter may bear further discussion.

15. I emphasize this distinction in various places. See my (1988), p. 662.

16. See my (1993), pp. 457–488; (1997), pp. 21–47; (1998a), pp. 1–37; and (1999).

17. The argument is from “Wherein Is Language Social?” (1989).

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