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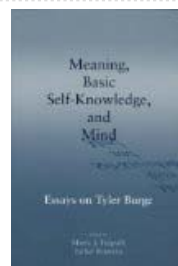
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Review - Meaning, Basic Self-Knowledge, and Mind

Essays on Tyler Burge
by Marma J. Frapolli and Esther Romero (Editors)
CSLI Publications, 2003
Review by Nick Trakakis
Aug 5th 2004 (Volume 8, Issue 32)

This collection explores Tyler Burge's advocacy of anti-individualism, externalism, and basic self-knowledge. The papers are drawn mainly from a conference hosted by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Granada in Spain on May 23-25, 1996. Also included are Burge's replies to each paper, this clearly being one of the book's greatest assets.

The opening paper, "Social Externalism and Linguistic Communication", by Christopher Gauker attempts to show that Burge's social externalism (characterized by Gauker as the view that the content of a person's thought is relative to the way words are used in the surrounding linguistic community) when combined with 'the expressive theory of communication' (according to which the primary function of language is to enable speakers to convey the contents of their beliefs to hearers) produces a vicious explanatory circularity: the way words are used is explained (by the expressivist) by appeal to mental content, and mental content is explained (by the externalist) by appeal to the way words are used. Burge responds that he has never subscribed to what Gauker calls 'the expressive theory of communication', and that, moreover, Gauker has distorted his (Burge's) conception of social externalism.

The next paper, Tobies Grimaltós' "Terms and Content", is a defence of the view that "the meaning of the terms we use in thinking or in expressing a thought does not always determine (not even partially) the content of the thought we have" (p.36), a thesis which – perhaps to the surprise of Grimaltós – Burge notes he had accepted from early on (p.251). The third contribution, "On Orthodox and Heterodox Externalisms" by Jorge Rodríguez Marqueze, deals only indirectly with Burge's work. Marqueze's principal concern is to show that the externalist theory defended by Gregory McCulloch in *The Mind and Its World* (London: Routledge, 1995) is open to the criticisms voiced by Akeel Bilgrami against 'orthodox externalism', i.e., forms of externalism, such

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as Putnam's and Kripke's, that are linked to causal or direct theories of reference.

In the fourth and one of the more interesting contributions, Steven Davis' "Arguments for Externalism", an excellent comparative analysis is provided of the Twin Earth thought experiments devised by Putnam and those devised by Burge. Davis' aim is to expose various problems underlying Donnellan's recent interpretation of these thought experiments, with Burge showing himself to be largely sympathetic to Davis' endeavours. Thought experiments are also the focus of Antoni Gomila Benejam's paper, "Thought Experiments and Semantic Competence", where Benejam addresses the interesting question: How is it that thought experiments manage to be fruitful? Benejam's answer, briefly put, is that we have, by dint of our semantic or conceptual competence, an implicit understanding of concepts, and thought experiments help to render this understanding explicit.

Another excellent contribution, Martin Davies' "Externalism, Self-Knowledge and Transmission of Warrant", attempts to show that externalism raises 'the problem of armchair knowledge'. Davies' point is that externalists such as Burge tend to argue as follows:

- (1) I am thinking that water is wet.
- (2) If I am thinking that water is wet, then I am (or have been) embedded in an environment that contains samples of water.
- (3) (Therefore) I am (or have been) embedded in an environment that contains samples of water.

The problem here, notes Davies, is that the externalist has reached in (3) a conclusion about an empirical matter (regarding his environment and his way of being embedded in it) without ever rising from his armchair. Davies' solution to the problem is, controversially, that in arguments such as (1)-(3) there is a failure of transmission of epistemic warrant from the premises to the conclusion. (Burge, interestingly, rejects (2).)

In "Anti-Individualism and Basic Self-Knowledge", María J. Frápolli and Esther Romero carefully elucidate the interconnections between Burge's externalism about meaning, his anti-individualism about mind, and his commitment to basic self-knowledge (a form of self-knowledge that is direct, authoritative, non-empirical, and self-verifying). According to the authors, however, Burge has failed to remove the threat that externalism poses to basic self-knowledge, for given Burge's externalism, "we no longer have an internal, introspective, and reliable path to all aspects of our beliefs about the world" (p.145). This threat is addressed in Carlos Moya's insightful contribution, "Externalism, Inclusion, and Knowledge of Content," where various responses to Paul Boghossian's case against the compatibility of externalism and self-knowledge are discussed. The same theme is taken up in Daniel Quesada's "Basic Self-Knowledge and Externalism", where it is argued that, at least in some circumstances, externalist considerations rule out basic self-knowledge – but Quesada's reasons for thinking this are, as Burge correctly points out, "deeply misguided" (p.283).

Manuel Liz, in "Intentional States: Individuation, Explanation, and Supervenience", attempts to show that one can plausibly uphold an individualistic supervenience thesis with respect to intentional states while at the same time upholding anti-individualism with respect to the individuation and explanation of intentional states. Going by Burge's reply, however, Liz has been attacking a strawman, since few (if any) anti-individualists would (according to Burge) reject the kind of individualistic supervenience discussed by Liz. Supervenience is again discussed in the final paper of the collection, Stuart Silvers' "Individualism, Internalism, and Wide Supervenience". Silvers challenges the claim, put forward by Rob Wilson, that lying at the heart of the controversy over individualism and anti-individualism is a conflation of two distinct notions of mental causation.

In sum, the contributions to this volume contain many interesting and insightful observations, though they do not

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compare in depth and originality to the papers contained in the recently published *Reflections and Replies: Essays on the Philosophy of Tyler Burge* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), edited by Martin Hahn and Bjørn Ramberg.

Also, given the nature of the debates and the level of abstraction and technicality in which they are couched, Frápolli and Romero's collection would only be appreciated by graduates and academic philosophers.

One final point. Unfortunately, most papers in this collection are marred by poor proofreading or just a poor grasp of the English language (I could not always work out which). Some classic, but not rare, examples of this: "...it is easy to directly accuse McCulloch of incurring in bifurcation" (p.61); "This paper has been written after a Seminar on some aspect of Tyler Burge's philosophy..." (p.131); and "Now, which the conflict exactly is depends on how we determine what I have been, to this point, deliberately vaguely describing as the 'unproblematic character' of basic self-knowledge" (p.189).

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Nick Trakakis writes about himself:

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