

24.500 spring 05
topics in philosophy of mind
session 2

- new time 3-6 wed
- readings
- slides
- teatime

self-knowledge

externalism and self-knowledge, contd.

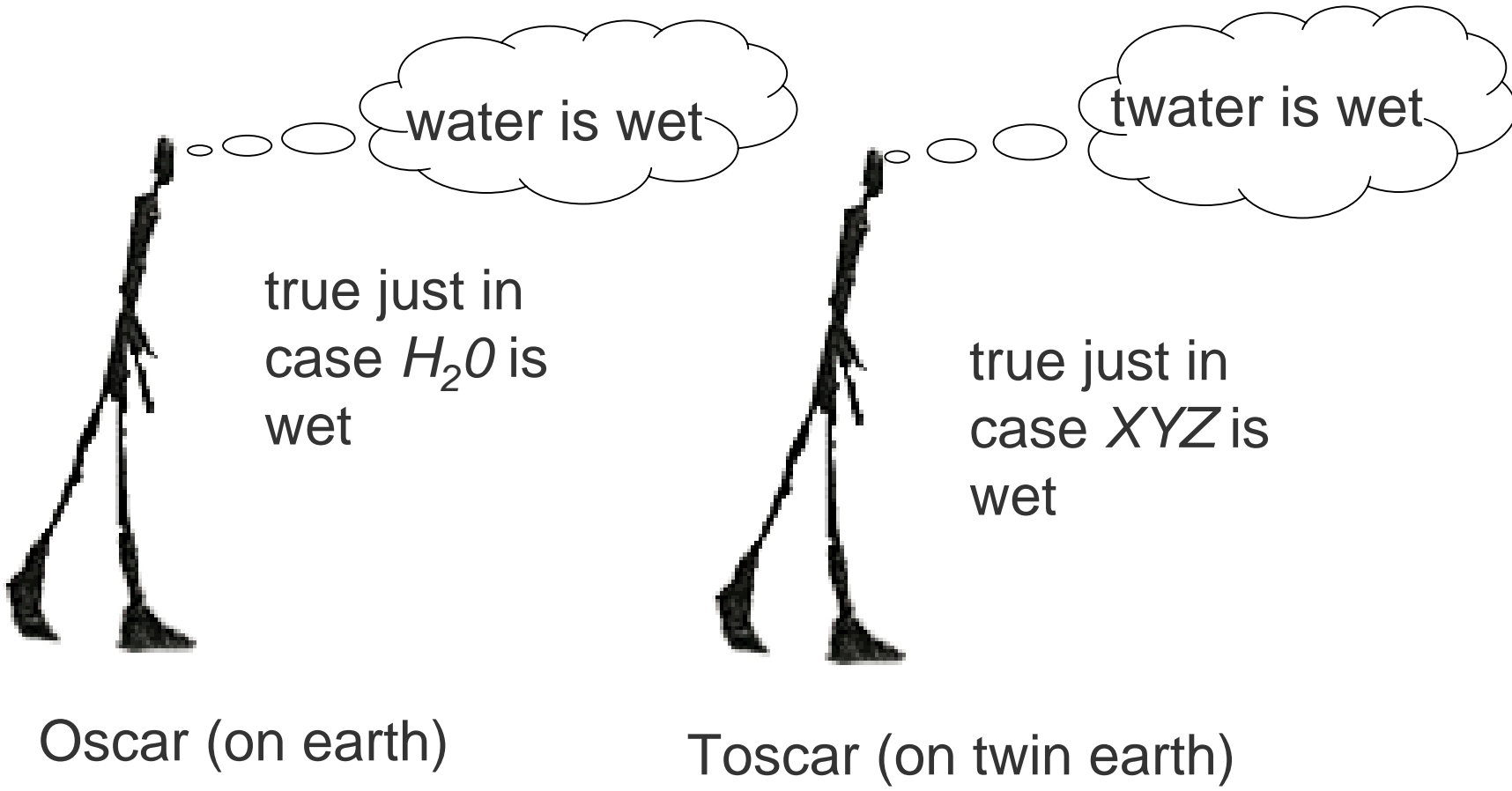
- recall the distinction between
 - privileged access
 - and
 - peculiar access

Putnam's twin earth

earth

twin earth

...the oceans and lakes contain "XYZ", which is a very different chemical kind from H_2O , although superficially like it at normal temperatures and pressures



Burge's thought experiment

- **stage 1**
- Alfred has various beliefs about arthritis: that he has had arthritis for years, that stiffening joints are a symptom of arthritis... (all true)
and:
- that he has arthritis in his thigh (false, because arthritis is an inflammation of the joints)

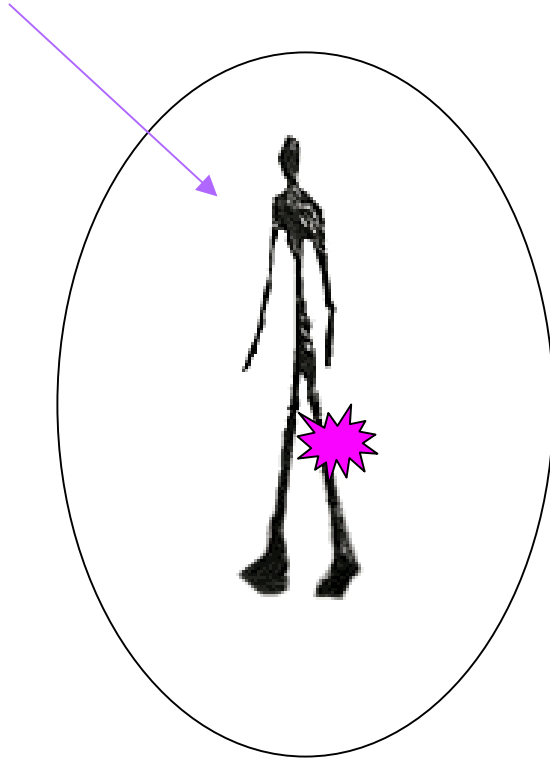
Burge's thought experiment

- **stage II**
- a counterfactual situation in which Alfred is exactly the same in all intrinsic respects, but lives in a slightly different linguistic community
- in this community, 'arthritis' applies "not only to arthritis, but to various other rheumatoid ailments"
- in the language of this community, 'Alfred has arthritis in his thigh' is true

Burge's thought experiment

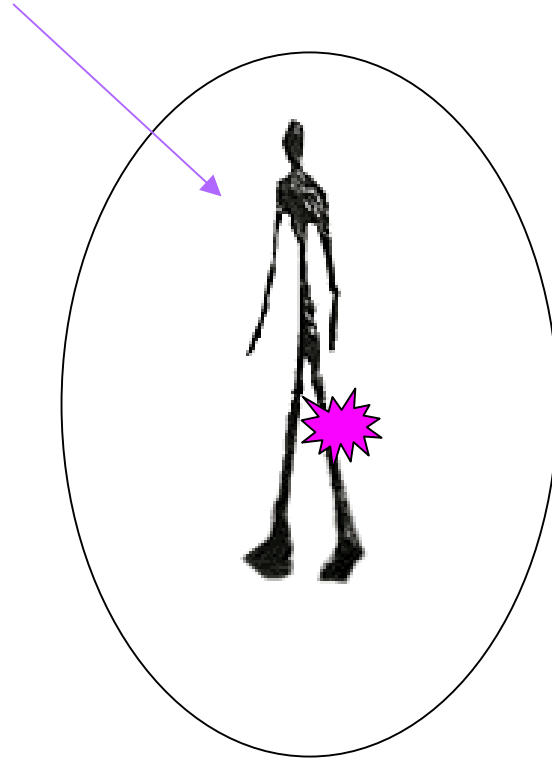
- **stage III**
 - an “interpretation of the counterfactual case”
 - Alfred has no beliefs about *arthritis* (in particular, he doesn't believe that he has arthritis in his thigh)
 - instead, he has beliefs about the sort of general rheumatoid ailment that is labeled in his community by the word 'arthritis'

Alfred with arthritis beliefs



@ (the actual world)

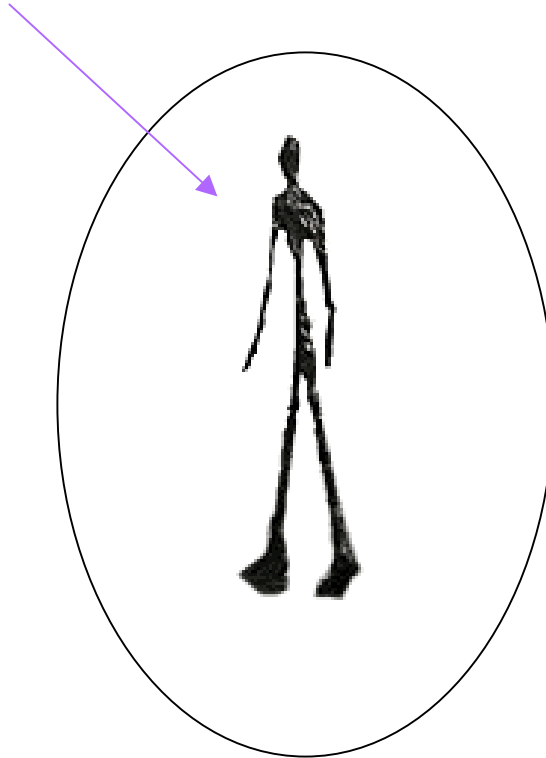
Alfred (a duplicate of Alfred as he is in @) without arthritis beliefs



w_1 (the counterfactual situation)

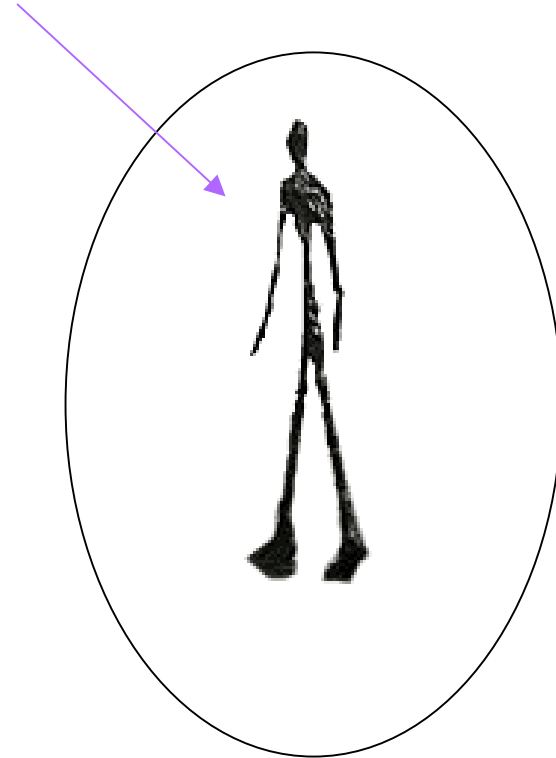
another example

Alfred with sofa beliefs



@ (the actual world)

Alfred (a duplicate of Alfred as he is in @) without sofa beliefs



w_1 (the counterfactual situation, in which 'sofa' applies to overstuffed armchairs)

- By...privileged self-knowledge, I mean the view that we are able to know, without the benefit of empirical investigation, what our thoughts are in our own case
- compatibilism: externalism and privileged self-knowledge are compatible
- anti-compatibilist arguments with this general form have been attempted in the past, but...those earlier efforts have misstated the case
- See...McKinsey, 'Anti-individualism and privileged access'...and the effective response by Anthony Bruecker (Boghossian, 'What the externalist can know a priori')

two incompatibilist arguments

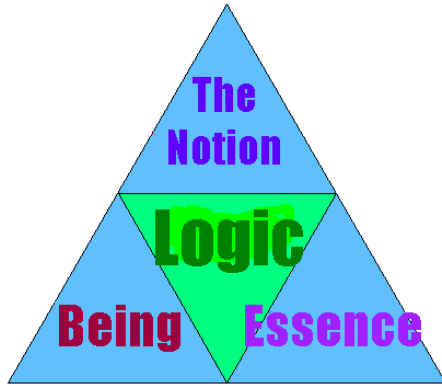
- discrimination—“slow switching”, etc.
- consequence—a priori knowledge that water exists, etc.

McKinsey and Brueckner

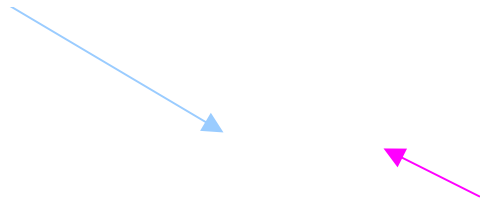
- “each of us can know the existence and content of his own mental states in a privileged way that is available to no one else” (McKinsey)
- “**privileged way**”: some version of *privileged access*

- “**available to no one else**”: some version of *peculiar access*
- merely by sitting in an armchair, one can know, “just by thinking” (“a priori”), that one is thinking that water is wet, for example





a priori?



especially because “inner sense” is a live option, self-knowledge should not be classified with knowledge of logic, etc. (cf. proprioception, clairvoyance)

- knowing is a mental state (Williamson)
- one has peculiar access to the fact that one knows that p just as one has peculiar access to the fact that one believes that p
 - (this point doesn't assume that knowing is a mental state)
- if this peculiar access were a priori access, then one would know a priori that it's snowing, e.g.

perhaps the incompatibilist should
emphasize privileged access?

- distinguish:
 - skeptic-convincing vs. skeptic-unconvincing
privileged access to one's mental states
- one might have skeptic-unconvincing privileged
access to some environmental condition
 - cf. Putnam's proof

McKinsey's recipe

- 1 Oscar knows from the armchair (“a priori”) that he is thinking that water is wet
- 2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet conceptually implies E (according to externalism)

hence:

C E can be known from the armchair

but: E can't be known from the armchair

note that the argument just relies on *peculiar* access

but what is E?

- suggestion (Brueckner, interpreting McKinsey)
 - E is the proposition that Oscar inhabits an environment containing H₂O and not XYZ
- one cannot know E from the armchair
- but is it true that the twin earth thought experiment shows (a priori) that one can only think about water if there is H₂O in one's environment?

but is 2 true?

2 The proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet implies that water exists (according to externalism)

- suppose hydrogen and oxygen exist, but hydrogen hydroxide doesn't
- scientists "theorize that H₂O exists" (Brueckner, p. 202; Burge, "Other Bodies")
- they introduce a term, *swater*, for this chemical compound, and use it on Nova broadcasts, in *Scientific American* articles, etc.
- Oscar reads these articles and learns the new word (perhaps without remembering the chemical composition of swater)
- Oscar might say, "I wonder whether swater is wet"
- wouldn't he be wondering (in a waterless world) whether *water* is wet?

E = the proposition that either water exists or some in Oscar's speech community theorize that H₂O exists?

2 the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet conceptually implies that either water exists or some in Oscar's speech community theorize that H₂O exists

- nope

Brueckner's final suggestion

- E is the proposition that there exist some physical entities distinct from Oscar
- Brueckner's response: are we so sure that this E is *not* knowable from the armchair?

OK, but what about:

E = the proposition that either water exists or some in Oscar's speech community theorize that water exists?

- 2 is (arguably) conceptually implied by the proposition that Oscar is thinking that water is wet, yet surely it is not knowable from the armchair

enter Boghossian

I claim that Oscar is in a position to argue, purely a priori, as follows:

- 1 if I have the concept water, then water exists [or other speakers who have the concept water exist]
- 2 I have the concept water
therefore
- 3 water exists

“the concept water”?

- a word’s meaning = the concept it expresses
- what is it to “have” the concept water?
- so: S has the concept water iff S believes/thinks that...water..., for some filling of the dots
 - but see p. 281, on the “language of thought” picture

the many concepts of concept

- concepts as word meanings
- concepts as Fregean senses
- concepts as pleonastic entities
- concepts as mental representations (e.g. words in a language of thought)
- concepts as conceptions

- ...in the case of an atomic, natural kind concept C, the substance actually picked out by C enters in to the individuation of C
- atomic: the corresponding word is semantically simple (unlike ‘the actual liquid in the lakes’, ‘H₂O’)
 - natural kind: the referent of the corresponding word is a natural kind
 - enters in...: whether or not a person has C depends on the substances with which she interacts

the argument sans “concept”

I claim that Oscar is in a position to argue, purely a priori, as follows:

- 1 if I think that water is wet, then water exists [or other speakers who have thoughts about water exist]
 - 2 I think that water is wet
- therefore
- 3 water exists

water without water?

- that would just complicate the absurdity:
- either water exists, or other speakers who have the concept water exist
- “this suggestion harbors a number of difficulties”?
 - this seems to overlook the “theorizing” option

no water without water, but this is not knowable a priori

- what conditions does a word have to meet if it is to be Twin Earth-eligible?
- it has to be a word that expresses an atomic concept
- it also has to aim to name a natural kind
- the user of the word...must be chemically indifferent
 - this last point is potentially confusing

- a compatibilist would have to hold that the last two conditions are available a priori
- according to the doctrine of privileged access, the content of one's intentions and beliefs are available a priori
 - cf. M&T on privileged access and belief
 - note that Oscar's reasoning must be partly about the *word* 'water'
 - knowing that he has such a word in his vocabulary presumably requires "empirical investigation"
- the question about atomicity is somewhat more delicate

- we need not claim that facts about atomicity are easy, only that they are not empirical
- how could they be otherwise?
- it is hard to make sense of the idea that knowledge of whether a concept is internally structured..depend[s] on empirical information
 - not if this gets cashed out in semantic terms

isn't the argument really *metalinguistic*?

I claim that Oscar is in a position to argue, purely a priori [?], as follows:

- 1 the word 'water', as I use it, aims to name a natural kind (because I intend to use it so)
- 2 the word 'water', as I use it, is not semantically complex
- 3 if the word 'water', as I use it, is meaningful, then either:
 - (a) it names a natural kind, or
 - (b) other speakers exist
- 4 the word 'water', as I use it, is meaningful therefore...

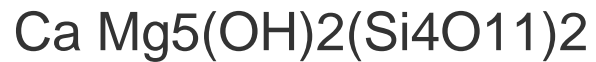
- if...we can run Twin Earth experiments even on terms that fail to refer, then how do we know a priori that water [or other speakers] is required for 'water' to express water?
- in other words, how do we know a priori that:
 - 3 if the word 'water', as I use it, is meaningful, then either:
 - (a) it names a natural kind, or
 - (b) other speakers exist?
 - (ignoring (b)) for all I know a priori, 'water' is meaningful and I am on dry earth

Jadeite:



Silicate of sodium and aluminum

Nephrite:



Silicate of calcium and magnesium

dry earth

earth

dry earth

...a sort of pervasive collective mirage...the lakes, rivers and taps on this particular twin earth run bone-dry

- what concept does 'water' express under the envisaged dry conditions?
- a compound concept?
- no, because it's atomic if it has an extension
- an atomic concept?
- no, because there is no fact of the matter what truth-condition is expressed by sentences involving 'water' on dry earth
 - in other words:
 - if 'water' is meaningful, then water exists [or other speakers exist]

back to the argument

I claim that Oscar is in a position to argue, purely a priori, as follows:

- 1 the word 'water', as I use it, aims to name a natural kind (because I intend to use it so)
- 2 the word 'water', as I use it, is not semantically complex
- 3 if the word 'water', as I use it, is meaningful, then either:
 - (a) it names a natural kind, or
 - (b) other speakers exist, or
 - (c) it names a heterogeneous motley [?]
- 4 the word 'water', as I use it, is meaningful therefore...

McLaughlin and Tye

- McKinsey's recipe is perfectly fine, but you can't buy the ingredient E anywhere

- *Privileged access thesis*: It is conceptually necessary that if we are able to exercise our actual normal capacity to have beliefs about our occurrent thoughts, then if we are able to occurrently think that p, we are able to know that we are thinking that p without our knowledge being justificatorily based on empirical investigation of our environment.

- since we don't know a priori what our "actual normal capacity" is, it's unclear why M&T think the PAT "has considerable intuitive support"
- compare a similar-ish thesis about knowledge of our environment:
 - it's conceptually necessary that if we are able to exercise our actual normal capacity to have beliefs about our environment, then these beliefs will sometimes be knowledge

- in any case, surely all we need is this:
 - *Privileged access thesis 2*: we sometimes know that we are thinking that p without our knowledge being justificatorily based on empirical investigation of our environment.
- note that “privileged access” is actually peculiar access
- why is PAT “silent” on belief, etc.?

- < , the property of being an orator >
- no one holds that we have privileged access even to whether we are having an object-dependent thought
- *were* someone to maintain this wildly implausible thesis, we could use McKinsey's recipe to show that she is mistaken

1. I am thinking that Cicero is an orator
2. if I am thinking that Cicero is an orator then Cicero exists

therefore

C Cicero exists

- next time:
 - McLaughlin and Tye, Boghossian, contd.
 - Shoemaker, On knowing one's own mind