Externalism, Surrogate Reference and Empty Kind Terms

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Boghossian (1997) and Segal (2000) have offered parallel arguments against externalist accounts of content. Actual non-empty names may very well have an extension as part of their content, yet they may lack such an extension *counterfactually*. If we consider such worlds in which they lack an extension, we will realize they still have content. This is either because the concept changes its truth-conditions to 'motley' ones (Segal) or because it changes its structure from atomic to complex (Boghossian), without an external condition accounting for the difference. Much has been said in response to both arguments (see Goldberg, 2005; Korman, 2006; and more recently Besson, 2012). In this paper I have two goals. First, I want to argue that the externalist replies available have failed to offer a satisfactory account. Second, I want to present an alternative account based on a theory of human *pretense* and *fiction making abilities* and show how it offers a more satisfactory externalist account of empty names and empty kind terms.

Internalism, intrinsic properties, relational properties, external conditions, empty names, fiction-making.

1. Introduction

According to the externalist view of content, the content of referential terms, whether proper or common nouns, proper names or kind terms, cannot be determined solely in terms of the internal or psychological properties of individual speakers. An external, non-individualistic psychological condition is needed. According to the slogan, "Cut the pie any way you like, 'meanings' just ain't in the *head*!".

Thanks to Putnam (1975) and Kripke (1981) externalism became the orthodox view. Eventually, it also became a popular target for varied sorts of criticism. Boghossian (1997) and Segal (2000) offered objections that have proven to be resilient to multiple responses. These objections are based on a mix of semantic, epistemic, and modal intuitions concerning the use of kind terms such as 'H2O' and 'water'.

Boghossian (1997) wants us to consider the case of dry earth.

> A planet just like ours in which, although it very much seems to its inhabitants that there is a clear, tasteless and colourless liquid flowing in their rivers and taps and to which they confidently take themselves to be applying

the word 'water', these appearances are systematically false and constitute a
sort of pervasive collective mirage. In point of actual fact, the lakes, rivers
and taps on this particular Twin Earth run bone dry. [1997:170]

Boghossian admits this is a far-fetched scenario, yet he takes it to be "not substantially different" from the case of 'phlogiston' and 'caloric'. There is, however, a substantial difference. As we all know, 'phlogiston' and 'caloric' are the product of failed scientific hypothesis. We can gain a proper insight into such cases by looking at the reasons behind their postulation. The case of 'water' in Dry Earth, however, is different, as it involves a pervasive and systematic form of collective illusion or hallucination. Little or nothing may be learned by looking at the reasons behind the competent use of 'water' or its postulation by the inhabitants of Dry Earth. Nonetheless, Boghossian claims that the point of considering Dry Earth is to inquire into the proper semantic account of cases of reference failure. Following Boghossian's lead, I shall consider it strictly as a case of reference failure, thus ignoring the presence of collective illusion or hallucination.

Boghossian claims that the Dry Earth scenario poses a dilemma for the externalist. There are two options; either dry 'water' expresses an atomic concept, whose content is purely referentially determined, or a compound one with internal structure and proper parts (e.g., "the clear, tasteless, colorless, liquid that flows in the taps and the rivers around here" [1997:171]). On the one hand, if it is an atomic concept, then the externalist has no way of determining the content in virtue of the fact that 'water' in Dry Earth has no referent. "To suppose otherwise would contradict his overriding commitment to individuating a concept in terms of its referent." [Boghossian, 1997:173]. On the other hand, if it is a compound concept, with a descriptive content, then the externalist will have problems explaining the shift from atomic (referential) to compound (descriptive) semantics in externalist terms. Why is it that our atomic and referential 'water' becomes compound and descriptive in Dry Earth? Furthermore, what is it about the compound semantics in Dry Earth that makes it externalist? There seems to be nothing externalist about a descriptively determined content.

There are, I think, several problems with Boghossian's objection. First of all, there is a problem with the common yet naïve assumption that by merely associating descriptive conditions to an empty term we somehow get some content. If Dry Earth is really dry, with its rivers and taps running bone dry, it is difficult to understand what an inhabitant of such planet means by 'the liquid that flows in the taps and rivers around here is

refreshing' (see Brock, 2004). Second, Boghossian seems to think that if the compositional structure is internal to a concept, then it is *ipso facto* internal to a speaker. "Compositionality, as I understand it, can only be a function of the internal syntax of a concept; it can't supervene on external circumstances." [1997:172-173]. Even if compositionality is a function of internal syntax, it can still be an externalist semantic condition if we assume, for example that concepts "just ain't in the head". The compound option is only a problem for the externalist if we assume that concepts are psychological entities, but that seems question begging.

I will not dwell on these problems, however, as I shall focus mainly on a third problematic feature of Boghossian's (and Segal's as we shall see) objection. It is a common mistake, in fact a widely shared view, to identify externalism with referentialism, so that whenever there is no reference available there seems to be no externalist condition at hand. According to Boghossian (1997), the externalist has "an overriding commitment to individuating a concept in terms of its referent." [p.173] Yet these are importantly distinct views. Externalism claims that external conditions are needed for content individuation. Referentialism claims that reference is needed for content individuation. Clearly, externalism may hold even when referentialism does not, so long as we can identify external (i.e., non-psychological or individualistic) semantic conditions for terms that lack a referent. One of the goals of this paper is to offer an account that does that. Before doing so, let me consider Segal's parallel objection.

Segal (2000) aims against the externalist thesis according to which at least some concepts are world dependent [p.29-30], that is, the claim that external (non-psychological) conditions are needed to account for the content of some concepts. He takes this thesis to "have" three "characteristics". First, the extension conditions of a nonempty concept "depend in part on a real relationship between thinkers and samples in the external world" [p.30]. Second, "extension conditions are essential to the cognitive content of the concept" [p.30]. Third, such concepts have only one factor determining their content, i.e., their extension. Segal thinks these three characteristics make it impossible for the externalist to account for empty concepts and empty kind terms. To show this, Segal (2000) asks us to consider the following counterfactual scenario.

> Suppose that there were no aluminum or topaz or quarks or polio. But
> imagine that otherwise things are as much like they are as they could be,
> compatible with this counterfactual premise. Then what would happen to the

> meanings of the terms (…), "aluminum", "topaz", "quark", and "polio"? What concepts would these words express? [The externalist thesis of world dependence] entails that either they would express no concept or they would express a concept different from the one they actually express. [Segal, 2000:31]

Segal (2000), like Boghossian (1997), thinks this scenario presents the externalist with a dilemma, as neither of the two alternative consequences are supposed to be good or acceptable for the externalist. The first option is a bad one simply because "there do exist plenty of empty kind terms, terms that have the basic character of kind terms (whether natural kinds or not), that do express concepts but that lack an extension" [p.31] The second option is also a non-starter because, when you consider a nonempty kind term as it is used in a counterfactual situation where it is empty "the concept it expresses must be what you get when you take the original nonempty concept and remove its extension" [p.32]. From this it apparently follows that there is no difference between the concept expressed in the actual and the counterfactual scenarios.

I see two problematic assumptions in Segal's objection. First, Segal's dilemma rests heavily on the assumption that a kind term that does have a referent (e.g., 'water') expresses the same concept as it is used in a context where it has no referent (e.g., 'water' in Dry Earth). Segal simply assumes that it is one and the same concept that we are dealing with, when this is exactly what is at stake for the externalist. This is evidenced by Segal's claim that "the concept it expresses must be what you get when you take the original nonempty concept and remove its extension" [p.32]. If you happen to think that 'water' expresses a concept that is individuated by its extension, you will naturally reject the idea that such word expresses the same concept in a counterfactual situation where it lacks such an extension and, thus, you will also reject the claim that *the* (single) concept 'water' expresses is "the one you get when you take the original nonempty concept and remove its extension". This latter idea makes little to no sense for the externalist. The externalist has the option to take the word 'water', as used in Dry Earth, to express a different concept. Of course, to do so the externalist needs a justification, and it better be that this justification explains how those two concepts differ in virtue of having different external conditions. I will do so in this paper.

Like Boghossian (1997), Segal (2000) seems to be presupposing that externalism is tantamount to referentialism. If you assume that only reference can play the role of external conditions, then there is simply no external condition associated to the use of

'water' in Dry Earth. This would explain why it is so natural for Segal to think that the concept expressed by 'water' in Dry Earth is just that expressed in Earth once you take out its extension in Earth (i.e., its referent). But, as I have already claimed, externalism and referentialism are two distinct, yet compatible, theories of content. Nothing precludes one from being a referentialist about some kind terms (e.g., the nonempty ones) and a non-referentialist externalist for some others (e.g., the empty ones). I will develop some such view here.

This chapter is divided as follows. Section 2 is concerned with externalism. First, I will be drawing distinctions that will help clarify what it is for an account to be externalist. Second, I will present two recent externalist replies to the objections presented by Boghossian and Segal and show why they fail to offer a satisfactory account of the phenomena in question. Third, based on these results, I will follow Besson's (2012) recent work to offer a critical account of the phenomena and the explanatory alternatives left for the externalist to follow. As a whole, section 2 is meant to offer a complete picture of the requirements that any externalist account should satisfy in order to properly explain the phenomena of empty kind terms. Section 3 is dedicated to present a novel externalist account of the phenomena that satisfies all such requirements. Finally, in section 4 I present some further reasons to consider the latter as our best available account.

2. Externalism and empty kind terms

2.1 Distinguishing externalism from referentialism

Let me start by distinguishing externalism from what is commonly known as referentialism. They are both theories of content, whether it be semantic, mental, or what have you. These two views are usually conflated. I believe, however, that without a proper distinction they are capable of creating much confusion. The externalist intuition (EI) claims the following:

Externalist Intuition: the content (whether it be meaning, truth-conditions, reference or semantic contribution) of a given term (or class of terms) 'K' is at least partly determined by facts Φ -i.e., facts that do not supervene on the internal state of the subject.

Put in a more positive and direct way, to defend externalism about a term or class of terms is to defend the externalist condition (EC):

Externalist Condition (EC)*:* facts Φ are needed to determine the content of a given term (or class of terms) 'K'.

Now, like externalism, referentialism makes claims about the content of terms, yet it presents more specific and, hence, restrictive referentialist conditions (RC).

Referentialist Condition (RC): the content of a given term (or class of terms) 'K' *just is* its referent.

There are two ways in which RC are stronger than EC. First, EC talks about a general class of facts, those relevant facts Φ that do not supervene on the subject's internal state. RC, however, talks about a very specific object or property that happens to stand on the reference relation with the term (or class of terms) 'K'. Second, EC takes those requirements to be only partly responsible for individuating content, whereas RC takes them to *be* or *constitute* such content.

That EC and RC present distinct and mutually independent conditions can be seen in the following example. Consider a psychotherapist's competent use of the term 'neurosis'. Intuitively, the following is true about such use. First, it refers to something that does supervene on a subject's internal state. Second, its use is at least partly socially determined, pretty much in the same way that Burge (1979) taught us that 'arthritis' was. If this is true, then externalism is true about 'neurosis', yet not because of its referent, whatever that may be.

So what does an externalist need in order to offer an externalist account of a given term (or class of terms) 'K'? There are two kinds of requirements that must be satisfied. On the one hand, the externalist must identify the fact or facts Φ that at least partly determine the content of the relevant term (or class of terms) 'K'. In other words, the externalist must show how EC is satisfied. On the other hand, the externalist must show how the resulting account is a satisfactory one, that is, an account that explains how competent speakers use 'K', and why competent speaker intuitions are correct (if the account vindicates them) or incorrect (if the account rejects them).

In the case at hand, the use of 'water' in Dry Earth, any externalist account must answer the following questions in order to constitute a satisfactory account:

Q1: Why competent speakers use 'water' in a meaningful, truth-evaluable way?

Q2: Why competent speakers distinguish 'water' from any other empty term, such as 'phlogiston'?

Q3: Why competent subjects appear to guide their behavior partly in virtue of what seems to be the meaning of 'water'?

Q4: Why competent speakers make serious uses of 'water' in contexts where no pretense-making or fictional intentions are relevant?

In what follows I will present two externalist replies to Boghossian (1997) and Segal (2000) and show why they fail to offer satisfactory accounts of the phenomena. In the following section, section 3, I will offer an alternative externalist yet non-referentialist account that is meant to solve this problem.

2.2 Avoiding Fregeanism in disguise

Goldberg (2005) presents a *seemingly* externalist and referentialist reply to Boghossian (1997) and Segal (2000). On Goldberg's view, the term 'water' as used by dry-earthians expresses a different concept from the one expressed by earthian's use of 'water'. While earthians use 'water' to express the concept WATER, dry-earthians use it to express the concept EWATER. These concepts are importantly similar to each other and also importantly distinct.

Both concepts "correspond to the mental state typically produced in speakers when they are in the presence of what they take to be a clear, tasteless, colorless liquid fluid in their riverbeds and out of their taps" [Goldberg, 2005:150] Yet, while WATER does apply to something (i.e., H_2O), EWATER applies "to nothing".

Goldberg's account is based on two separate theses that, together, account for the meaningfulness and the externalist character of 'water' in Dry Earth. According to the first thesis, 'water' expresses the concept EWATER, i.e., that which corresponds with the mental state produced in speaker when they are in the presence of what appears to be water. This thesis is meant to account for the meaningfulness of dry-earthians' use of 'water'. The attitudes they have and what they talk about when they use 'water' is, at least partly, determined by this concept.

According to the second thesis, the concept EWATER applies to nothing. This thesis is meant to account for the externalist character of 'water' in Dry Earth. The concept EWATER applies to nothing in virtue of the fact that the rivers and lakes of Dry Earth "run bone dry". Thereby identifying the latter as the set of facts Φ that satisfy the externalist condition for the individuation of the content of 'water' as it is used in Dry Earth. It is the set of facts Φ that determines whether a given use of 'water' expresses

the concept WATER or EWATER and this, in turn, determines whether such use refers to H_2O or to nothing at all.

Besson (2012) argues against Goldberg's (2005) account by claiming that the resulting theory is unable to account for the difference between distinct empty kind terms. It cannot distinguish, she claims, between uses of 'phlogiston' in Earth and uses of 'water' in Dry Earth. If this were so, then Goldberg's account would be in serious trouble. I believe, however, that Besson's objection is owed to a misunderstanding of Goldberg's proposal, which Besson (2012) mistakenly understands as a *referentialist* for which all there is to the content of a kind term is its referent. Yet, Goldberg's (2005) account is more complex than that. To properly understand such complexity it will be best to see how the account does in fact offer a way to meet the satisfaction requirements Q1-Q4 above presented:

Q1: Why competent speakers use 'water' in a meaningful, truth-evaluable way?

Q2: Why competent speakers distinguish 'water' from any other empty term, such as 'phlogiston'?

Q3: Why competent subjects appear to guide their behavior partly in virtue of what seems to be the meaning of 'water'?

Q4: Why competent speakers make serious uses of 'water' in contexts where no pretense-making or fictional intentions are relevant?

To meet these requirements we must remember that Goldberg's account is based in on two different theses concerning the semantics of 'water'. These theses give place to what is more properly understood as a two-tiered semantic account. On this view, the term 'water' has two different semantic levels. On the first level there is a concept that is expressed by every use of the term, i.e., EWATER. This concept is identified as that which corresponds to the mental states "typically produced in subjects" when they are in the presence of what appears to them to be a colorless, tasteless liquid… On the second level there is the term's referent or referents. This referent, or referents, is identified as the object to which the associated concept applies. In the case of EWATER, there are no such referents or, if you prefer, the concept applies to the empty set.

From this perspective it is easy to see how Goldberg's account avoids Besson's (2012) objection, while meeting Q1-Q4. On this view, kind terms like 'water' have two semantic levels. One level accounts for the meaningfulness and semantic differences among kind terms. The other level accounts for the externalist features of the term. The former level may vary among different kind terms, whether they are empty or not. For

example, it varies between the use of 'water' and the use of 'phlogiston' in Dry Earth. We may assume that both terms refer to the empty set, yet it follows from Goldberg's account that they will each express different concepts, since the mental states to which they correspond are different: EWATER corresponds to the mental states produced in subjects by the presence of what appears to be water whereas PHLOIGSTON corresponds to mental states produced in subjects under clearly different conditions (e.g., by the presence of what appears to be heat). More generally, it is this first conceptual level of Goldberg's account that easily meets the requirements Q1-Q4.

It explains why speakers in Dry Earth use 'water' in a meaningful and truth-evaluable way (Q1) i.e., by expressing the concept EWATER. It explains why and how competent dry-earthians distinguish 'water' from 'phlogiston' (Q2) i.e., by distinguishing EWATER from PHLOGISTON. It explains how speakers may guide their behavior in Dry Earth by means of what appears to be the meaning of 'water (Q3) i.e., by means of EWATER. And, finally, it explains why competent speakers in Dry Earth make serious, non-pretense-involving, uses of 'water' (Q4) i.e., because they seriously (yet mistakenly) think that EWATER applies to some or other liquid in their environment.

The problem with Goldberg's (2005) is not, then, that it lacks enough resources to do the theoretical job that is needed. Rather, the problem is that it appears to have too many resources for what is supposed to be an externalist account. Goldberg's two-level account is reminiscent of Fregean semantic accounts, which constitute perhaps a paradigm of internalism.

Upon reflection it becomes clear that the reference level is not doing any theoretically relevant job in Goldberg's account and that, contrary to what Goldberg (2005) claims, facts Φ do not really determine the meaning of (i.e., the concept expressed by) a given use of 'water'. Consider the allegedly different concepts WATER and EWATER. Goldberg makes two claims about these concepts. First, he claims that they both "correspond to the mental state typically produced in speakers when they are in the presence of what they take to be a clear, tasteless, colorless liquid fluid in their riverbeds and out of their taps" [Goldberg, 2005:150] Second, he claims that they differ since one refers to H_2O and the other to nothing at all. This latter difference is, in turn, supposed to be explained by environmental difference. But, is it really true that the environmental differences are the ones determining whether a given use of 'water' ends up expressing one concept or the other? Isn't it really the other way around? Isn't it in virtue of the fact that 'water' expresses a concept that corresponds to mental states

typically produced by the presence of water that 'water' applies to nothing at all in Dry Earth?

I believe Goldberg's (2005) account is little more than an internalist descriptivist account in externalist clothing. To see this, consider the following explicitly internalist account. According to this Fregean account, 'water' has to different semantic levels. There is, first, the level of sense, which is the relevant one since it sets up the requirements that something must meet if it is to be the referent of 'water. At this level, the meaning of 'water' is given by the descriptive information "the clear, tasteless, colorless liquid fluid that runs in the riverbeds and out of the taps". This descriptive information is part of the information that any competent user of 'water' must know in order to properly use the term. It is, in fact, supervenient on the speaker's psychological states. The second level, that of reference, is truth-conditionally relevant yet determined by the former. At this level, meaning of 'water' is determined by whatever satisfies the descriptive information given at the first, sense, level. On this view, 'water' has the same (first level) meaning both on Earth as well as on Dry Earth, yet it has different (second level) meanings (or referents) at different worlds. Given that in Dry Earth nothing satisfies the sense of 'water', 'water' refers to nothing at all in Dry Earth.

This Fregean internalist account follows the steps of Goldberg's account, and does its job in pretty much the same way. It comes with two semantic levels (i.e., senses are Goldberg's corresponding concepts), and it varies at the referential level (i.e., on both views 'water' refers to H_2O on Earth and to nothing at all on Dry Earth). The only difference between both theories is that, according to Goldberg, WATER and EWATER are different concepts, whereas on the Fregean view all uses of 'water' have the same sense. This, however, seems to be little more than an appearance. For Goldberg has no good reason to think that WATER and EWATER are really different concepts. They are both individuated in the same way (i.e., as the concept that "corresponds to the mental state typically produced in speakers when they are in the presence of what they take to be a clear, … liquid") and they both have the same referents in the same worlds, for presumably the concept WATER also applies to nothing in Dry Earth.

If we want a proper externalist account of empty natural kind terms we need a theory that can help us do everything that Goldberg's (2005) theory does, but without implicitly (or explicitly, or course) appealing to descriptive information as a means to individuate the meaning – content or reference – of such terms. We need an account where the externalist conditions Φ do in fact fix the meaning of the term as it is used in

the relevant context. For this to be the case, the theory must clearly show how it is that any common semantic feature it may have with 'water' as it is used on Earth does not determine the meaning of 'water' as it is used on Dry Earth. This gives a further externalist requirement to be met.

> E1: The difference of meaning of the empty kind term must not be explained in terms of common semantic features between empty and non-empty uses.

2.3 Avoiding *ad hoc* internalism

Korman (2006) offers a disjunctive reply to Boghossian (1997) and Segal (2000). According to this view, externalism should be more properly understood as a theory of natural kinds and natural kind terms as long as they are not empty. As such, externalism is not committed to any particular view about either empty names or empty kind terms. More specifically, externalism is committed only to the following two claims. First, it is metaphysically necessary that all instances of a kind *K* are identical "with respect to their basic physical constitution" to actual instances of the kind. Second, it is necessary to have causal interaction with instances of the relevant kind in order to refer to the kind or to possess the relevant natural kind concept.

If we understand externalism this way, it is clear that nothing precludes the externalist from say anything whatsoever about empty kind terms, for these will be cases where non of the two externalist claims will be satisfied. Such a peculiar externalist may, as Korman (2008) claims, accept the following application conditions for kind terms.

> Non-empty: if 'K' turns out not to be empty, then 'K' refers to all and only the actual instances of K and all other instances that are identical to them in basic physical terms.

> Empty: if 'K' turns out to be empty, then 'K' is either necessarily empty or it refers to "all and only samples with the superficial features that K was believed to have". [Korman, 2006:508]

It should be obvious how this account is meant to respond to the challenge from Dry Earth. Given that it presents a scenario where 'water' is an empty kind term, the externalist should say either that it is necessarily empty – and hence that it is a different term from that of 'water' as it is used on Earth – or that it has descriptive content – and hence that it refers to the liquid that runs in the riverbeds and out of the taps.

Either option is, of course, already considered by both Boghossian (1997) and Segal (2000) and rejected on the grounds that none of them is adequately externalist. What Korman (2006) allegedly adds to the debate is the claim that this latter judgment is mistaken. The externalist may in fact endorse either one of these options, for she has no commitment whatsoever when it comes to empty terms.

I believe Korman (2006) is substantially mistaken for several reasons. First, because what he takes to be externalism simply fails to meet the basic externalist intuition, i.e., that of anti-individualism. There is nothing at all about Korman's notion of externalism that gets close to satisfying Putnam's slogan: meanings are simply not in the head. Nothing in causal relations and basic physical identity among instances grants us with an externalist account unless the content of the term is fixed by non-psychological facts Φ.

Second, Korman's (2006) appears to be little more than the acceptance that Segal (2000) and Boghossian (1997) have found a serious problem for the externalist, for it explicitly claims that the externalist has nothing to say about empty kind terms. I believe this is false, but even if it were true, it would be a vice (not a virtue) of externalism, for it is trivially true that all natural kind terms[1] are counterfactually empty or empty with respect to some possible world. Thus, accepting that externalism has nothing to say about empty kind terms is tantamount to accepting that it has nothing to say about natural kind terms or, if you prefer, about most uses of them.

Third, even if we ignore both problems above, Korman's account would still fail to be a satisfactory externalist account. Consider the two options given by the application conditions for empty cases. On the one hand, the externalist might claim that the concept is necessarily empty. Suppose, as Korman (2006) wants us to think, that we decide to do this after consulting speaker intuitions. It turns out then that we have an intuitive and externalist friendly account of the use of 'water' in Dry Earth. Yet on this view, there is nothing that differs between the use of 'water' and the use of 'phlogiston', for they both are necessarily empty. If this is so then, even if it is intuitively acceptable, the account is still unsatisfactory for it offers no explanation of why uses of 'water' in Dry Earth are meaningful and truth-evaluable, why and how they differ from uses of 'phlogiston' and how is it subjects successfully guide and predict behavior by using and

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[1] If a given kind term 'K' turns out to be necessarily non-empty, that is, if the relevant kind were to have instances in all possible worlds, then that would be a good reason to think that it is not a *natural* kind, for it would have instances no matter what the nature of a possible world is.

expressing the allegedly empty concept WATER. Briefly put, we have no acceptable way to meet requirements Q1-Q4.

On the other hand, we might one to follow the alternative option and claim that uses of 'water' in Dry Earth refer to "all and only samples with the superficial features that K was believed to have". Doing this would help us avoid all the problems faced by the previous alternative. It would be rather easy to show how requirements Q1-Q4 are met. In fact, it would be too easy, for doing so would be tantamount to offering a descriptivist and, whit it, internalist account of the use of 'water' in Dry Earth. If we are prepared to do this as externalists, why not simply accept that there is no externalist account of empty kind terms – and with them, of non-empty ones as well?

Korman's (2006) externalism seems to be satisfied with the idea that "it is up to the environment to determine which of the default conditionals is the operative default conditional" [p.509]. This may very well be true, but its truth has no bearing on the issue of whether the relevant terms should have its content defined in the externalist way. For one thing is for the external facts Φ to determine whether a term or a concept is empty and a very different one is for there to be external facts Φ that determine the content that a given term or concept has.

This gives us a second and final externalist requirement that our account should meet.

> E2: empty uses of 'K' must be meaningful and the relevant facts F must be necessary for determining the content of 'K'

3. Props instead of referents: a cognitive externalist account

What is needed, then, for an externalist account of empty kind terms to be satisfactory? The answer should be clear by now. We need an account according to which empty uses of 'water' in Dry Earth are meaningful. It must also be an account that individuates the meaningfulness of such uses by identifying the relevant external facts Φ. In so doing, the account must also meet externalist requirements

> E1: The difference of meaning of the empty kind term must not be explained in terms of common semantic features between empty and non-empty uses.

> E2: empty uses of 'K' must be meaningful and the relevant facts Φ must be necessary for determining the content of 'K'

And explanatory requirements as well, by explaining:

Q1: Why competent speakers use 'water' in a meaningful, truth-evaluable way?

Q2: Why competent speakers distinguish 'water' from any other empty term, such as 'phlogiston'?

Q3: Why competent subjects appear to guide their behavior partly in virtue of what seems to be the meaning of 'water'?

Q4: Why competent speakers make serious uses of 'water' in contexts where no pretense-making or fictional intentions are relevant?

Briefly put, an externalist account must meet what appear to be inconsistent requirements. There must be some set of facts Φ that determine the meaningfulness of 'water', yet these facts cannot be either the referent of 'water', for 'water' has no referent as it is used on Dry Earth, or a common semantic feature shared with non-empty uses of 'water' on Earth, for such features will typically be given by descriptive information that supervenes on the speaker's psychological states. If it cannot be the referent and it cannot be descriptive information, what else could it be?

The challenge is particularly problematic if, like most philosophers, you happen to identify externalism with referentialism. If reference is all there is to the externally relevant conditions for meaning determination, then the challenge is tantamount to finding something that is neither outside or inside the head, thus, externalism is doomed to fail. I have already argued that this is mistaken. So the first step towards finding a solution is to separate externalism from referentialism, something I have already argued for in section 2.1.

The next key step is to realize that even if we do not have a referent we still have plenty of would-be referents. In other words, the environment includes objects or properties that either purposefully or mistakenly are taken to be the referents of the relevant terms even if, in point of fact, they are not. Consider the case of 'Vulcan'. LeVerrier postulated the existence of a planet between Mercury and the Sun. He had reasons to do so. If there were such a planet, then certain peculiarities in the orbit of Mercury would be explained. Furthermore, LeVerrier based his reasoning on what was thought to be a sighting of Vulcan by an amateur astronomer. Whichever object it was that the amateur astronomer saw, it was mistakenly taken to be the referent of 'Vulcan'. It seems right to think that LeVerrier, as mistaken as he ways, used an object as a prop or stand-in for something else.

Now consider the case of Dry Earth as presented by Boghossian (1997):

> A planet just like ours in which, although it very much seems to its inhabitants that there is a clear, tasteless and colourless liquid flowing in their rivers and taps and to which they confidently take themselves to be applying the word 'water', these appearances are systematically false and constitute a sort of pervasive collective mirage. In point of actual fact, the lakes, rivers and taps on this particular Twin Earth run bone dry. [1997:170]

According to the setup there is some sort of "pervasive collective mirage". Dry Earth is such that, perhaps owed to how light reflects upon surfaces, a pervasive optical (perhaps also auditory?) illusion takes place. However it is that this phenomenon takes place, it must be an external (i.e., non-individualistic) one, for otherwise it would be hard to explain why not a single inhabitant of Dry Earth has discovered the truth. Briefly put, the collective mirage constitutes itself a set of relevant facts Φ that do no supervene on the psychological states of the inhabitants of Dry Earth.

Whatever the nature of Φ, it seems natural to think that speakers in Dry Earth take their uses of 'water' to be meaningful in virtue of such facts Φ. Competent speakers take Φ, the pervasive mirage, to be the referent of 'water', though they ignore that Φ is what it is (a mirage) and not a clear tasteless liquid.

As theorists, we cannot take Φ to be the *referent* of 'water' in Dry Earth, for 'water' is meant to be a natural kind whose referent, if any, are instances of H_2O. The term, as is used in Dry Earth, is after all an empty one. Yet, even if the term lacks any semantically determined content, this does not preclude speakers from using it meaningfully or us, theorists, from account for such meaningfulness in non-semantic terms. What is needed is a theory that systematically explains how speakers may use objects as substitute or *surrogate* referents when none are available. With such a theory in hand, an externalist can easily explain how speakers in Dry Earth use 'water' meaningfully while relying on externalist conditions of meaning, such as facts Φ.

I will present some such theory in what remains of this paper.

3.1 Cognitivism

Human beings are well known to have higher order representational abilities. Among others, humans have the ability to form, understand, manipulate and interpret mental representations. According to Leslie (1987) and Nichols and Stich (2000) this ability is of special relevance for the Theory of Mind Mechanism (ToMM) and, with it, in contexts of pretense and make-believe. It is relevant for ToMM, as it requires the use of higher order mental representations (e.g., representations about representations, such as

attitude ascriptions); and it is relevant for pretense and make-believe, as it allows participants to represent the environment as if it were in such a way that it is not.

Leslie (1987) famously postulates the existence of a decoupling mechanism, a higher order cognitive mechanism, as a means for explaining how infants and adults engage in complex forms of pretense and make-believe. One of the most elaborate forms of pretense is the one known as "object substitution". There is object substitution when participants take an object as a prop or surrogate of something else, e.g., as when children use a bicycle as a prop of a horse in a game of make-believe. For there to be object substitution participants must take the prop as the referent of the relevant term (e.g., 'my horse' or 'this horse') even though, as a matter of fact, it is not.

It is by means of the decoupling mechanism that subjects are able to modify the relevant mental representations in order to engage in a game of make-believe. This mechanism is constituted by different sub-processes that *copy, manipulate,* and *interpret* mental representations for the purposes at hand. The result is a higher order cognitive mechanism that is available for general cognition and independent of any domain specific task. In other words, the decoupling mechanism is independent of both language and perception and may be use to aid any or both of them.

Take, for example, the case of a game of make-believe: two children pretending their bicycles are horses. They both have perceptually formed representations such as THIS IS A HORSE and THIS IS A BICYCLE. The decoupling mechanism works, first, by coping the relevant representation, say THIS IS A HORSE. To copy a representation, in this technical sense, is to form a duplicate of it while suspending it semantic and existential properties. Leslie (1987) takes this to be similar to the process of putting a sentence within quotes. Next, the decoupling mechanism manipulates the representations, by associating it with information available either in perception or in memory, e.g., that horses are good for racing, that there is a bicycle in front of you, etc. After the copy, say 'THIS IS A HORSE', is manipulated, the result is a different representation. This latter representation may be assigned semantic (e.g., referents) and existential commitments at will, depending on the interest of the subject. The result is a representation such as 'THIS IS A HORSE' where the term 'this' refers to a particular bicycle. This representation may be assigned truth-values correspondingly.

The decoupling mechanism can be of great theoretical use when it comes to accounting for how speakers use empty names, whether fictional or not. This, in turn, has substantial philosophical implications, as it allows us to offer an externalist account

of empty terms in general. Briefly put, the decoupling mechanism explains in a systematic fashion how it is that speakers may take a mind independent object or property and use it as a surrogate of something else, either in place of a different existent object or property (e.g., a bicycle as a surrogate of a horse) or in place of a missing referent that simply does not exist (e.g., fictional characters or failed scientific hypothesis).

As I have already argued elsewhere (see Garcia-Ramirez, 2011), all the externalist needs to do is accept the following cognitivist principle.

> Cognitivism: Serious assertions, belief reports, and fictional uses of empty names and empty kind terms are meaningful and intelligible mainly in virtue of the cognitive-general resources they recruit and not in virtue of their semantics alone.

There are two important features of the decoupling mechanism that must be underscored. First, the decoupling mechanism is meant to help as an aid for any task that may benefit from the use of mental representations. As such, it may be triggered whenever other mechanisms may require. ToMM may trigger it, whenever the subject is in need of a mental representation that can predict someone else's mental states. The subject's perceptual system may also trigger the decoupling mechanism, whenever the subject is in need of interpreting a term or a concept for which no referent is available, either in memory or in perception.

Second, the decoupling mechanism is meant to work at a sub-personal level, as a opposed to a conscious, reflexive one. What the subject knows (believes or ignores) about the relevant name or kind term is irrelevant to the use of the mechanism.[2]

Thus, once we accept the cognitivist principle we have an externalist account available. Whenever inhabitants of Dry Earth use the word 'water' they use it in a meaningful way in virtue of the fact that they sub-personally put their decoupling mechanism to use by manipulating 'water', the information associated with it, and stipulate that the relevant facts Φ (i.e., the odd yet accepted phenomenon of systematic, collective, optical illusion) are to work as a surrogate referent of 'water.

3.2 Not a pretense account

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[2] For more on the details of this cognitive theory of empty terms, including the nature of the resulting representations and the different contexts at which the account may be put at use, see Garcia-Ramirez, 2011

At this point it is important to note that the resulting, cognitive and externalist, account of empty kind terms is not a "pretense" account, as they are known in the literature. What the account claims is not that speakers use 'water' meaningfully because they pretend to do so. Pretense is a personal-level attitude and, as such, it is consciously available. The decoupling mechanism, as I have said, works at a sub-personal level. It may be put at use for cases of pretense, but it may also be a central part of serious, non-pretense-involving, uses of empty terms – such as LeVerrier's 'Vulcan' and Dry Earth's 'water'. All this is possible precisely in virtue of the fact that the decoupling mechanism is a general-purpose (i.e., available for different tasks) cognitive mechanism that works at a sub-personal level (i.e., independently of the specific kind of attitudes that may benefit from its use).

3.3 The cognitive externalist account

In her recent defense of Boghossian's (1997) and Segal's (2000) objections, Besson (2012) offers what appears to be an exhaustive account of the alternative options available for the externalist. Considering what 'water' means both on Earth and Dry Earth, there are four different options:

(i)   'water' is a meaningful natural kind term on Dry Earth and it means the same as on Earth;

(ii) 'water' is a meaningful natural kind term on Dry Earth, but it means something different as on Earth;

(iii) 'water' is a meaningless term on Dry Earth; and

(iv) 'water' is a meaningful term on Dry Earth, but it is not a natural kind term.

Besson (2012) argues against (i) to (iii) for reasons I have already considered. Option (i) is a truly internalist one and, hence, it is not available for externalists. For option (ii) to be externalist we must take 'water' to refer to an empty natural kind, thus going back to Goldberg's (2005) proposal, which I have already rejected. Finally, option (iii) simply fails to offer an account of the meaningful uses of 'water' on Dry Earth. So we are left with option (iii), which is the best option within Besson's taxonomy for classifying the cognitive account I have here presented.

Besson (2012) argues that option (iii) is not a good externalist option on the basis that it requires the use of descriptive information for content determination purposes.

> Typically, on this proposal, the empty case is treated in the same way as the case of natural kind terms that refer to motleys – several kinds – such as 'jade' (which refers to nephrite and jadeite).

But there are serious problems with this proposal. One is the very assumption that empty natural kind terms and natural kind terms that refer to motleys should have the same descriptive semantics.

Also, in a strange way, this proposal is at once radically externalist, and yet very internalist. On the one hand, it is internalism in that descriptivism is typically associated with internalism. […] On the other hand, it is radically externalist because it means that weather an expression is descriptive or not depends on the external physical environment of the speakers. [Besson, 2012:413]

Besson's diagnosis of option (iii) seems to apply to theories such as Korman's (2006) according to which 'water' turns out to have a semantic switch that allows it to change from a simple referential term into a complex descriptive one (see section 2.3). Yet, this is not the case of the cognitive account I have here offered.

On the cognitive externalism 'water' is a referential term both on Earth and on Dry Earth. It is meaningful on Dry Earth in virtue of what goes on with the decoupling mechanism – in virtue of the speaker's ability to use the facts Φ that constitute the collective illusion as a surrogate referent of 'water'. Yet, even though there is a *surrogate* referent associated with its use, 'water' *does not* have a *referent*. Thus, 'water' fails to refer to a natural kind on Dry Earth and so it fails to be a natural kind term.

What is crucial on this account, at least with respect to the anti-externalist challenge posed by Boghossian (1997) and Segal (2000), is that there is a relevant identifiable set of facts Φ that do not supervene on the speaker's psychological states and that determine the meaningfulness of 'water' on Dry Earth. Thus, no descriptive information is needed for explanatory purposes. Hence, 'water' does not turn out to be a term for motley kinds, nor those it have a descriptive semantic level, and much less does it switch from referential to descriptive semantics depending on the occasion. So, even though option (iii) theories "typically" appeal to these complex descriptivism, the cognitivist account does not. As a result, it faces none of the three problems that Besson (2012) associates with them: it does not assume that 'water' has a descriptive content on Dry Earth; it is not internalist, as it does not use descriptive information at all; and it does not have the consequence that 'water' shifts its metasemantic profile from referential to descriptive depending on external facts.

To further convince the reader that this is a satisfactory externalist account, let me conclude by showing how it meets all the relevant externalist criteria (E1-E2), while meeting also the satisfaction requirements (Q1-Q4).

The account individuates the meaningfulness of 'water' on Dry Earth by identifying the relevant external facts Φ. These are the facts that constitute the external phenomena of the pervasive and systematic optical (and perhaps auditory) illusion in virtue of which the inhabitants of Dry Earth believe there is a clear odorless liquid that runs out of their taps. In so doing, the account also meets externalist requirements E1 and E2.

E1: The difference of meaning of the empty kind term must not be explained in terms of common semantic features between empty and non-empty uses.

E2: empty uses of 'K' must be meaningful and the relevant facts Φ must be necessary for determining the content of 'K'

The difference of meaning between uses of 'water' on Earth and on Dry Earth is explained in terms of the difference among the external facts Φ that determine the meaningfulness of each use of the term. Whereas on Earth these facts are pretty much instances of H2O, on Dry Earth we have the pervasive illusion. Thus, the account directly meets E1.

It is easy to see how the account meets E2 as well. On this view, 'water' is meaningful in virtue of using a surrogate referent, identified by the relevant facts Φ, thus making them necessary for content determination purposes.

Finally, let us consider the explanatory requirements Q1-Q4:

Q1: Why competent speakers use 'water' in a meaningful, truth-evaluable way?

Q2: Why competent speakers distinguish 'water' from any other empty term, such as 'phlogiston'?

Q3: Why competent subjects appear to guide their behavior partly in virtue of what seems to be the meaning of 'water'?

Q4: Why competent speakers make serious uses of 'water' in contexts where no pretense-making or fictional intentions are relevant?

The cognitivist externalist account takes competent speakers to use 'water' in virtue of exploiting their higher order cognitive abilities and, more specifically, in virtue of the decoupling mechanism. This explains both, why speakers use the term meaningfully and why they successfully distinguish it from the use of other empty terms – which would have a different meaning if they were meaningful at all. Given that on this view

there is a content associated with the term 'water' (i.e., a surrogate referent), this content, produced by the decoupling mechanism will be good enough to guide the behavior and mental states of the relevant subjects. They will fetch the surrogate referent as if it were the referent of 'water' and will behave as if they could quench their thirst with it. Finally, the fact that all these is produced by a sub-personal representation processing mechanism helps explain why inhabitants of Dry Earth make serious uses of the term.

For all these reasons I believe the cognitivist externalist account of empty names (see Garcia-Ramirez, 2011) and empty kind terms should be considered a serious theoretical alternative.

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