4. I have had it suggested to me that the on/off light found on some measuring instruments has the function of indicating that the instrument is on—thus carrying the information that the instrument is in a representational mode. When the instrument registers "0" with the light off, it does not represent $Q$ to be $0$. When it registers "0" with the light on, it represents (possibly misrepresented) $Q$ to be $0$. So the light carries the information that the instrument is representing (possibly misrepresenting) $Q$. I agree that the light indicates—at least it has the function of indicating—when the instrument is turned on, but I don’t agree that it indicates that the instrument is representing $Q$. Swampmeter also has a light that goes on when a switch is closed, but swampmeter never represents anything. The light doesn’t tell us—it has no way of telling us—that it is installed in a genuine $Q$ meter rather than, say, a swampmeter.

5. Though I confess to being uncertain in this area. See Dretske, forthcoming.

6. See Evans 1982: 205–233 and Shoemaker 1988 for (what I regard as) attractive accounts of how we might learn to self-ascribe thoughts and experiences to ourselves without being aware (in a perceptual way) of the thoughts and experiences themselves.

7

A Puzzle about Doubt
Gary Ebbs

1 What Can an Anti-individualist Know A Priori?

My central goal in this paper is to identify and dissolve a puzzle that lies behind a vexing debate about what an anti-individualist can know a priori. In this opening section, I will review common assumptions and contested points of the debate, and briefly explain my misgivings about one of the common assumptions. In later sections I will identify and dissolve the puzzle that lies behind the debate.

Anti-individualism is the view that what a person believes and thinks is not settled by his linguistic dispositions, internal physical states, or phenomenal experiences, described independently of his social and physical environment. One central question about anti-individualism is whether it is compatible with minimal self-knowledge—the familiar fact that (in a sense yet to be clarified) we each know without empirical investigation what thoughts our own utterances express. If what we know without empirical investigation is what we know a priori, then the question of whether anti-individualism is compatible with minimal self-knowledge is linked to the question of what an anti-individualist can know a priori.

This question has been much discussed recently in the literature about anti-individualism. Although several answers to the question have been proposed, a single debate now dominates the discussion. On one side are those who argue that an anti-individualist who assumes she has minimal self-knowledge is committed to the unacceptable conclusion that she has a priori knowledge of some truths that in fact she cannot know a priori. On the other side are those who argue that anti-individualists are not committed to this unacceptable conclusion. Philosophers on both sides of the debate assume that minimal self-knowledge is second-order, in the sense that statements that express
such knowledge have the logical form ‘I am thinking that $p$’, where ‘$p$’ is replaced by a declarative sentence. They also assume that both reason and introspection can be sources of a priori knowledge.

Much of literature about the debate has focused on an argument by Michael McKinsey (1991a: 9). The argument presupposes that a priori knowledge is “knowledge obtained independently of empirical investigation.” Suppose that I utter the sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’, thereby expressing the thought that water is a liquid at room temperature. Suppose also that I have minimal self-knowledge, so I know without empirical investigation that I am thinking that water is a liquid at room temperature. By assumption, a priori knowledge is knowledge obtained without empirical investigation, so I know a priori that (1):

(1) I am thinking that water is a liquid at room temperature.

If anti-individualism is correct and I accept it, McKinsey assumes, I am in a position to know by reasoning alone, hence a priori, a conceptual truth of the form ‘If I am thinking that water is a liquid at room temperature, then $E$’, where $E$ is a statement that most philosophers would say I cannot know a priori. I am in a position to know a priori, for instance, that (2):

(2) If I am thinking that water is a liquid at room temperature, then either I or members of my linguistic community have seen or touched water.

And if I can know a priori that (1) and (2), then by modus ponens I can deduce, and thereby know a priori, that (3):

(3) Either I or members of my linguistic community have seen or touched water.

But it seems that no one can know a priori that either he or members of his linguistic community have seen or touched water. Hence anti-individualism apparently implies that a person can have a priori knowledge of some statements that in fact he cannot know a priori. I will call this McKinsey’s argument.

The orthodox reply to McKinsey’s argument (implicit in Burge 1982a, explicit in Brueckner 1992a and McLaughlin and Tye 1998) is that despite appearances to the contrary, an anti-individualist who assumes he has minimal self-knowledge has no reason to think he can know a priori any statement that most philosophers would say he cannot know a priori. According to this reply, to know what one is thinking when one utters a particular sentence, one need not know or presuppose any empirical statements. Premise (2) of McKinsey’s argument may be true, but even if it is true, it is not a conceptual truth, as McKinsey assumes, and so we cannot know it a priori.

The initial plausibility of this reply masks a deep problem with both sides of the debate. The problem can be traced back to a widely accepted but unexamined assumption about how an anti-individualist should analyze epistemic possibility. Twin Earth thought experiments suggest that for each person we can describe subjectively equivalent worlds in which everything that is relevant to the person’s subjective assessment of her situation seems the same to her as it does in the actual world, but her social or physical environments are different from her social or physical environment in the actual world. According to the standard analysis of epistemic possibility, no one can know by reasoning or introspecting—without empirical investigation—which of her subjectively equivalent worlds she is actually in.

The problem, I will argue, is that this standard analysis of epistemic possibility conflicts with the truisms that to express a thought, one must have some idea of what that thought is. To defend and clarify the truisms, I will argue that contrary to the standard analysis of epistemic possibility, if we accept anti-individualism, there are some apparently empirical statements that we cannot make sense of doubting.

2 Anti-individualism and Self-Knowledge

To see the conflict between the truisms and the standard analysis of epistemic possibility, it helps to reflect first on the methodology behind Putnam’s (1975) Twin Earth thought experiments, which have persuaded many to accept anti-individualism. In my view, these thought experiments are persuasive because they are based in our practice of taking fellow English speakers’ words at face value.

Recall the thought experiment involving Oscar, an ordinary English speaker who is competent in the use of the English word ‘water’ but does not accept (or reject) the sentence ‘Water is H$_2$O’. Suppose that Oscar utters the sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’. Since Oscar is a competent English speaker, other English speakers take his words at face value—they take him to have said that water is a liquid at room temperature. If they think his utterance is sincere, they also take him to believe this.
Now suppose there is a planet called Twin Earth, which is just like Earth except that wherever there is water on Earth, there is twin water, a liquid with an underlying chemical structure very different from the chemical structure of water, on Twin Earth. On Twin Earth there lives a physical, phenomenological, and behavioral twin of Oscar, Twin Oscar, who is a normal speaker of Twin English, the Twin Earth counterpart of English. When Twin Oscar utters the sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’, his fellow Twin English speakers take his words at face value—they take him to have said (translated into English) that twin water is a liquid at room temperature. If they think his utterance is sincere, they also take him to believe this.

Together with our trust in our practice of taking other speakers’ words at face value, these observations show that what a person believes and thinks is not settled solely by his linguistic dispositions, internal physical states, or phenomenal experiences, described independently of his social and physical environment. This negative thesis is what I call anti-individualism.9

Putnam (1975) also argued that even in 1750, before scientists on Earth and Twin Earth discovered the chemical properties of water and twin water, respectively, a competent English speaker who uttered the sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’ thereby expressed the thought that water is a liquid at room temperature, while his twin on Twin Earth expressed the thought (translated into English) that twin water is a liquid at room temperature. In my view, it is because we endorse our practice of taking each other’s words at face value across time, from moment to moment, and even for centuries, that we can see that in both linguistic communities, looking backward from today, the references of the words for water and twin water did not change when the chemical properties of the liquids to which they apply were discovered.10

If we endorse our practice of taking each other’s words at face value, we can also see that minimal competence in the use of a word requires more than simply writing or uttering sentences in which the word occurs. We wouldn’t take a speaker to be using the English word ‘apple’ competently if she applies it only to points of light visible in the night sky. Yet a child who at first refuses to call a green apple an ‘apple’ might still be taken to be able to use the word ‘apple’ to express thoughts about apples, and to believe of the green apple that it is not an apple, provided that she has some other beliefs about apples, including some true beliefs that she expresses by using the sentence ‘That’s an apple’.11

Our firmest grip on the requirements for minimal competence is our practice of taking each other’s words at face value in a given context, unless we see some concrete reason in that context for not doing so.12

These observations about minimal competence are intimately linked with our judgments about when a speaker has minimal self-knowledge.13 To credit a speaker of a given natural language with minimal self-knowledge is to take her to be able to use words of her own language to express thoughts, make claims, raise questions, and so on. Any situation in which we are willing to take another’s words at face value is thereby also one in which we will credit her with having minimal self-knowledge.14 Viewed in this way, minimal self-knowledge is a practical aspect of ordinary competence in the use of language, not a kind of second-order propositional knowledge, as many philosophers assume. Unlike second-order propositional knowledge of what one is thinking, minimal self-knowledge is as widespread as the everyday use of language to express thoughts, evaluate beliefs, raise questions, and so on.15 In taking other speakers’ words at face value, we thereby also take them to know what they are talking about in a minimal sense that goes with competence.16

These observations clarify the truism that to express a thought, one must have some idea of what that thought is. To take someone to express a thought by using a given word is also to take him to have some beliefs that he expresses by using that word. These beliefs may be false or misleading, but not just any utterances of sentences containing a word suffice for minimal competence in the use of the word, as the ‘apple’ example shows.17

3 Apriority and Epistemic Possibility

The only assumption that McKinsey explicitly makes about a priori knowledge is that it is “knowledge obtained independently of empirical investigation” (1991a: 9). Most philosophers involved in the debate sketched above simply repeat McKinsey’s characterization of a priori knowledge and agree with him about which beliefs the person can know a priori. It is widely agreed, for instance, that no one can know a priori that members of her linguistic community have seen or touched water.18

But McKinsey’s characterization of a priori knowledge does not explain this agreement. To see why, consider my belief that physicists in my linguistic community have detected quarks. I have read this in authoritative books, but have never undertaken any empirical investigation into
whether it is true. By ordinary standards, I am epistemically entitled to believe that physicists in my linguistic community have detected quarks; if this is true, then I know it independently of empirical investigation. Similarly, an unusually sheltered person who is told that members of her linguistic community have seen or touched water might be epistemically entitled to believe this without undertaking any empirical investigation into whether the person who told her this is trustworthy or whether it is true; if it is true, then by ordinary standards she knows it independently of empirical investigation. It therefore seems that according to McKinsey’s characterization of a priori knowledge, she knows a priori that members of her linguistic community have seen or touched water. But it is supposed to be obvious that no one knows a priori that members of her linguistic community have seen or touched water.

One might think that in both of these cases the knowledge gained by testimony is not independent of empirical investigation, because it can be traced back to empirical observations made by others. But minimal self-knowledge cannot be independent of empirical observation in this sense, since it requires minimal competence, which typically depends on accepting testimony from others. For a large number of words, the testimony that we accept when we acquire competence in the use of those words can be traced back through chains of similar testimony to speakers who have made empirical observations that support it. In the context of anti-individualism, then, we cannot assume that a given person’s minimal self-knowledge is independent of everyone else’s empirical observations. The most we can say is that to have minimal self-knowledge is to know what thoughts one’s utterances express without going through any empirical investigation of one’s own.

For this reason, McKinsey’s characterization of a priori knowledge does not explain why so many philosophers agree with him about which statements can be known a priori. What does explain this? The answer, I believe, is that most philosophers presuppose a tempting but misguided analysis of epistemic possibility that looks like an immediate consequence of the Twin Earth thought experiments themselves. As I noted earlier, the Twin Earth thought experiments suggest that for each individual, we can describe subjectively equivalent worlds in which her physical and phenomenal states, described independently of her environment, are the same, but her environments are different. Most philosophers assume that no one can distinguish between any of her subjectively equivalent worlds just by reasoning or introspecting—that all of a person’s subjectively equivalent worlds are epistemically possible for her.

They find this analysis of epistemic possibility appealing on its own terms, for two reasons that I will soon discuss. In addition, I believe, they find it attractive because it is like the analysis of epistemic possibility that Saul Kripke introduced in Naming and Necessity to solve a puzzle about his view of reference and necessity. The puzzle is that in Kripke’s view, if Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus, then there is no possible world in which Hesperus is not identical to Phosphorus. Prior to our discovery that Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus, we assumed that ‘Hesperus is identical with Phosphorus’ may actually be false. Hesperus is in fact identical to Phosphorus, however, and so, by Kripke’s theory, Hesperus is necessarily identical with Phosphorus: we can’t express our prior assumption by saying that it could have turned out that Hesperus is not identical to Phosphorus. Kripke therefore had to provide a new analysis of our previous assumption that ‘Hesperus is identical with Phosphorus’ may actually be false. He stipulated that “given the evidence that someone has antecedent to his empirical investigation, he can be placed in a sense in exactly the same situation, that is a qualitatively identical epistemic situation, and call two heavenly bodies ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’, without their being identical” (1972/1980: 104).

Kripke suggested that since prior to our empirical investigation, we could not discriminate between these worlds on the basis of our evidence, we may actually have been in a world in which ‘Hesperus is not identical to Phosphorus’ is true. He explicitly connected this analysis with the traditional idea of a priori knowledge: “Two things are true: first, that we do not know a priori that Hesperus is Phosphorus, and are in no position to find out the answer except empirically. Second, that this is so because we could have evidence qualitatively indistinguishable from the evidence we have and determine the reference of the two names by the positions of two planets in the sky, without the planets being the same” (Kripke 1972/1980: 104). I suggest that this characterization of a priori knowledge is what lies behind the agreement that a person cannot know a priori, for instance, that members of her linguistic community have seen or touched water. The idea is that she can’t know without empirical investigation that she is not in any one of her subjectively equivalent worlds in which no member of her linguistic community has seen or touched water.

Most philosophers writing about what an anti-individualist can know a priori take this analysis of epistemic possibility for granted, without giving any reasons why we should accept it. Kripke himself does not argue for his analysis of epistemic possibility; he presents it as obvious...
and beyond question. To evaluate it, however, we need a better idea of why so many philosophers accept it.

I think that there are two main reasons. The first is that they want to make sense of Descartes’ radical skeptical hypotheses about the nature and existence of an “external” world, including the hypothesis that all my experiences, from the beginning to the end of my life, are parts of an elaborate dream, and the hypothesis that I am massively deceived by an evil demon. To find these hypotheses compelling is to picture a vast gulf between how things seem and how they are. In the context of anti-individualism, a tempting way of picturing this supposed gulf is by holding our subjective experiences constant and specifying different external environments compatible with all those subjective experiences. Many philosophers assume that to entertain the thought that they are in one of these worlds, it is enough for them to picture the subjective experiences they would have in these worlds (experiences that are by definition the same as the subjective experiences they have in the actual world) and then add a caption that describes an “external” world that is compatible with the picture. In what follows, I’ll say that to combine one’s subjective experiences with a caption in this way is to picture oneself in a specified subjectively equivalent world. Most philosophers assume that for a person to entertain the thought that she is actually in one of her subjectively equivalent worlds, she need only picture herself in it.

A second reason why so many accept Kripke’s analysis of epistemic possibility is that it provides a natural interpretation of the traditional view that a priori knowledge is based on reasoning or introspecting, independent of any evidence from the senses, and that neither reasoning nor introspecting, by themselves or in combination, can tell us which possible world we are in.

4 The Puzzle

It follows from the standard analysis of epistemic possibility just described that if I restrict myself to what I can know without empirical investigation, I must accept (4):

(4) I may actually be in any of my subjectively equivalent worlds.

Yet I assume that without empirical investigation, I know what thoughts my utterances express. For instance, I assume without empirical investigation that I am epistemically entitled to accept (5):

(5) My utterances of ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’ express the thought that water is a liquid at room temperature.

If I am justified in accepting (4) and (5) without empirical investigation, then I am justified in concluding (6) without empirical investigation:

(6) In all of my subjectively equivalent worlds, my utterances of ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’ express the thought that water is a liquid at room temperature.

The trouble is that the normal procedure for conducting thought experiments that support anti-individualism implies the negation of (6):

(7) In some of my subjectively equivalent worlds, my utterances of ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’ do not express the thought that water is a liquid at room temperature.

Thus I seem committed to accepting the conjunction of (6) and (7)—a contradiction.

One strategy for trying to avoid this contradiction is to question whether we can know without empirical investigation all the premises that generate it. With this in mind, I constructed this puzzle so that each of its claims, (4) to (7), appears to be independent of empirical investigation. The key premise, (4), apparently follows from our understanding of the phrase “subjectively equivalent world.” And we can’t give up (5) without abandoning the presumption that anti-individualism is compatible with minimal self-knowledge. Given (4) and (5), we cannot deny (6). It seems that the only claim that may require empirical justification is (7).

To construct a thought experiment that supports (7), we need to understand the possible worlds we are describing well enough to see that in those worlds our utterances of sentences would express different thoughts from the ones we take them to express. (This is just another illustration of the truisms that to express a thought one must have some idea of what that thought is.) For instance, to support (7) by constructing an anti-individualistic thought experiment involving my word ‘water’, I must presuppose that the subjectively equivalent world that I take to be different from the one that I am actually in is in fact different from it. But if all my subjectively equivalent worlds are epistemically possible for me, I can’t know without empirical investigation which of my subjectively equivalent worlds I am in. One might therefore think that I cannot support (7) without empirical investigation.
Let's say that a substantive statement for a given person is any statement of hers that according to the standard analysis of epistemic possibility she cannot know without empirical investigation. A substantive statement for a person is true in some of her subjectively equivalent worlds and false in some of her subjectively equivalent worlds. For instance, my statements that water is a liquid at room temperature and that I am not in the subjectively equivalent world in which I was born, raised, and now live on Twin Earth are substantive, because according to the standard analysis of epistemic possibility, I cannot know these statements without empirical investigation.

Let's also say that if a person affirms a substantive statement that $p$, then she holds a substantive belief that $p$, and that if she suspends this belief, then she does not affirm or deny that $p$. Then the reasoning presented two paragraphs above presupposes that I can have minimal self-knowledge of what thoughts I express by using a given group of terms even if I suspend all the substantive beliefs I express by using those terms. On this view, I know what thoughts I express by asserting my sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’, for instance, even if I suspend any substantive beliefs that I could express by using the terms ‘water’, ‘liquid’, or ‘temperature’.

The trouble is that for most terms I use, I can’t have minimal self-knowledge of what thoughts I express by using those terms if I suspend all the substantive beliefs I express by using those terms. To have minimal self-knowledge, one must be able to use one’s own words to make claims, raise questions, express thoughts, and so forth. Moreover, as I’ve already noted several times, it is a truism that to make claims, raise questions, and express thoughts, one must have some idea of what those claims, questions, or thoughts are. For most terms of English, including such terms as ‘water’, ‘liquid’, or ‘temperature’, for instance, a person who suspends all substantive beliefs that she would express by using one of those terms is incompetent in its use and does not count as expressing any thoughts by using it.

One can appreciate this aspect of the puzzle without endorsing my view that anti-individualism implies that to make claims, raise questions, and express thoughts, one must have some idea of what those claims, questions, or thoughts are. It is enough simply to assume that we have minimal self-knowledge, and to accept the truism. But the account of anti-individualism that I sketched earlier deepens and consolidates this aspect of the puzzle, by explaining why anti-individualism requires that we have minimal self-knowledge, and why we can’t have minimal self-knowledge unless we have some idea of what thoughts our utterances express. The key point is that in a large number of ordinary cases, to take a person to have expressed a particular thought by uttering a given sentence is to take her to be minimally competent in the use of the terms that make up the sentence. This requires that she have some substantive beliefs—affirm some substantive statements—that she expresses by using those terms. As I argued above, a speaker is incompetent in the use of a word—whether it be a widely shared word of a public language, or a word that only a few idiosyncratic speakers share—if she refuses to affirm any substantive statements in which it occurs.

The puzzle, then, is this. It seems that without empirical investigation, we are each epistemically entitled to accept (4), because it follows from the standard analysis of epistemic possibility; (5), because we have minimal self-knowledge; and (7), because it follows from the Twin Earth thought experiments. But (4) and (5) together entail (6), which is the negation of (7). If we reject (7) for this reason, we must suspend all our substantive beliefs, so we can’t be credited with having minimal self-knowledge, and hence we must reject (5). Yet (5), an instance of minimal self-knowledge, is in fact a consequence of anti-individualism, as I argued above. We are therefore apparently committed to each of (4) through (7), including the contradictory pair (6) and (7).

5 My Strategy for Dissolving the Puzzle

The weakest premise of the puzzle is the one that almost everyone accepts without reflection—premise (4). I will argue that in the same sense of ‘know’ in which we know without empirical investigation what thoughts our utterances express, we can know without empirical investigation that (4) is false. It is a formidable task to make this seem plausible, however, given the popularity of the standard analysis of epistemic possibility, which is sustained by two almost irresistible assumptions: first, that we can make sense of radical Cartesian doubts, and second, that we can’t know by reasoning or introspecting which of our subjectively equivalent worlds we are actually in. It is no answer to these deeply entrenched assumptions simply to assert that we can know without empirical investigation that (4) is false.

To challenge the standard reasons for accepting (4), we must distinguish between two questions:

(Q1) Given what I know without empirical investigation, is it epistemically possible for me that I am actually in any one of my subjectively equivalent worlds?
(Q2) Are there worlds \( w_1, \ldots, w_n \) such that (a) \( w_1, \ldots, w_n \) are among my subjectively equivalent worlds and (b) I can know by reasoning or introspecting, without relying on any of my substantive beliefs, that I am not in any of \( w_1, \ldots, w_n \)?

These questions are not explicitly addressed in the literature about what an anti-individualist can know a priori, but I speculate that philosophers who are attracted to (4) would reason roughly as follows:

"The answer to (Q2) is 'No,' because I can't discriminate between my subjectively equivalent worlds by introspecting, and reasoning can only be a source of knowledge about what is in some sense necessary, but all my subjectively equivalent worlds are possible. Hence I cannot know by reasoning or introspecting, without relying on any of my substantive beliefs, which of my subjectively equivalent worlds I am in. Therefore, for all I know without empirical investigation, I may actually be in any one of my subjectively equivalent worlds. Hence the answer to (Q1) is 'Yes.'"

Against this, I will argue that to solve the puzzle we must see that the answer to both (Q1) and (Q2) is "No." Since I agree with the standard assumption that the answer to (Q2) is "No," I must show why, despite this answer to (Q2), the answer to (Q1) is "No," and, as a consequence, we can know without empirical investigation that (4) is false.

The heart of my argument is that even if the answer to (Q2) is "No" and I restrict myself to what I know without empirical investigation, not all of my subjectively equivalent worlds are epistemically possible for me. I start by assuming that it is epistemically possible that \( \phi \) for a given person only if she can make sense of its actually being the case that \( \phi \). Most philosophers assume that all of a person's subjectively equivalent worlds are epistemically possible for her because they assume that each person can make sense of actually being in any one of her subjectively equivalent worlds. I will argue that this is an illusion sustained by the mistaken assumption that for a person to make sense of actually being in any one of her subjectively equivalent worlds, it is enough for her to picture herself existing in that world.

6 Epistemic Possibility and Doubt

To get clear about what is epistemically possible, we must make a number of distinctions and clarifications. First, at any given time \( t \), sub-ject \( A \) will have a number of beliefs and a range of observational evidence; what is epistemically possible for \( A \) (at \( t \)) depends on \( A \)'s beliefs and observational evidence (at \( t \)). Second, to say that \( \phi \) is epistemically possible for \( A \) (at a given time \( t \)) is to say that \( A \) can make sense of its actually being the case that \( \phi \) (at \( t \)). Third, \( A \) can make sense of its actually being the case that \( \phi \) (at \( t \)) only if \( A \) can express the possibility that \( \phi \) (at \( t \)).

Fourth, human fallibility tells us nothing about what is epistemically possible for a person at a given time. To see why, suppose that Alice has just constructed what she regards as a proof of a mathematical theorem \( T \); she has checked her work carefully, and shown it to a number of prominent mathematicians, who all find it compelling and correct. It does not follow that her proof is correct, or that \( T \) is true, and she knows this. Nevertheless, it is not epistemically possible for her that not \( T \). Epistemic possibility requires more than mere fallibility; it requires that we be able to specify a way in which the supposed epistemic possibility may be actual. To specify a way in which it may actually be the case that not \( T \), Alice would have to be able to specify a way in which one of her axioms may actually be false, or a way in which the logic she used may actually be inconsistent. But this she cannot do, if she has what she regards as a proof of \( T \).

These preliminary clarifications may be summed up as follows: \( \phi \) is epistemically possible for \( A \) (at \( t \)) if and only if \( A \) can make sense of its actually being the case that \( \phi \) (at \( t \)), in the sense that \( A \) can specify a way in which it may actually be the case that \( \phi \) (at \( t \)). These clarifications don't by themselves rule out the standard analysis of epistemic possibility. Together with anti-individualism, however, they can help us to see why the standard analysis of epistemic possibility is incorrect.

Anti-individualism provides a framework for investigating, for a given speaker \( A \) and a statement \( \phi \), whether or not \( A \) can specify a way in which it may actually be the case that not \( \phi \). For instance, suppose Alice believes that she is not in the subjectively equivalent world in which she was born, raised, and now lives on Twin Earth, but she has not looked for empirical evidence that might settle this question. She wonders whether that world is epistemically possible for her—whether she can specify a way in which she may actually be in the subjectively equivalent world in which she was born, raised, and now lives on Twin Earth.

According to the standard analysis of epistemic possibility, she can easily specify a way in which she may actually be in that world. All she has to do is describe the world and picture herself in it. To do this, she
need only say, 'Suppose I am in a world that seems to me exactly like this world, except that I was born, raised, and now live on Twin Earth'.

But this does not show that she can specify a way in which she may actually be in that world. For if Alice understands and accepts anti-individualism, she should reason as follows:

(8) I am now using this sentence to express the thought that water is a liquid at room temperature.

(9) If I were actually in the world in which I was born, raised, and now live on Twin Earth, I could not use sentence (8) to express the thought that water is a liquid at room temperature.

(10) Therefore, I am not actually in the world in which I was born, raised, and now live on Twin Earth.

Alice accepts (9), because she accepts anti-individualism and realizes that if she were actually in the world in which she was born, raised, and now lives on Twin Earth, her uses of 'Water is a liquid at room temperature' would express the thought (translated into English) that twin water is a liquid at room temperature. As part of her minimal competence in the use of 'Earth', 'Twin Earth', 'water', and 'twin water', she takes for granted that Twin Earth is not Earth and that the twin water is not water. Given her understanding of the thought she expresses by denying (9), she can't reject (10) without rejecting (8).

But Alice can't make sense of rejecting (8). She takes for granted that she has some idea what thoughts she is entertaining when she accepts the above argument, including premise (8). But the epistemological principle that supposedly should lead her to reject (8)—the principle, based on the standard analysis of epistemic possibility, that she can coherently think that she may actually be in any one of her subjectively equivalent worlds—implies that she can coherently suspend all her substantive beliefs. If Alice were somehow to suspend all her substantive beliefs, she could no longer think of herself as minimally competent in the use of any words, including the words that compose (8). She would no longer have any idea what thought (8) expresses, and so she could no longer think of herself as rejecting the claim that (8) expresses.

If Alice can picture herself existing in the world in which she was born, raised, and now lives on Twin Earth, then she can add to her first-person subjective experiences a caption in English that states that they are experiences of the world in which she was born, raised, and now lives on Twin Earth. When Alice uses the words 'I may actually be in the world in which I was born, raised, and now live on Twin Earth', she takes for granted that she has some idea of what she is talking about. More generally, when a person pictures herself existing in a subjectively equivalent world that she can describe, she presupposes that she has minimal self-knowledge of what thoughts her descriptions of that world express. For this reason, a person cannot use her capacity to picture herself existing in a given subjectively equivalent world to undermine her assumption that she has minimal self-knowledge.

You might think that this reasoning just expresses my preference for the anti-individualist's "intuitions" that we have minimal self-knowledge and that the subjectively equivalent world we are in settles what thoughts our utterances express, on the one hand, and my rejection of the intuition that to make sense of being in any one of our subjectively equivalent worlds, all we need to do is picture ourselves in it, on the other. Perhaps the puzzle in (4) to (7) ultimately comes down to a clash of intuitions. If so, we could just as well reject the anti-individualist's intuitions and embrace the traditional intuition that to make sense of being in any one of our subjectively equivalent worlds, it is enough to picture ourselves in it.

It is very misleading, however, to say that the anti-individualist's thought experiments depend on intuitions. Recall that to accept the conclusions of Putnam's Twin Earth thought experiments is to endorse the practice among English and Twin English speakers of taking their fellow speakers' words at face value, together with our stipulations about how sentences of Twin English are to be translated into English. These clear aspects of Putnam's reasoning are obscured by the claim that the Twin Earth thought experiments merely elicit our "intuitions" about what individuals believe in different circumstances. If our best grip on thoughts and beliefs is rooted in our practices of attributing beliefs and thoughts, then the conclusions of the Twin Earth thought experiments are not based on intuitions that may be weighed against other intuitions, and possibly rejected; they challenge any philosophical assumptions that conflict with them, including the assumption that we can make sense of being in any one of our subjectively equivalent worlds just by picturing ourselves in it.

I conclude that if we accept anti-individualism, we must reject (4). Taking for granted a number of substantive beliefs, we can specify subjectively equivalent worlds that we cannot make sense of actually being in; from our perspective, any attempt to specify a way in which those worlds may be actual is self-undermining. By the criterion articu-
lated at the beginning of this section, therefore, these worlds are not epistemically possible for us. Once we reject (4), we can accept (5) without committing ourselves to (6), which is the negation of (7). This dissolves the puzzle, by leaving us free to accept (5) and (7) without contradiction.

7 Do I Know That p If I Can’t Make Sense of Doubting That p?

Suppose that I use the argument (8) to (10) to support (10), applied to myself. Many readers will be inclined to respond as follows:

“You have not shown that you are not in the subjectively equivalent world in which you were born, raised, and now live on Twin Earth; you have simply presupposed it. To establish that you are not in that world, you must be able to show that you are not in that world without relying on any of your substantive beliefs, hence without making any prior commitments about which subjectively equivalent world you are actually in. You would be able to do that only if you had some cognitive faculty that would enable you to see directly, without relying on any empirical assumptions, which subjectively equivalent world you are actually in. But there is no such cognitive faculty. Hence you do not know that you are not in that subjectively equivalent world.”

There is something right about this objection: by reasoning or introspecting, without relying on any substantive beliefs, I cannot derive any conclusions about what world I am in. What the objection overlooks, however, is that if I don’t presuppose enough substantive beliefs to have some idea what am talking about, I cannot take myself to be able to describe any of my subjectively equivalent worlds. If I presuppose enough substantive beliefs to have some idea of what I’m talking about, then some of the subjectively equivalent worlds that I can describe are worlds that I can’t make sense of actually being in.

This shows, I think, that the answer to both (Q1) and (Q2) is ‘No’. In my view, we should reject (4), which was supported by the ‘yes’ answer to question (Q1). But we should agree with most philosophers that the answer to question (Q2) is ‘No’, although not for the reasons they give. We can’t simultaneously take ourselves to be able to describe some proper subset of our subjectively equivalent worlds and suspend all our substantive beliefs. For this reason, the answer to question (Q2) is ‘No’—we can’t know by reasoning or introspecting, without relying on any of our substantive beliefs, that we are not in some proper subset of subjectively equivalent worlds that we can specify. But for the same reason, many of our substantive beliefs are beliefs that we can’t actually make sense of doubting. We can see without special empirical inquiry that some subjectively equivalent worlds that we can describe are worlds that we cannot coherently describe as being actual. But if we cannot coherently describe a given world as being actual, then that world is not epistemically possible for us: given substantive beliefs that we find ourselves unable coherently to doubt, no empirical investigation is required for us to know that we are not in that world. The answer to (Q1) is ‘No’, and we know without empirical investigation, in the sense just explained, that (4) is false. This dissolves the puzzle and leaves us free to accept (5) and (7) without contradiction.

This proposed dissolution to the puzzle depends on distinguishing between the claim that we know a given statement a priori and the claim that we know the statement without empirical investigation. Many of the statements that we know without empirical investigation are statements that we cannot know a priori, in any standard sense of that term. What we know without empirical investigation includes what we are entitled to believe without going through any special empirical investigation. Empirical investigation always relies on substantive beliefs, which therefore cannot all be simultaneously supported by empirical investigation. To say that a person’s belief that p is independent of empirical investigation is to say that from her perspective there is (for the moment, at least) no coherent way to doubt that p. It is in this sense that a person can know without empirical investigation that she is not in the subjectively equivalent world in which she was born, raised, and now lives on Twin Earth.33

One might find it odd to say that a person can know this if from her perspective there’s no coherent way to doubt it. One might think, instead, that to know that p one must be able to provide a reason for believing that p that does not beg the question of whether p or in any way presuppose that p. I agree that if knowledge does require such a reason, then a person’s inability to make sense of actually being in one of the subjectively equivalent worlds that she can describe does not count as knowledge that she is not in that world. I suggest, however, that not all cases of knowledge require independent justification.

To justify any knowledge claim, one must take for granted some other beliefs or claims for which we are unable to give independent reasons, but which we nevertheless take ourselves and others to be entitled to accept. Some of these other beliefs or claims are so fundamental to our
thought that water is a liquid at room temperature. Hence an “empirical investigation” that leads me to accept the sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’ does not support the conclusion that water is a liquid at room temperature. In fact, it does not support any conclusion that I could express by using, not mentioning, my word ‘water’. The shows that if I don’t know what thoughts my utterances express without empirical investigation, I can’t find out what thoughts they express even if I try to engage in empirical investigation.36

My second reason for resisting the proposal is that it suggests that there is a deep gulf between beliefs we can’t make sense of doubting, on the one hand, and truth, on the other, a gulf that we need a philosophical theory of knowledge to bridge. This suggestion is undercut by the observation that we can’t specify how these beliefs may actually be false. The illusion that we can specify how these beliefs may actually be false is sustained by the mistaken assumption that to think that we are in a given situation it is enough to picture ourselves in it.

This is not to say that we cannot formulate any skeptical hypotheses at all. My argument does not show that I can’t make sense, for instance, of actually being on Twin Earth right now, after being whisked away from Earth yesterday without my knowledge. The supposition that I am now in this situation does not conflict with my self-knowledge, because I would not turn into a speaker of Twin English if I spent just one day on Twin Earth without my knowledge. It may appear that there is a slippery slope from this kind of case to the conclusion that for all I know, I have been on Twin Earth for years, and so my uses of the sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’ express the thought that twin water is a liquid at room temperature. But the appearance is illusory, for the same reason that I can’t make sense of being in the world in which I was born, raised, and now live on Twin Earth.37 Those who find the standard analysis of epistemic possibility appealing overgeneralize from the fact that we can accept anti-individualism and still make sense of being on Twin Earth right now, for instance, to the puzzling and contradictory conclusion that we can accept anti-individualism and make sense of being in any one of our subjectively equivalent worlds. If we want to clarify what an anti-individualist can know without empirical investigation, we must resist the temptation to overgeneralize in this way.

My central point is that if we are convinced by the anti-individualists’ thought experiments, then there are some beliefs that we cannot make sense of doubting—beliefs that are so basic for us that from our perspective, any attempt to specify how those beliefs may actually be false is

way of thinking that they deserve to be called knowledge, even if we cannot provide independent reasons for accepting them. One indication that a belief has this kind of fundamental status for a person is that she can’t make sense of doubting it—from her perspective, any attempt to specify how the belief may actually be false is self-undermining. I suggest that if a person accepts a given statement and she cannot make sense of doubting it for the reasons just described, then she is epistemically entitled to believe it. Since from her perspective, any attempt to specify how the belief may actually be false is self-undermining, she cannot provide reasons for believing it that are more firm or secure than her acceptance of the statement itself. In practice we take such beliefs to amount to knowledge, partly because they set the framework for our practice of making and evaluating knowledge claims. I propose that to understand this practice, we take ourselves to know that we are not in some specified subjectively equivalent world if from our perspective, any attempt to specify how we may actually be in that subjectively equivalent world is self-undermining.34

But why not reserve the word ‘know’ for cases in which we can provide independent reasons for our beliefs or claims?35 Why not accept that without empirical investigation, we cannot know which subjectively equivalent world we are in?

I reject this for two reasons. First, it suggests that we can know which of our subjectively equivalent worlds we are in if we engage in empirical investigation. But if we don’t make any assumptions about which of our subjectively equivalent worlds we are actually in prior to engaging in any empirical investigation, then we will be unable to find out what subjectively equivalent world we are in by engaging in what we call empirical investigation. To see why, suppose that I am trying to discover whether I am in a world in which water is a liquid at room temperature. It follows from the definition of a subjectively equivalent world that my subjective experiences don’t distinguish between any of my subjectively equivalent worlds. On the basis of some of my subjective experiences, which I regard as evidence about how things are in the world, I may come to accept the sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’. But from this I cannot infer that I am in a world in which water is a liquid at room temperature, unless I presuppose that I am in a world in which my uses of the sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’ express the thought that water is a liquid at room temperature. But I know that in some of my subjectively equivalent worlds, my uses of the sentence ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’ do not express the
self-undermining. I suggest that we view such beliefs as limiting cases of knowledge. Like any beliefs that we take to be knowledge, we may find reasons later to revise them. We may revise some of the background beliefs, such as our belief that water is different from twin water, that we now treat like definitions; after such revisions, we may find that we can make sense of doubting certain beliefs that we previously found it impossible to doubt. In these cases, we lose our entitlement to accept the beliefs, and we should revise or reject the beliefs unless we can provide reasons in the new context for accepting them. In retrospect, we may conclude that we did not know what we previously could not make sense of doubting. But if we can't now make sense of doubting that \( p \), then the abstract possibility that we may later be able to make sense of doubting that \( p \) does not imply that we don't know that \( p \), any more than our general human fallibility implies that when Alice takes herself to have a proof of a mathematical theorem, and all the trustworthy mathematicians she has consulted agree with her, she nevertheless doesn't know the theorem. Statements that we can't make sense of doubting in the sense described above are among the statements that we properly take ourselves to know without empirical investigation. 38

Notes


2. This kind of reply is presented explicitly in Brueckner 1992a and McLaughlin and Tye 1998, and implicitly in a number of other papers about anti-individualism and self-knowledge, including Burge 1988b and Falvey and Owens 1994.


4. There is disagreement about whether it is helpful to view ‘introspective’ knowledge—the sort of a priori knowledge that we supposedly have of our own thoughts—as based in a kind of ‘perception’ of one’s own inner mental states. Tyler Burge (1988b) prefers to think of it as based in understanding, which involves actually thinking the thought, not merely regarding it as an object of one’s knowledge. He accepts a modified Kantian conception of a priori knowledge, according to which ‘understanding is capable of yielding non-empirical and non-sensible cognition of thoughts in singular form’ (2000: 28—29) and ‘warrant can be a priori if it derives from reason or from understanding, if it does not depend on sense experience for any of the force of its epistemic war-

5. According to McKinsey (1991a: 14), our knowledge of anti-individualism is a priori knowledge of conceptual truths independent of empirical facts. In my view, anti-individualism is not a conceptual truth, and cannot be known a priori in any traditional sense of that term, as McKinsey assumes. But it is independent of empirical investigation, in an ordinary sense that I will clarify below. Since my primary focus is not on the epistemological status of anti-individualism, I will not take the time in this paper to explain how my view of what we know independent of empirical investigation applies to our knowledge of anti-individualism.

6. According to this analysis of epistemic possibility, our sensory evidence is confined to our subjective experiences. This raises an apparent problem: if our sensory evidence is the same in all of our subjectively equivalent worlds, regardless of how things are in the external world, then it seems we cannot know any particular facts about the external world, whether or not we engage in empirical investigation. But most philosophers are not radical skeptics, and it would be wrong to attribute to them a view of epistemic possibility that immediately implies radical skepticism. By this reasoning, it appears that what I call the standard analysis of epistemic possibility would be rejected by most philosophers. This challenge is serious, but not decisive, because many philosophers assume that some epistemic possibilities are so remote from the actual world that they are not relevant to our ordinary assessments of what we know, and so we need not rule them out in order to know what we ordinarily take ourselves to know. Those who embrace the standard analysis of epistemic possibility but are not radical skeptics hold some version of this ‘relevant alternatives’ approach to evaluating knowledge claims. This is explicit in Burge 1988b: 655—656 and Burge 1999, for instance. For a sophisticated recent version of this way of avoiding skepticism, see DeRose 1995. I assume, provisionally, that the standard analysis of epistemic possibility, when combined with the ‘relevant alternatives’ approach to evaluating knowledge claims, does not entail radical skepticism.

7. We sometimes have reason in a context for suspending this practice, but the practice embodies our default treatment of our fellow speakers’ words.

8. It helps to imagine a context in which Oscar may actually say this. One possibility is that Oscar is explaining to his son that ice is (solid) water, not just that water turns into ice when it freezes. In this context, ‘Water is a liquid at room temperature’ may be the first of two sentences that Oscar utters, the second one being ‘But ice is water, too—water that is at or below the freezing point’. This is compatible with our supposition that Oscar does not know that water is \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \)—Oscar may know that ice is water at or below the freezing point, even if he forgot, or never learned, that water is \( \text{H}_2\text{O} \).

9. Putnam (1975) is standardly credited with showing that the references of a person’s words are not are settled by his linguistic dispositions, internal physical
states, or phenomenal experiences, described independently of his social and physical environment. Burge (1979) is credited with making the corresponding case for beliefs and thoughts—the case for the stronger thesis that I am calling ‘anti-individualism’. I have reconstructed Putnam’s reasoning in a way that supports anti-individualism. Although I do not accept the standard interpretation of Putnam’s (1975) reasoning, my goal here is not to present an historically accurate account of what Putnam actually thought but to highlight the methodology that in my view explains what is persuasive about Putnam’s reasoning, whether or not he was clear about it.

10. Many philosophers assume that in the early 1970s Putnam and Kripke accepted this aspect of the Twin Earth thought experiment only because they believed they could explain it by constructing a causal theory of reference. But both Putnam and Kripke were cautious about whether reference could be given a noncircular explanation in causal terms. Moreover, no viable causal theory of reference has yet been constructed, but the force of the thought experiment remains. In my view, the idea that there is what Putnam called a “contribution of the environment” is rooted in our practice of taking each other’s words at face value across time and does not depend on the existence of a substantive theory of reference that explains this practice. For more discussion of this point, see Ebbs 1997, 2000.

11. This does not imply that to use a given word, we must make some true demonstrative claims by using that word. Minimal competence in the use of some words can be picked up very quickly, just on the basis of what the speaker was told, even if what she was told is false.

12. This cannot be an informative criterion, because what counts as a concrete reason for suspending the practice is itself context-sensitive.

13. A speaker may use words that have the same spelling as words of a public language so idiosyncratically that her words have meanings different from the meanings that the identically spelled words have in the public language. Such uses would be judged incompetent as uses of the identically spelled public-language words, and yet the idiosyncratic speaker may still express thoughts by using her identically spelled words and have minimal self-knowledge of what thoughts she expresses by using them. This happens much less frequently than most individualists believe, however. And when it does happen, there are usually some words of the public language that the idiosyncratic speaker uses competently and that help other speakers to figure out what thoughts her idiosyncratic utterances express.

14. For a more thorough presentation of the points in this and the previous paragraph, see Ebbs 1996; 1997, secs. 100–123. For a parallel point about what it is to know the meanings of one’s own words, see Putnam 1988: 32.

15. The kind of self-knowledge embodied in these everyday uses of language is not best viewed as a disposition to form justified second-order beliefs about what one is thinking, either. To credit someone with being able to form or justify such second-order beliefs, we must presuppose that she already has the kind of minimal self-knowledge that goes with linguistic competence. This is the kernel of truth behind Brueckner’s (1992b) criticisms of Burge and Davidson.

16. Those who are inclined to think that minimal self-knowledge is a cognitive achievement that requires more than being able to use one’s words in discourse (as argued, for instance, in Bar-On and Long 2001 and Fricker 1998) may be confusing what I call “minimal self-knowledge” with a deeper kind of self-knowledge that involves knowing what one believes, desires, and feels about a given topic. This latter sort of self-knowledge does not follow immediately from linguistic competence; it is a lifelong goal of most of us to achieve it, and we invariably fail in some respects.

17. Even an idiosyncratic speaker fails to know what thoughts she expresses by using her own words if she does not affirm any beliefs by using sentences that contain those words.

18. But some authors have noticed difficulties with McKinsey’s characterization of “a priori” knowledge. See Miller 1997 and Nuccetelli 1999. Neither Miller nor Nuccetelli questions the standard analysis of epistemic possibility, as I do below.

19. As J. L. Austin observed, “Reliance on the authority of others is fundamental … for corroborations and for the correctness of our own use of words, which we learn from others” (1979: 83, n. 1).

20. One might doubt that a person’s physical and phenomenal states, described independently of her environment, exhaust all that is relevant to her subjective assessment of her epistemological situation. I accept this now for the sake of argument. But I doubt that the relevant kind of “subjective equivalence” is relevant to epistemology, for reasons I will explain below.

21. The attitude is so widespread that it would be impractical to list all the works that are shaped by it. A small sample might include Boghossian 1997, Brueckner 1990, Falvey and Owens 1994, McLaughlin and Tye 1998, McKinsey 1991a, and McGinn 1976. Even Jaakko Hintikka, who disagrees with so much else in Kripke’s work, writes, “It is the easiest thing in the world to imagine epistemically possible worlds in which a proper name refers to different objects” (1999: 140), thus endorsing a key feature of the standard analysis of epistemic possibility.

22. What I call Kripke’s analysis of epistemic possibility is at best only an analysis of what might be called empirical epistemic possibility. It does not fit Kripke’s example of Goldbach’s conjecture that every even number greater than 2 is the sum of two primes. Kripke points out that it is epistemically possible for us that Goldbach’s conjecture is true and epistemically possible for us that it is false. But if it is true, it is necessarily true (true in every possible world), and if it is false, it is necessarily false (false in every possible world). Suppose that in fact Goldbach’s conjecture is true. Then we cannot analyze the epistemic possibility that it is false, for instance, in terms of the existence of subjectively equivalent worlds.
in which it is false—by supposition, there are no such worlds. This shows that Kripke’s analysis of epistemic possibility in terms of subjectively equivalent worlds must be restricted to empirical epistemic possibilities. Kripke and others apparently assume that we can know a priori whether or not a given epistemic possibility is empirical, and hence whether or not Kripke’s analysis of empirical epistemic possibility applies to it.

23. Recall that those who embrace the standard analysis of epistemic possibility but are not radical skeptics hold some version of the “relevant alternatives” approach to evaluating knowledge claims. See note 6.

24. This is similar to the orthodox response to McKinsey’s argument, which I discussed in the first section.

25. It may seem that there are contingent a priori statements, as Kripke (1972/1980) and others have argued, and so not all of a person’s statements that are true in some of her subjectively equivalent worlds and false in some of her subjectively equivalent worlds are substantive. But anyone who accepts the reasoning in the previous paragraph of the text must conclude that if all of a person’s subjectively equivalent worlds are epistemically possible for her, then even if she can know without empirical investigation that a particular contingent sentence expresses a truth, she can’t know without empirical investigation what truth it expresses. Therefore, no one who accepts the reasoning in the previous paragraph of the text can hold that there are contingent but nonsubstantive statements. One might think that the two-dimensional approach, as presented, for instance, in Chalmers 1996 and Jackson 1998, is relevant to what a person knows a priori. There are several problems with this thought. The main problem is that anti-individualism is the thesis that the *de dicto* contents of a person’s beliefs are world-involving contents that are settled partly by external factors, not the (imaginary) world-independent contents (Chalmers calls them “primary intentions”) that yield different extensions at different worlds. Another problem is that there is no reason to think that our beliefs about how to apply our terms in the actual world are a priori, as Chalmers and Jackson claim. See Stalnaker 1999: 14 and essays 9–11.

26. Those who do not accept this argument can simply conjoin our ordinary assumption that we have self-knowledge with anti-individualism to get the same result.

27. Ted Warfield (1998) claims, in effect, that we can know a priori that (4) is false, but says very little about why (4) seems so gripping and how we can avoid the strong temptation to accept (4). For this reason, in my view, he does not really address the puzzle that lies behind the current debate about what an anti-individualist knows a priori.

28. Austin (1979: 98) emphasizes that human fallibility by itself is not a good guide to epistemic possibility or to what it makes sense to doubt.

29. There is a very weak sense in which a person can “make sense of doubting” any statement, even a statement that she can prove: she knows she is fallible and may have made a mistake. In this weak sense, a person can “make sense of doubting” a statement that *p* even though she can’t actually specify how it may actually be the case that not *p*, hence even though it is not epistemically possible for her that not *p*.

30. The argument (8) to (10) is similar in form to an argument I presented in Ebbs 1996; 1997, chap. 9. Anthony Bruckner (1997b) criticizes the argument, and I reply to his criticisms in Ebbs 2001. The argument (8) to (10) also is similar to (one version of) Putnam’s argument (1981, chap. 1) that we are not always brains in vats. I discuss Putnam’s argument in Ebbs 1992; 1997, chap. 9. See also Tymoczko 1989.

31. For similar observations about the methodology of belief attributions, see Kripke 1979. In my view, Kripke’s observations about our ordinary practices of attributing beliefs do not inevitably lead, as he argues, to a puzzle about belief. Nor do I endorse his comment that “something’s having intuitive content . . . is very heavy evidence in favor of anything . . . I really don’t know, in a way, what more conclusive evidence one can have about anything, ultimately speaking” (Kripke 1980: 42). Perhaps he and I mean different things by “intuition,” but I do not find it illuminating to describe our most fundamental judgments about beliefs, for instance, as “based” on “intuition”—as though “intuition” were a quasi-perceptual faculty, such as sight or hearing.

32. If not all of our subjectively equivalent worlds are epistemically possible for us, how can we solve the puzzle about necessity that originally led Kripke to suggest that all of our subjectively equivalent worlds are epistemically possible for us? I don’t have the space here to address this question properly; I will just give a brief hint of how I would proceed. In my view, a reasonable person may believe (without paraphrase into Kripke’s model of epistemic possibility) that Hesperus is not necessarily identical to Phosphorus, for instance, even if Hesperus is necessarily identical to Phosphorus. I think that to accept this, one must also be convinced that Kripke’s puzzle about belief (1979) is not a genuine puzzle, but a confusion fostered by questionable assumptions about what is required to make sense of a person’s beliefs.

33. A related point is that our knowledge of anti-individualism itself, like all our knowledge, presupposes a background of entrenched substantive beliefs. Contrary to what many philosophers suppose, our knowledge of anti-individualism is not a priori in the traditional rationalists’ sense.

34. I am not suggesting that we can tell what world we are in by reasoning or introspecting without relying on any of our substantive beliefs. If my argument is correct, then contrary to what is usually supposed, there is no such thing as reasoning or introspecting without relying on any of our substantive beliefs. To avoid confusion about this, we should not use the word “a priori” when we try to say what an anti-individualist can know without empirical investigation.

35. In a very different context, Ludwig Wittgenstein asserts, “One says ‘I know’ when one is ready to give compelling grounds. ‘I know’ relates to the possi-
bility of demonstrating the truth" (1969, sec. 243). But there are also places in Wittgenstein 1969 where he seems more open to the use of 'know' that I am proposing.

36. I made the same argument in a slightly different way in Ebbs 2001, sec. 1. The argument undermines the assumption, which I accepted provisionally in note 6 of this paper, that a relevant-alternatives conception of knowledge can be used to prevent the standard analysis of epistemic possibility from implying radical skepticism. Here I can only hint at the reasons why: if we can't know what thoughts our sentences express, then even if we are somehow entitled to say that some sentences describe possibilities that are not relevant to our ordinary knowledge claims, we will not be entitled to use those sentences to say what possibilities those are. Hence our "ordinary knowledge" must be regarded as metalinguistic knowledge that certain of our sentences are true, in a context in which we are not entitled to use those sentences, since we do not know what thoughts we would thereby be expressing. This is no way to avoid skepticism!

37. I do not have the space here to defend this claim, which I have discussed in Ebbs 1996, esp. sec. VIII and n. 31.

38. I am grateful to Anthony Everett, David Hills, Hilary Putnam, and Charles Travis for helpful and timely comments on a previous draft.
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