

How is Content Externalism Characterized by Vehicle Externalists

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Content externalism and vehicle externalism (what-externalism and how—externalism) or more commonly known as the thesis of extended mind, are said to be two totally independent views that “diverge sharply” (Stanford encyclopedia). There are advocates, adversaries but also agnostics about the extended mind thesis. The approach has been much debated and the controversies about vehicle externalism are importantly manifold. I am not going into any of them. My aim is different and focused on why and how content externalism is characterized by vehicle externalists. Content externalism is labelled by extended mind theorists as: merely causal, taxonomic (Wilson), reactionary (Rowlands), passive (Clark), while vehicle externalism is: constitutive, radical and active. Since content externalists (to my knowledge) have not reacted to a rather negative presentation of their ideas, I restrict myself to showing that many of vehicle externalist (VE) presented views about content externalism (CE) are partly unjustified, not definitive and even wrong. I zoom on the following: 1. CE being ‘merely’ causal. 2. Active vs. Passive distinction, 3. CE being behaviourally inert.

Keywords: Vehicle externalism; content externalism; causal vs. constitutive; passive vs. active; non-intentional vs. intentional.

1. Introduction

In 1998 Andy Clark and David Chalmers published an essay in *Analysis* which started an exciting debate about the nature and study of mind and cognition. Their thesis begins with the question “where does the mind stop and the rest of the world begin?” (Menary 2010: 1) and the claim is that the mind does not stop with the head but spreads into the world. Thus, Clark and Chalmers (1998) in their *extended mind thesis* hold that the mind and the cognitive processes that constitute it extend beyond the boundary of the skin of the individual agent (Menary 2010).

This radical thesis about the mind is usually called *the extended mind thesis* by its proponents and creators (Clark and Chalmers 1998) but it is given a number of other names: *locational externalism*, *enabling externalism* (Wilson 2000, 2004), Rowlands calls it *environmentalism*, *vehicle externalism* (1999, 2003), *wide computationalism* and it is named *how-externalism* by Susan Hurley (1998, 2010) and Wilson (2010), *transcranialism* by Adams and Aizawa (2010), sometimes *process externalism* (Keijzer and Schouten 2007).

The other kind of externalism, externalism about mental *content* has been around for a long time. This externalism was the reaction against what Jerry Fodor (following Hilary Putnam) called “methodological solipsism,” i.e. against the belief that meanings/contents takes place solely inside the head. Philosophical doubts against “methodological solipsism” or individualism were first raised in the now classical arguments of Hilary Putnam (1975) and Tyler Burge (1979). Content externalism also goes under a number of other names: *semantic externalism*, *traditional externalism*, *philosophical externalism*, *meaning externalism*, *what-externalism* (Wilson 2000, 2004).

Content (semantic) externalism and vehicle externalism (what-externalism vs. how-externalism) are said to be two totally independent views that “diverge sharply” (Stanford encyclopedia). “We conflate vehicles and contents, as Dennett (1991) and Hurley (1998) stress, at our philosophical and scientific peril” (Clark 2005: fn.1). One is about mental content and the other about vehicles, i.e., about cognitive processes.¹

There are staunch advocates, but also many adversaries and of course some agnostics about the extended mind thesis.² The approach has been much debated and the controversies about vehicle externalism are importantly manifold and often very argumentative and heated. There are also attempts to show that the two externalisms do not “diverge sharply and in a radical way” (Sprevak and Kallestrup 2014; Lyre 2016; Vosgerau 2018). I am not going into any of the above mentioned controversies.

My aim is different and focused on *how content externalism is characterized by vehicle externalists*. I try to show that many of vehicle externalists’ (EV) presented views about content externalism (CE) are partly unjustified, not definitive and even wrong. I zoom on the following: 1. content externalism (CE) being “merely” causal. 2. active vs. passive distinction, i.e., distal, historical vs. proximal, “here-and-now.” 3. CE being behaviourally inert.

¹ A vehicle need not necessarily be a process. In the previous sentence the inscription ‘peril’ is a vehicle of the meaning/concept PERIL, but it is not a process. Of course, one might say that the complex *sound* /peril/ is a process. Vehicle is often used to mean a state and/or a process. I look at it as a process.

² The literature on radically extended cognition has burgeoned. For a good review, see Shapiro (2011).

Vehicle externalists are keen on stressing the difference between two externalisms.³ The way that the difference is stressed seems to me to downplay the role/importance of content externalism. Or at least I shall try to show that. The very names/labels and qualification given to semantic externalism by vehicle externalists in their discussion about the differences between the two indicate that they think that content externalism is: *merely causal* (Wilson), *reactionary* (Rowlands), *passive* (Clark). These labels sound rather negative especially in contrasts to the positive qualifications given to vehicle externalism as being: *constitutive*, *radical* and *active*.

The following is one of overt (and there are many more covert) quotations that point to the *generally* negative view of content externalism.

Wilson and Clark say: “If the extended mind thesis is true, it is true of something implementationally *deep* about cognition, rather than some *debatable view of mental content* [...] the extended mind thesis is *not simply a view of how we ‘talk about’ or view cognition and the mind*—about the epistemology of the mind, one might say—but about what cognition and the mind are—about the ontology of the mind” (Wilson and Clark 2009: 4, italics mine).

When talking about the difference between content externalism and vehicle externalism Mark Rowlands says:

[W]e might distinguish between what we can call reactionary and radical forms of content externalism. Reactionary content externalism is the view that some propositionally individuated mental properties are externally individuated. Radical content externalism is the view that tokens or instances of some propositionally individuated mental properties are externally located. Reactionary content externalism is a thesis about mental properties and entails rejection of the internalist Possession Claim [...] What makes it reactionary is its preservation of at least one core aspect of the Cartesian conception of the mind: the idea that the mental is, ontologically speaking, an internal entity, one located, in one way or another, inside the skins of mental subjects. (Rowlands 2003: 137)⁴

2. “*Merely causal*”

I first take a look at vehicle externalists’ claim that content (semantic/meaning) externalism is “merely causal.”

One of the big, if not even the most important, issues in the extended mind proposal involves the relation between causality and constitu-

³ Sprevak says: “HEC has more distant relationship to other kinds of philosophical externalisms such as content externalism [...] content externalism says that the representational content of our cognitive states does not supervene on the internal physical state of our brains. HEC has almost nothing to say about this” (2019: 10). However, VE are referring and criticizing CE all along.

⁴ The above account of content externalism is basically right but why would the lack of talk about the location of processes make it reactionary? The term “reactionary” is surely offensive and one of many inflammatory rhetoric that VE use about CE.

tion. Adams and Aizawa (2008) and Aizawa (2010) argue that the extended mind hypothesis makes an unjustifiable inference from causal dependence (where bodily and environmental factors play a causal role in support of cognitive processes) to constitutive dependence (where the claim is that such factors actually are part of the cognitive processes). The theory is said to confuse causality with constitution. This is the so-called causal-constitution (C-C) fallacy.

I cannot go into the intricate and much discussed issue whether vehicle externalism is causal or constitutive thesis. Let us, for the present, accept that the vehicle externalism is constitutive thesis as extended mind theorists try to show. What I want to challenge is the extended mind overt and covert statements that content externalism is merely causal or causally weak in supposedly big contrast to vehicle externalism which is constitutive. Here are some chosen passages where it is rather clear that vehicle externalists think that content externalism is “merely causal.” Some are more covert and others more overt.

Robert Rupert in distinguishing content and vehicle externalism says:

Here is a final reason to reject the close association of content externalism and HEC (hypothesis of extended cognition). Recall the sorts of examples externalists typically give in support of their views, examples where content-reference, most clearly is determined by *causal interaction* between the subject and that to which the mental representation in question refers: the subject’s ‘water’ concept refers to H_2O because she has had the right sort of *causal intercourse* with samples of H_2O (Rupert 2024: 401).

Robert Wilson in talking about the chief difference between the two says: “The first (CE) involves the *causal integration* of explicit symbols located in an organism’s environment [...]” (2010: 181). Richard Menary characterizes content externalism as asymmetric vs. vehicle externalism as symmetric. He says that “vehicle externalism is symmetric form of externalism while content externalism is asymmetric because active externalism (i.e. vehicle externalism) is a constitutive thesis, *it is not a matter of asymmetric causal influence of the environment on internal processes*” (2007: 49, italics mine). The implication surely being that content externalism is just causal and not constitutive.

All the authors mention causal connection, causal integration or causal influence and we know, however, that “causal dependencies are relatively cheap, metaphysically speaking” (Robbins and Aydede 2009: 6).

Vehicle externalists’ statements about content externalism most of the time claim that content externalism is a causal thesis and nothing else. It is never mentioned that content externalists claim and show that content itself is not only caused but is *constituted* by certain links to the world. I try to point this in the following discussion.

3. *Causation and constitution*

Daniel Harris (2018) in *Convention, Causation, and Grounding* (on the web) states the difference between causal explanation versus grounding (constitutive) explanation as follows:

1. Roughly speaking, a causal explanation accounts for a phenomenon by spelling out the events that led to it and saying how they brought it about.
2. To give a grounding (constitutive) explanation of a fact is to spell out the more fundamental facts in virtue of which it obtains—i.e. the facts that ground it, that *make it the case* or in *virtue of which* it obtains.

When discussing content externalism, the proponents of VE always mention just Putnam-Burge externalists' claim. In what follows I will, however, help myself with the externalist causal-historical theory of content (or "picture" as Kripke called it), as further importantly developed by Michael Devitt (1981, 2001, 2015), a leading content externalist, to show that externalist theories of content are far from being merely causal.⁵

As early as 1974, in the presentation of the causal theory of proper names in Devitt (1974) the opening sentence reads: "The main problem in giving the semantics of proper names is that of explaining the *nature of the link between name and object in virtue of which the former designates the latter*" (1974: 183, italics mine). In 1981, in his book *Designation* Devitt, said:

It is important to distinguish our main problem from another. Our problem is to explain *the nature* of the link that certain kinds of words have to the world. The other problem is to explain *how words come to be so linked to the world*: what is the historical or causal explanation? *Causal theories of reference are sometimes seen simply as solutions to this other problem*. As such they may seem true enough but trivial. However, they are offered primarily as solutions to the main problem: *they claim that the nature of the link is to be found by looking to the historical explanation*. (Devitt 1981: 8, italics mine)

Here is another relevant passage: "I emphasize that we look to d-chains not merely to discover how a word *came* to designate an object but to discover *the nature of designation*. Understanding designation is understanding groundings, thoughts (of a certain sort), and reference borrowings" (Devitt 1981: 138, italics mine). Obviously, the talk of nature runs right through these passages. To ask about the nature of X is not to ask about the cause of X. It is to ask about the constitution or grounding of X.

⁵ Panu Raatikainen says: "Now the critical literature on externalism has a regrettable tendency to focus solely on the earliest statements of semantic externalism and the causal theory of reference, and totally ignore its later developments [...] Critics of externalism tend to ignore important improvements" (2020: 80).

Let us look at some concrete examples: What is the meaning of the term ‘horse’? The answer is: The meaning of ‘horse’ is a *property*, the property of referring to horses by a certain causal mode. That’s what *constitutes* the meaning. So, horses partly constitute the meaning property. We can then ask: How much of the horse itself goes into the meaning of ‘horse’. The answer is: The horse gets into the meaning (so “direct reference” got that right). But more gets in: the mode of referring to the horse. Let’s take another example: Dunja has the property of being Croatian. That is the property of being appropriately related to Croatia. So Croatia partly *constitutes* the property Dunja has. How much of Dunja herself goes into the meaning of ‘Dunja’. Dunja gets into the meaning (so “direct reference” got that right). But more gets in: the mode of referring to Dunja.

It seems obvious that the above externalist story is far from showing merely causal dependence. On the contrary, the causal story of ‘horse’, etc. is partly constitutive of its meaning.⁶

Here is another example about the distinction between causation and constitution that often gets blurred: 1. What caused gold is one thing (some dramatic developments in the conditions of the Earth’s surface). 2. What constitutes gold is another thing (having atomic number 79). The meaning has to be a property that at least determines that ‘gold’ refers to gold, i.e. to anything that has the essence/nature of gold. This is the answer to statement 2. The Kripke-Putnam view is that the latter is atomic number 79, and what does the determining is a causal network of reference borrowing back to those that fixed the reference in that essence (more about it in the next section). In sum, the meaning is the property of referring to stuff (gold) with that essence by that causal mode. The point is that the meaning and reference of the name are *constituted* by these causal links.⁷ Thus historical-causal theory isn’t merely causal: it is the thesis that meanings are constituted by causal link to reality.⁸ Descriptions theories of reference are theories of what *constitutively* determines reference (not of what *causally* determines reference). Causal-historical theories (or “pictures”, as Kripke would say) are explicitly presented as *rivals* to description theories. So how could they be simply causal? The warning is/was, not to confuse the two theories; how-externalism is different from what-externalism.

⁶ Devitt in correspondence: “Right from the beginning in 1970 I had to deal with the objection to the causal theory of names that ‘of course, a name gets its reference at a dubbing,’ so what’s new?”

⁷ “[I]t is not a consequence [of Putnam’s slogan] that no aspect of meaning is in the head. The point of the slogan is simply to deny that meanings are entirely in the head. In my view, the meaning of a term is likely to involve many psychological states [...] the slogan emphasizes that extra-cranial links to reality are also necessary to meaning” (Devitt 1990: 83).

⁸ Katalin Farkas says: “We already know that meaning is outside the head: so the content of beliefs is also outside the head. Similar considerations will apply to other instances of intentional directedness. Hence some mental features are *constitutively* determined by things outside a thinking subject” (2019: 261).

Nevertheless, in both theories the boundaries of cognition extend beyond the boundaries of individual organisms, beyond the boundary of the skin. Extended mind (interesting or controversial) bold thesis is that their externalism is a *constitutive* thesis as rehearsed by the slogan “cognitive processes ain’t (all) in the head,” while, they say, content externalism with the slogan “meanings just ain’t in the head” is *merely causal* one. If the above discussion is true, that cannot be right since content externalism described above is the thesis that the meaning *properties* of mental states (particularly thoughts) are partly *constituted* by external (causal) relations. So their thesis is not just a causal one.

In sum, we can concede that vehicle externalism is a bolder thesis but it certainly is not bolder because it is constitutive while content externalism is supposedly merely causal or weakly causal. Although the Kripke-Putnam-Devitt thesis is about mental properties and not mental processes, the former is a constitutive thesis, not a merely causal one. “Meanings just ain’t in the head” means that meanings are partly constituted by the external (horses, Croatia, etc.). Andy Clark’s words “cognitive processes ain’t in the brain” means that cognitive processes are partly constituted by the external. The main *controversial* part is that processes occurring outside of the brain can be partial constituents of cognitive processes. Whether they are constituents is much discussed and many think that they are not. The issue is undecided so far.⁹ Whichever way this interesting thesis turns out, the matter of constitutivity itself is not the main bone of contention between the two (rival) theories.

4. *Active versus passive externalism*

Vehicle externalism also goes under the name of active externalism. Clark and Chalmers (and others) pay great attention to show how the *active externalism* can be distinguished from the more traditional content externalism, familiar from the writings of Putnam (1975) and Burge (1986), which they label *passive* externalism. What I am concerned with in this section is why content externalism is seen and defined by vehicle externalists as passive. I try to point out what is wrong with this characterization.

Here is one of the most important (relevant) quotes from Clark and Chalmers:

This externalism [radically extended cognition] differs from the standard variety advocated by Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979). When I believe that water is wet, and my twin believes that twin water is wet, the external features responsible for the difference in our beliefs are *distal and historical*, at the other end of a *lengthy causal chain*. Features of the *present* are

⁹ Daniel Dennett asked whether the enactive program was really revolutionary or rather a welcome shift in emphasis (1993: 122). He thought it was too soon to answer the question in 1993, and it is not obvious that the matter has been settled since then.

not relevant: if I happen to be surrounded by XYZ right now (maybe I have teleported to Twin Earth), my beliefs still concern standard water, because of my history. In these cases, the *relevant external features are passive*. Because of their distal nature, they play no role in driving the cognitive process *in the here-and-now* [...]

In the cases we describe, by contrast, the relevant external features are *active*, playing a crucial role in the *here-and-now*. Because they are coupled with the human organism, they have a direct impact on the organism and on its behavior. In these cases, the relevant parts of the world are in the loop, *not dangling at the other end of a long causal chain*. Concentrating on this sort of coupling leads us to an *active externalism*, as opposed to the *passive externalism* of Putnam and Burge. (Clark and Chalmers 1998: 9, italics mine)

Why is content externalism not active?

1. Because (when I believe that water is wet, and my twin believes that twin water is wet), the external features responsible for the difference in our beliefs are *distal and historical, at the other end of a lengthy causal chain*.
2. Also features of the *present* are not relevant. Because of their *distal nature*, they play no role in driving the cognitive process in the *here-and-now*.

By contrast in vehicle externalism

1. There is no lengthy causal chain. (The relevant parts of the world are in the loop, *not dangling at the other end of a long causal chain*).
2. Vehicle externalism *is active, playing a crucial role in the here-and-now*. “Features of the present are relevant.” They “play a role in driving the cognitive process in the here-and-now.”

In a nutshell, the claims are that contents of beliefs depend on *my history and that because of that they are distal and thus they do not play an active role in here-and-now*. The two claims about CE—that it is historical and distal and thus not relevant for here-and-now—are related so I shall look at them together.

Whether the above assessments are true/correct depends in large part on the characterization of CE.¹⁰ As stressed before, content externalism is defined and identified only with Putnam and Burge’s claims and no other elaborations of the CE are mentioned in the extended mind discussions. However, we should look more closely at content externalism where the theory is elaborated in much more details than what we find in Putnam and Burge. Here again I take the theory of content externalism as developed by Devitt which is a relatively straight-

¹⁰ Let me stress once more that what Clark and Chalmers are after is quite different from Putnam-style semantic externalism: their focus is on the locus of cognitive processes, whereas Putnam, Burge and others are concerned with the external conditions that ground the content of mental or linguistic tokens. However, my concern is not the difference between the two but VE’s characterization about content externalism.

forward development of Kripke's (1980) revolutionary idea/picture known as "the causal theory of reference."¹¹ Devitt's development of content/meaning externalism is within a naturalistic and anti-Cartesian framework.¹² The theory has two parts: a theory of initial fixing of reference, and a theory of reference borrowing. First, a referring expression is typically introduced in a "baptism" or a dubbing event, in the perceptual contact with the referent or a sample of the kind. Second, other language users not present at the name-giving occasion acquire the word from those present at the dubbing, still others from the former, and so on. This is the idea of reference borrowing.

When VE say that all beliefs are historical and thus distal they do not take into account (or ever mention) the first part of the theory, that is, reference/content fixing, i.e., they do not mention grounding.

Let us take the name 'Elvis' for Elvis Presley. In the grounding or reference fixing scenario the name is introduced at a dubbing (formal or informal). The dubbing is in the presence of the object (baby Elvis) that will from then on be the bearer of the name.¹³ The grounder (Elvis's mother) has a dispositional property that *caused* a certain thought and *the nature* of that thought is partly explained by its causal connection to the object (baby Elvis). What is crucial for the present discussion is that *it is not the causal history* that grounded the representational or "aboutness" relation to Elvis, or Elvis's name. It was the present Elvis's mother thought that played a role in direct causal connection to the object (baby Elvis). More generally, the grounders of the term 'F' are the people who fix the reference of 'F' that others then borrow. So a key thing for the reference of 'F' is what as a matter of fact goes on in the groundings by those people, whatever anyone's opinion about Fs is. This is Kripke important "ignorance and error" claim/discovery. There is no "lengthy causal chain." There is nothing *historical or distal* in the grounding scenario and nothing "dangling at the other end of a long causal chain." It is not the causal history that plays a role in this interaction. The represented entity (baby Elvis) in the environment is represented precisely because it (he) has a direct impact on the cognizing organism (Elvis's mother) and its (her) behavior. There is nothing distal and historical about such scenario.¹⁴

¹¹ Other names are "the historical theory of reference," "the causal-historical theory of reference," or simply "the new theory of reference." See Raatikainen (2020).

¹² Devitt says: "This is not to say, of course, that the theory is complete. I have emphasized that any theory of reference at this time must look to future psycholinguistics for more details. And it is not to say either that the details already provided are certainly right. The point is simply that we have good reason now to think that this theory is more or less right, so far as it goes, and it goes as far as it is reasonable to expect at this time. And we can see that such adjustments as may be necessary will not be large and will be in terms of the same reality of designating or denoting-chains" (2015: 128).

¹³ Devitt and Sterelny (1999: 67). The example with Elvis is mine.

¹⁴ If you consider demonstratives rather than names, then the causal link to the referent is typically immediate.

One may wonder: Why would content externalism be passive when the grounder is in the direct contact with the thing grounded in the dubbing scenario? The situation cannot be more direct than it is. And it does not seem to be passive. Why not? In the naming ceremony, the entity (baby Elvis) that individuates the contents of mental states (his mom's), has an impact on the organism (his mom) and there does not seem to be any legitimate reason not to say that the relation is active and that it is "driving the cognitive process in the here-and-now." Both sides, the grounder and the object grounded, are influencing one another. There does not seem to be any passivity in the naming ceremony and its completion. On the contrary the entity in the world (baby Elvis) plays an active role in cognition because the result of the interaction is that the environment (baby Elvis) partly constitutes grounder's (his mom's) cognitive states.

Hajo Greif in defining the active externalism says: "The activity of interest is in the environment and the organism at the same instance, and it is that *concurrent activity* which serves to make both cognition extended and externalism active" (Greif 2017: 4313). Content externalist can say that this is exactly what we have in the grounding scenario. The grounder and the thing grounded are in "concurrent relation," and the interaction is active. In this relation there are without doubt relational processes that make the interaction dynamic and thus makes referring an activity in which the relational bond (between Elvis's mom and baby Elvis) is established (more on this issue follows). So much for grounding.

When vehicle externalists say that CE is distal and historical, they are obviously referring only to reference borrowing (indirectly, since they do not mention it under this name) which supposedly make content externalist's approach *historical and distal and thus (consequently) passive*.

What is happening in reference borrowing? Language users who were not at the grounding gain the ability to refer with the expression in virtue of an appropriate causal-historical chain going back to the introduction of the expression. The borrower may borrow its reference from that of others, whether she knows anything about this borrowing or not,¹⁵ and she can be totally ignorant about this chain or the referent. Nevertheless, she can successfully refer with the expression. Going back to our example. My (or present) term 'Elvis' is about Elvis Presley in virtue of a designating-chain going back to him involving people participating in the convention of designating him by 'Elvis.' That *underlying d-chain* is a causal relation that *constitutes* the content of 'Elvis' (see part one of this paper) and it is true that the d-chain is historical. It can go a bit into the past or centuries into the past. Because of this the content ELVIS, or the term 'Elvis' then, according to vehicle exter-

¹⁵ She presumably knows about her own borrowing at the time of her borrowing but that is a minor point.

nalists, has a “passive” role since it is “removed from the cognitive processes of the individual (it is distal)” through a long chain. VE are thus denying that represented entities could play an active role in cognition just because they are distal (i.e. located at a distance to cognitive activity) and thus their impact on cognition, supposedly cannot be direct.

The question is: Does the fact that there is a long d-chain going back to Elvis make the process passive in the way that vehicle externalists assume? I think it does not. The reference/content borrower is connected to the thing through a historical chain. That is distal and historical for sure. But why is this passive when the content of the belief is *constituted* by the d-chains? It is in *virtue of* that content that the belief plays its role in cognition and also in causing behavior here and now. In other words, how could the fact that represented entities are historical and distal (i.e. located at a distance to cognitive activity), be the ground for denying that represented entities play an active role in cognition? There is no reason to assume the past to be in any normative sense irrelevant. Hajo Greif, in presenting kind of defense of CE, says: “On the other hand it is this *history of interactions* that explains any possible difference between the contents of two *prima facie* identical mental or linguistic tokens, no matter what the current interactions may look like to participants and observers” (Greif 2017: 4313). The implication being, I think, that history of interactions is even more important than the current interaction (here-and-now). The reference borrowing with its d-chains is just such a scenario. The first interaction, namely the grounding and then the past interactions had been relevant to shaping (constituting) the content of some present linguistic or mental token, and there is no reason to assume the past is “remote” from the present.

However, VE argue that because these entities are distal and historical, their impact on cognition cannot be direct. This is surely misleading. The constancy and past-endorsement criteria show that the causal history is constitutive of belief. So, the fact that contents are distal and historical does not matter since the representer/speaker is *ipso facto* appropriately receptive here-and-now by the constitutive features of the content. *The historically determined content plays a role here-and-now. It is in virtue of that content that the belief plays its role in cognition and in causing behavior.* Vehicle externalists seem to be committed to thinking that historically represented environmental entities—those entities that individuate the representational contents of mental states as content externalism suggests—are not represented in virtue of “driving the cognitive process in the here-and-now.” Take Burge’s example about the arthritis in my hip. My belief should be established (or is grounded) in an existing active relationship with the doctor and then it would presumably “drive the cognitive process in the here-and-now,” but my causal-historical relationship to a language community (reference borrowing) would not.

In sum, the statement that the relevant external features “because of their distal nature, do not play a role in driving the cognitive process

in the here-and-now [...] overlooks (1) the fact that the content of my belief plays a causal role here-and-now even though it is partly constituted by historical causal links, and moreover it overlooks the fact (2) that terms can be, and typically are, *multiply* grounded in their referent. As a result, words can change their reference; ‘Madagascar’ used to refer to a part of the African mainland but now refers to an island.

5. Possible objections

One might say that the causal theory being relational is therefore static. The term ‘Elvis’ (in our example) has the content in virtue of standing in the relation to a famous American rock star. But relational does not necessarily mean static and meaning constitution as primarily the expression of thought surely includes some process. The content states are formed in interaction between the environment and some inner processes going on in the grounder. The result of the interaction is the belief that ends up being in person’s mind or it can be outside the mind because produced in speech and writing. If one still insists that the relationship is static this is not surely the same as passive.

However, vehicle externalists argue that more is included in the characterization of active externalism. It is insisted that external features are “in the loop,” where this indicates more than “merely playing a crucial role in the here-and-now.” It is a “two-way interaction” between the human organism and external entities by which externalism is distinctively “active” and supposed to be part of what it is to be “in the loop” (Greif 2017: 4313). Whether external features being in the loop is more appropriate characterization of active externalism is a question that is not a part of this discussion. There are convincing arguments given by Sprevak and Kallestrup in showing that “many external resources [...] do not satisfy ACTIVE’s conditions” (2014: 87). They conclude that “it is rather misleading to say that what distinguishes radically extended cognition from Putnam-Burge anti-individualism is that the former is distinctively active and the latter is passive” (2014: 83–84). One cannot but agree. But that is not the concern here. What was important to point out (and hopefully show) is that VE’s claim that CE is passive is at least questionable or maybe downright wrong. Whichever way it turns out for the active externalism to be, it is still simply false to say that content externalism plays a passive role in cognition. The fact that (mental) representation is importantly relational does not show that it is passive.

Furthermore, content externalists, although not primarily interested in cognitive processes, are not immune to this particular issue. The question arises in the so-called *qua* problem, the name coined by Kim Sterelny. Continuing with our example, the question is: why ‘Elvis’ refers to the whole individual and not to his face or his lips. By virtue of what is the grounding term grounded in the object *qua*-Elvis and not in some of his parts. There have been a number of attempts to solve the

qua problem.¹⁶ The most recent statement is found in Devitt who says: “I have struggled mightily with this problem (1981a: 61–4; Devitt and Sterelny 1999: 79–80), but I now wonder whether this was a mistake: perhaps the problem is more for psychology than philosophy” (2002: 115, footnote 15). Why it is more a problem for psychology than philosophy? Because it is concerned with mental processes of the grounder. In virtue of what has the grounder grounded the term ‘Elvis’ and not Elvis’s lips? In order to find the answer one has to go beyond looking at the mental processes of the grounder to the mechanisms/processes of perceptual experiences which will tell us if applied to the whole object and not just parts of it. In order to complete the causal theory of content Devitt and Sterelny’s suggestion is to add the teleological elements to the causal story, to appeal to the biological function in the explanation of the mechanisms/processes of referential relation. Recently their suggestion seems more plausible with the fine elaboration of the teleosemantic explanation of the preconceptual/nonconceptual level of sensory perceptual representations found in Neander (2017). Needless to say, we cannot go into any details of such suggestion or claim that it is true. The main point here is that content externalism is not immune to the problems (and possible solutions) to the workings and structure of cognitive processes. Giving a detailed account of the actual mechanisms might not be, *pace* Devitt, a philosopher’s task but the concern again points to the fact that CE worry about processes which VE do not mention at all.

6. *Content externalism is behaviorally inert (irrelevant)*

The third point to look into is vehicle externalists’ claim that content externalism is behaviorally inert. It is inert because it does not affect the results of behavior and it does not generate action. Here are two quotes:

Many have complained that even if Putnam and Burge are right about the externality of content, it is not clear that these external aspects play a causal or explanatory role in *the generation of action*. In counterfactual cases where internal structure is held constant but these external features are changed, *behavior looks just the same*; so internal structure seems to be doing the crucial work (Clark and Chalmers 1998, in Menary 2010: 29, italics mine)

[...] the relevant external features are *passive*. Because of their distal nature, they play no role in driving the cognitive process in the here-and-now [...] This is reflected by the fact that the *actions performed by me and my twin are physically indistinguishable, despite our external differences*. (Clark and Chalmers 1998, in Menary 2010: 29, italics mine)

In sum the claim is that content externalism is not action-guiding, it does not explain behavior because external changes do not cause internal changes. External differences leave the Twins physically indistin-

¹⁶ For a rather comprehensive review see Jutronic (2019: 449–477).

guishable, their behavior is physically the same. Thus, external component is behaviorally irrelevant and inert.¹⁷

What kind of action or behaviour vehicle externalists have in mind? “V(ehicle)E(xternalism) requires that the external resource guide the agent’s action in the here and now. The relevant sense of ‘action’ is non-intentional; ‘action’ means something like *bodily movement*” (Clark and Chalmers 1998: 8–9).¹⁸ Thus Otto walking to 53rd street and Twin Otto walking to 51st street involve different bodily movement, different neural activity which explains the difference in their non-intentional walking behavior. But if the relevant sense of ‘action’ is *non-intentional*, i.e. ‘action’ meaning something like *bodily movement* then vehicle externalists’ claim that content externalism cannot explain behavior is misplaced since what Twin-Earth example tries to explain is not non-intentional action in the guise of some bodily movement or neural activity but it tries to explain *intentional behavior*. If that is the case then how can we explain different intentional behaviors of two Otto’s going to two different streets? Otto’s and Twin Otto’s intentional behavior cannot be explained with the difference in the neural activity. When VE say that CE is behaviourally inert because it does not affect the results of behavior and it does not generate action they are talking at cross purposes. Content externalists are concerned to explain intentional behaviour and not some bodily movement. Moreover, vehicle externalists’ opinion about the generation of action is based on Narrow dogma. i.e. the belief that only narrow meanings are needed for the scientifically proper explanation of behavior.¹⁹ What narrow psychologists have in mind is fairly brute-physical, neural impulses or mere bodily movements to explain behaviour. Tyler Burge (1986) has shown that narrow dogma is wrong and that “many relevant specifications of behavior in psychology are intentional, or relational, or both” (Burge 1986: 11). There is nothing to show how narrow meanings of a sentence—as a functional role involving other sentences, proximal sensory input, and proximal behavioral output—might explain intentional behaviors. Devitt brings out the crux of the problem: “In brief, Narrow psychology committed to functional-role meanings faces a dilemma. Either it claims that psychology should explain only brute-physical behaviors, or it accepts that psychology explains intentional behaviors. If the former, then Narrow psychology is committed, implausibly, to denying intentional behaviors. If the latter, then Narrow psychology is committed, implausibly, to narrow meanings explaining intentional behaviors” (Devitt 1990: 298). Consequently, the intentionally described

¹⁷ Lyre says: “Clark and Chalmers endorse Putnam’s and Burge’s externalism as a thesis about content individuation, although they find it insufficient to account for all aspects of cognitions (in particular, the current causal contribution made by the environment), and therefore ultimately reject it” (2015: 2).

¹⁸ In Sprevak and Kallestrup (2014: 83–84).

¹⁹ On the terminology “narrow” and “wide,” see Putnam (1975: 220–2). Also Devitt (1990, 2001).

behavior of Otto who walks to 53rd Street and Twin Otto who walks to 51st cannot be explained with their neural differences or their bodily movements. The intentionally described behavior of Otto is not the same as that of his Twin because it involves 53rd street, not 51st street.

7. Conclusion

I tried to show that CE is not merely causal, that it is active and behaviourally relevant.

Content externalism entails that (1) some entities, that are biologically external to an organism, are theoretically important for understanding organism's cognitive psychology and that (2) these entities play an active cognitive role in having a direct impact on the cognizing organism and its intentional (not non-intentional) behavior. Content externalism is neither merely causal, or simply passive and behaviorally inert. If true, then the content externalism's arguments showing that meanings of our words "aren't in the head" is not a totally independent view that "diverge sharply" and is in opposition to the arguments of the extended mind claim that cognitive processes just "ain't in the head." In other words, the externalism about content carries over into the externalism about mind. However, that does not show that the vehicle externalism is true.

In her article "Modelling the Mind" K.V. Wilkes said: "A danger as far as psychology is concerned, comes when we switch from indefinite to definite article, when we stop talking of 'a' model, metaphor [...] and sneak in the term 'the'" (1990: 63–64). Her suggestion and belief was: "Let a hundred models bloom" (1990: 82).

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