

Real Narrow Content

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Abstract: The purpose of the present paper is to develop and defend an account of narrow content that would neutralize the commonplace charge that narrow content ‘is not real content’. On the account I offer, a concept’s narrow content consists in its bearing the right relation to the right sort of response-dependent property.

1. Introduction

Our mental life is full of thoughts, experiences, and other mental states. These states are *contentful*: something is being thought, something is being experienced. What is being thought or experienced is the *content* of the thought or experience. What kind of entity is a mental content? This question is of the first importance, because ultimately it concerns the relationship between mind and reality.

A more specific question is whether mental content is internal to us, in the sense of being fully determined by what goes on inside our head. Let us call mental content that is fully determined by what goes on inside the head *narrow content*, and one that is not *wide content*. The question, then, is whether mental content is narrow or wide. There are three general positions on this matter. Let us call *internalism* the view that mental content is narrow; *externalism* the view that it is wide; and *dual content theory* the view that mental states have two separate contents, one narrow and one wide.^{1,2}

Both internalism and dual content theory maintain that mental states have narrow contents. Externalism rejects this. The main argument adduced by

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¹ This usage of these labels is purely stipulative and overlaps only partially with common usage. Thus, the terms ‘internalism’ and ‘externalism’ are very often used to label the views that mental states *individuate*, respectively, by their narrow contents and wide contents. Both these views are consistent with dual content theory. According to the latter, mental states have both narrow contents and wide contents. It thus remains an open question which of the two kinds of content is individuating of the states that have them.

² Note that the three views are mutually exclusive but not jointly exhaustive. All three views are universal theses: they claim that all mental states have certain contents. It is perfectly coherent to hold, say, that some mental states have narrow content and others wide content, or that some have only narrow content while others have both narrow and wide content, or cetera.

externalists is the charge that narrow content 'is not real content'. The charge was aired already by Putnam (1975), but has been operative in the background of most discussions of internalism and externalism. At a first pass, the reasoning seems to be this: real content is content that puts us in 'cognitive contact' with the (relevant part of the) world; but narrow content does not put us in cognitive contact with the (relevant part of the) world; therefore, narrow content is not real content.

The middle term in this reasoning is the notion of 'cognitive contact with the world'. This notion is not altogether transparent, but may be elucidated, in the first instance, in world-involving semantic terms, such as reference, denotation, and truth condition. Consider a simple subject-predicate sentence of the form '*a* is *F*', and its mental analog $\langle a \text{ is } F \rangle$.³ There are three main representational items in the mental analog. The first is $\langle a \rangle$, the analog of the subject term; we may say that $\langle a \rangle$ puts us in cognitive contact with the world just in case it has a reference, i.e., just in case it is directed at a worldly particular. The second is $\langle F \rangle$, the analog of the predicate term; we may say that $\langle F \rangle$ puts us in cognitive contact with the world just in case $\langle F \rangle$ has a denotation, i.e., just in case it is directed at a worldly property. The third is the analog of the entire sentence, $\langle a \text{ is } F \rangle$; we may say that the latter puts us in cognitive contact with the world just in case it has a truth condition, in the form of a worldly state of affairs (consisting in the instantiation of the property denoted by $\langle F \rangle$ by the particular referred to by $\langle a \rangle$).

In recent years, a flourish of work on so-called two-dimensional semantics has resulted in a fairly clear and compelling account of narrow content that is truth-conditional (Stalnaker, 1981; Chalmers, 2002, 2003, 2006). This may clarify how the mental analog of a sentence puts us in cognitive contact with a state of affairs that constitutes its potential truthmaker. But two-dimensional semantics does not clarify how the *elements* making up the mental analog of a full sentence get hooked up with the corresponding *constituents* of the state of affairs. It does assign 'semantic values' to the elements, in the form of functions from centered worlds to extensions, but the entities we think about when we think that *a* is *F* are after all not functions, but rather have to do with the particular *a* and the property *F*. How our thought connects with these entities is something two-dimensional semantics does not account for.⁴ In order to do so, an account would be needed of referential narrow

³ I am assuming here that there *are* mental analogs of sentences. Of course, this depends on what is meant by an 'analog'. If one embraces the language-of-thought hypothesis, there are not only mental analogs of sentences, but mental sentences proper. However, something much weaker than the language-of-thought hypothesis is needed to make sense of the notion of a mental analog of a sentence. Probably all that is needed is the notion of a mental item that has the same content that a sentence has.

⁴ There is a usage of the term 'two-dimensional semantics' in which every dual-content theory, or more liberally yet any theory that distinguishes two kinds of content, is two-dimensional. In this usage, Frege's theory can be counted as a form of two-dimensional semantics, as it distinguishes sense and reference (Chalmers, 2006). When I speak in this paragraph of two-dimensional semantics, I have a more restricted usage in mind that targets the view that wide content is given by a function from possible worlds to extensions and narrow content by a function from centered worlds to extension.

3 content for the mental analogs of subject terms and of denotative narrow content
4 for the mental analogs of predicate terms.

5 In this paper, I propose to tackle the latter task. Let us call the mental analog of
6 a predicate term a *concept*. I will offer an account of the narrow content of concepts
7 that is genuinely denotative and thus puts the concept-user in cognitive contact
8 with the world.⁵

9 At a first pass, the 'not real content' line of reasoning, as applied to concepts,
10 would look like this: real content for concepts is content that puts us in contact
11 with relevant worldly properties; but the narrow content of concepts does not put
12 us in contact with relevant worldly properties; therefore, narrow content of concepts
13 is not real content. (We will seek a stricter reconstruction in the next section.)

14 The purpose of the present paper is to sketch an account of narrow content for
15 concepts on which the second premise of this argument is false, that is, a conception
16 on which the narrow content of concepts does put us in cognitive contact with
17 relevant worldly properties. The purpose, then, is to develop an account of narrow
18 content (for concepts) as real content.

19 The account I will offer is based on two main claims. The first is (very roughly)
20 that narrow content (of concepts) is a relational property of subjects that supervenes
21 on their non-relational properties. The second is (very roughly) that the other
22 relatum of the relevant relation is always a response-dependent property of a
23 specific kind. The upshot is that wherever there is a property the right relation to
24 which constitutes a concept's wide content, there is also in the vicinity a response-
25 dependent property the right relation to which constitutes the concept's narrow
26 content. Thus narrow content puts us in contact with a special class of worldly
27 response-dependent properties.

28 The paper is divided into three parts. In §2 I defend the first of these two claims,
29 and in §3 the second. In §4, I consider a variety of objections to the emerging
30 account of narrow content.⁶

31 Before starting, let me stress that the present paper addresses itself to those
32 philosophers who are impressed with the 'not real content' charge. Some
33 philosophers are unmoved by the charge, and some may think that it would require
34 much further elaboration by its proponents before it is to be taken seriously. I
35 suspect, however, that these philosophers are broadly sympathetic to the notion of
36 narrow content, and perhaps more generally to some form of content internalism.
37 The present paper does not address itself to the sympathetic reader, if you will, but
38 on the contrary, to the antipathetic reader who finds the whole project of devising
39 a notion of narrow content deeply misguided. This sense of misguidedness strikes
40 me—and this is primarily a sociological observation—as animated first and foremost
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43 ⁵ More specifically, I will focus on the subclass of concepts commonly thought to be most
44 clearly not amenable to a narrow treatment, namely, natural kind concepts—concepts that
45 are supposed to denote natural kind properties.

46 ⁶ From now on, I will—more often than not—drop the parenthetical reminder that our
47 concern is with the content of concepts.

by something like the ‘not real content’ line of thought. The burden of the present paper is to show that the notion of narrow content can accommodate the sensibilities that animate this sort of resistance to the theoretical viability of narrow content.

2. On the Very Possibility of a Narrow Content

According to the externalist view (as formulated above), concepts do not *have* a narrow content. Before considering what inspires this idea, let us examine what inspires the idea that they do have a wide content. The inspiration is drawn from possible cases in which two subjects are indistinguishable in terms of what goes on inside their head, but seem intuitively to be in mental states that deploy concepts with different contents. The best known of these is Putnam’s (1975; see also Burge, 1979) Twin Earth case. Twin Earth is a planet just like earth, with the exception that the watery stuff on it is not H₂O, but XYZ. Oscar and Twin Oscar are two internally indistinguishable subjects, but intuitively their water concepts have different contents:⁷ Oscar’s concept is directed at the property of being H₂O, whereas Twin Oscar’s is directed at the property of being XYZ.⁸

In reaction to Putnam’s case, several philosophers have attempted to construct a notion of content which is shared by Oscar and Twin Oscar’s water concepts, that is, to construct a notion of narrow content (for concepts). There are at least five sources of motivation for this. First, there are *prima facie* reasons to think that a wide content cannot be causally responsible for observable behavior, as mental content ought to be (Fodor, 1980, 1987; Kim, 1982). Secondly, there is a suspicion that wide content is not the sort of thing to which one can have the kind of privileged access we appear to have to our mental contents (Boghossian, 1989; McKinsey, 1991). Thirdly, there are questions surrounding the possibility of misrepresentation on an externalist picture of content (Fodor, 1984, 1987). Fourthly, there seems to be a kind of mental content that is fully determined by the phenomenology of conscious experiences and thoughts, and since phenomenology is naturally thought of as narrow, so must this content be (Loar, 2002; Siewert, 1998; Horgan and Tienson, 2002). Fifthly, there is simply the resistant intuition

⁷ Two further points about the setup: first, Oscar lives on Earth, while Twin Oscar lives on Twin Earth; second, by ‘water concepts’ we should not understand ‘concepts that denote water’ (for on that understanding the externalist holds that Twin Oscar does not possess a water concept), but rather something like ‘concepts that play the cognitive role that a water-denoting concept does’.

⁸ It is possible to deny this intuition, or deny that it *is* an intuition, and instead hold that Oscar and his Twin’s water concepts have the same content (see Zemach, 1976). If we hold this, the motivation for claiming that concepts have wide contents—at least this motivation—disappears. To my mind, there is nothing particularly unintuitive about this notion. It is sometimes claimed that the difference in content is clearly visible when we consider the fact that Oscar’s thought <this is water!> is true whereas Twin Oscar’s thought <this is water!> is false. But this is a *non sequitur*: their thoughts may well have different truth value, and yet have the same truth condition. It is just that the truth condition is met by Oscar’s thought and not by Twin Oscar’s.

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3 that what a person thinks or experiences cannot have to do *constitutively*, though it
4 may have to do *causally*, with what goes on outside her (Loar, 1988). To be sure,
5 each of these motivations has been questioned in the literature.⁹ Yet their force
6 persists, combined and severally.¹⁰ In this paper, I assume that having a workable
7 notion of narrow content is an advantage for a theory of content. I do not seek to
8 justify this assumption. Thus it is not a burden of the present paper to establish the
9 *desirability* of narrow content, only its *viability*.

10 The accounts of narrow content devised in reaction to Putnam's Twin-Earth
11 argument have tended to fall into one of two families.¹¹ The first construes narrow
12 content as a 'short-armed' functional role, that is, as an abstraction from the total
13 set of a concept's typical deployments' intra-cranial causes and effects (Loar, 1981;
14 Block, 1986; Rey, 1998).¹² The second construes narrow content as a function
15 from contexts to wide contents (Fodor, 1987; Stalnaker, 1990).¹³

16 Both construals have been greeted with skepticism. The main charge has been
17 that narrow content, as construed in these accounts, is not real content. When one
18 thinks of an apple, what one thinks about is not a role or a function, but a fruit.
19 Real content must put the subject in cognitive contact with the external world.
20 Although (as noted above) the notion of 'cognitive contact' is somewhat unclear,
21 it intimates a certain relation between mind and world. A water concept, for
22 example, must involve a relation between the thought wherein the concept is
23 deployed and some worldly property or kind, presumably having to do with water.
24 The problem with narrow content, construed as a short-armed functional role or
25 as a function from contexts to wide contents, is that it is not clear how it could
26 involve any such relation.¹⁴ Again, when we have a water thought, what we think
27 about is not a role or a function. Rather, it is something to do with water.

28 For the narrow content of water thoughts to be real content, it would have to
29 involve a relation to a relevant worldly property. The term 'worldly property' is
30 to some extent metaphorical, inasmuch as the contrast class is surely not that of
31 *un*worldly properties. Thus, the property of being a unicorn, though not a property
32 instantiated in the actual world, ought to qualify as 'worldly' in discussions of
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35 ⁹ For example: Dretske (1988) and Burge (1989) have attempted to respond to the first
36 challenge; Burge (1988) to the second challenge; Dretske (1986) to the third; Dretske (1996)
37 and Lycan (2001) to the fourth.

38 ¹⁰ Different philosophers are responsive to different considerations, but it is difficult to remain
39 unmoved by all five of them.

40 ¹¹ An exception is Segal's (2000) account of narrow content, which is different, and which in
41 my opinion meets the 'not real content' challenge more or less satisfactorily. The account of
42 narrow content to be presented here is different than Segal's, however.

43 ¹² The restriction of causes and effects to intra-cranial ones is what makes the functional role
44 'short-armed'.

45 ¹³ What kind of thing a 'context' is, is something that changes from one version of this account
46 to another.

47 ¹⁴ Short-armed functional roles do not involve a relation to *anything* in the external world,
48 while functions from contexts to wide contents do not constitute any specific property or
kinds, certainly not the properties or kinds we think about when we think about water.

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3 mental content, since some of our thoughts are about unicorns. In the present
4 context, what makes unicornity a worldly property is the fact that it is not a
5 property of our ideas, or mental states, but of what these ideas or states are about.
6 Let us use the common distinction between the vehicle of representation (what
7 does the representing) and the content of representation (what is being represented).
8 In devising a notion of narrow content, we must ensure that the property the
9 content puts us in cognitive contact with is not a vehicular property, not a property
10 of the representing, but a property of the represented. The notion of 'worldly
11 property' is just supposed to flag that. The problem with properties such having
12 functional role F is that they belong with the vehicle, not with the content.

13 (Note that the attribute of being a worldly property, so construed, applies to
14 property *instantiations*, not properties. One can certainly have, say, a higher-order
15 thought about the functional role of one's first-order thought about water. For
16 that higher-order thought, the property of having functional role F would be
17 perfectly legitimate as a non-vehicular, worldly property.)

18 For narrow content to be real content, it would have to involve a relation to a
19 worldly property in this sense. But not any relation to a worldly property would
20 do. It must be a relation to a *relevant* worldly property. In this context, the point
21 of the relevance requirement is to rule out relations to worldly properties that have
22 nothing to do with what is being thought. A water thought may bear the relation
23 of coming into being five minutes after the death of the tallest man in China, and
24 thus bear a relation to a worldly property. But surely this relation does not impute
25 real content on the thought. The reason is does not is that the thought is about
26 water, not tall Chinese. For this thought's narrow content to be real content, it
27 must involve a relation to a worldly property *to do with water*.

28 It should be clear why the accounts of narrow content in terms of short-armed
29 functional role and function from contexts to wide content are unsuitable to meet
30 the challenge of real content. A water thought is about something liquid, but no
31 functional role is liquid; it is about something drinkable, but no function from
32 contexts to wide contents is drinkable. Simply put, water thoughts are not about
33 roles or functions. These are not the relevant worldly properties—they are
34 unsuitable to constitute potential contents of water thoughts.

35 These considerations apply rather uncontestedly to the two mentioned families
36 of narrow content. But it has been felt that they would apply equally to any
37 possible account. The feeling is that narrow content is inherently not the kind of
38 thing that puts us in cognitive contact with the world, or at any rate the right part
39 of the world, and thus does not capture 'what is being thought'. Informally, the
40 general reasoning appears to go somewhat as follows: genuine, real content involves
41 a relation to entities in the external world, not just the vehicles of representation;
42 but such entities are almost uniformly outside the head;¹⁵ so genuine, real content
43 involves a relation to entities outside the head; yet narrow content is by definition
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45 ¹⁵ They are not in cases of higher-order representation. But in all cases of first-order
46 representation, they are.

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3 independent of entities outside the head; therefore, narrow content is not real
4 content.¹⁶

5 The argument may be put more succinctly and precisely as follows. Suppose
6 subject S has a concept M with a content C. C is a *narrow* content only if M's
7 having C is a non-relational property of S.¹⁷ But C is a *real* content only if M's
8 having C is a relational property of S. Therefore, if C is a narrow content, then C
9 is not a real content. That is, narrow content is not real content.

10 There are two ways to respond to this argument. One is to remove the
11 requirement that real content involve a relation to the external world (Loar, 2002;
12 Horgan *et al.*, 2005; Chalmers, in conversation). I will not pursue this strategy
13 here. Although it strikes me that a notion of real narrow content might be devised
14 that would be altogether non-relational (Kriegel, 2008), the purpose of the present
15 paper is to show that there is also a viable notion of narrow content that construes
16 it as relational. In other words, we might imagine a defender of narrow content
17 who says this: first of all, real content can be both narrow and relational; but even
18 if it cannot, real content can be entirely non-relational. In terms of this two-prong
19 strategy, this paper pursues the first prong: it attempts to develop a notion of
20 narrow content that casts it as a relational property of the subject. The challenge,
21 of course, is to show that relational content can still be genuinely narrow.

22 Note that when we introduced narrow content informally, we characterized it
23 as content that is 'fully determined' by what goes on inside the subject's head.¹⁸
24 Importantly, we did not characterize it as *constituted* by what is in the head, but as
25 *determined* by what is in the head. It is consistent with this characterization that a
26 concept's narrow content be a relational property of the subject—so long as the
27 instantiation conditions of that relational property are fully determined by the
28 instantiation conditions of certain non-relational properties of the subject. In other
29 words, narrow content may be a relational property, as long as it is a relational
30 property *that supervenes on non-relational properties*, that is, as long as it is a 'locally
31 supervenient' property.

32 Returning to subject S's concept M and its content C, I do wish to endorse the
33 principle that C is a real content only if M's having C is a relational property of S.
34 But if we are to follow our informal characterization of narrow content, we should
35 reject the principle that C is a narrow content only if M's having C is a non-
36 relational property of S. In its stead, we should adopt the more lenient principle
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39 ¹⁶ To be sure, we can go on using the label 'narrow content', if we so desire, but this is not to
40 be understood to *describe* something as really being a content. Just as a rubber duck is not
41 really a kind of duck, so narrow content is not really a kind of content.

42 ¹⁷ This is probably not the most accurate way to put this. The following, though unlovely as
43 prose, would be more accurate: C is a narrow content only if S's property of having a C-
44 carrying concept M is a relational property of S. Note that having C may well be a relational
45 property of M, as long as it is not a relational property of S. Thus, if M's having C involves a
46 relation to other items 'inside S', such as other concepts, C is still narrow.

47 ¹⁸ This is not an idiosyncratic characterization, but one that is continuous with widespread
48 practice in the literature.

that C is a narrow content only if M's having C *supervenes on* the non-relational properties of S, that is, only if M's having C is a locally supervenient property of S. This combination of principles opens a logical space for real narrow content: C is both real and narrow content just in case M's having C is a relational property of S that supervenes on the non-relational properties of S.¹⁹

There is nothing incoherent about the notion of a relational property that supervenes on non-relational properties. Any concept's relation to a non-twin-earthable property would qualify. Thus, when recounting informally Putnam's story, we described Twin Earth as one in which the watery stuff is XYZ. In this story, the property of being XYZ is twin-earthable. But the property of being watery stuff is, by the very nature of its role in the story, a non-twin-earthable property. So the shared narrow content of Oscar's and Twin Oscar's water concepts could be readily construed in terms of a relation to the property of being watery stuff. Furthermore, the relevant relation between a concept and the non-twin-earthable property that constitutes its narrow content might be exactly the same as the relation between the concept and the corresponding twin-earthable property that constitutes its wide content. That is, for any relation R adduced by someone as the relation that holds between a concept M and water when water constitutes M's wide content, it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that M also bears R to the property of being watery stuff, and that, in virtue of this, watery stuff constitutes M's narrow content.²⁰ Such narrow content would be real content, as it would put one in cognitive contact with a worldly property, namely, the property of being watery stuff.

The emerging picture is this. Whenever a concept M bears the relation R that underlies contentfulness to a twin-earthable property F, there is in F's vicinity a non-twin-earthable property G, such that M bears R to G. M's bearing R to F constitutes M's having the wide content it does, while M's bearing R to G constitutes M's having the narrow content it does.

The challenge is to provide a general characterization of the relevant non-twin-earthable properties, and show that there is indeed such a property wherever there is a corresponding twin-earthable one. Meeting this challenge is the task of the next section.

3. A Response-Dependent Account of Narrow Content

A property G is non-twin-earthable if the following holds: for any two subjects S_1 and S_2 , if S_1 stands in the appropriate relation to G and S_2 does not, then there is a non-relational property H, such that S_1 instantiates H and S_2 does not. This

¹⁹ This is, again, a tad inaccurate. We should say rather the following: C is a real narrow content just in case M's having C is an *appropriate* relational property of S that supervenes on the non-relational properties of S. The qualifier 'appropriate' is needed here in order to exclude relational properties that have nothing to do with content (e.g. being faster than).

²⁰ In §4, I consider the objection that M in fact cannot bear the same relation R to a non-twin-earthable property. This is the fourth objection considered in §4.

condition guarantees that whenever subjects differ in their relation to the property G, there is some internal difference between them as well. That is, it guarantees local supervenience.

The most straightforward way to ensure that this condition is met is to *define* property G in terms of its internal effects on subjects. If G is *defined* as the kind of property that elicits certain internal reactions in a subject when the latter is appropriately related to it, then it is metaphysically necessary that whenever two subjects differ in bearing the relevant relation to G, there is also an internal difference between them.

(Strictly speaking, of course, one cannot *define* a property. What one *can* do is describe the instantiation conditions of the kind of property one is interested in. In what follows, I use the phrase ‘define a property’ as shorthand for that.)

Properties that are defined in terms of the responses things (are disposed to) elicit in subjects are sometimes referred to as *response-dependent properties* (Wright, 1988; Johnston, 1989; Pettit, 1991).²¹ A response-dependent property is a disposition to elicit the right responses in the right respondents. Johnston (1989) construes them more precisely in terms of a priori biconditionals of the form ‘*x* is C iff *x* is such as to produce an *x*-directed response R in a group of subjects S under conditions K’ (Johnston, 1989, p. 145).²² When this sort of biconditional is true a priori, C denotes a response-dependent property. On the assumption that apriority is more or less the same as epistemic necessity, we may formulate the general principle as follows: a property F is response-dependent iff epistemically-necessarily, for any *x*, *x* is F iff there is a set of subjects S_1, \dots, S_n , responses R_1, \dots, R_n , and conditions K, such that *x* is disposed to elicit R_1, \dots, R_n in S_1, \dots, S_n in conditions K.

Some properties lend themselves to response-dependent treatment. Perhaps the best known response-dependent treatment is of color properties. According to response-dependent accounts of color, for something to be red is for it to be disposed to elicit redly responses in normal subjects in normal conditions (Boghossian and Velleman, 1989; Harman, 1996). To avoid circularity, the notion of ‘redly response’ must be analyzed in color-free terms. A natural suggestion, first aired by Sellars, is to construe ‘redly response’ as the exemplification of a sensory

²¹ Under different labels, something like response-dependent properties have been widely discussed for centuries. Thus Locke’s notion of secondary quality is a close ancestor of the notion of response-dependent property.

²² Note that the responses Johnston focuses on are specifically responses directed at the particular that elicited them. A particular might also elicit responses to other particulars. For example, a particularly good breakfast might elicit a disappointment response to the next morning’s breakfast. But that response is not part of the response-dependent properties of the outstanding breakfast, as response-dependent properties are construed by Johnston. To my mind, this restriction is misplaced. Although we would normally be more *interested* in response-dependent properties defined in terms of responses to the eliciting particular, properties defined partially in terms of other responses should not be disqualified from the realm of response-dependent properties altogether.

quality that bears the same web of similarity and dissimilarity relations to other sensory qualities that red bears to other colors.

Response-dependent accounts of color typically appeal to *normal* respondents in *normal* conditions. But it is important to realize that there are any number of response-dependent properties that are *not* defined in terms of normal respondents and normal conditions. For example, there is the property of being disposed to elicit redly responses in Tony Blair in normal conditions; the property of being disposed to elicit redly responses in Tony Blair in conditions of poor lighting; the property of being disposed to elicit redly responses in normal respondents in conditions of poor lighting; etc. Each of these is a different response-dependent property. The reason we ignore them in philosophy is that none is a plausible contender for identification with the property of redness. But they are real properties nonetheless.²³

Likewise, although the above response-dependent account of red adverts to perceptual responses exclusively, there are any number of other responses red things elicit in sentient creatures, and which can be used to define other response-dependent properties. Thus, there is the property of being disposed to elicit certain perceptual and *hormonal* responses in Spanish bulls in normal conditions; being disposed to elicit certain perceptual and *emotional* responses in Scandinavian adult humans in any conditions; the property of being disposed to elicit certain hormonal and emotional responses in Tony Blair in normal conditions; etc. All these are response-dependent properties routinely instantiated by myriad worldly objects.

When we specify the nature of a response-dependent property, the specification must always include the relevant (i) kinds of response and (ii) kinds of respondent. Given the theoretical role of narrow content, it is reasonable to construe it in terms of (i) perceptual and cognitive responses and (ii) intrinsic duplicates.

Consider a random body of water B. B instantiates a great many dispositional properties. It is disposed to elicit perceptual, cognitive, emotional, digestive, and many other responses in Tony Blair, Nicole Kidman, Scandinavian adult humans, and many other respondents. But the responses B is disposed to elicit in Nicole Kidman and Scandinavian adult humans appear utterly irrelevant to the narrow content of Tony Blair's water concept, as do the emotional and digestive responses it is disposed to elicit in Blair himself. What are relevant to the narrow content of Blair's water concept are only the perceptual and cognitive responses B is disposed to elicit in Tony Blair. Thus our interest is in the response-dependent property defined as the disposition to elicit water-directed perceptual and cognitive responses in Tony Blair in normal conditions, or more accurately the disposition to elicit those responses in Blair *and any intrinsic duplicate thereof*.²⁴ This property is instantiated by B, but also by

²³ I consider the objection that in fact they are *not* real properties in §4 (the third objection considered).

²⁴ Also, we should probably be focused on responses *to the particular eliciting them*. See footnote 22 above for background.

most other bodies of water.²⁵ Call this special property ‘Tony-water’. The suggestion I would like to make is that the wide content of Tony Blair’s water concept is constituted by H₂O, while its narrow content is constituted by Tony-water.²⁶

On this account, a property G is a potential narrow-content-constituting property iff epistemically-necessarily, for any *x*, *x* is G iff there are intrinsically indistinguishable subjects S₁, ..., S_n and perceptual and cognitive responses R₁, ..., R_n, such that *x* is disposed to elicit R₁, ..., R_n in S₁, ..., S_n in normal conditions. When a subject’s concept bears the appropriate (contentfulness-underlying) relation to a property of this sort, the property constitutes the concept’s narrow content.²⁷

To avoid circularity, the relevant perceptual and cognitive responses must be characterized otherwise than in terms of their contents. That is, they must be characterized non-intentionally. Two ways of doing so present themselves. The more convenient and less controversial one is to characterize the responses in terms of their short-armed functional role. Another one is to characterize them in terms of their phenomenological character.²⁸ Tony-water, then, is the property of being disposed to elicit in Tony Blair in normal conditions short-armed-functional-role occupant responses (or, alternatively, phenomenological responses).

In summary, on the account presented here, a subject S’s concept M’s having narrow content C consists in M’s bearing the (contentfulness-underlying) relation R to a disposition to elicit certain perceptual and cognitive responses, functionally (or perhaps phenomenologically) characterized, in S and its intrinsic duplicates in normal conditions. Call this the *response-dependent account of narrow content*.

The sort of content assigned to concepts in the response-dependent account is real content, because it involves a relation to a worldly property. It puts us in cognitive contact with a realm of response-dependent properties instantiated by entities in the external world. At the same time, it is genuinely *narrow* content. Because the relevant response-dependent properties are defined in terms of subjective reactions, they are non-twin-earthable. Consider again Tony-water,

²⁵ Though not all of them—bodies of water consisting of five H₂O molecules, for example, do not instantiate this property.

²⁶ As for Twin Blair, Blair’s counterpart on Twin-Earth, the wide content of his water concept is twin-water, but its narrow content is Tony-water.

²⁷ Some may find reason to modify the specifics of this characterization in one way or another. One change might be the introduction of a temporal index to the definition of the relevant response-dependent property, which would then be construed as the disposition to elicit perceptual and cognitive responses in a specific individual in normal conditions *at a given time*. Another possible modification would be to allow as relevant not only perceptual and cognitive responses, but also certain *conative* responses. Yet another modification would recommend focusing not on *normal* conditions, but on some other conditions (e.g. ideal conditions). I am not going to discuss these possible modifications here, because they do not affect the general picture of narrow content I want to canvass in this paper.

²⁸ For the latter to work, there must be a distinctive phenomenological character associated with cognitive states, not only perceptual ones. I would follow Pitt (2004), as well as Horgan and Tienson (2002), in assuming that this is so. For the reader who is unsympathetic to this notion, there is always the functional-role option. That is why I refer to it as the more convenient.

which is defined in terms of the effects it has on what goes on inside the head of subjects with the intrinsic properties of Tony Blair. Tony-water is clearly non-twin-earthable. It is essential to the story of Twin Earth that XYZ is disposed to elicit the same perceptual and cognitive responses in Twin Oscar or Twin Blair that H₂O is in Oscar or Blair.²⁹ Thus the content the response-dependent account assigns to Twin Blair's water concept is the same as the one it assigns to Blair's water concept. More generally, the content assigned to a concept by the response-dependent account is always and necessarily shared by Twins. That is to say, it is locally supervenient content, hence narrow content.

Response-dependent properties are dispositional. As such, they require categorical bases.³⁰ It is quite clear that the categorical basis of Tony-water is H₂O. More generally, it is attractive to think of the categorical basis of a narrow-content-constituting property as the corresponding wide-content-constituting property. On this line of thought, the narrow contents of our concepts are always constituted by dispositional properties whose categorical bases constitute our concepts' wide contents.

Another potentially fruitful way to think of the relation between narrow and wide contents as construed here is in terms of roles and occupants. For any property F that constitutes the wide content of a concept M, and a (response-dependent) property F_{RD} that constitutes M's narrow content, we may say that F is the actual occupant of F_{RD}. This is because F_{RD} is obtained, after all, by abstraction from the total causal role of F. For example, the property of being H₂O realizes, or occupies, the functional role that is Tony-water. Thus the relationship between F and F_{RD} is one that should be familiar from forty years of functionalist literature in the philosophy of mind.³¹ The question facing ordinary functionalist theories is what principles to adopt for abstracting from the total causal role.³² The discussion above can be construed as addressing this question, and proposing to abstract away, quite broadly, from anything that does not have to do with the eliciting of certain perceptual and cognitive responses in certain intrinsically indistinguishable individuals.

The response-dependent account also meshes well with the intuitively attractive notion that while the wide content of our water concept consists in the property

²⁹ Another way to put it is to say that the property of being Tony-water is identical to the property of being Tony-twater.

³⁰ I am assuming here that dispositions are never free-standing but are grounded rather in categorical bases. This assumption is almost universally accepted; to my knowledge, Shoemaker (1979) is its only persistent opponent. This point is applied explicitly to response-dependent properties by Smith and Stoljar (1998).

³¹ Perhaps more accurately, we should construe Tony-water not as the functional role property itself, but rather as the second-order property of having a property that plays the relevant functional role. This way it is clearer why Tony-water is a property of certain worldly particulars, rather than a property of the property of being H₂O. Thanks to Jordi Fernández for pressing me on this point.

³² Block (1986) notes that, if two mental states have all the same causal relations, except that one of them takes three milliseconds more than the other to produce a certain effect E, for most psychological purposes we would want to abstract from this difference and type-identify the two states as functionally the same. Most functional role properties are defined in this way—by abstraction from total causal role.

3 of *really* being water, its narrow content consists in the property of *appearing* to be
4 water, or appearing *to the relevant individual* to be water, and more generally, that
5 the relation between narrow and wide content maps neatly onto the relation
6 between appearance and reality. The account meshes well with this notion because
7 the disposition to elicit water-directed perceptual and cognitive responses is
8 plausibly all that appearing to be water amounts to. Interestingly, it is this kind of
9 'appearance property' that some recent accounts of perceptual content have
10 appealed to as constituting a narrow content that varies concomitantly with
11 perceptual phenomenology (Shoemaker, 1994, 2002; Kriegel, 2002).³³
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13 4. Objections and Responses 14

15 In this section, I consider ten objections to the account of narrow content proposed
16 above. Some of these objections will be fended off and some will occasion
17 modifications or clarifications of the account.
18

19 *Objection One.* One objection is that, despite advertisement to the contrary, the
20 response-dependent account of narrow content defended here is only marginally
21 different from the more traditional account of narrow content in terms of short-
22 armed functional roles. After all, it construes narrow content as a relation to a
23 dispositional property defined in terms of precisely such short-armed functional
24 roles. The point can be put conspicuously by noting that the response-dependent
25 account allows us to type-individuate narrow contents *purely* in terms of these
26 short-armed functional roles, for when two mental states differ in their short-
27 armed functional roles, they *eo ipso* differ in the dispositional property to elicit
28 occupants of those functional roles that they are related to. Consider two mental
29 states M and M* with short-armed roles R and R*. If $R \neq R^*$, then the relevant
30 dispositional properties D and D* they are related to are different, since D is the
31 disposition to elicit R whereas D* is the disposition to elicit R*, and $R \neq R^*$.
32 Conversely, if $R = R^*$, then other things being equal $D = D^*$, for the same
33 reason. Thus whenever two mental states differ in their relation to the relevant
34 dispositional property, they also differ in their short-armed roles, and vice versa.
35 Therefore, the individuation of contents in terms of the relevant dispositional
36 properties is bound to be coextensive with their individuation in terms of short-
37 armed roles. If so, the replacement of the account of narrow content in terms of
38 short-armed roles by the response-dependent account may strike the reader as
39 as much ado about very little.

40 For some purposes, the objection would be well taken. There is certainly a
41 tradition of taking the governing goal of the theory of mental content to
42 provide a principle of content individuation. Against the background of this
43 approach to the theory of content, the short-armed role account and the

44 ³³ These recent accounts follow a longer tradition in the epistemological theories of perception
45 known sometimes as the 'theory of appearances'. For a recent illustration of the latter, see
46 Alston, 1999.
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3 response-dependent account are theoretically equivalent, since they produce
4 coextensive principles of individuation, ones that return the same verdict on
5 any given pair of contents.

6 From a broader theoretical perspective (one that does not restrict theorization in
7 this area to the production of individuation principles), however, the theories are
8 very different. In particular, if we are interested in the metaphysics of the property
9 of having narrow content C , the two accounts are very different. When a subject
10 S is in a mental state M with a short-armed functional role R in the (appropriate)
11 presence of an instance of the relevant dispositional property D , the two accounts
12 provide a completely different ontological assay of the property of M 's having
13 narrow content C . According to the short-armed role account, $C = R$. According
14 to the response-dependent account, $C = D$. Given that $R \neq D$, the two accounts
15 differ in the metaphysics of the narrow content (though because there is a
16 constitutive connection between R and D , the two tend to be co-instantiated).

17 The different metaphysics become important when the 'not real content' charge
18 arises. If for no other reason, the difference is theoretically significant because the
19 view that $C = R$ fails to cast C as real content in the relevant sense, whereas the
20 view that $C = D$ succeeds in doing so. A water thought might have as a typical
21 cause the auditory sound of wheels on a wet road and as a typical effect the
22 intention to take an umbrella. But for all that, umbrellas and wheel sounds are not
23 candidates for that-which-is-being-thought for water thoughts, whereas watery
24 stuff—more specifically, the disposition of bodies of water to elicit thoughts with
25 those kinds of typical causes and effects—is.

26 To be sure, if one is unimpressed with the 'not real content' charge to begin
27 with, one may find this difference between the short-armed role and response-
28 dependent accounts unimportant. But it should be recalled that the purpose of this
29 paper is to defend narrow content against the charge, and defend it not by dismissing
30 it as ill-begotten but by accommodating the central sensibility that animates it.
31 Another way to put it is this: the 'not real content' charge does not easily arise
32 against the background of the assumption that the theory of content is only supposed
33 to produce a principle of content individuation, so narrow content would not need
34 defending from it if that was our considered position. To the extent that narrow
35 content does require defending against this charge, it must be against a broader
36 background that calls for an assay of narrow content, and against that background
37 there is a genuine and all-important difference between the short-armed role
38 account of narrow content and the response-dependent account.

39 *Objection Two.* One of the widely accepted constraints on the adequacy of an
40 account of content is that it allow us to see how different persons may think the
41 same content—and how their concepts could share content. Yet if narrow contents
42 are constituted by response-dependent properties defined relative to intrinsically
43 indistinguishable individuals, then it is impossible for two intrinsically *distinguishable*
44 individuals, no matter how similar, to share narrow content. Thus, if the narrow
45 content of Blair's water concept is constituted by Tony-water, whereas that of
46 Nicole Kidman's is constituted by Nicole-water, then given that Tony-water and
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3 Nicole-water are numerically distinct properties, Blair and Kidman's water concepts
4 do not share their narrow contents.

5 There are three responses to this objection. The first is that the proposed constraint
6 could be satisfied, within the theory of content, by *wide* content. Thus, even if the
7 narrow contents of Blair and Kidman's water concepts are distinct, their wide
8 contents are the same, namely the property of being H₂O. Distinguishable individuals
9 do share contents, then; it is just that the contents they share are not narrow.

10 This response is unavailable to the internalist, who denies that concepts have a
11 wide content. But it is very natural for the proponent of dual-content theory.³⁴
12 The idea behind dual-content theory is that there is a division of semantic labor
13 between narrow and wide content. Each satisfies some of our pre-theoretic
14 expectations from content.³⁵

15 A stronger response to the objection is that even if the response-dependent
16 account does not cast the narrow contents of Blair and Kidman's water concepts
17 as *exactly identical*, it may cast them as *similar enough* for all pragmatic purposes.
18 Some account of what makes them similar would be needed, but a natural thought
19 is that when the perceptual and cognitive responses overlap significantly, the
20 response-dependent properties defined in terms of these responses can be said to
21 be relatively similar (whereas when the responses do not overlap significantly, the
22 properties would be said to be relatively dissimilar).

23 The third and strongest response is that the response-dependent account can be
24 readily modified to allow for *strict identity* of narrow contents. The modification is
25 to advert to more restrictive response-dependent properties. Consider the property
26 of being disposed to elicit responses R₁, ..., R_n in Tony Blair *and* Nicole Kidman
27 (in normal conditions). If this was the property that constituted the narrow contents
28 of Blair and Kidman's water concepts, the resultant contents would be strictly
29 identical (yet still narrow). If we wanted more latitude, so that the property
30 constituting Blair and Kidman's narrow contents be identical even if the perceptual
31 and cognitive responses in them were slightly different, we could advert instead to
32 the property of being disposed to elicit responses R₁, ..., R_j in Tony Blair and
33 responses R_k, ..., R_n in Nicole Kidman (in normal conditions).

34 In principle, we could also 'define' a response-dependent property in which the
35 relevant respondents would be all actual sentient creatures, and modify the account
36 to claim that such 'universal' response-dependent properties are the potentially
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38 ³⁴ I am referring here to the internalist position as construed in §1.

39 ³⁵ The objection might be pressed further, however, by insisting that shareability is a constraint
40 not just on the theory of content, but also on content itself. For something to count as
41 content, on this view, it must be shareable. So the fact that narrow content as accounted for
42 here is unshareable disqualifies it from the status of being genuine content. Again the upshot
43 is that narrow content is not real content. However, the claim that shareability is a necessary
44 condition for genuine content-ness is too strong. Although it is natural to think of content
45 as shareable, this should not be taken as *constitutive* of the notion of content. Certainly there
46 is a useful notion of content which is not constitutively shareable. What is important for the
47 notion of content is only that whenever an unshareable content is borne by a concept, some
48 shareable content is borne as well. That is easily delivered by a dual-content theory.

narrow-content-constituting properties. This would ensure that the narrow content of *all* sentient creatures are shareable. Thus it is plausible to identify *watery stuff* with the universal response-dependent property associated with water, so this modified account would identify the narrow content of everybody's water thoughts with watery stuff. A compromise view would focus on properties defined in terms of responses in large groups of individuals, perhaps grouped together by shared characteristics that would make shared contents psychologically or sociologically plausible. The important thing is that all these different response-dependent properties exist; it is a somewhat technical question just which ones are those the response-dependent account, in its ultimate form, should designate as the potentially narrow-content-constituting ones.³⁶

Objection Three. A non-negotiable constraint on what counts as content is the ability to misrepresent. For something to qualify as a representational type, it must have possible tokens that misrepresent. It might be thought that the response-dependent properties highlighted here, being definitionally tied to subjects' responses, are impossible to misrepresent.

The objection is not entirely misguided, in that the response-dependent properties I have focused on are indeed 'harder' to misrepresent (by the individual in terms of whose responses they are defined) than other properties. But it is nonetheless *possible* to misrepresent them. This is because they are defined in terms of responses *in normal conditions*, which leaves the possibility of misrepresenting them in abnormal conditions. Suppose Blair, under the influence of hallucinogens, drinks lemonade but experiences it as tasteless, clear, etc., thereupon coming to think <this is water>. The lemonade does not instantiate the property of being Tony-water, but Blair represents it to do. This is misrepresentation.

To allow misrepresentation in laxer circumstances, we could modify the response-dependent account so that it advert to properties defined not in terms of normal conditions, but in terms of, say, ideal conditions, or very good conditions, or just good conditions. Again, all these response-dependent properties exist, and it is a question of a technical order which ones it would be wisest for the response-dependent account to advert to.

Objection Four. I keep saying 'all these response-dependent properties exist' and being very latitudinous about which properties there are. But an objector could adopt a sparse conception of properties and complain that the elaborately defined response-dependent properties I have focused on simply do not exist. These properties are not 'natural', the objector might insist. If they do not exist, then narrow content as construed here fails to put us in contact with anything in the external world after all.

There are three responses to this objection. The easiest response is to reject the objector's sparse conception of properties and adopt a latitudinous one. According to a latitudinous conception of properties, there is a property for every predicate

³⁶ Furthermore, a triple-content theory can be imagined according to which concepts have *both* restricted narrow contents that are shared and unrestricted narrow contents that are purely individualistic—in addition to their purely wide contents.

we can devise.³⁷ Since we can devise the predicate that describes or denotes Tony-water, the property of being Tony-water exists, on this view of properties.³⁸

A less metaphysically committal response would insist that the response-dependent properties I have focused on do exist, even on a sparse conception of properties. The reasoning may be this. One question in this area is what makes a property 'natural', and how we could determine whether it is. A reasonable view is that a property is natural when it plays an explanatory role in our overall theory of the world. Against this background, it is clear that if the properties I have focused on do in fact constitute narrow contents, and narrow content does play an explanatory role in our overall theory of the world, then these properties qualify as natural. To assume that the relevant properties are not natural is to presuppose that they do not have an explanatory role in our overall theory of the world, which is to beg the question against the present account of narrow content.³⁹

Finally, even if the entities I have focused on are not properties, we may call them schmoperties, and insist that as long as narrow content puts us in contact with worldly schmoperties, it is *real* content. After all, there is no question that some worldly particulars are disposed to elicit in Blair certain responses. So they have that disposition. Whether that disposition qualifies as a 'property' is irrelevant to the question of whether a concept makes contact with the world when it represents that disposition. Given that the particulars are 'worldly', so is their disposition. This should be enough to make sure that content constituted by that disposition is 'real content' as far as making cognitive contact with the world is concerned.

Objection Five. An interesting objection is that, even if the relevant response-dependent properties exist, they are not the kind of properties to which we can bear the natural (informational, teleological, or whatever) relation that underlies content-bearing. I have suggested above that whatever the relation R that stands between a concept M and a property F when F constitutes M 's wide content is, R may also hold between M and F_{RD} when F_{RD} constitutes M 's narrow content. Yet on most naturalist accounts of content, R is a nomologically robust relation. Dretske (1981) construes it in terms of nomic dependence: the lawlike dependence of M 's instantiations on the instantiations of the property M picks out. The problem is that while it is plausible to suppose that there are laws of nature pertaining to the dependence of water thoughts on water, it is unlikely that there are laws of nature pertaining to the dependence of Blair's water thoughts on Tony-water. So the relation between M and F_{RD} cannot be based on nomic dependence.

One might be tempted to dismiss this objection by insisting that there *are* relationships of nomic dependence involving such properties as Tony-water. More

³⁷ The property may not be instantiated in the actual world, but it does exist.

³⁸ The downside of this response is that it is more metaphysically committal than is ideal for a theory of content. But it brings out the fact that the objection has force only if the sparse conception of properties works.

³⁹ Another account of naturalness might claim that a property is natural if it captures a meaningful similarity among particulars. The same reasoning could be run with this conception of naturalness as I do in the text with the explanatory conception.

plausibly, however, one could simply claim that while the relationships in question do not qualify as nomic dependencies, they are nonetheless fundamentally *the same as* nomic dependencies. Perhaps we are disinclined to treat such relationships as laws of nature because they are not 'general' enough (whatever that means). But the relationships in question are not inherently different for that. They are inherently the same as laws of nature; it is just that they do not qualify as such for special reasons. As long as the relationships are the inherently the same, however, there is no obstacle to construing the relation a concept bears to narrow-content-constituting properties as fundamentally the same as the relation that it bears to wide-content-constituting properties. More specifically, it would not do much violence to the account if we modified it so that concepts bear relation R to their wide contents but relation R* to their narrow contents, where R and R* are very similar relations.

Objection Six. Water thoughts put us in contact not just with any kind of property. They put us in contact with water. But what the present account ensures is that they put us in contact not with water, but with some other property.

There are two responses to this objection. The first might deny that the disposition to elicit water-appropriate responses is not water. Although the common view is that water is identical to H₂O, some have argued that it is not quite identical to it, but merely *constituted* by it (Johnston, 1997). What is agreed upon is that H₂O is not identical to, but merely constitutes, watery stuff.⁴⁰ The disagreement is on whether (i) H₂O is identical to water and water constitutes watery stuff, or (ii) H₂O constitutes water and water is identical to watery stuff. Although the more popular view is (i), if we embrace (ii), the result is that it is the narrow content of our water concept, rather than its wide content, that puts us in contact with water.

A more placid version of this response would claim that the English word 'water' is used in everyday life sometimes to refer to whatever is H₂O and sometimes to refer to whatever is watery stuff, and so there is no fact of the matter as to which one *is* water.⁴¹ Each is water in one legitimate sense of the term. So the narrow content of our water concepts put us in contact with water in one legitimate sense of the term.⁴²

A second response is that even if it follows from the response-dependent account that the narrow content of our water concept does not put us in contact with water, it certainly puts us in contact not with a random worldly property, but with a property

⁴⁰ Recall that here we construe watery stuff as a 'universal' response-dependent property, with which a version of the response-dependent account identifies the narrow content of everybody's water thoughts (see Objection Two above).

⁴¹ To justify this claim, we would probably have to make a statistical claim to the effect that 'water' is used more or less as frequently to refer to the one property as it is to refer to the other. This is of course an empirical claim, but my armchair sense is that it is a true one!

⁴² Also, on this view, our water thoughts put us in contact, widely, with H₂O, and narrowly, with watery stuff. Between these two facts, we can say that they put in contact with water. And narrow content has an equal role in this putting-in-contact.

3 that very much has to do with water. At the very least, it is a property which tends to
4 be coinstantiated with water, and whose tendency to do so is nomic, in that it is
5 grounded in the laws of nature. It would be very hard to insist that the narrow content
6 of our water concepts is not real content despite putting us in contact with a worldly
7 property, and moreover one that tends nomically to be coinstantiated with water.

8 None of this is to concede that the response-dependent account indeed entails
9 that narrow content does not put us in contact with water. I think the placid
10 version of the first response is extremely plausible, and it means that the narrow
11 content of our water concept puts us in contact with water in one legitimate sense
12 of the term.

13 *Objection Seven.* The response-dependent account construes the narrow content
14 of natural kind concepts in terms of certain response-dependent properties. But
15 how does it handle response-dependent concepts? Consider for example the
16 concept of red, which is arguably a response-dependent concept; or even the
17 concept of Tony-water, which you have probably acquired for the first time while
18 reading this paper. It is not clear how the present account would handle their
19 content. Having fielded response-dependent properties in the account of the
20 content of natural kind concepts, what would these properties' role be in the
21 account of the content of response-dependent concepts?

22 In addressing this objection, we must keep in mind the distinction between
23 regular response-dependent concepts, of the sort the concept of red may be, and
24 the kind of special response-dependent concepts devised in the presentation of the
25 account of narrow content under consideration.

26 Regarding the former, there is still a distinction, for any given individual,
27 between the wide content and narrow content of the concept. Suppose the
28 concept of red is the concept of a disposition to elicit redly responses in normal
29 subjects in normal conditions. Jim may be an abnormal subject. Perhaps Jim is
30 dramatically abnormal, e.g. colorblind. Or Jim might be slightly abnormal, say
31 experiencing red surfaces and volumes a little more darkly than is common among
32 subjects in his age, gender, and race group. Either way, the narrow content of
33 Jim's red concept would be different from its wide content. Whereas its wide
34 content is given by the property of being disposed to elicit responses R_1, \dots, R_n in
35 normal subjects in normal conditions, its narrow content is given by the property
36 of being disposed to elicit responses R_1, \dots, R_m (perhaps overlapping, but certainly
37 non-identical, with R_1, \dots, R_n) in Jim himself, and his intrinsic duplicates, in
38 normal conditions.

39 If Jim is a normal perceiver of red surfaces and volumes, there are two ways of
40 understanding the relationship between the properties of redness and Jim-redness
41 (if you will). On one understanding, the two properties are still distinct, since
42 redness is defined in terms of *all* normal subjects, whereas Jim-redness is defined
43 in terms of a subset of normal subjects, namely Jim and his intrinsic duplicates.
44 On another understanding, however, the reference to subjects is only supposed to
45 help us fix our mind on the right kinds of response, so given that the responses
46 themselves are the same in Jim as in 'the normal perceiver', the properties of
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redness and Jim-redness are one and the same. If we follow the second understanding of the relation between redness and Jim-redness, the upshot is simply that the wide content of Jim's red concept is identical to its narrow content, or perhaps better put, that Jim's red concept does not *have* a wide content.

Such lack of wide content is the natural position to have on the matter of the concept of Tony-water, or rather *Blair's* concept of Tony-water, once he acquires it. As for *our* concept of Tony-water, its narrow content is different from its wide content. The wide content of my concept of Tony-water is given by Tony-water, but its narrow content is given by Tony-water's disposition to elicit certain responses in me and my intrinsic duplicates. The latter property is quite complex indeed: it is the disposition-to-*elicit-the-right-responses-in-normal-conditions-in-Tony-Blair-and-his-duplicates'* disposition to elicit the right responses in normal conditions in me and my duplicates. If this sort of property strikes you as too exotic to be worth having a concept for, so it should. This is precisely why I never bothered to acquire this concept before writing this paper.

Objection Eight. Another objection might be that response-dependent properties are not the right kind of properties to constitute narrow content, for the following reason. As we noted in §1, one of the motivations for narrow content is that there appears to be a kind of content fully determined by narrow phenomenology. Yet response-dependent properties are dispositional, whereas what is presented in phenomenology is not, and arguably cannot be, a dispositional property.⁴³

One response to this objection is that there are enough other motivations for narrow content that even if we forsake this one, the notion of narrow content is still well motivated. But there is also another response that does not concede the phenomenological point.⁴⁴

The response is that the properties presented in the phenomenology are dispositional, even though they are not presented in phenomenology *as* dispositional. Compare: the property of weight is presented in tactile phenomenology as non-relational; yet we know that weight is a relational property (Shoemaker, 1994). The present response claims that, in a less obvious way, this is what in fact happens with all properties presented in phenomenology.

It might be objected that this would embarrassingly implicate the present account in error theory, casting experience as massively erroneous. However, it

⁴³ I am using the phrase 'presented in the phenomenology' as though it is unproblematic. Clearly, if 'presented in' is supposed to mean something different from 'represented by', then it *is* problematic just what it means.

⁴⁴ Personally, I do not wish to endorse this response, as the phenomenological motivation for narrow content is probably the most potent one for me. The phenomenological motivation for narrow content does not arise merely from the claim that there is a content determined by phenomenology, but by this claim combined with the thesis that the phenomenology is narrow or non-relational. As noted above, this latter thesis is rejected by so-called phenomenal externalists (Dretske, 1996; Lycan, 2001). However, I happen to reject phenomenal externalism and yet hold that phenomenology determines a kind of content (Loar, 2002; Horgan and Tienson, 2002). I will not argue for these views here. I merely mention them by way of clarifying why I find Objection Six troublesome.

is important to distinguish two grades of error theory. Weak error theory is the claim that the properties presented in phenomenology are dispositional, but are not presented as being dispositional. Strong error theory is the claim that the properties presented in phenomenology are dispositional, but are presented as being non-dispositional. The weak variety is not particularly embarrassing. The properties presented in phenomenology have many features they are not presented as having. Thus, the properties presented in phenomenology, as all properties, are not mango-shaped; yet phenomenology fails to present them as such. The strong variety of error theory is genuinely embarrassing, but is also much more difficult to assess. After all, the claim that phenomenology itself is simply silent on whether the properties it presents are dispositional or not, rather than committed to their being non-dispositional, is in many ways the safer and more conservative claim. There is some reason to think that phenomenology does not comment on such matters. But in any event the objector who insists that it does would have to offer some procedure by which we might settle the question of whether this is so.^{45,46}

Objection Nine. An account of content must respect as much as possible our pre-theoretic intuitions about the truth value of our thoughts. But the response-dependent account fails to do so for many thoughts about non-existents. Thus, the thought that there are no witches is true. Yet its narrow content, according to the response-dependent account, is that there is no disposition to elicit witchy responses (in the thinker and her intrinsic duplicates in normal conditions). Since there *is* such a disposition, the narrow content of the thought that there are no witches turns out to be false on the response-dependent account. Thus the account returns

⁴⁵ Another response, somewhat more speculative, relies on a distinction between micro-level and macro-level categorical bases. An object's explosiveness may have not only the micro-level categorical basis of containing potassium nitrate, but also the macro-level categorical basis of containing gunpowder (where the relation between containing potassium nitrate and containing gun powder is weaker than identity—perhaps constitution). I have suggested in §2 that the categorical basis of a narrow-content-constituting response-dependent property may be the wide-content-constituting property. If this claim is modified to state that it is the *micro-level* categorical basis that is the wide-content-constituting property, then (against the putative background of the non-identity of micro- and macro-level categorical bases) we may hold that the narrow-content-constituting property is not the response-dependent property itself, but its macro-level categorical basis. This would yield the result that the properties presented in phenomenology are not dispositional after all, as per intuition. This suggestion faces the problem, however, that the macro-level categorical bases might turn out to be twin-earthable. At least some story would have to be told if we are to have a guarantee that they will not.

⁴⁶ Relatedly, it might be thought odd to assign such complex properties to the narrow contents of our thoughts. Certainly we do not think about bodies of water *as* instantiating the complex response-dependent properties the present account says we hook up to when we think about them. However, the requirement that we be fully aware of the metaphysical nature of the property we hook up with in thought is too demanding. Thus we do not impose it on wide content: most people do not think of bodies of water *as* made up of molecules composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom.

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3 the wrong result for the thought that there are no witches—and would return the
4 wrong result for many thoughts about non-existents.

5 My response to this objection is to plead guilty, but resort to a *tu quoque*. I agree
6 that the response-dependent account of narrow content fails to account for certain
7 thoughts about non-existents. But the externalist is in no better position on this
8 score. According to the externalist, the wide content of the thought that there is
9 water is grounded in a relation to water. Correspondingly, the wide content of the
10 thought that there are no witches would have to be constituted by a relation to
11 witches. Since there are no witches, the externalist cannot ascribe to the thought
12 any content, let alone a true one.

13 There is a disanalogy between the externalist treatment of thoughts about non-
14 existents and the response-dependent treatment. The former cannot ascribe to
15 such thoughts any content, the latter ascribes to them the wrong content. But both
16 fail to ascribe to such thoughts the right content.

17 The underlying problem seems to do with the relational conception of content
18 itself. As soon as content is expected to involve a relation to the represented, there
19 will arise a problem in the case of representations of non-existents. For we cannot
20 bear relations to non-existents. This is what generates the traditional problem of
21 intentional non-existence, and relational conceptions of content are particularly
22 ill-suited to solve this problem.

23 Ultimately, what this means is that the externalist is not entitled to raise this
24 objection to the response-dependent account. As far as we can tell, the only kind
25 of account of content that can handle thoughts about non-existents is one according
26 to which content is altogether non-relational. Such an account casts all content as
27 narrow, and is thus internalist. An internalist who is dismayed with the response-
28 dependent account of narrow content is entitled to raise the objection that the
29 account cannot handle representations of non-existents. But an externalist is not so
30 entitled. For what creates the problem in the first place is the requirement that
31 content involve a relation to the world, a requirement imposed by the externalist
32 as part of the 'not real content' line.

33 In a way, what this discussion brings out is that the requirements that real
34 content be relational and that it return the right results for all thoughts about non-
35 existents are not mutually satisfiable. If so, we must choose between a purely
36 internalist conception of content as altogether non-relational and a relational
37 conception of content that allows it to be either wide or narrow in the manner of
38 the response-dependent account. But in any case the issue of thoughts about non-
39 existents does not give an advantage to externalism over the response-dependent
40 account.

41 *Objection Ten.* The present account construes narrow content in terms of
42 worldly response-dependent properties. This sort of move may work for the
43 content of concepts, but it is not clear how it could extend to the content of (the
44 mental analogs of) singular terms, which are supposed to represent particulars.

45 The most straightforward reaction to this objection is to remind that (the mental
46 analogs of) singular terms fall outside the scope of the present proposal. For all I have
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3 said, it may well be that (mental analogs of) singular terms do not have a narrow
4 content. That should not affect the prospects for an account of narrow content for
5 concepts. In any case, I have developed elsewhere a notion of *response-dependent*
6 *particular* (Kriegel, Ms.), which could serve as the narrow content of (mental analogs
7 of) singular terms in a generalized response-dependent account of narrow content.⁴⁷
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10 5. Conclusion

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12 It is plausible to suppose that there is a certain kind of mental content that is
13 determined fully by what goes on inside our head. This sort of content is influenced
14 causally by external entities, but it is not constitutively dependent upon them. At
15 the same time, in having such content in mind, we are still directed at the world—
16 it is about the world that we think with this content in mind. These two facts
17 about such content—its being constitutively independent of the world and its
18 being directed at the world—present a difficulty for understanding how such
19 content is possible. Some philosophers have been so impressed by the difficulty
20 that they have declared such content impossible. In this paper, I attempted to show
21 how such content is possible—and how it probably is.
22

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44 ⁴⁷ I plan to pursue such an account in a sequel to the present paper. In the present paper, I have
45 set my sight lower—on a response-dependent account of the narrow content of concepts, or
46 the mental analogs of predicate terms.
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