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Externalism, Rational Explanation, Identity Premises

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RESUMEN

En este artículo desarrollo y defiendo una respuesta tipo premisa de identidad al argumento de la inferencia de Paul Boghossian. De acuerdo con este argumento, el externalismo sobre el contenido mental es incompatible con una noción *sustancial* de auto-conocimiento puesto que resulta incompatible con la afirmación de que podemos conocer *a priori* las propiedades lógicas de nuestros pensamientos. Aquí defiendo la respuesta tipo premisa de identidad en contra de cuatro críticas diferentes y, al hacerlo, bosquejo las líneas generales de un modelo sobre involucrarse en inferencias y explicación racional.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *externismo semántico, inferencia, transparencia epistémica, racionalidad, Boghossian.*

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I develop and defend an “identity premise” response to Paul Boghossian’s argument from inference. According to this argument, externalism about mental content is incompatible with a *substantial* notion of self-knowledge because it happens to be incompatible with the claim that we can know *a priori* the logical properties of our thoughts. Here, I defend the identity premise response against four different criticisms, and to do so, I sketch the general lines for a picture on inference-engaging and rational explanation.

KEYWORDS: *Semantic Externalism; Inference; Epistemic Transparency; Rationality; Boghossian.*

I. THE ARGUMENT FROM INFERENCE

The story is pretty well known: some authors protest that externalism about mental content is incompatible with us having authoritative self-knowledge, while many contend that they are indeed compatible.¹ In this paper, I offer a response to an argument by Paul Boghossian (1992), (1994) — let us call it “the argument from inference”— that aims to show that externalism happens to be incompatible with a *substantial* notion of self-knowledge. The identity premise response I favor has been mentioned by many different authors,²

but I am afraid that it has not been properly developed and defended from some criticisms. That is my main goal here.

However, first: what is *insubstantial* self-knowledge? Once incompatibilistic worries started to spread out, some philosophers responded that the mechanisms on the basis of self-knowledge themselves saved the compatibility between externalism and authoritative self-knowledge. According to them, whatever is responsible for determining content properties of first-order thoughts is also responsible for determining the content properties of second-order thoughts, and hence, there is no room for the second-order thought to *fail* when identifying the concepts employed in the first-order thought.³ Take, for example, Tyler Burge's (1988) proposal. Burge defends that *cogito* thoughts constitute basic self-knowledge. Cogito thoughts are second-order thoughts that contain the first-order thought they are about, such as "I am thinking, with this very thought, that water is wet." The point is that, given that the first-order thought is itself a constituent part of the whole cogito thought, the very same concepts involved in the first-order thought are also involved in the cogito thought, so that if different concepts were involved in the first-order thought, then the cogito thought would also be different. Hence, there is no room for a mismatch between the concepts involved in the first- and second-order thoughts, so no theory about content determination (including externalism) can undermine the basic self-knowledge formed by cogito thoughts.

Now, again, Boghossian points out that this type of self-knowledge is not substantial enough: "the assurance that this sort of proposal provides, about the compatibility of externalism with authoritative self-knowledge, is, in a sense to be explained, *hollow*" [Boghossian (1992), p. 15] because "the kind of self-knowledge that is thereby secured falls short — way short — of the kind of self-knowledge we normally think of ourselves as possessing" [Boghossian (1994), p. 35]. Boghossian's point is that self-knowledge involves not only just knowing what one is thinking but also some other abilities. For example, we tend to think that we can always know what the logical properties of our thoughts and beliefs are, and with that, we can adapt them to the norms of logic and rationality on an *a priori* basis. Thus, according to Boghossian's argument from inference, externalism about mental content is incompatible with *that*.

The argument uses a slow switching example to exemplify those consequences about which it warns. The example introduces Peter, a big opera enthusiast, who one day meets the famous tenor Pavarotti swimming in Lake Taupo. This meeting makes a great impression on Peter, who even many years later remembers the evening during which he saw Pavarotti swimming in Lake Taupo. One day, Peter is transported to Twin Earth (Peter does not notice that he has been transported from one environment to another), which contains a *doppelgänger* of Pavarotti, whom we shall call 'Twin Pavarotti'.

Twin Pavarotti bears an extreme resemblance to Pavarotti; he sings marvelously, he is Italian (twin Italian maybe?), he is a bit overweight, and he is called ‘Pavarotti’. Peter stays enough time on Twin Earth to acquire the concept TWIN PAVAROTTI even though he never suspects that there are two different individuals he dubs ‘Pavarotti’. One day he attends a recital by Twin Pavarotti. The next day, Peter engages in reasoning he would express by uttering the following sentences: ‘I once met Pavarotti at Lake Taupo; I listened to Pavarotti last night; therefore, I once met at Lake Taupo the tenor I listened to last night.’

Now, the problem. According to Boghossian, the externalist is committed to the following ascriptions, that is, committed to saying that this is the inference Peter is making:

- (1) That Peter once met Pavarotti at Lake Taupo.
- (2) That Peter listened to Twin Pavarotti last night.
- (3) That, therefore, Peter once met at Lake Taupo the tenor he listened to last night.

Now, if these ascriptions are correct, premise (1) contains the concept PAVAROTTI, while premise (2) contains the concept TWIN PAVAROTTI, even though Peter falsely believes that he expresses only one concept by his different utterances of the term ‘Pavarotti’. This then shows, according to Boghossian, that externalism is incompatible with mental content being transparent, with the claim that for any two thoughts (or thought constituents) a subject can consider at a given time, at that time, that subject can know with no need for any empirical investigation whether those thoughts (or thought constituents) do share their contents or not.

One might wonder why we would want to preserve transparency, and why self-knowledge without transparency becomes *hollow*. The point is that, according to Boghossian, if content is not transparent, then some thesis about the “a priority of our logical abilities” will be false. If the abovementioned ascriptions are correct, then the inference Peter is making is invalid, while Peter believes the argument is indeed valid: he accepts its conclusion because he believes that it follows from the premises. Furthermore, *a priori* reflection will not be sufficient for him to amend his error; what he needs to discover is that he is thinking about two different individuals, which he can learn only by empirical investigation. If content is not transparent, then we will not be able to know *a priori* the logical properties of our thoughts and beliefs and we will not be able to know *a priori* what follows from our thoughts (and what does not). That is the type of *substantial* self-knowledge we would lose if externalism were true, Boghossian protests.

Moreover, if the a priority of our logical abilities is false, our *de dicto* ascriptions will not be able to rationalize beliefs and behaviors, something they are supposed to do.

Our *de dicto* ascriptions have to provide *rational explanations*. We say, for example, that Annie believes that the finals are tomorrow, among other things, in order to explain why she believes that we all should study hard tonight — it is *rational* for her to believe that we should study hard because she also believes that the finals are tomorrow. The externalist's ascriptions seem not to rationalize Peter's beliefs in the same way. When the externalist ascribes to Peter the belief that he once met Pavarotti at Lake Taupo and the belief that he listened to Twin Pavarotti last night, she does not explain why it is rational for Peter to believe that he once met at Lake Taupo the tenor he listened to last night (because the first two constitute no good reason for believing the latter). Nonetheless, Peter is intuitively rational, and we believe that Peter *ought* to believe that he once met at Lake Taupo the tenor he listened to last night. The externalist's ascriptions, then, do not provide the explanations we desire, they do not explain why we find Peter rational.

That is, briefly, Boghossian's argument from inference. It has been widely discussed and has received many different answers.⁴ I will not discuss these responses here, even if I think that some of them may be quite successful. Instead, my aim is to propose and argue for a strategy that, even if it has been mentioned quite widely in the literature, has not received the attention it deserves. In a nutshell, this response claims that Peter's inference is indeed valid because it involves the identity premise that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti. Let me present this strategy.

II. THE IDENTITY PREMISE SOLUTION

As explained in the previous section, one of the conclusions of the argument from inference is that the externalist lacks good *de dicto* ascriptions offering rational explanations of Peter's belief. This is simply false; the externalist can offer a good explanation for why Peter believes as he does if she adds to her explanation an ascription of an identity belief. Equivocations are not a new phenomena introduced by semantic externalism; for someone to equivocate between two different persons or objects and to come to believe something false is not such a strange thing, no matter how we individuate the content properties of intentional mental states. When that happens, we do not conclude that the person making the equivocation is irrational; we can explain why it makes sense to her to acquire the belief in question. *One* way (and, of course, not the only way) of doing this is by making use of an identity belief ascription in our explanation. For instance, we can explain why Pierce is greeting that guy over there by saying that he believes (wrongly,

perhaps) the guy over there is Jeff and he wants to be polite to Jeff. By ascribing these states to Pierce, we explain why he is acting rational when greeting that guy over there and why that action makes sense from his point of view.

I do not think that Peter's story is that peculiar (no matter how many times he switches from one Earth into another). Equivocations happen, and we can explain why a subject who is equivocating is acting rational by ascribing to her identity beliefs. Hence, according to the *Identity Premise Solution* that I favor, the following is a good way of describing the inference Peter is actually engaging in:

- (0) That Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti.
- (1) That Peter once met Pavarotti at Lake Taupo.
- (2) That Peter listened to Twin Pavarotti last night.
- (3) That, therefore, Peter once met at Lake Taupo the tenor he listened to last night.

Contrary to Boghossian's opinions, then, the externalist has at hand good *de dicto* ascriptions that will offer the rational explanations we expect from them. And, if we take these ascriptions at face value, then it is just false that Peter is making an invalid inference, since this contains an identity premise.

An important feature of this response is its denial that transparency plays as important a role as Boghossian intended to show that it does. What I want to remark is that *even if* we assumed that content is not transparent (even if we accept that premise (1) involves the concept PAVAROTTI and premise (2) the concept TWIN-PAVAROTTI), the consequences about which Boghossian warned would not follow. Even if we accept that externalism is incompatible with transparency, then it is far from obvious that self-knowledge without transparency becomes *hollow*; preserving transparency does not look as important as Boghossian takes it.

I do not think that the falsity of the "*a priority* of our logical abilities" follows from denying that content is transparent.⁵ Peter confuses his concepts PAVAROTTI and TWIN-PAVAROTTI, but it is far from clear that he will therefore make invalid inferences — the one introduced by Boghossian is valid if supplemented by the identity premise (0).

The identity premise solution I favor is quite simple then: Peter's inference contains an identity premise and is therefore valid. Nevertheless, many⁶ have argued that the identity premise solution is unacceptable, and some have proposed that Peter's identity belief does not constitute a premise in his inference but is just a presupposition of it.⁷ I will consider some alleged problems for the premise solution in the following sections, and I hope to explain in the

fourth section why we should bet on an identity premise solution rather than on the presupposition view. For the time being, let me just stress the main differences between the presupposition view and the identity premise view. According to the presupposition view, Peter's inference is invalid, and Peter is committing a logical mistake. Now, according to this view, it does not follow that Peter is acting irrational because the identity presupposition in his inference explains why he is indeed rational. Instead, I think that Peter's inference is valid and that we should not hesitate to describe his inference as containing an identity premise. As I shall explain later, I think that the premise view is simpler than the presupposition view and that it fits better with the correct model on inference-engaging and rational explanation.

In the rest of the paper, I shall address four worries one may have regarding the solution I just characterized. In the next section, I will present the first two of them, which, I suspect, are motivated by a faulty picture of what it is engaging in an inference and what offering a rational explanation. I will then sketch the general lines for a correct model on these topics and argue that, once we accept such a correct model, we see that the first two worries are ungrounded (and that the presupposition view is also unsustainable). I will conclude the paper by considering two other worries one might have regarding the response I favor.

III. TWO WORRIES (AND A WRONG PICTURE)

I think that a fairly common reaction to my response is to protest that it fails to correctly describe Peter's first-person perspective; the explanation proposed above might quite correctly explain *why* Peter adopts his belief, but one might protest, it fails to correctly describe *what* Peter is doing. In the end, this worry comes down to claiming that Peter's inference lacks any identity premise and, therefore, that the response I favor fails to correctly describe it. This point might be fleshed out in two different ways.

On the one hand, one might deny that Peter even believes that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti. For example, some argue that this is the case by claiming that Peter *could not* even believe that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti because he even lacks the concept PAVAROTTI⁸. On the other hand, one might claim that, even if Peter does indeed believe that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti, this belief does not constitute a premise in his inference. When Peter considered whether he should believe that he once met at Lake Taupo the tenor he listened to last night, he did not consider any identity claim. If asked to justify his belief, Peter would mention no identity premise. Again, maybe an explanation containing an identity belief ascription does indeed explain to the hearer why Peter believes what he believes, but it does not nicely describe Peter's perspective, and that is something belief ascriptions should do.

The second worry has to do with one alleged consequence of the identity premise response. One might suspect that claiming that Peter's inference contains an identity premise would have as a consequence something we might dub 'Inference Externalism'.

Suppose that Peter and Schpeter are internally identical; they have learned the same words (or word forms) under quite similar circumstances and are disposed to utter exactly the same sentences (sentence forms). The difference between them is that Schpeter has never been the victim of any switch — he has never entered into contact with Twin Pavarotti. Therefore, Schpeter lacks any TWIN PAVAROTTI concept, and all of his utterances of 'Pavarotti' refer to Pavarotti. Like Peter, Schpeter engages in reasoning to conclude that the tenor he once met at Lake Taupo is the tenor he listened to last night.

We would not use an identity belief ascription to explain Schpeter's belief. Now, if our ascriptions are correct, it seems that even if they are internally identical, Schpeter is engaging in an inference that lacks any identity premise, while Peter is engaging in an inference that contains such an identity premise. In other words, due to external factors, the inferences Peter and Schpeter are engaging in differ in their structural properties. One might think that such an "Inference Externalism" is quite counterintuitive and that it does not seem to be independently motivated.

Those are the first two worries I wanted to mention. Now, I suspect that both may be motivated by acceptance of a faulty picture about what it is to engage in an inference (and to ascribe beliefs and inferences to others) and that these two worries disappear once we adopt a correct model on these matters.

I suspect that both worries are motivated by a model on inference-engaging quite close to the Cartesian observational model on self-knowledge. According to such a model, if one judges an argument sound, then one engages in an inference constituted by the premises and conclusion of that argument. One first makes up an argument using some beliefs one has picked out in advance, considers it, and decides about its validity. If one judges the argument sound, then one engages in the corresponding inference (constituted by the premises and conclusion of the argument). On the other hand, when one describes someone as making an inference, then the description will be correct if and only if it correctly describes the premises of the argument the subject has considered.

If we accept such a model, worries like those exposed earlier arise. First, an explanation containing an identity belief ascription would not correctly describe the inference Peter is making because the argument he built up and considered lacks any identity premise. Second, within this picture, Inference Externalism seems quite counterintuitive. The arguments Peter and Schpeter consider are quite analogous: their propositions might represent different facts, but their premises and conclusion are ordered in exactly the same

way. If the sketched model is right, the two corresponding inferences will share structural properties.

However, I think such a picture on inference-engaging is wrong. Let me make it clear: I am not claiming that the worries presented above are committed to the model I just mentioned, I am just pointing out that accepting such a model could naturally move someone to present those worries. It is not my aim to show that such a model is wrong and that those presenting the worries are in some kind of trouble. Instead, my strategy will be to superficially sketch a model that I judge correct on inference-engaging and rational explanation and to show that once we stick to such a model, we see that the two worries are ungrounded.

IV. REMARKS FOR A MODEL ON INFERENCE-ENGAGING AND RATIONAL EXPLANATION

First and mainly, I think it is important to note that engaging in an inference and considering an argument are two different things. Engaging in an inference is our holding to some beliefs to cause us to adopt a further belief.⁹

Some of our beliefs rest on other beliefs. That is to say, we hold to them *because* we also hold to some other beliefs, many times without there being any further nondoxastic reason *directly* supporting that believing. When this happens, we say that one has *inferred* the belief that p_n from her beliefs that p_i, p_{ii}, \dots . We can look at this relation as a *causal* one; one's inferring that p_n consists of one's holding to some other beliefs *causing* one's adopting or holding the belief that p_n . We have a bunch or a net or a system of beliefs, and because we have those beliefs, many times we feel ourselves committed to adopting some further beliefs. One can look at this relation "in counterfactual terms"; if in all the close counterfactual scenarios where S lacks the belief that p_{ii} (and where she has no belief she does not have in the actual scenario) she also lacks the belief that p_n , then in the actual scenario (in which S holds to both, p_{ii} and p_n), S 's belief that p_{ii} plays some causal role in her holding the belief that p_n , and p_n is inferred partially from p_{ii} .

If this is the case, if we accept that inferring that p_n from $p_i, p_{ii} \dots$ just consists of one's beliefs that $p_i, p_{ii} \dots$ cause one to believe that p_n , then it does not seem that engaging in an inference is always somehow related to considering an argument. Actually, this last idea seems obviously false. For most of our inferential beliefs, it does not happen that we consciously consider some argument to decide to accept its conclusion after judging it sound. In addition, when we make an inference because we have considered some argument, most of the time, we do not consider every belief that has played a causal role in our acceptance of that belief.¹⁰

Let me now make a couple of very superficial remarks on how we offer rational explanations of beliefs other people hold. First, in the spirit of what I just mentioned above, I think it is important to bear in mind that when describing someone as engaging in an inference, it is not our aim to describe a concrete argument she has considered and judged sound. Instead, our aim is to explain why she believes and behaves as she does; we want to explain which other beliefs moved her to adopt the belief in question — what are her reasons for believing as she does.

When one adopts the belief that p through an inference, typically there is a whole net or heap of beliefs that caused one to adopt the belief that p . Now, of course, when we describe someone as engaging in an inference, when we explain why she believes that p , we do not ascribe to her all the beliefs that played some causal role in her believing that p . We have to pick out, from among the beliefs that played such a causal role, only those whose ascription is relevant for the explanation we are offering.

Suppose that S 's belief that q partly caused S to adopt the belief that p . When is the ascription of the belief that q *relevant* for explaining why S believes that p ? Roughly: whenever the ascription is informative for the hearer. Within a Stalnakerian model, for example, the appropriateness and informativeness of an utterance in a context consists of its capacity to change the context in which it is uttered. We can also account for the relevance of an ascription of a belief to an explanation in these terms. The ascription of a belief that q to S is relevant for our explanation if and only if the fact that S believes that p in part because she also believes that q is not part of the common ground of the context, and it is the goal of the speaker to change the context in such a way that it is part of the common ground why S came to believe that p .

Let us put it in an example. Suppose that Troy finds the cookie jar is empty. "Abed ate all the cookies again", he says to Jeff and Britta, who accompanied Troy to the kitchen with the aim of eating some cookies. Troy leaves the kitchen angrily, and Jeff asks Britta why Troy believes that Abed ate the cookies. "Well, I know that the jar was full of cookies yesterday (I saw it), and I guess that he takes it for granted that nobody but he and Abed has been home since. And he knows that he ate no cookies", answers Britta.

There are many beliefs that move Troy to believe that Abed ate the cookies. He would not believe so, for example, if he did not also believe that the jar was full yesterday, that it is not now, that he did not eat the cookies, that cookies are edible, and that Abed exists. In order to explain to Jeff why Troy believes that Abed ate the cookies, Britta picks from among those beliefs. Britta makes an utterance in a context that contains a common ground that she shares with Jeff, and with that utterance, she intends to change the context in which the conversation takes place. She does not ascribe to Troy the beliefs that Abed exists or that the jar is empty now because she takes it for granted that Jeff knows that Troy has those beliefs and that he knows that

Troy would not believe that Abed ate the cookies if he did not have them, and therefore, she assumes that these are presuppositions that conform the common ground she shares with him. Because it is not part of the common ground that Troy believes that nobody but he and Abed has been home since yesterday and that this causes Troy to believe as he does, ascribing this belief to Troy is mandatory for Britta to explain why Troy believes as he does.

This characterizes what it is to offer an explanation of a belief, to explain why the subject of the ascriptions believes as she does, but it does not explain what it is to offer a *rational* explanation of a belief. Identifying those beliefs that moved *S* to adopt the belief that *p*, by itself, does not explain why *S* is acting rationally when believing that *p* (her reasons for believing that *p* could be bad). Only when the beliefs ascribed constitute, along with the belief that is being explained, a valid argument do the ascriptions explain why the subject is acting rationally when believing as she does. Take, for example, Britta's ascriptions in the example above. She ascribes to Troy the beliefs that the jar was full yesterday, that nobody but Abed and Troy has been home since, and that he has eaten no cookies. Add to these the beliefs that the jar is empty now and that the only possible reason for the cookies to disappear is that somebody ate them, which are presuppositions in the context of the explanation. If we form an argument with these beliefs as premises and the proposition that Abed ate the cookies as a conclusion, we get a valid argument. Hence, Britta's ascriptions offer a rational explanation of Troy's belief — they show why Troy is acting rationally when believing that Abed ate the cookies.

These remarks about rational explanation apply also in cases where one tries to explain why one believes as one does, in cases where the roles of ascriber and ascribee are filled by the same individual. Also in these cases the relevance of an ascription for an explanation depends on the context in which the explanation takes place. If the ascriber fails when identifying the context, she might fail when trying to offer a rational explanation of a belief — also when she is trying to explain one of her own beliefs.

Those, then, are the remarks I intended to make on what it is to engage in an inference and to offer a rational explanation of someone's belief. It was not my aim to fully describe a correct model, but to offer some general remarks and just a taste of the whole picture. Now my goal is to show that, once we adopt such a model, the worries mentioned in the previous section should not bother us too much.

V. WORRIES ARE UNGROUNDED

I said first that one might protest that the identity premise solution does not nicely show Peter's *first-person perspective*. I mentioned that one might deny that Peter has the identity belief that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti. One

way of doing this is by claiming that Peter lacks any PAVAROTTI concept once he acquires the new concept TWIN PAVAROTTI. I will not discuss this last idea; after all, Boghossian's argument *assumes* that externalism is committed to claiming that Peter has both a PAVAROTTI and a TWIN PAVAROTTI concept, and I want to show that, even if we accepted that assumption, there would be no real problem for the externalist. It does not seem plausible to me to claim that, even if Peter has both concepts, he lacks any belief that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti. Peter believes that Pavarotti is the tenor he met at Lake Taupo, that Twin Pavarotti is the tenor he listened to last night, and that the tenor he met at Lake Taupo is the tenor he listened to last night. Given the transitivity of identity, he should believe that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti. Moreover, there is nothing in Peter's behavior suggesting that he lacks such a belief. Any principle of charity will require us to assume that Peter does indeed believe that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti.

Hence, the most promising way of protesting that the identity premise solution does not nicely characterize Peter's first-person perspective is by claiming that, even if Peter does indeed believe that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti, his inference does not involve that belief as a premise. Now, once we adopt the frame sketched in the previous section, we see that the identity premise solution nicely characterizes Peter's first-person point of view. Peter's belief that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti does indeed play some causal role in his adopting the belief that the tenor he met at Lake Taupo is the tenor he listened to last night (if he did not believe that, he would not accept the conclusion of his inference). Additionally, the ascription of such a belief is relevant for explaining *why* Peter believes as he does because that belief causing Peter to acquire a new belief is not necessarily part of the common ground. It might be that we have to explain to the hearer that Peter confuses two different individuals.

Sure enough, Peter would not describe the inference he is making as containing an identity premise. Peter would assume that he believes that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti; that he believes that *that* object is *that* object is presupposed in the context. Peter has faulty beliefs about the context in which his explanation takes place; his explanation takes part in a defective context. Hence, the fact that Peter would not ascribe to himself the belief that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti is no conclusive evidence that the inference he is engaging in lacks such a premise.

The other alleged problem I mentioned is that one might protest that the identity premise solution has Inference Externalism as a consequence. Again, if we adopt a correct model on inference-engaging and rational explanation, we see that there is no real problem here.

As I said, when offering a rational explanation, the goal of our ascriptions is not to identify an argument one is considering, but to explain why one adopts a belief in question. In order to do so, we have to pick out, from

among the beliefs actually playing some causal role in the adoption of the belief in question, those that are relevant for the explanation. The relevance of an ascription for an explanation depends on the context in which the explanation takes place. Hence, it may happen that two individuals are internally identical, that the inferences they make do not differ in their structural properties, but that due to some contextual factors, different ascriptions are needed in order to offer good rational explanations.

This is Peter and Schpeter's case. Peter makes a mistake of equivocation, but Schpeter does not. This suffices for the ascription of an identity belief to be relevant in one scenario, but not in the other. Now, it does not follow that there is any structural difference between the inferences they make; a difference in explanation does not necessarily imply a difference in the structural properties of inferences. The identity belief that Pavarotti is Pavarotti is causally responsible for Schpeter to adopt the belief that he met at Lake Taupo the tenor he listened to last night — if he did not have the first belief (whatever this might mean), he would not accept the latter. Because Schpeter's inference is about one only individual, we can take it that the fact that Schpeter believes that Pavarotti is Pavarotti, that all his utterances of 'Pavarotti' refer to the same individual, is presupposed in our context. On the other hand, the proposition that Peter believes that Pavarotti is Twin Pavarotti will most likely not be presupposed in the context, and this difference in the context explains why we need different ascriptions in order to explain why Peter and Schpeter believe as they do.

Finally, let me mention that I do think that, on the basis of the model sketched in the previous section, we should prefer an identity premise view to a presupposition view. First, the notion of *presupposition* makes sense if we talk about arguments, about representations of inferences — as when we say that it is a presupposition of an argument that every token of a symbol refers to the same object — but once we stick to the model sketched above, it is not clear what it is for a belief of a subject to be a presupposition of an inference. Engaging in an inference is for some beliefs to cause another; on the basis of this, I find it difficult to find good criteria for distinguishing, among the beliefs that play such a causal role, those that have to be considered presuppositions and those that have to be considered premises of the inference. Moreover, on the basis of such a model, it just follows naturally that Peter's identity belief constitutes a premise in his inference because it in part causes Peter to adopt the belief that he met in Lake Taupo the tenor he listened to last night. Last, the premise view permits us to describe Peter as acting rationally, as we wanted to claim, without having to admit that he accepts as valid an inference that is not. We can agree with Boghossian then that one is acting rationally only if she engages in no invalid inference; the premise view has fewer commitments than the presupposition view.

Hence, so far, I fail to see any reason for denying that Peter's inference contains an identity premise. I think that the identity premise solution follows naturally from the model on inference-engaging described in the previous section, and I find the claim that the identity belief constitutes just a presupposition unmotivated.

VI. A RISK OF REGRESS?

Some have claimed that the identity premise solution has a fatal consequence: it condemns us to an infinite regress.¹¹ If the identity premise solution is correct, then perhaps Peter should add a further identity premise to make sure that the occurrences of 'Pavarotti' refer to the same object in the identity premise and in the rest of the premises:

At t_1 , I see an object a_1 and think 'This is F'. At t_2 , I see an object a_2 and think 'This is G'. Then I draw the conclusion: 'Something is both F and G'. When am I entitled to that conclusion? Well, of course, whenever $a_1 = a_2$. But was that a tacit premise, and my inference, therefore, an enthymeme? That way, I suggested, madness lies. For suppose 'Fa₁' and 'Ga₂' are not enough for you to infer ' $\exists x (Fx \wedge Gx)$ '. After all, *you need to make sure* that 'a₁' and 'a₂' are co-referential. That is, you need the further premise: $a_1 = a_2$. But that's not gonna do, either. For now *you have to make sure* that 'a₁', as it occurs in 'Fa₁', and 'a₁' as it occurs in ' $a_1 = a_2$ ' are also co-referential; and ditto for 'a₂' as it occurs in 'Ga₂' and 'a₂' as it occurs in ' $a_1 = a_2$ '. At which point it is manifest that you are embarked on a vicious, Lewis Carroll-style, regress [Faria (2009), pp. 196-197; italics added].

Briefly, this is what the criticism says: let us accept that the only thing Peter has to do is to add an identity premise to his inference. He would express this premise by uttering the sentence 'Pavarotti is Pavarotti'. Peter is at the same risk as before, given that it is possible that the first token of 'Pavarotti' in the identity premise and the token of 'Pavarotti' in the first premise do not refer to the same object. To *make sure* that they indeed do so, according to the identity premise solution, he will have to add a further identity premise, and we have the very same problem again. The regress seems obvious.

However, this criticism misses the mark; it misunderstands what the identity premise solution says because it also misunderstands the challenge Boghossian's argument seeks to pose. Those presenting this criticism think that the argument from inference warns us that if externalism is true, then we are at risk of being irrational and that *a priori* reflection will not always suffice to *ensure* the validity of our inferences. In the same vein, they take it that the identity premise solution counters this by trying to establish that we can *ensure* our rationality if we add enough identity premises to our inferences. If

this characterization were correct, then the identity premise solution would indeed irremediably condemn us to an infinite regress.

However, this interpretation is wrong. The argument from inference does not say that if externalism is true, then we cannot *ensure* our rationality on an *a priori* basis; it says that if externalism is true, then our ascriptions will not be able to rationalize beliefs and behavior. Accordingly, the identity premise solution does not respond that Peter can *make sure* he is rational by adding identity premises to his inferences but rather that the externalist does indeed have at hand ascriptions of attitudes that explain Peter's situation. As far as such an explanation is correct, it is false that Peter cannot conform his thoughts and beliefs to the norms of rationality; it is false that externalism is incompatible with the fundamental thesis that one can always conform one's thoughts and beliefs to the norms of rationality on an *a priori* basis.

According to the identity premise solution, we can *actually* explain Peter's situation by ascribing to him reliance on an identity premise, and there is no need for any further premise (or, therefore, any risk of regress) because there is nothing we (or Peter) have to *make sure of*. Peter's concept PAVAROTTI *actually* refers to Pavarotti when it occurs in the identity premise and when it occurs in the first premise; there is no need to *ensure* this fact.

Proponents of this objection tend to think that the identity premise solution presupposes or "must be part of a more general view that a subject cannot just rely on the identity of concepts in inference" [Brown (2004), p. 180]. However, this is wrong; the issue presented in the argument from inference is not what Peter can rely on, but how the externalist can explain Peter's situation or to what extent externalism is (in)compatible with theses we believe to be fundamental.

VII. ERRORS OF REASON, ERRORS OF FACT

I would like to mention one last problem. One could respond that, even accepting that the externalist has at hand good rational explanations of Peter's attitudes if she makes use of identity belief ascriptions, part of the problem has not been addressed. Briefly, the idea is that, no matter what inferences Peter is making, he still seems to be condemned to make logical mistakes.

If content is not transparent, Peter will wrongly judge that the proposition that he met at Lake Taupo the tenor he listened to last night logically follows from the propositions that he met Pavarotti at Lake Taupo and that he listened to Twin Pavarotti last night (and from those propositions alone). He could decide to consider an argument formed by those premises alone. In such a scenario, Peter would wrongly believe that the argument is valid, and he could not undo his mistake without the aid of empirical investigation.

Briefly, it looks like embracing externalism and abandoning transparency “blurs the distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact” [Boghossian (2011), p. 458].

I do not think that there is any big problem here. First, it is important to see why the distinction between “errors of reasoning” and “errors of fact” is so important for Boghossian:

I made two main claims about transparency. First, that when mental contents violate one or both of these transparency theses, we get cases in which a thinker who intuitively looks fully rational, and is merely missing some empirical information, is made to look as though he is committing simple logical fallacies in his reasoning. I claimed, in other words, that violations of transparency blur the distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact [Boghossian (2011), pp. 457-458].

If I understand him correctly, Boghossian closely relates making “errors of reasoning” with our status as rational agents. Making errors of reasoning condemns an agent to act irrationally, but they are (supposedly) avoidable by mere *a priori* reasoning. Moreover, “committing simple logical fallacies” like making wrong judgments about the validity of a given argument would constitute an “error of reasoning” and, hence, would itself constitute a flaw in one’s rational status. That is why, I think, the distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact is so important to Boghossian; the point is that, if it were true that *a priori* reasoning did not suffice for avoiding logical errors, then we could not assure our status as rational agents by mere *a priori* reflection (and this last point is an important thesis for how we have traditionally understood what it is to be rational).

Now, I do not think that I am committed to denying that *a priori* reflection suffices for assuring our status as rational agents, even if we accept that content is not transparent and, therefore, that one might be condemned to make logical mistakes. The point is that our status as rational agents depends on our inferential practices, not on which arguments we judge valid. The rational status of an agent depends on why she believes and behaves as she does and the reasons that moved her to believe and behave in that way, not on whether she makes logical errors; logical mistakes by themselves do not involve flaws in rationality.

For example, one might have incorrect beliefs about which argumental forms are valid and which not. Logicians discuss these matters, so someone has to be wrong. However, of course, it does not follow that they are acting irrationally because of that. On the other hand, wrong metasemantic beliefs might move one to make wrong judgments about the logical form of a given argument and, with this, to make wrong judgments about its validity. This is, of course, Peter’s case. But, again, this does not condemn Peter to irrationality.

ty; it is not our judgments about the validity of the arguments we are considering (or our judgments about which argumental forms are valid) that determine whether we are behaving rationally or not, but our inferential practices. Peter does indeed have good reasons to believe as he does (as I have been arguing in this paper). Hence, his mistakes about the validity of a given argument do not condemn him to irrationality.

VIII. CONCLUSION

My main goal was to prove that there is a coherent and quite plausible response to Boghossian's argument from inference that exploits the idea that Peter's inference contains an identity premise that saves its validity. I presented four different worries one might have regarding this solution, and I sketched the general lines for a model on inference-engaging and rational explanation in order to dismiss two of them. Boghossian aimed to show that externalism is incompatible with a *substantial* understanding of self-knowledge, and I have argued that we will conclude to the contrary if we accept an identity premise view. Even if externalism were committed to denying that content is transparent, it does not follow that we will not be able to conform our thoughts and beliefs to the norms of logic and rationality on an *a priori* basis, and our common *de dicto* ascriptions will offer the rational explanations we expect from them. Perhaps externalism is incompatible with claiming that content is transparent; perhaps if content is not transparent, we will be condemned to make some wrong judgments on the validity of some *arguments*, but as far as we are able to respect the norms of logic and rationality on an *a priori* basis (and we are), it is far from obvious that this kind of self-knowledge is, in a sense, *hollow*.¹²

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NOTES

¹ On this discussion, see: Davidson (1987); Heil (1988); Burge (1988); Boghossian (1989); McKinsey (1991); Falvey and Owens (1994); McLaughlin & Tye (1998); Brown (2004); Stalnaker (2008).

² See: Schiffer (1992), Burge (1998), Brown (2004), Collins (2008), Stalnaker (2008), Faria (2009) and Gerken (2011).

³ See: Davidson (1987), Heil (1988), and Burge (1988).

⁴ See: Schiffer (1992), Tye (1998), Burge (1998), Sorensen (1998), Williamson (2000), Brown (2004), Collins (2008), Faria (2009), Gerken (2011) and Pérez Otero (2014).

⁵ Nevertheless, see the last section on these issues.

⁶ Brown (2004), Collins (2008), Faria (2009), Gerken (2011).

⁷ Burge (1998), Brown (2004), Collins (2008).

⁸ See, for example, Tye (1998).

⁹ For the sake of clarity, here, I will stick to deductive inferences that have as a consequence the adoption of a new belief by the agent. Of course, I do not mean that there are not other kinds of inferences.

¹⁰ The frame I am sketching here ties pretty well with the so-called “dual-process models” in psychology, according to which inferring and arguing are made possible by two different cognitive mechanisms. See, for example: Evans (2007) and Mercier & Sperber (2011).

¹¹ See Faria (2009) and Brown (2004).

¹² Previous versions of this paper have been presented at the Logos GRG Seminar (Barcelona), the ILCLI Seminar on Logic and Foundations of Symbolic Systems (San Sebastian), the tecuemepe Seminar (México), the Taller sobre Perspectivas Cognitivas sobre la Mente y el Lenguaje (Mexico) and the 7th Conference of the SLMFHC (Compostela). I have also benefited from discussion with many people that have read and commented substantial parts of this paper; I would like to thank Áxel Barceló, Lenny Clapp, Laura Duhau, Manuel García Carpintero, Eduardo García-Ramírez, Ángeles Eraña, Carlos Moya, Elías Okon, Jorge Ornelas, Manuel Pérez Otero and Jesús Vega. Financial Support: I benefited from a postdoctoral grant offered by the UNAM. I also benefited from the project “Knowledge, Reference and Realism” (FFI2011 – 29560-C02-01).

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