

# *Social Relations and the Individuation of Thought*<sup>1</sup>

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## *1. Introduction*

Tyler Burge has argued that a necessary condition for an individual's having many of the thoughts he has, instead of others or none at all, is that he bear certain relations to objects (events, properties, etc.) in his environment. Such objects include those in the extensions of expressions used to provide the contents of the individual's thoughts, as well as other language users. By way of thought experiment, Burge invites us first to imagine that, counterfactually, the individual lacks the relevant relations, and then to judge that he cannot correctly be attributed many of the thoughts he actually has.<sup>2</sup>

That the natures of many of one's thoughts depend on social relations one bears to language users is an idea that Burge has developed in articles since "Individualism and the Mental" (1979).<sup>3</sup> However, that paper contains his main argument for that thesis, an argument resting on his thought experiments involving conceptual error (about arthritis, brisket, etc.) on the part of the thinker. Of all of Burge's thought experiments, those alone support his thesis that social relations are essential to the natures of one's thoughts, for in those alone are one's social relations all that is manipulated between the actual and counterfactual situations.

My target in this essay are those very thought experiments. For Burge to derive his conclusions from them, he must make it plausible that, counterfactually, the individual in the thought experiment lacks at least one thought he actually has. I shall try to argue that that is not plausible. What will result is not an argument for Individualism—since Burge's other thought experiments will remain untouched by what I say—but an argument that one's social relations are inessential to the natures of one's thoughts.

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<sup>2</sup> For the thought experiments meant to show that social relations to language users are essential to the natures of one's thoughts, see Burge 1979, and 1982a. The thought experiments purporting to show that (causal) relations to natural kinds, artifacts, events, etc., are crucial to which thoughts one has are found in Burge 1982a, 1982b, and 1986c. Finally, those intended to show that the contents of low level perceptual states, events, etc., depend upon causal relations that obtain between those states and the world are in Burge 1986a, and 1986b.

<sup>3</sup> Primarily in Burge 1986c, and 1989.

*Burge's Thought Experiment*

Here, briefly, is Burge's well-known thought experiment (Burge, 1979). (Those familiar with it might skip this paragraph and the two that follow.) There are three steps. In the first, we imagine an individual, Yolanda, who has many beliefs, occurrent and nonoccurrent, that can correctly be attributed to her with that-clauses containing "arthritis" in oblique occurrence. Yolanda believes that her father has arthritis in his ankle, that arthritis is painful, and so on. Also, and crucially, she believes falsely that arthritis can affect the thigh.

In the second step, we imagine a counterfactual situation in which Yolanda's physical and phenomenal histories, as well as her nonintentionally described dispositions, are held constant. The situation is counterfactual in that "arthritis" is correctly used in the language community in a way that encompasses Yolanda's actual misuse. That is, counterfactually, "arthritis" *does* apply to ailments in the thigh (and elsewhere), in addition to arthritis.

The third step, finally, is an interpretation of the counterfactual situation. We are invited to judge that Yolanda lacks most or all beliefs attributable with "arthritis" in oblique occurrence. The word "arthritis" in Yolanda's language community does not mean *arthritis*, and we can suppose that no other word in her repertoire does. We might even imagine that no one in the counterfactual situation has ever isolated arthritis for special consideration. Under such circumstances, Burge maintains, it is hard to see how Yolanda could have picked up the notion of arthritis. However, if she lacks that notion, she cannot correctly be attributed beliefs with "arthritis" in oblique occurrence, and consequently her thoughts in the counterfactual and actual situations differ.

That, then, is the thought experiment. It is important to note that Burge does not take its conclusion—that Yolanda's actual and counterfactual thoughts differ—to be entailed by his description of the actual and counterfactual situations, or by anything else he says. While he defends at length the point that Yolanda actually has arthritis thoughts<sup>4</sup> in spite of her misconception, he offers little defence of his claim that counterfactually she lacks arthritis thoughts, and maintains only that "it is plausible, and certainly possible" that she does. That claim is meant to rest entirely upon our judgments or intuitions about Yolanda's thoughts in the counterfactual situation.<sup>5</sup> Now Burge does provide an account from which it follows that Yolanda's actual and counterfactual thoughts differ—his story that "language-community membership" is essential to the natures of one's thoughts. But that is a supposed *conclusion* of the thought experiment: it derives what support it has in virtue of being an explanation of the intuitions the thought experiment generates.

<sup>4</sup> By "arthritis thoughts" I mean thoughts correctly ascribable with "arthritis" in oblique occurrence; and *mutatis mutandis* for expressions other than "arthritis".

<sup>5</sup> Burge's defence of the first step of the thought experiment is found primarily in §3 of "Individualism and the Mental" (Burge, 1979). His claims to the effect that the conclusion of the thought experiment is meant to rest on its intuitive plausibility, and not on any particular theory from which it follows, are found in Burge 1979, pp. 88-89, and 1982, p. 288.

### *Preview*

All of this, consequently, leaves room for a quite different account of underwrites the thought experiment, of why we have the intuitions we do; a story, moreover, on which Yolanda's actual and counterfactual thoughts are *the same*. Part of what I shall attempt to do in this essay is provide such a story. In particular, I shall offer in §2 an *alternative account* of the thought experiments, according to which one can accept the intuitions Burge wishes to evoke while denying his conclusion that the actual and counterfactual thoughts of those in the thought experiments differ. The alternative account on its own, however, is not enough to refute Burge; it still must be shown that it is preferable to Burge's account of the thought experiments. That I attempt to do in §3 by eliciting some intuitions that Burge does not focus upon, and then arguing that his picture cannot accommodate them. The alternative account, on the other hand, handles those intuitions naturally. The argument is thus complete.

## *2. An alternative account of Burge's thought experiments*

### *Developing the Account*

I wish to show how the intuitions concerning Burge's thought experiment can be explained by an account that has it that Yolanda's actual and counterfactual thoughts are the same. I do not wish to explain *away* the Burgean intuitions, but rather to accept them as correct. Accepting the intuitions while rejecting Burge's conclusions, however, would appear to lead straight to contradiction. For consider the following sentence:

- (1) Yolanda believes that arthritis is painful.

One way of characterizing the intuitions of the thought experiment is as a pair of judgments about the truth value of (1) (and other attitude-ascribing sentences containing "arthritis"<sup>6</sup>): In the first step of the thought experiment, and with respect to the actual situation, we judge (1) to be true; and in the third step, with respect to the counterfactual situation, we judge (1) to be false. Now if we are to deny Burge's conclusions, and maintain that Yolanda's thoughts are the same in the two situations, we should judge (1) to be true counterfactually since we judge it true actually. But that would be to judge (1) both true and false in the counterfactual situation. And that looks very much like a contradiction.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Burge's contention, of course, is that Yolanda has many arthritis thoughts actually and none counterfactually. While I shall stick with sentence (1) for illustration throughout most of this essay, any other sentence referring to any other of Yolanda's arthritis thoughts could be substituted.

<sup>7</sup> Alternatively we should judge (1) false actually since we judge it false counterfactually, the apparent contradiction now being that (1) is judged both true and false in the actual situation.

A contradiction, however, is never forced on us by the mere fact that a sentence has been judged both true and false with respect to the same situation. In evaluating a sentence across contexts of use, one can get opposing truth values not only if relevant features of the world differ across the contexts, but also if the sentence expresses distinct propositions across the contexts due to its containing an indexical element whose semantic value is contextually determined. Utterances of the sentence,

(2) Yolanda is there

for example, will in general be true in contexts in which the utterer points to Yolanda, and false in contexts in which the utterer points away from her. If Yolanda's location remains fixed across such contexts, the reason for the opposing truth values will be that (2) expresses distinct propositions across the contexts because the referent of the indexical "there" has changed.

Take another example:

(3) Zachary is tall.

In a context in which Zachary is considered in relation to professional basketball players, one might correctly judge (3) to be false, and in a context in which he is considered in relation to professional jockeys, one might rightly deem (3) true. For such opposing judgments both to be correct, Zachary's height need not change across the contexts of judgment. It suffices if different propositions are evaluated across the contexts because the implicit indexical element in "is tall" refers to distinct "comparison classes".

Sentences containing indexicals, therefore, can express distinct propositions across contexts of use. So across contexts, one and the same sentence can be judged without contradiction to be both true and false of the same situation. Indeed, it would seem that the only way of getting two opposing judgments of a sentence's truth value, where both are correct, and where nothing relevant in the world changes across contexts, is for the sentence to contain an indexical element, either explicitly or implicitly. Now according to the alternative account of Burge's thought experiments that I shall propose, propositional-attitude ascribing sentences like (1) contain an implicit indexical element. Consequently, across contexts of use, distinct propositions can be expressed. Thus it is possible for (1) to be judged both true and false in the counterfactual situation without contradiction, provided the judgments are made in distinct contexts.<sup>8</sup>

I shall have more to say of these implicit indexicals in attitude-ascribing sentences below. For now, here is a sketch of how they function in the alternative account. When we evaluate (1) in the first step, we tacitly settle upon a particular indexing, and then correctly judge the proposition expressed to be true. When (1) is evaluated in the third step, we index differently, taking (1) to express a different proposition, one we correctly judge to be false. We switch indexings between the

<sup>8</sup> The first and third steps of the thought experiment amount to two distinct contexts in which the truth value of (1) (and other such sentences) are judged. The contexts are distinguished from each other at least with respect to the time at which the judgments are made (the first step is taken before the third); and further differences will be described below.

first and third steps because the description of the counterfactual situation in the second step makes it overwhelmingly natural to do so. (I shall elaborate on this presently.) While it is natural to switch indexings, however, it is not necessary that we do: (1) is true in *both* the actual and counterfactual situations when indexed in the first way, and false in both situations when indexed in the second. Yolanda's thoughts, therefore, are the same in both situations.

The essentials of the alternative account can be illustrated by the following thought experiment based on sentence (3):

(3) Zachary is tall.

There are three steps. In the first, imagine that Zachary, an adult male, is six feet, four inches tall. Clearly Zachary is a tall man, and so (3) is true. In the second step, imagine a counterfactual situation in which Zachary's height remains constant, but the average height of normal adults is nine feet. Imagine moreover that all artifacts—e.g., buses, chairs, clothes—are proportionately larger so as to reflect people's increased sizes. The final step is an interpretation of the counterfactual situation. Counterfactually, it seems, Zachary is short, not tall. When he stands in a bus, he is unable to reach the handles above, and when he sits his feet do not reach the ground. He invariably takes the front row at movies, his clothes are custom-made, people are always looking down to see him, and so on. Counterfactually, everyone *thinks* of Zachary as short and not tall, and surely they are correct in so doing. But if they are correct in thinking Zachary not tall, then counterfactually (3) is false.

The first thing to say about the above thought experiment is that the right conclusion obviously is *not* that Zachary has different "degrees of tallness" in the actual and counterfactual situations. While one can correctly judge in the first and third steps, respectively, that (3) is true actually and false counterfactually, one also can perfectly well judge that (3) is false actually and true counterfactually: Is Zachary tall in the actual situation? Well, no, not compared to the giants we have just been considering. And is he tall in the counterfactual situation? Of course, *everyone* is. In evaluating (3) in either the actual or counterfactual situation, therefore, one can index to any comparison class one wishes—to the actual adults, the counterfactual adults, Napoleon, the Rocky Mountains, etc. Then, once an indexing has been fixed, (3) gets the same truth value in both situations. Accordingly, Zachary has the same degrees of tallness in both.

How then are the opposing judgments in the thought experiment—that Zachary is tall actually and not tall counterfactually—to be explained? In the first step, we have Zachary's height and the fact that he is an adult male; immediately thereafter it is suggested that (3) is true. Now in order to evaluate (3), a comparison class must be indexed so that a proposition can be determined. Which is likeliest to be indexed in this context? I would suggest it is the class of adult males (or perhaps adult humans) which plausibly is the *default indexing* that is used when context does not supply another. Since no other is supplied, the class of adult males (or humans) is indexed in the first step, and (3) is judged true. Next, in the second step, the description of Zachary's relations to the people and objects in the coun-

terfactual situation makes the counterfactual adults seem the natural comparison class to be indexed. When the counterfactual folk are said to correctly think of Zachary as not tall, for example, the comparison class in play is the counterfactual adults. And in agreeing with their assessment, the participant in the thought experiment switches indexes to the counterfactual people, and judges (3) to be false in the third step. In terms of this, or some similar pragmatic account of how indexed comparison classes are selected in contexts, the opposing judgments can be explained.

We now possess a model of how Yolanda can have all the same thoughts actually and counterfactually *and* it can be correctly judged that (1) is actually true and counterfactually false. For the preceding thought experiment is like Burge's in that Zachary's relations are all that change across the two situations, yet (3) is evaluated differently in each. The correct explanation of the thought experiment, however, differs markedly from the explanation Burge gives of his thought experiments in that Zachary has all the same degrees of tallness in both situations, and the pattern of judgments results from different propositions being evaluated across the two contexts due to a change in the indexed comparison class. A "Burgean account",<sup>9</sup> on the other hand, would have it that "is tall" expresses a relational property involving the relations manipulated in the thought experiment, and that the opposing judgments result from the fact that Zachary has the property actually but not counterfactually.

Now I claim that the same kind of account that explains the thought experiment about Zachary can be used to explain Burge's thought experiments. To show how, I must say what the implicit indexicals in propositional-attitude ascribing sentences are, how they function in the opposing judgments in Burge's thought experiment, and how it is that Yolanda's actual and counterfactual thoughts nevertheless are the same. To these matters I now turn.

### *Burge's Account*

The alternative account is best given in contrast to Burge's. Consider again (1):

- (1) Yolanda believes that arthritis is painful.

On Burge's view of propositional attitudes, (1) is true if and only if Yolanda is in a belief state with the content expressed by the clause, "that arthritis is painful". A necessary condition for her being in such a state is that she possess the constituent notions expressed by the words "arthritis", "is", and "painful".

Under what conditions will she have or lack those notions? As Burge argues at length, she does not require mastery of them; on the contrary, she can be conceptually mistaken regarding them. Indeed, the thought experiment depends on such a conceptual error, and it shows up in the first step where Yolanda believes that one can have arthritis in the thigh. What Yolanda needs, therefore, is a certain *minimal competence* with the notions expressed in the that-clause. However in virtue of what, in the actual situation, for example, is she minimally competent

<sup>9</sup> Which is not to imply of course that Burge or anyone else would offer such an explanation in this case.

vis-à-vis the notion of arthritis? Certainly she must contribute something. Here internal (physical) structure must be such that it produces, under normal conditions, and in the appropriate circumstances, the sorts of brain events, bodily motions, sounds, etc., required for minimal competence with the notion of arthritis. After all, not all physical structures can be thinkers.<sup>10</sup>

However that is not enough for minimal competence according to Burge's account of the thought experiment. For Yolanda's internal structure, bodily motions, etc. are the same actually and counterfactually, but she is minimally competent with the notion of arthritis only in the actual situation. It is here that *language community membership* enters the picture.

The story must go something like this. Associated with each language community, there must be a way of fitting notions, or organized schemes of notions, over individuals' internal structures, or parts of those structures. Typically this gets done indirectly by way of individuals' behaviours and behavioural dispositions, though in principle perhaps the route could be more direct. Since different internal structures might realize the same scheme of notions, we might say that associated with each language community there is a function from internal structures into notions, or notional schemes. Call this an *interpretation function* or *I-function*.<sup>11</sup>

Now one thing the I-function associated with the English community does is assign to Yolanda in the actual world the notion of arthritis, in light of those aspects of her internal structure that underwrite her dispositions to utter "arthritis" when she does, etc. The I-function associated with the counterfactual community, on the other hand, assigns to those very same internal structural features the notion expressed by their word "arthritis"—the notion *tharthritis*, let us say. Moreover, the counterfactual I-function does not assign the notion of arthritis to Yolanda at all; nor does the actual I-function assign to her the notion of *tharthritis*.

In the actual situation, therefore, Yolanda is minimally competent with the notion of arthritis (but not *tharthritis*) because the I-function associated with the actual language community *says so*, given her internal structure (and perhaps also her causal relations to the world). That specific I-function, and that one alone, is relevant to which notions Yolanda actually has, on Burge's view, because the linguistic community associated with that I-function is the one of which Yolanda *is a member*. Similarly, in the counterfactual situation, Yolanda's notions are determined by her internal structure, causal relations, and the I-function associated with her linguistic community—the counterfactual one.

<sup>10</sup> Precisely which behavioural dispositions, brain structures, etc. are required for minimal competence with any given notion is something about which I have little to say at this time. It seems certain, however, that we tacitly appeal to *some* folk psychological principles or other in judging whether or not to attribute to individuals particular notions. These principles should be seen as fixing necessary conditions for minimal competence with such notions. Of course, that is not to rule out the possibility that, in the future, principles from some scientific theory might replace the folk principles.

<sup>11</sup> Though the notion of an *interpretation function* could certainly be sharpened, its vague and undeveloped form will suffice for the purposes of this essay.

That is about all that needs to be said of Burge's account of propositional attitudes as it emerges from "Individualism and the Mental". Propositional attitudes turn out to be relational properties individuals have in virtue of their internal structures, causal relations, and linguistic community affiliations. Yolanda's counterfactual thoughts differ from her actual ones because her language community membership changes across the actual and counterfactual situations. Our judgments shift between the first and third steps of the thought experiment because we are sensitive to those facts.

### *Explaining Burge's Thought Experiment*

The alternative account can now be given. According to it, the semantics of the predicate "believes that arthritis is painful" is much like the semantics of "is tall", in that both expressions contain an implicit indexical element. With uses of "is tall", what gets indexed is some particular comparison class or other (e.g., actual adult humans). On uses of "believes that arthritis is painful", what gets indexed is an I-function that is associated with some particular community of language users. Depending upon which I-function gets indexed in a given context of use, different propositions can be expressed by (1).

How does an indexed I-function contribute toward determining an expressed proposition? Take a concrete example. Consider a context in which (1) is uttered, and the I-function associated with the actual language community is indexed. Call that I-function the "I-function<sub>A</sub>". I claim that in uttering (1) where the I-function<sub>A</sub> is indexed, what is said, roughly, is that Yolanda stands in the belief relation to the content that arthritis is painful *in a manner licensed by the I-function<sub>A</sub>*. Put another way, what is said of Yolanda is that her internal structure, and perhaps also her causal relations to the world, are of a certain kind—namely, a kind that meets the minimal requirements *according to the I-function<sub>A</sub>* for believing that arthritis is painful. And that is true: in spite of Yolanda's misconception, her utterances of "arthritis", e.g., count as expressions of the notion of arthritis, according to the I-function<sub>A</sub>.

In a context in which (1) is uttered and the I-function associated with the *counterfactual* community is indexed, on the other hand, a quite different proposition is expressed—one that has Yolanda standing in the belief relation to the content that arthritis is painful *in a manner licensed by the I-function associated with the counterfactual community* (the I-function<sub>CF</sub>). That proposition, however, is *false*, since Yolanda does not meet the minimal requirements of the I-function<sub>CF</sub> for having the notion of arthritis. The reason she does not, we can imagine, is related to the fact that her "arthritis" utterances get interpreted by the I-function<sub>CF</sub> as expressions of *tharthritis thoughts*; and quite different dispositions, ones which Yolanda lacks, are needed to have thoughts about arthritis.

On the alternative account, therefore, what gets specified when an individual is attributed a belief is not just the content of the belief, but also the particular I-function by way of which the individual is being said to get that content. Both elements are contained in the proposition expressed by a belief attribution. The content of the belief is explicitly expressed by the attributor's that-clause, and the



I-function that is being said to licence attribution of the content to the individual is provided by the implicit indexical.

The proposition expressed by (1) when the I-function<sub>A</sub> is indexed is true of Yolanda *independently of which language community she is a member of*. Her internal structure and causal relations meet the minimal requirements for believing that arthritis is painful, according to the I-function<sub>A</sub>, in both the actual and counterfactual situations. Structurally she is the same in both situations, and she also is appropriately causally related in both situations to arthritis, pain, and so on. Similarly, when the I-function<sub>CF</sub> is indexed, the proposition expressed by (1) is false in both situations since the property attributed to Yolanda is one she lacks in both. It follows that Yolanda's thoughts are the same in both situations: both actually and counterfactually she has arthritis thoughts and lacks tharthritis thoughts where attributions are indexed to the I-function<sub>A</sub>, and she has tharthritis thoughts and lacks arthritis thoughts where they are indexed to the I-function<sub>CF</sub>.

We can now explain the pattern of judgments in Burge's thought experiment. According to the alternative view, when we attribute arthritis thoughts to Yolanda in the actual situation in the first step of the thought experiment, our attributions are indexed to the I-function that is associated with the actual community. The reason is essentially pragmatic: We are told that Yolanda speaks English, and that she lives among English speakers; so it is natural to interpret her with the I-function associated with the English language community. This "naturalness" can be cashed out by saying that the I-function associated with the community of which an individual being interpreted is a member is a *default index*, much as the class of adult humans among whom one lives is a default index where attributions of tallness are at issue.

The second step of the thought experiment describes the counterfactual situation, and, in the third step, we are invited to intuit that Yolanda lacks arthritis thoughts counterfactually. On Burge's view, the reason we have that intuition is that Yolanda's linguistic affiliation in the counterfactual situation, coupled with her internal structure and causal relations, exclude her from having arthritis thoughts. That is because interpretation must be carried out by means of the I-function associated with the linguistic community of which the interpreted individual is a member.

On the alternative view, however, the reason we have the intuition that Yolanda lacks arthritis thoughts is that *we have switched indexes from the I-function<sub>A</sub> to the I-function<sub>CF</sub>*. Why has the switch been made? We are told that in the counterfactual situation there is a different language community, and that Yolanda speaks that language and is a member of that community. Since the default indexing is to the I-function of the community of which the interpreted individual is a member, we switch indexes. Interpreting Yolanda using the I-function<sub>CF</sub> will best enable us to explain and predict her interactions with the people in the counterfactual situation among whom she lives. (That is why the default index is what it is.) So we make the switch. But crucially, according to the alternative account, we are *not required* to index to the I-function associated with the counterfactual commu-

nity, just as we are not required to think of Zachary as short in a world in which he is the shortest. Because it is *natural* to switch indexes, the intuitions are explained. But since it is not *necessary* that the switch be made (to be correct), Burge's conclusion that Yolanda's actual and counterfactual thoughts differ is rejected.<sup>12</sup>

One implication of the alternative view worth stating explicitly is that an individual is having not just one thought whenever he or she utters something, but an indefinite number of thoughts. For instance, when Yolanda, in either the actual or counterfactual situation, says "Arthritis is painful", she is having the thought that arthritis is painful, the thought that tharthritis is painful, and an indefinite number of others, where what are indexed are the I-functions associated with various language communities. This might strike the reader as counterintuitive at best. However it really should be no cause for alarm, just as one ought not be concerned over the fact that Larry Bird is not just tall, but also extremely tall, sort of tall, short, very short. Once one settles on an indexed comparison class for whatever purposes one has, Bird gets assigned the degree of tallness determined by the meaning of "is tall" and the comparison class, *and no other degree of tallness*. And so long as one stays with that class, none of the indefinite number of other degrees of tallness he has need enter one's mind. Similarly, once the I-function of a particular language community is indexed for whatever purposes one has, Yolanda gets assigned a range of notions and thoughts, and other notions she might be assigned by other I-functions associated with other communities she correctly is said to lack. And for the entire duration that that I-function remains in play, other thoughts Yolanda has on other indexings *can be kept wholly out of thought and out of mind*, as they should.

So where do matters now stand? We have Burge's explanation of the thought experiment, and the alternative explanation. According to the former, Yolanda's actual and counterfactual thoughts differ; on the latter they are the same. Are there reasons for preferring one account over the other? I believe so. In the following section I shall say what they are.

### 3. *Evaluating the options*

Burge's conclusion that the natures of many of one's thoughts depend on one's linguistic affiliation is based upon intuitions generated in a single type of thought

<sup>12</sup>In practice the default index virtually always will be selected. The practical possibility of selecting other indexes will arise only where we are faced with two languages about as closely related as are English and counterfactual-English. In such cases, as we shall see, we may interpret an individual by way of an I-function associated with a community of which the individual is *not* a member (e.g., the I-function associated with our community). There could be any number of reasons why we might: it may simply be easier for us, given the fit between the individual's linguistic dispositions and our own; we may wish to consider how the individual might communicate and otherwise get along with members of our community; and so on.

experiment. Since the alternative view also explains those intuitions, what is needed to decide among the two views are further considerations of some sort. In this section therefore I shall offer considerations that I think strongly favour the alternative view. Specifically, I shall attempt to elicit intuitions to the effect that it is perfectly appropriate under many circumstances to attribute thoughts to an individual by way of an I-function that is associated with a language community other than the individual's own. Assuming those intuitions are genuine, I shall argue that while they are easily accounted for by the alternative view, it is hard to see how Burge's view can deal with them.

### *Other Intuitions*

I begin with a minor variation on Burge's thought experiment, one he himself briefly considers in "Individualism and the Mental". Burge calls it the "reversed version" of the thought experiment, and the idea is to keep the actual and counterfactual language communities as they are in the standard thought experiment, but have the individual's conceptual error show up counterfactually rather than actually.<sup>13</sup> So we can imagine Yolanda, for example, using the word "arthritis" in the actual situation in accordance with proper English usage, applying it only to inflammation of the joints, and not to ailments of the thigh. Then, if her dispositions are held constant across the counterfactual situation, counterfactually her uses of "arthritis" will constitute a misconception. For counterfactually "arthritis" does apply to rheumatoid ailments outside the joints, and Yolanda believes otherwise. The upshot, Burge maintains, is the same as for the standard version of the thought experiment: Yolanda lacks arthritis thoughts in the counterfactual situation; so her actual and counterfactual thoughts differ.

Burge offers two reasons why he chose to emphasize the standard rather than the reversed version of the thought experiment. My interest here lies with his second reason.<sup>14</sup> He writes:

A secondary reason for not beginning with this "reversed" version of the thought experiment is that I find it doubtful whether the thought experiment always works in symmetric fashion. There may be special intuitive problems in certain cases—perhaps, for example, cases involving perceptual natural kinds. We may give special interpretations to individuals' misconceptions in imagined foreign communities, when those misconceptions seem to match our conceptions. In other words, there may be some systematic intuitive bias in favour of at least certain of our notions for purposes of interpreting the misconceptions of imagined foreigners. (Burge 1979, p. 84)

<sup>13</sup> See Burge 1979, p. 84.

<sup>14</sup> His first reason is that both versions of the thought experiment depend upon finding a misconception in Yolanda's understanding; but our intuitions are stronger, and more reliable, concerning the status of misconceptions in *our own* language community. I think the idea is that since we speak English, we are in a position to judge, in the standard version of the thought experiment, that Yolanda has arthritis beliefs in the actual situation in spite of her misconception. Since we do not speak counterfactual-English, however, in the reversed version we cannot judge as reliably that Yolanda has tharthritis thoughts in the counterfactual situation in spite of her misconception.

In the above quotation, Burge puts his finger on precisely the sort of intuition to which I wish to draw attention in this section—the kind that involves the application of *our conceptions* (i.e., the I-function associated with our language community) to individuals from other language communities.

By “cases involving perceptual natural kinds”, I assume that Burge means thought experiments involving notions of colour (red, blue), taste (sour, bitter), and so forth. The following thought experiment, perhaps, illustrates what he has in mind. Imagine that in the actual situation “red” is used according to normal English usage. In the counterfactual situation, suppose that “red” applies to the red part of the spectrum, and also to some of the orange part. Next, imagine an individual, Jed, whose dispositions are such that he applies “red” only to red objects. In the thought experiment based on these details, then, Jed misconceives his notion in the counterfactual situation, and in the actual situation his understanding is complete.

Here, I believe, is Burge’s worry. In the first step of the thought experiment, we rightly attribute red thoughts to Jed in the actual situation. Then, if all goes as it should in the second and third steps, we should intuit that Jed lacks red thoughts counterfactually. Intuitively, however, it seems that Jed has red thoughts counterfactually. When Jed says “I love everything red”, for example, it seems as though the content of his thought includes the notion of *red*; he seems to be expressing the thought that he loves everything red. He may *hate* orange. Now insofar as it seems that way to us, Burge suggests, we have given a special interpretation to Jed’s misconception in the counterfactual situation because it matches our conception. We have been “systematically biased” in favour of our own notions.<sup>15</sup>

I shall consider Burge’s “bias” account of these intuitions presently. For now I want to suggest that such intuitions are generated in cases other than those that involve perceptual natural kinds. Indeed they seem to arise in the reversed thought experiment across the board. Take, for example, the reversed version of the thought experiment involving arthritis, and consider Yolanda’s thoughts in the counterfactual situation. (Recall that in the reversed thought experiment Yolanda applies “arthritis” only to inflammation of the joints.) Does Yolanda have arthritis thoughts? When she says “Arthritis is painful”, does she express the thought that arthritis is painful? It seems to me far from obvious that the answers should be “no”. Granted, the counterfactual community applies “arthritis” to rheumatoid ailments other than arthritis. But Yolanda does not. Her word applies only to arthritis. Whatever she normally calls “arthritis” is *arthritis*.

In the reversed thought experiment, therefore, it seems intuitively correct to think of many of Yolanda’s thoughts in the counterfactual situation as including the notion of arthritis—particularly, those thoughts she would express by utterances that contain “arthritis”. That, of course, is not to rule out that it also might be correct to hold that Yolanda expresses *tharthritis* thoughts by those utterances. It is just to say that it is easy and natural to conceive of her as expressing arthritis thoughts. Thus it would appear that this type of result extends beyond the thought

<sup>15</sup> See his discussion in Burge 1979, p. 84.

experiments involving perceptual natural kinds, and is instead a general feature of the reversed thought experiment.<sup>16</sup>

So we have some intuitions that favour interpreting individuals' thoughts in terms of I-functions associated with foreign language communities—"foreign I-functions", we might call them. These intuitions are quite unlike the intuitions featured in "Individualism and the Mental".<sup>17</sup> Since the intuitions appear to be genuine, they must be accounted for in some way. I shall now consider what the alternative view and Burge's view might have to say of them.

### *Explaining the Other Intuitions*

With regard to the alternative view, there is really not much that needs to be said. For the view seems tailor made to accommodate the range of intuitions facing us. In all of the above examples, according to the alternative account, Yolanda has the same thoughts actually and counterfactually. Both actually and counterfactually she correctly can be attributed thoughts by way of the I-function<sub>A</sub>, and by way of the I-function<sub>CF</sub>. If we have intuitions that Yolanda has arthritis thoughts counterfactually (via the I-function<sub>A</sub>), therefore, *we are right*, according to the alternative view. In short, then, the alternative account accords perfectly both with the intuitions Burge elicits in the standard version of the thought experiment, and with those generated in this section.

The situation is rather different when it comes to Burge's view. As we have seen, an individual can be attributed thoughts, according to Burge, only by way of the I-function associated with the community of which the individual is a member. For Burge, therefore, it is simply false that Yolanda has arthritis thoughts in any of the counterfactual situations described above. Assuming the intuitions from this section are genuine, then, Burge must end up saying something like this: The intuitions are illusions; we are being misled into thinking that Yolanda can correctly be conceived as having arthritis thoughts counterfactually;

<sup>16</sup> This is not to deny that the intuitions might be strongest in the thought experiments involving perceptual natural kinds.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth pointing out that the type of intuition I have been concerned with in this section—that it is correct to interpret individuals by way of foreign I-functions—can be had not only when individuals harbour no misconceptions relative to the indexed foreign I-function (as in the reversed thought experiment generally), but also when individuals misconceive notions relative to a foreign I-function. Here is one example. Imagine the actual and counterfactual communities' usages of "arthritis" as they have been, and Yolanda's dispositions as in the reversed thought experiment, except for one difference: while she applies "arthritis" only to ailments in the joints, she restricts her applications to inflammation of the joints *in the hands*. (So she misconceives her notion relative to the I-functions of both the actual and counterfactual communities.) We might suppose she has heard "arthritis" applied only to such cases and has inferred incorrectly that the disease is specifically a disease of the hands. She says things like, "My mother's arthritis is acting up", "Bufferin eases minor arthritis pain", and so on. Now is it obvious or even compelling that Yolanda lacks arthritis thoughts counterfactually? If we picture her worrying over the swelling (i.e., *arthritis*) in her mother's fingers, while being disposed not to apply "arthritis" to any ailment not located in joints, it would seem we can quite comfortably conceive of her as having arthritis thoughts. But then we have a case in which it is intuitively correct to interpret an individual with a foreign I-function even though the individual misconceives some of her notions with respect to that I-function.

we are being systematically biased to adopt our own conceptions by the particular features of the above examples.

We have seen that this is precisely the line Burge takes with respect to the intuitions generated in the reversed thought experiment, and he must take the same line with all other intuitions involving the application of foreign I-functions. What is to be made of this response? Well, in the presence of the alternative view that maintains that foreign I-functions can appropriately be applied, the response is no response at all; it merely begs the question. We need *reasons* for thinking that the intuitions elicited in this section involve a systematic bias, instead of supposing that they are accurate, as the alternative view would have it. Simply to state that the intuitions are illusory, and that we are being systematically misled, is just to say that Burge's view is correct and there is something funny going on with the troublesome intuitions. But that will not do. For the intuitions make no trouble for the alternative view.

The bias response on its own, therefore, is not enough. Burge needs something more. However it is hard to see what that something could be, aside from an independent argument that his view is correct (an argument that foreign I-functions cannot be applied). If Burge had such an argument he would not require his thought experiments. Since he takes his conclusions to rest upon the intuitions generated in his thought experiments, we can infer that he does not take himself to be in possession of the sort of independent argument we now see he requires. None of this, of course, is to say that such an argument could not be had. It is just to say that Burge is in need of one, and so he currently lacks an adequate response to the challenges posed by the intuitions elicited in this section.

### *Conclusion*

Since the alternative view *does* accommodate the intuitions from this section, it follows that it is to be preferred to Burge's. Accordingly there is no reason to suppose individuals have the thoughts they do in virtue of being related to speakers in their environment. Thought is not social in the way in which Burge imagines.

There is a sense, however, in which thought does retain a social component. According to the alternative view, I-functions are indexed in all attributions of thought. Consequently one always appeals to the principles of attribution of some possible language community or other in attributing thoughts; and the resulting interpretation is essentially connected to those principles. In a sense, then, thoughts are individuated nonindividualistically: thinkers are not considered in vacuums, but rather as they appear under the "conceptual grid" of some possible public language or other. How thoughts get carved up depends upon which grid is used. In this light the alternative view looks not so different from Burge's. However, one's linguistic affiliation, one's social relations, have no bearing at all, according to the alternative view, on which grids are applicable, and thus on which thoughts one has. Physical duplicates that are causally related

to the world in all the same ways have all the same thoughts. In this respect the two views differ.

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