

# Chapter 5

## Self-Conception: Sosa on *De Se* Thought

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### 1 The Problem of *De Re* Thought

More than 50 years ago, Quine (1956) brought the *de re/de dicto* distinction back to the attention of philosophers; in the following decade, Barcan Marcus, Donnellan, Kaplan, and Kripke initiated the debate confronting direct vs. descriptivist accounts of reference. The nature of *de re* or singular thoughts thus became one of the leading concerns of philosophers. In spite of the immediate popularity of direct-reference accounts, Ernest Sosa (1970) adopted early on a conservative *latitudinarian* or *Fregean* account of *de re* thought as just a case of *de dicto* thought. The debate goes on, with direct-reference approaches being the more popular standpoint; writers such as Soames (2005), Recanati (2010), or Jeshion (2010) have proposed different takes on the matter from that perspective. However, the tide is perhaps changing; important new work by both linguists and philosophers vindicates Sosa's line, which Hawthorne and Manley (2012) call *liberalism*, which is a good representative.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I will be focusing on a critical discussion of Sosa's related work on

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<sup>1</sup> I myself sympathize with the Fregean line in part as a result of earlier exchanges with Sosa, although the view that I defend makes room for the direct-reference notion of contents individuated by the referents of singular terms and does not purport to reduce *de re* thoughts to *de dicto* thoughts: thoughts irreducibly come in singular and general varieties. Cf. García-Carpintero (2000, 2006a, 2008a, 2010) for different aspects of the view.

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what he takes to be an important variety of *de re* thought: thought about oneself *as such* or *de se* thought as it has usually been referred to in the literature after Castañeda's (1966), Perry's (1979), and Lewis's (1979) classic papers. The remainder of this section sets up the issue by providing an outline of Sosa's latitudinarian view of singular thought in general.

Quine characterized *de re* thought in terms of semantic features of thought-ascriptions: availability of the embedded positions occupied by singular terms to inferences governed by the rules of substitutivity of co-referential terms and existential generalization. This is in sync with the principle on ascriptions of *de re* thought that Hawthorne and Manley call *Harmony*:

Harmony: Any belief report whose complement clause contains either a singular term or a variable bound from outside by an existential quantifier requires for its truth that the subject believes a singular proposition – which in turn suffices for the subject to have a singular thought about it.

However, as it has become clear through these debates, given well-established report practices, uncritical applications of *Harmony* will make life difficult for the opponent of the Fregean view. Let us assume that I think that the families of all of Peter's students hold strong democratic convictions so that, on this purely general ground, I believe that the father of every student of Peter voted for Obama in the 2008 election. On this basis, in the appropriate context, you may intuitively truly report to one of the fathers of Peter's students:

- (1) Manuel believes that you voted for Obama.

If this report is true, given *Harmony*, I hold a singular thought about that person in spite of the fact that my only conception of such a person would represent him by means of an attributively used description: that *the father of  $\sigma(x)$*  voted for Obama, assuming an assignment  $\sigma$  of one of Peter's students to the variable. This seems not only to give the game away to the Fregean side but in fact, to cause the collapse of the distinction that Quine was after. It is more advisable (at the very least, so as to explore the issue more in depth) to conclude that the Quinean criteria are potentially misleading indirect guides to distinguish singular from general thoughts, not to be invoked uncritically: believers in a substantive *singular/general* distinction will have to accept that some *de re* ascriptions (those meeting Quine's criterion) report what in fact are general thoughts and vice versa – a point that, as Burge (2007) candidly admits, was not clear to many early writers on the topic.<sup>2</sup> Sosa's successive formulations of his Fregean approach reflect this evolution from indirect, linguistic characterizations to more direct ones.<sup>3</sup> Sosa (1995a) characterizes a latitudinarian view of *de re* thought, L, as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> As Hawthorne and Manley emphasize, however, *Harmony* cannot simply be dismissed; any adequate treatment of these matters should include an account of the relation between *de re* ascription and singular thought.

<sup>3</sup> I do not mean to suggest that in his case there was any confusion about the difference, which Sosa (1970) clearly makes.

- L A subject *S* has at time *t* a thought (belief, intention, etc.) about *x* (of *x*) if *S* thinks (believes, intends, etc.) *de dicto* a proposition that predicates some property  $\phi$  with respect to some individuating concept (or individuator)  $\alpha$  of *x* for *S* at that time.

The earlier formulation that Sosa (1970) gave was in the same spirit; he related the account of *de re* thought to the account of ascriptions of such thoughts and considered two versions to deal with potential counterexamples: a stricter one on which the ascription of a *de re* thought is always semantically correct when the subject has a corresponding *de dicto* descriptive thought but might be pragmatically misleading; and a contextualist one, on which the singular term selected for the *de dicto* ascription must meet contextually dependent conditions (must be contextually “distinguished”) – so that, in some contexts, an ascription like (1) could be false and not simply misleading, as in the alternative view. Given that the final lines of the paper provide a more direct characterization of *de re* thought very much along the lines of L, we can put aside the roundabout, potentially misleading route through attitude-ascriptions.

Sosa characterizes in the following way the view the Fregean opposes (“N” is for *narrower*, in contrast with the *latitudinarian* or liberal approach of the Fregean); it imposes a more or less strict epistemic constraint on having singular thoughts, an “acquaintance” requirement:

- N A genuine relation of reference must be constituted by some special relation binding the thinker with the object of reference, probably some causal psychological relation like perception or memory.

Thus, consider the cases proposed by Kripke (1980) in his discussion of the contingent a priori, including “the length of this stick is one meter,” said pointing to the meter standard, and “Neptune causes perturbations in Uranus’ orbit, if anything does,” said after having fixed the reference of “Neptune” by means of the description “the heavenly body that causes perturbations in Uranus’ orbit, if anything does.” Paradoxically, at first sight, contrasting modalities appear to apply to them: they are contingent, in that, although true with respect to the actual world, we can easily imagine possible circumstances with respect to which they would be false, while we seem to be capable of knowing their truth a priori. Rejecting the appearances, Donnellan (1979) argued, by appealing to N, that what can be properly classified as knowable a priori about utterances like these involving “one meter” or “Neptune” cannot be the very same singular content that is contingent<sup>4</sup>; he distinguished to that

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<sup>4</sup>Kripke does not speak of contents or propositions; wisely he speaks rather of “statements.” Here is a relevant quotation (1980, 56): “What then, is the *epistemological* status of the statement ‘Stick *S* is one metre long at *t*’, for someone who has fixed the metric system by reference to stick *S*? It would seem that he knows it a priori. For if he used stick *S* to fix the reference of the term ‘one metre’, then as a result of this kind of ‘definition’ (which is not an abbreviative or synonymous definition), he knows automatically, without further investigation, that *S* is one metre long. On the other hand, even if *S* is used as a standard of a metre, the *metaphysical* status of the statement ‘Stick *S* is one metre long’ will be that of a contingent statement, provided that ‘one metre’ is regarded as a rigid designator: under appropriate stresses and strains, heatings or coolings, *S* would have had a length other than one metre even at *t*. (Such statements as ‘The water boils at 100 degrees centigrade, at sea level’ can have a similar status.) So in this sense, there are contingent a priori truths.”

end between *knowing a true proposition* expressed by an utterance and *knowing that an utterance expresses a true proposition*.<sup>5</sup> Evans (1979) argued by similarly relying on a view related to N that, at least for a very specific sort of case involving “descriptive names,”<sup>6</sup> a descriptivist account should be preferred to Donnellan’s, on which it is not the singular contingent content but rather a related general descriptive one which is knowable a priori (thus, not merely that the sentence expresses a truth but a general truth it expresses). In this debate, both Donnellan and Evans presuppose a non-liberal account along the lines of N – that to entertain a *de re* thought, one should be acquainted with the relevant *res*, making assumptions on the nature of acquaintance such that Le Verrier was not acquainted with Neptune when he descriptively introduced the name.<sup>7</sup>

Partisans of a conception of *genuine direct reference* along the lines of N – which many (wrongly in my view) derive from Kripke (1980) – thus oppose the view of singular thought articulated by L, confusedly suggesting that it should be thought somehow uncontaminated by descriptive components; the label “nonconceptual” is sometimes invoked in this regard to gesture in the direction of this alleged purity of singular thoughts vis-à-vis descriptive excrescences.<sup>8</sup> Here is an example of the unstable trains of thought on these matters I have in mind. After quoting Russell’s famous contention in “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description,” “Here the proper name has the direct use which it always wishes to have, as simply standing for a certain object, and not for a description of the object,” Donnellan (1990, 101, fn.) says approvingly: “This is the mark of the genuine name; its function is simply to refer without any backing of descriptions, without any Millian connotation or Fregean sense.” Later, however, while discussing Kaplan’s character rule for “I,” which he describes in a way that obviously provides descriptions like “the utterer of this token of ‘I,’” he says: “This rule, however, does not provide a description which ‘I’ goes proxy for nor a Fregean sense. It simply “fixes the referent,” in Kripke’s phrase” (*op. cit.*, 109). So genuine reference is not in any way backed by description; reference with cases of “I” is genuine; reference with cases of “I” is fixed by description. Unless we can substantiate the unexplained difference between “backing” and “fixing,” this is a contradiction.

There are two indirect considerations suggesting that entertaining *de re* thoughts cannot be understood as lacking a descriptive conception of the relevant *res* and thus favoring at least a version of L on which an individuator is necessary for singular

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<sup>5</sup> If, while listening to an utterance in a language that I do not know, I am told by a reliable person who knows the language and whom I trust that the utterance is true, I may come thereby to know that the sentence expresses a truth, without knowing the truth that it expresses.

<sup>6</sup> Evans’s famous example was “Julius,” introduced to refer to whoever invented the zip.

<sup>7</sup> For present purposes, I am interpreting Evans’s account as proposing just one form of upholding N, thus classifying it together with the more purely causalist proposals of Donnellan, Soames, and others. Unlike the latter, Evans’s account of genuine singular thought requires a substantive identifying conception of the relevant *res*.

<sup>8</sup> I think this is confused because nonconceptual thoughts, in the only clear-headed way I (2006b) know of tracing the distinction, are simply prelinguistic thoughts, and these can be as “descriptive” as linguistic thoughts.

reference, even if further conditions along the lines of the one in terms of ED below are needed for sufficiency. The first is that the distinction between deictic and anaphoric uses of indexicals does not appear to draw a genuine semantic boundary. As Heim and Kratzer (1998, 240) put it, “anaphoric and deictic uses seem to be special cases of the same phenomenon: the pronoun refers to an individual which, for whatever reason, is highly salient at the moment when the pronoun is processed.”<sup>9</sup> We should not expect any significant difference in the nature of the thoughts expressed by means of them. Now, in the case of anaphoric uses, what typically makes the individual salient is a descriptive characterization available from previous discourse.

The second indirect consideration comes from referential uses of descriptions. This is independent of whether the phenomenon is a non-semantic, “merely pragmatic” one. We should distinguish here a narrow from a wider notion of what counts as a semantic phenomenon. In the narrow sense, Gricean conversational implicatures are the paradigm of the non-semantic; in this sense, semantic features are, roughly, those to be taken into consideration in answering the theoretical questions addressed by linguistic accounts of natural languages, foremost among them accounting for the phenomena of systematicity and productivity by providing a compositional theory. But there is a wider notion, on which a semantic proposal is, roughly, an answer to any other good theoretical question essentially posed in terms that pre-theoretically relate to *meaning*. Accounting for the differential behavior Donnellan revealed in our intuitions concerning referential and attributive uses of descriptions is a semantic problem in this wider sense. In fact, it is one closely related to the present discussion of philosophical accounts of the nature of *de re* contents: in referential uses, descriptions are used to express singular thoughts in contrast with the general thoughts that they express in attributive uses.<sup>10</sup> Hence, even if, as I am urging, *de re* thoughts are not independent of descriptive features, we nonetheless need to distinguish *de re* and *de dicto* thoughts, particularly *de dicto* descriptive purely general thoughts.

In a series of papers, Robin Jeshion (2001, 2004) has forcefully criticized both Donnellan’s and Evans’s claims on the contingent a priori, and in general, acquaintance constraints on singular thought like theirs; she (2002, 2010) has developed an “acquaintanceless” account of singular thoughts as an alternative view. Jeshion sensibly claims that one can fully grasp a singular thought expressed by a sentence including a proper name, even if its reference has been descriptively fixed and one’s access to the referent is “mediated” by that description. On the other hand, she

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<sup>9</sup> Sainsbury (2005, 95–6) and Jeshion (2004) argue for grouping together both descriptive names like “Jack the Ripper,” “Unabomber,” or Evans’s “Julius” and ordinary proper names into (as Sainsbury puts it) a single semantic category or linguistic kind.

<sup>10</sup> This point can be combined with the simple direct argument for L provided by Sosa (1995a, §2). Following Martí (2008), Recanati (2010, 163) would argue that referential uses are devices of genuine reference because the descriptive material does not play any role in determining the referent. Invoking Sosa’s (1995a) account of such cases based on ED below, I would deny that the descriptive material is irrelevant: it at least points to the descriptive conception (the one on which the former epistemically depend) which does fix the referent.

(2006, 2010) still wants to reject “semantic instrumentalism,” the view that “there are no substantive conditions of any sort on having singular thought. We can freely generate singular thoughts at will by manipulating the apparatus of direct reference,” and therefore she also rejects the latitudinarian view that L articulates. Her account of singular thoughts is a psychological one, rejecting any epistemic requirement. Having singular thoughts is for her a matter of deploying “mental files” or “dossiers” that play a *significant* role in the cognitive life of the individual (Jeshion 2002, 2010).<sup>11</sup> Sosa (1970, 889–90), discussing a related suggestion by Kaplan (1969), made a decisive objection: “... it would make the life of a tourist intolerable. The great majority of the things a tourist comes across are not likely to play major roles in his inner story. Hence, by this account, he could not notice anything about them. But presumably I can see a pagoda to be beautiful or to have six stories even if I had never heard of it before and will soon forget it, and even if I never learn much about it.”

In his more recent work, however, Sosa (1995a, 94–5; 1995b, 238) makes some concession to supporters of less latitudinarian views on singular thought that I deem well taken. Although the proposal is more sophisticated, the basic idea is that, of two individuating concepts  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  which a subject takes to be co-designative (and may or may not be so), one might be *epistemically dependent* on the other, in the following sense:

- ED Individuator  $\beta$  is epistemically dependent on individuator  $\alpha$  for S at t iff S at t knows (or believes) that something satisfies  $\beta$  on the basis of knowing (or believing) that something satisfies  $\alpha$  and that whatever satisfies  $\alpha$  satisfies  $\beta$ , but not vice versa.

With this notion, Sosa captures the intuition that, in circumstances like that of Donnellan’s “the man drinking a martini” case (in which the subject’s intended referent is not drinking a martini, but somebody else unnoticed by the subject), although in the most superficial sense of “aboutness” captured by the unrestricted L the subject’s thought is about the man in fact drinking a martini, in a deeper sense, it is not, because the individuator on which *the man drinking a martini* epistemically depends for the subject is not about the man drinking a martini (but rather about the man *who appears to the subject to be doing so*). The restricted sense of aboutness is still fundamentally Fregean, in that it still upholds “the doctrine that reference is always through an individuating concept, that thought about an entity is always “under a description” or anyhow “under an individuating concept” which uniquely specifies that entity” (1995b, 247). As Sosa points out, this more constrained account on which a thought is not about the object satisfying the individuator “present” in it, but about the one satisfying the individuator on which it is epistemically dependent, also accounts for the causal intuitions behind N, to the extent that epistemic bases for our individuating concepts (perceptual experiences, memory impressions, witness’ reports) constitutively have causal aspects.

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<sup>11</sup> Recanati (2010) used to defend acquaintance constraints on singular thought, but in his more recent work, he holds a weaker position on which only a preparedness for acquaintance actually satisfied in the future is required.

In this section, I have presented Sosa's Fregean picture of singular thought and suggested a few considerations in its favor. On the one hand, the intuitions suggesting that not just any descriptive thought about an individual is a good basis for a correct ascription of a singular thought can be accounted for by ED. On the other, the considerations allegedly supporting a non-Fregean form of singular thought appear, on closer examination, neither robust nor stable.

## 2 Sosa's Account of *De Se* Thoughts

Following Castañeda (1966 and related work in the 1999 compilation), Perry (1979) and Lewis (1979) showed that thoughts about oneself "as oneself" – *de se* thoughts – require special treatment and advanced rival accounts. In this section, I will briefly present the data that need to be explained, Perry's and Lewis's proposals, and then Sosa's (1981, 1983, 1995b) own account, its relation to Perry's and Lewis's, and to the views on *de re* thought presented in the Sect. 1. In Sect. 3, I will present the account I prefer – a "token-reflexive" version of Perry's original account that Perry himself came to adopt following Stalnaker's (1981) criticisms. In Sect. 4, I will take up Recanati's (2007) recent arguments, from a viewpoint on *de se* thought very similar to Sosa's to the effect that such an account is in a good position to explain the phenomenon of *immunity to error through misidentification*. I will argue that that is not the case, and I will conclude by suggesting that the token-reflexive account fits better both with the data and with Sosa's Fregean take on *de re* thought that I have just presented.

Perry (1979, 33) introduces the problem with a celebrated example: "I once followed a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, pushing my cart down the aisle on one side of a tall counter and back the aisle on the other, seeking the shopper with the torn sack to tell him he was making a mess. With each trip around the counter, the trail became thicker. But I seemed unable to catch up. Finally it dawned on me. I was the shopper I was trying to catch." Before his epiphany, Perry has, according to the latitudinarian account L, a belief about himself (under the individuator *the shopper with the torn sack*) to the effect that he was making a mess, but this is insufficient for him to have the reflexive, self-conscious belief to that effect that he would express in accepting "I am making a mess," the one that leads him to rearrange the torn sack in the cart.

As Perry (1979, 42) points out, it will not help to move to a more restrictive account, requiring *de re* thought in the narrower sense of N: "Suppose there were mirrors at either end of the counter so that as I pushed my cart down the aisle in pursuit I saw myself in the mirror. I take what I see to be the reflection of the messy shopper going up the aisle on the other side, not realizing that what I am really seeing is a reflection of a reflection of myself." Now, given that he is perceiving himself in the mirror, even the narrower N allows for Perry to have a *de re* belief about himself, to the effect that he is making a mess, but this still falls short of the reflective, self-conscious belief manifested by acceptance of "I am making a mess" and the

cleaning up behavior. Cases of amnesiacs imagined by Castañeda and Perry, reading without realizing it what in fact are detailed biographies of themselves, or Lewis's (1979) case of the two gods, one on the tallest mountain throwing down manna and the other on the coldest mountain throwing thunderbolts, omniscient in terms of traditional propositional knowledge but still unable to locate themselves on one or the other mountain, show that richer individuators are insufficient too. Finally, the amnesiac cases suggest also that descriptive individuators, whether or not they allow for *de re* thought on the strictures of N, are unnecessary, for amnesiacs *are* able to think about themselves in a fully self-conscious reflexive way by using and understanding "I" and related expressions for first-personal reference while ignoring everything about themselves.

Propositional attitudes and speech acts are conceived as constitutively individuated by representational contents that are taken to be propositions with absolute truth values: given a full specification of a possible way for the world to be, propositions thus understood get a definite truth value with respect to it. Alternatively, propositions can be simply identified as classes of possible worlds, those with respect to which they are true. Thus, in believing that snow is white, one represents worlds in which snow is white and places the actual world among them. Notice that, on this traditional view, in believing a given proposition, one represents the actual world in which the believing takes place as belonging in the class of worlds selected by the proposition – as being correctly characterized by the proposition, but this intended relation between the actual world and the represented content is not itself part of the content.<sup>12</sup> It is rather a feature of the attitude of believing (of its "force" or mental type) that the believed proposition is taken to characterize the actual world at which the believing occurs. Subjects who believe that snow is white at different possible worlds (worlds at which snow is in fact white or worlds at which it is rather blue) nonetheless believe the same content.

Lewis, Perry, and Sosa take *de se* thoughts to question this traditional picture. Assume that Lewis's story of the two gods is coherent; in being omniscient, they both believe the same detailed proposition, exhaustively characterizing in every correct detail the actual world at which their believing occurs (and thus their belief states respectively select just one possible world, the actual one); all the same, there is an aspect of their condition that they ignore.<sup>13</sup> To deal with the problem, Lewis proposes to abandon the traditional theory of contents and to take them to be *properties* instead of propositions: entities which are true or false, given a full characterization of a way for the world to be, only relative in addition to a subject and a time.<sup>14</sup> Alternatively,

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Schaffer questions this orthodoxy in "Necessitarian Propositions," ms. downloaded from <http://www.jonathanschaffer.org/>.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis is working with a coarse-grained notion of proposition; the example can be taken to show, alternatively, that we need a finer-grained one, cf. Stanley (2011, 81–2). This would also be the diagnosis of someone upholding the token-reflexive account proposed below.

<sup>14</sup> Or just relative to a subject, if subjects are time-slices of what we ordinarily take to be so. I will ignore henceforth this more economical possibility, which is actually Lewis's preferred way of presenting the view, given his four-dimensional leanings.



the contents of propositional attitudes are, or at least select, not just classes or worlds but rather classes of *centered worlds*: worlds together with a designated subject and a time. In coming to believe what he would express by accepting “I am making a mess,” Perry locates himself among all subjects making a mess at a given time and world. Similarly, what Lewis’s two gods ignore is whether they are among subjects at the top of the tallest mountain throwing down manna at a given time and world or at the top of the coldest mountain throwing down thunderbolts at that time and world. Lewis acknowledges that some of the things we believe are ordinary propositions, as when we believe that snow is white, but he takes this to be just a particular case of believing a property: that of believing the property that one is such that snow is white – one which every subject at a given world either has or lacks at all times, non-interesting for self-locating purposes because it does not discriminate among subjects at times in a given world.<sup>15</sup>

We pointed out before that, on the traditional conception of contents, although in believing a proposition one ascribes it to the actual world at which the believing occurs, the actual world is not part of the believed content; it is rather the attitude of believing or the act of judging, which, as it were, as part of its “illocutionary” nature, brings the world at which it occurs as the relevant one to evaluate the truth of the belief. A mere *imagining* with the same content would not similarly bring the actual world to bear, because imaginings are not evaluated as true or otherwise relative to whether the actual world where the imagining occurs is correctly represented by their contents. Similarly and by analogy, on Lewis’s view, we should take the attitude of believing itself, as opposed to its content, which brings to bear the subject and time relevant for the evaluation of its truth or falsity. Subjects who come to believe what they would express in English by uttering “I am making a mess” believe the same contents, in the way that subjects who believe that snow is white at different worlds believe the same contents. This provides a nice solution to the initial problem of *de se* thought: if no descriptive conception of the subject (including one allowing for *de re* thought on the narrow conception N) is sufficient for *de se* thought and none appears to be needed, this is on the present view because the subject *is not represented as part of the content*; it is brought to bear for purposes of evaluation by the act of judging itself, not by its content.

Keeping this in mind, we can reply to an objection by Perry (1979, 44):

I believed that a certain proposition, *that I am making a mess* was true – true for me. So belief that this proposition was true for me then does not differentiate me from some other shopper, who believes *that I am making a mess* was true for John Perry. So this belief cannot be what explains my stopping and searching my cart for the torn sack. Once we have adopted these new-fangled propositions, which are only true at times for persons, we have to admit also that we believe them as true for persons at times, and not absolutely. And then our problem returns.

In this argument, Perry assumes the proposal to be that the content of the belief is that the relevant property (*making a mess*) is true for oneself, so he takes the subject to be surreptitiously introduced back into the content of the proposition – with

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<sup>15</sup> Following common practice, I’ll indulge in modal-realist talk because it makes exposition easier at some points, but I take this to carry no metaphysical commitments.

the result that a different shopper, with very different rational behavioral dispositions and responding to very different evidence, may well believe the same. But this is a misunderstanding. Lewis's proposal is that the content of Perry's epiphanic belief is *the property of making a mess*, which, in judging it, he self-ascribes (at the time of the believing). The other shopper rather believes a traditional *de re* proposition that the property *making a mess* applies to Perry.<sup>16</sup>

This concludes our exposition of Lewis's proposal. We have seen that the reasons Perry proposes for rejecting it are not very good; let us see now what his own view is. I will distinguish the "original" view that Perry (1979) defends, from a modified one that he (to my knowledge) first presented in the postscript to the version of the paper in the 1993 OUP compilation, acknowledging Stalnaker's (1981) criticism; Perry (2006) provides a clear presentation. It is this latter, more refined version that I plan to compare favorably with Sosa's view in Sect. 3, where I will present it.

According to Perry, we should distinguish the content or object of the belief, from the belief *state* through which it is accessed. The content is just a traditional proposition, *de dicto* or *de re*. The state is a specific condition of the subject by being in which a given content is believed. Contents help accounting, in a coarse-grained way, for the role that propositional attitudes constitutively have in appraising the rationality of the subject, the adequacy of his beliefs to his evidence and of his actions to his beliefs and desires, the desirability of his desires, etc. but only in a coarse-grained way. To have a full account of rational action, for instance, we need not just the content but also the specific *state* through which the content is accessed; because, as Frege's puzzles already established, traditional contents are not enough to appraise rationality and cognitive significance, ways of accessing them should also be taken into consideration.

Belief states themselves must hence have some kind of meaning or significance, if they are to have a role in appraising the rationality of actions or inferences. In the original account, Perry appeals to Kaplan's (1989) distinction between *character* and *content* to characterize the significance of states. Utterances of "he is making a mess" and "I am making a mess" might have, in their contexts, the same singular content, but they have different characters. Similarly, Perry's belief state when he looks at what is in fact his own reflection in the mirror and later when he catches up are different states with the same content; given the differences in rational action to be expected from one and the other, states themselves must have a role in the explanation of action and the cognitive significance of the belief in virtue of their character-like meaning.

I will come back later to Perry's refined account, as I said; let me now present Sosa's. An initial problem I want to mention is that although it is presented as an alternative to Lewis's, I cannot tell what the difference is. In introducing it, Sosa

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<sup>16</sup> Sosa (1981, 323, fn. 5) provides essentially the same reply to Perry. Of course, on Lewis's view, in believing that *de re* proposition, the other shopper also self-ascribes a *different* property: the property of being one such that the *de re* proposition is true. This is the vacuous sense of self-ascribing properties in which one also self-ascribes the traditional propositions one believes, as we said two paragraphs back we do on Lewis's proposal.

(1981, 1983) presents the traditional conception of propositions to which his account of *de se* contents is intended as an alternative. Two components of that traditional conception are (a) propositions are true or false, objectively or absolutely, and (b) propositions are the objects of psychological attitudes. He then presents Lewis's view as rejecting (b), while he proposes instead to reject (a), advancing a theory of *perspectival propositions*: propositions that are true or false only relative to a *perspective*, consisting of a subject and a time.

However, this way of distinguishing himself from Lewis appears to be merely terminological because one and the same account can be presented as a rejection of (a) or one of (b) depending on how one uses the technical term "proposition." Lewis posits properties (which are not absolutely true or false) as the objects of the attitudes, reserving "proposition" for the traditional notion and thereby rejecting (b), while Sosa maintains (b), taking propositions to be, or to select, classes of *centered* worlds. But nothing important that I can see stands in the way of putting aside the term "proposition" and using only the neutral "content" and then ending up with uniform descriptions for Lewis's and Sosa's proposals: they both propose a view of the contents of the attitudes on which they not just have truth values relative to worlds but to subjects and times also.<sup>17</sup> Sosa himself wonders (1983, §52) whether his account differs from Lewis's in any substantive manner; he makes some suggestions in response that I am not sure I understand.

To be sure, the possible-world representation of *de se* contents would be exactly the same in Lewis's and Sosa's accounts. Sosa might point out that possible-world representations are too coarse-grained to properly characterize contents in their full, rationality-contributing role and that the account of *de re* contents in general we have seen him putting forward in the previous section takes contents to be (structures consisting of) concepts, or individuators. In the case of *de se* contents, I take it that Sosa assumes that there are also individuators for the specifically *de se* "parts"; it is only that they cannot determine their referents except relative to a perspective.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, Sosa's conception of perspectival propositions is very similar to Perry's original conception of belief *states* presented above.

In fact, from this point of view, we might now equally wonder to what extent the differences between Sosa's views and Perry's are substantive or the views are mere notational variants too. Perry's account features belief-objects or contents, which are traditional propositions, but invokes belief states to properly account for the cognitive significance and rational action-guiding role of beliefs – states whose significance is perspectival, character-like *à la* Kaplan. Sosa's account features something essentially like the latter, but he calls them "propositions" and takes them

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<sup>17</sup> As Stephan Torre reminded me, Lewis (1986, 54–5) considers to speak of *egocentric propositions* instead of *properties*, concluding as follows: "If you insist that propositions, rightly so called, must be true or false relative to worlds and nothing else, then you had better say that the objects of at least some thought turn out not to be propositions. Whereas if you insist that propositions, rightly so called, are the things that serve as objects of all thought, then you had better admit that some propositions are egocentric."

<sup>18</sup> Burge (1974, 1977) defends this view for demonstrative *de re* thought.

to be belief-objects or contents precisely on account of their role in rational appraisals. But Sosa (1981, 327) acknowledges the need for the more traditional, coarser-grained corresponding propositions to explain for instance the sense in which we agree if I say “I am standing” and you say, addressing me, “you are standing.” So, it is not clear to me why these theories are not just mere notational variants, this time diverging over what to call “contents” or “objects” of beliefs: where Perry has a traditional content and a perspectival, character-like state, Sosa has two different contents playing different explanatory roles, one of them perspectival, playing the same explanatory role that Perry ascribes to his states. Ontologically, the views are on a par: both posit mental items whose significance can be classified in two different ways, a Kaplanian-character-like one and a Russellian-proposition-like one, each playing a different theoretically significant role which both accounts presumably would describe equally.

To round the circle, it is not clear either why Lewis should disagree with contemplating structured contents consisting of “conceptions” whose significance is akin to that of Kaplanian characters; he would only insist that, properly deployed, the possible-world machinery (adding *centered* worlds) allows us to characterize contents in all their theoretically important roles. So, all in all, I am not sure that there are substantive differences between the three positions we have considered so far. Each of the three certainly contemplates the theoretical posits of the others; they differ in what they honor with the labels “proposition” and “content,” but it is unclear to me whether this gives rise to substantive differences.

The perspectival propositions that Sosa’s account features have made a very strong comeback to the philosophical scene in recent years, prominently appearing in so-called “relativist” accounts, advanced by writers such as Kölbel (2004), Egan (2007, 2010), or McFarlane (2003) for different areas of discourse: judgments of taste, epistemic modals, and future-tense claims on the assumption of indeterminism, among others. In the same way that Sosa argues that we need perspectival propositions – true only at pairs of subjects and times in addition to worlds – in order to understand the contents of *de se* thoughts, these authors argue that we need perspectival propositions, true only at standards of taste, epistemic states, or histories in branching time to properly account for certain facts about such discourses.

I do not point this out in order to suggest an argument of bad company against Sosa, for the sort of relativism that he thereby anticipated is of the moderate variety that I (2008b) have distinguished from a more radical one. On the moderate variety, although the truth of *contents* is relativized to items other than possible worlds, this has no relativizing effect on the evaluation (as true, correct, or whatever term is adequate) of the *acts* or *attitudes* with those contents – the judgments, assertions, beliefs, utterances, and so on to which contents are ascribed; for that evaluation is made by taking the content and evaluating it with respect to the relevant parameters provided by *the context or perspective* in which the attitude is taken or the act made *by its subject*. This is Sosa’s view (1983, 141, § 42–3; 1981, 323, 332). On the radical view, the very appraisal of the act or attitude remains relative, having to be assessed for definite evaluation, possibly with different results, from different perspectives or “contexts of assessment” over and above

that of its subject. I take the latter view to be unacceptable for reasons essentially given by Evans (1985), but I agree that there could in principle be good reasons for adopting the former one in some cases. I now go on to discuss whether the case of *de se* thoughts is one of them.

### 3 The Token-Reflexive Account of *De Se* Thoughts

Stalnaker (1981, 145–8) objected to accounts such as Lewis’s and the original one by Perry on the grounds that they cannot capture an “informational content” that is an essential feature of utterances including essential indexicals, and advanced an alternative account appealing to the “diagonal propositions” that he (1978) had introduced earlier. Like Perry, I prefer to think in terms of structured propositions, as opposed to possible-world ones (and in fact take them to be ontologically more fundamental), so I will not present the Perry-Stalnaker debate in terms of diagonal propositions; I will present it instead in terms of what I take to be essentially equivalent token-reflexive structured propositions.<sup>19</sup>

Let us imagine a variation on Perry’s supermarket story in which, contemplating the situation and realizing what is going on, a kind shopper warns Perry: it is you who is making a mess, which leads to Perry’s epiphany. He thereby comes to accept “I am making a mess” after being told “you are making a mess.”<sup>20</sup> As we saw, Sosa feels the need to have a place in his theory for the ordinary, coarse-grained *de re* propositions that are on Perry’s view the contents of the beliefs thereby expressed, and they are conveniently the same for the two utterances. However, as we know very well by now, this singular content does not account for what Perry comes to know after the epiphany: he already believed it beforehand. Nevertheless, it seems that whatever explains Perry’s distinctive behavior after the epiphany was in this variation of the story communicated to him by the other shopper’s utterance.

How could Perry’s, Sosa’s, or Lewis’s proposals account for this? The character-like contents corresponding to the shopper’s utterance, “you are making a mess,” are very different from those corresponding to the ones by means of which Perry would express his acquired knowledge, “I am making a mess.” The properties that the shopper and Perry respectively rationally self-attribute are very different (*addressing someone who is making a mess* vs. *making a mess*), and the corresponding relativized propositions or classes of centered worlds are similarly different. Alternatively put, it would be absurd for Perry to ascribe to himself the property that the samaritan shopper expresses, that of addressing someone who is

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<sup>19</sup>The reader might find further elaboration in my (2006a).

<sup>20</sup>I disregard here the differences between “it is you who is making a mess” and “you are making a mess,” which in my view are presuppositional.

making a mess.<sup>21</sup> For Lewis, Perry, and Sosa to deal with this consistently with their accounts, they should elaborate them so as to explain how it is that, in virtue of the shopper expressing a certain *de se* content, Perry comes to learn a different one. On a much simpler account compatible with intuitive notions about successful communication, the episode would be explained by Perry's learning the very same content that the samaritan shopper expressed. This is what Stalnaker's account in terms of diagonal propositions – or the equivalent one that Perry came to accept in terms of token-reflexive contents – purports to offer.

We can think of the meaning of indexicals like “I” or “you” as token-reflexive rules, which, given a particular token, fix its referent relative to some contextual property: the speaker who produced it or its (most salient) addressee. This provides a descriptive (but not purely general) conception of the referent; in the case of the samaritan utterance of “you are making a mess,” we have a token-reflexive conception associated with the particular case of “you,” *the addressee of that token*.<sup>22</sup> Both the samaritan shopper and Perry can share this way of representing Perry. So we have here a content that is both an ordinary one, determining a traditional non-relativized proposition, which is communicated from one to the other: the one we could explicitly articulate with “the addressee of that token of ‘you’ is making a mess.”

Perry (1993) accepts that, for the kind of consideration about informational content that Stalnaker pointed out, these token-reflexive contents provide a better representation of the significance of belief states than the one he had earlier suggested in terms of Kaplanian characters. As Perry (2006) explains, however, this refined version of his account can be taken in two different ways, only in one of which it is at least *prima facie* successful as a way of accounting for *de se* thoughts. Let us explore this carefully.

On the first interpretation, the proposal can be seen along the lines of Sosa's account in Sect. 2. Sosa's proposal was to take what in Perry's earlier account was the character-like significance of belief states as the proper *contents* of *de se* attitudes. Similarly, on the first interpretation, the proposal would be to take token-reflexive contents as the proper contents of *de se* attitudes, capable by themselves of accounting for the data on traditional views on psychological explanation.

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<sup>21</sup> Ninan (2010) and Torre (2010) develop a Lewisian response to Stalnaker, on which *centered worlds* contents are after all what is communicated: not properties that subjects self-attribute, which will not do for the reasons mentioned in the main text, but rather *properties that ordered groups of discussants collectively ascribe to themselves*, taken in the relevant order. Their accounts, however, essentially require conversational participants to keep track somehow of whom among them a given assertion ascribes a property, for we are not speaking of attributing properties that all conversationists may have (like their collective spatial or temporal location) but properties that only some of them have. Because of this, I do not take these accounts to preserve the crucial appealing feature of Lewis' theory highlighted before, namely, that the subject is not represented *as part of the content*. For speakers to coherently communicate on these accounts, the contents they have to ascribe to assertions (and other speech acts in the conversation) must be along the lines of those that Perry assumes in the objection to Lewis that we discussed in Sect. 2: namely, *that a given participant self-ascribes a given property*.

<sup>22</sup> I have discussed the role of these contents in detail elsewhere (1998, 2000, 2006a).

I think this is the way Stalnaker took his proposal, given his insistence in making do just with traditional, possible-world propositions. However, taken in this way, for reasons Perry (2006, 209–12) provides, the proposal does not work. The reason is that it is possible to reproduce the original problem, now with token-reflexive contents. The very same token-reflexive propositions can be accessed in different ways, and on some of them, they could not possibly have the rational role that *de se* thoughts do. Thus, for instance, Perry can hear the samaritan shopper's utterance of "you are making a mess," without realizing for whatever reason that it is addressed to him (perhaps the samaritan speaks behind him), but accepting on its basis that its addressee is making a mess at the time. The samaritan's utterance would have the token-reflexive content we have been considering, but accepting it could not have the epiphanic role that accepting the samaritan shopper's utterance had for Perry on our variant of the story.

On the second interpretation – which is the one that Perry subscribes to and I endorse – the proposal is just a refined way of understanding the significance of belief states, but an adequate account of *de se* contents (of the nature of attitudes and speech acts in general) still requires the distinction between belief contents and belief states (ways of accessing the content). The modification of Perry's original proposal lies only in that now the significance of belief states is taken to be characterizable in the traditional propositional way that token-reflexive contents afford for the reasons indicated by Stalnaker.<sup>23</sup> This still leaves us with the task of explaining better the nature of states and contents and their interrelation but at least evades the obvious objection we have made to the proposal on the first interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Perry has an account on which states are mental particulars which may be classified by

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<sup>23</sup> Stalnaker's criticism of Lewis's, Sosa's, and Perry's original proposal was not that they cannot account for the transmission of information in cases like the one we are considering but (as I presented it) that they have to do so in a more complex way than the one afforded by the view that it is the diagonal/token-reflexive content that is communicated. Once we understand the need to preserve the state/content distinction, this benefit is lost, for it will be essential to acknowledge that the belief state accounting for the samaritan shopper's utterance and for Perry's acceptance are crucially different. We will have to find arguments to prefer the token-reflexive proposal (properly understood) elsewhere. The final section suggests one.

<sup>24</sup> I said that I understand Stalnaker as adopting the first interpretation. How does he deal with Perry's objection, then? In his earlier work, he takes refuge in the holism he attributes to belief states. Thus, even though in accepting the samaritan shopper's utterance of "you are making a mess" in both versions of the story (with and without realizing he is the addressee) Perry may well accept the same proposition, his full belief state in each case can hardly be the same, and the account in terms of diagonal propositions is intended to characterize full belief states. But this appeal to holism is not sufficient to deal with Lewis's two gods example, because, with respect to traditional propositional knowledge, they are both supposed to be omniscient. Stalnaker (1981, 144–5) appeals to haecceitism (different worlds qualitatively indiscernible) to deal with the case and appears to reject as incoherent an objection by Lewis that this does not solve the problem – to assume the coherence of the objection is just to beg the question against his proposal, he suggests. More recently, Stalnaker (2008, 55–9) appears to back up and to accept the coherence of Lewis' objection, and he provides in reply a new account that replicates Perry's distinction between content and state in a formally elegant way.

their “official contents” (the coarse-grained singular propositions, in our examples) and also by a plurality of other finer-grained propositional contents, useful for different explanatory purposes.<sup>25</sup>

I myself have developed an alternative suggestion, also influenced by Stalnaker’s views on the distinction between presupposition and assertion, which goes as follows. Both in the language and in the thought case, we model the state as a linguistic item, an “interpreted logical form.” Now, the difference between “it is not you who is making a mess” and “you are not making a mess” lies not in the assertoric content of these utterances but in that the former, unlike the latter, carries the presupposition that someone is making a mess. Presuppositions are in my view normative conditions (which may thus in fact fail) on “previous” (*mutual*, in the language case; *antecedent*, in the case of thoughts) knowledge. Referential expressions carry specific *knowing wh*-presuppositions. The difference between “you” in the shopper’s utterance and “I” in the one expressing Perry’s acceptance lies in the content of those presuppositions, which would be manifest in the structure of the interpreted logical forms by means of which we would model their respective belief states.<sup>26</sup>

No matter how the state/content distinction is understood in a fuller account, sensitivity to it should help us deflate objections to the token-reflexive proposal along the lines of one developed by O’Brien (2007, 70) and Recanati (2007, ch. 25).

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<sup>25</sup> Peacocke (1983, ch. 5; 2008, ch. 3), Higginbotham (2003), and Howell (2006) provide alternative versions of this proposal. Cf. Howell’s (2006, 51–2) discussion of “objection two” (a version of the problem posed by taking the proposal on the first interpretation). As I indicated, for the sake of expediency, I am not distinguishing accounts of *de se* utterances from accounts of *de se* thoughts, even though, as Ernest Sosa pointed out to me, the latter pose a serious worry to the token-reflexive account; as he put it (pc): “Even if we presuppose a language of thought, so that there is some vehicle of that thought, it is not clear to me that we can identify the token of the singular term involved ... we have no way to distinguish that token in anything like the way we can visually or aurally distinguish the overt linguistic token.” The account I subscribe to assumes mental particulars, including individual concepts and particular acts of deploying them, and contends that the subject of a first-personal thought is identified token-reflexively as the person deploying the self-concept instance constituting it.

<sup>26</sup> The proposal is further developed in the papers mentioned in footnote 1. Both Ernest Sosa and Stephan Torre raised a serious objection to this proposal that I had not seen in print. As Torre put it (pc): “a token-reflexive account cannot provide for the true ascriptions of non-occurrent beliefs, desires, etc. Moritz is sitting at the desk next to me now and I take him to believe now that he, himself, is in Barcelona, that he is not a rabbit, that he is German, etc. I think these are true belief ascriptions of him but I don’t see how they can be accommodated by a token reflexive account since presumably he does not currently possess any mental tokenings corresponding to these beliefs.” Sosa made the same objection, concerning beliefs such as *it has been more than one month since my most recent swim in the Ocean*. Whether this is taken to be part of a general account of belief or just of those with *de se* or *de nunc* content, the proponent of the token-reflexive account might respond that the relevant beliefs should be understood as dispositions to make relevant occurrent judgments. I think this is particularly plausible in the case of present-tense beliefs, as in Sosa’s example, because they are plausibly taken as claims about the relation between the present time and a previous one, and for their semantics, we need some particular event (even if a merely possible one) to fix what counts as the present. In that respect, cases that appear to be atemporal claims made with a “tenseless” use of the present, such as “I am not a rabbit,” look more problematic.



Both consider the case of a schizophrenic patient who believes that some mental states he is conscious of are not really his but those of some other person that have somehow been implanted in him. In Recanati's example, the patient is conscious of the judgment that one would express by accepting "I am good and omnipotent"; he comes thereby to accept: the owner/judger of this state is good and omnipotent, but he does not accept that he is the owner of that thought; it is rather "the other" who has implanted it. Recanati (2007, 183–4) contends: "this is a counterexample, because the subject is in a certain state (he consciously entertains a certain thought), the content of the state reflexively refers to the subject of the state (whom the deluded subject takes to be different from what it actually is), yet the subject does not entertain a *de se* thought, to the effect that he himself is good and omnipotent. What this shows is that being in a state with a reflexive content is not sufficient to ground a self-ascription."

Recanati is right that being in a state with a reflexive content is not sufficient; this is just the point Perry makes above about the inadequacy of the first interpretation. Let us distinguish *the judgment* about oneself, to the effect that one is good and omnipotent, made by being in a state whose significance is captured by the token-reflexive interpreted form, *the owner (judger) of this very state is good and omnipotent*, from *the impression* about oneself, to the effect that one is judging oneself to be good and omnipotent, had by being in a state whose significance is rather captured by the token-reflexive form, *the owner of this very state appears to be judging herself to be good and omnipotent*. Normally, when one is in the latter belief state, one is thereby also in the former, but not so in the case of the schizophrenic patient. Recanati is right that to be in a state with a reflexive content is not sufficient to ground a self-ascription; as I already said, that was already shown by Perry's objection to the first interpretation of Stalnaker's suggestion.<sup>27</sup>

What is needed in addition is that the reflexive content provides *the significance of the attitude-state one is in*, the way through which some content is accessed, and not merely its content itself. This fails to be so in the case of the token-reflexive content that Recanati considers for the schizophrenic patient, who fails to make the relevant judgment. (As we saw, a more complex token-reflexive content does capture the significance of the appearance-state of the patient: the owner of this thought appears to judge that he himself is good and omnipotent.) We

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<sup>27</sup> Higginbotham (2010, 262–3) discusses these cases, in relation to the relation between *de se* thought and *immunity to error through misidentification*, to be discussed in Sect 4. He sounds as if he was providing an alternative defense of the token-reflexive account he also supports, but I fail to see how the defense goes. From the perspective I defend, the case of the schizophrenic shows that mental actions such as the judgment that I am good and omnipotent, as much as physical actions such as making a mess, are only "circumstantially" IEM (see below); under abnormal circumstances, the ordinary grounds one has to self-ascribe them survive as grounds for the existential generalization, someone is making a mess or someone is judging that he himself is good and omnipotent, while still wondering whether it is he himself who is doing them. For this to be possible, some other state has to be genuinely *de se* and IEM (the *impression* of being executing those actions, as in my account in the main text).

should of course acknowledge once more that the state/content distinction requires further elaboration for this to be a fully satisfactory account, but *prima facie* at least, what Recanati (2007, 182–3) suggests does not follow: that any way of turning the token-reflexive proposal into a sufficient condition for *de se* thought will make the account blatantly circular.

In connection with the issue of circularity, we should make a further acknowledgement, which curtails the explanatory ambitions of an account along the lines of the one suggested so far. Such an account should be understood as a “two-tiered” one in the sense of O’Brian (2007, 65): deploying the self-reference token-reflexive rule is a necessary *but insufficient* part of what thinking (and talking) about oneself as such is; the full account requires in addition an awareness of or introspective access to one’s own states, a self-knowledge that is assumed to be independent of the reliance on the self-reference rule.<sup>28</sup> This assumption will be considered unwarranted by some philosophers, and with it, the account will be deemed inadequate, depending at a crucial point on what is to be explained. Unfortunately, this is one more substantive matter I cannot go into any further here.<sup>29</sup> Instead, I hope it will help to conclude by critically examining how the refinement of Perry’s view that I have outlined compares with a version of Sosa’s proposal recently advanced by François Recanati (2007, 2009, 2012), when it comes to related epistemological matters. Sosa (Bonjour and Sosa 2003, ch. 7) has explored self-knowledge and indexical judgment, suggesting an externalist account in the framework of his virtue-theoretic conception that, as far as I can tell, is compatible with the sort of two-tiered perspective just envisaged. However, to my knowledge, he has not discussed in print the relation that Recanati explores between the essential indexical character of *de se* thoughts, as accounted for in a proposal very much like Sosa’s, and their *immunity to error through misidentification*. Recanati claims that his (and Sosa’s) perspectivalist view accounts better than the alternatives for that phenomenon. Thus, even though Sosa himself has not discussed that connection, it will be useful to round up this critical evaluation of his views on *de se* contents by examining whether Recanati is right.

#### 4 *De Se* Thoughts and Immunity to Error Through Misidentification

Recanati (2007) argues for a moderate relativist account of *de se* thoughts on which their possible-world contents must be given by *centered* worlds, along the lines of Lewis’s and Sosa’s. Recanati offers a new argument for this sort of account; he defends

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<sup>28</sup> I understand this to be the point Castañeda (1983, 324) is raising against Perry.

<sup>29</sup> In part to deal with this problem, O’Brian (2007, ch. 5 & 6) and Peacocke (2008, ch. 3) rely essentially on an “agent awareness” of one’s own actions, particularly one’s own mental actions such as judging and intending, to account for the first “tier,” awareness of one’s mental states. I do not understand their replies (O’Brian 2007, 89–93; Peacocke 2008, 89–92) to the obvious objection that we seem to be doing as much fully self-conscious self-reference with respect to our judgments than to our perceptual experiences or uncontrolled daydreamings.

it on the basis of observations about the phenomenon that Shoemaker (1968, 557) characterized as *immunity to error through misidentification* (“IEM” henceforth)<sup>30</sup>: “to say that a statement ‘*a* is  $\phi$ ’ is subject to error through misidentification relative to the term ‘*a*’ means that the following is possible: the speaker knows some particular thing to be  $\phi$ , but makes the mistake of asserting ‘*a* is  $\phi$ ’ because, and only because, he mistakenly thinks that the thing he knows to be  $\phi$  is what *a* refers to.”<sup>31</sup> In this concluding section, I will argue that, far from supporting the perspectivalist view, IEM vindicates the sort of token-reflexive proposal made in Sect. 3. In more recent work, Recanati (2009, 2012) acknowledges some of the points that I will make, but he still defends the perspectivalist proposal on the basis of considerations about IEM. I will argue that they are unconvincing.<sup>32</sup> Even though Sosa himself has not advanced any such arguments, this section will allow us to examine possible relations between his proposal and the epistemological issues surrounding the phenomenon of IEM.

Consider the moment in Perry’s original supermarket story when he sees what in fact is his image in a mirror with a torn sack. Imagine another variation on the story, in which this is in fact the ground for Perry’s epiphany, because this time he recognizes himself in the mirror; suppose then that he judges on this basis what he would express with “I am making a mess.” It seems that this claim, made on such epistemic grounds, is subject to the possibility of error that Shoemaker identifies: Perry might have been wrong in identifying himself with the person whose back is reflected in the mirror; he would then be right that someone is pushing a cart with a torn sack and is thus making a mess but wrong to think that it is he who is making a mess. On the other hand, let us assume that, in the original version of the story, the epiphany comes from Perry seeing that he is pushing a cart with a torn sack. Consider his physical self-ascription: I am pushing a cart with a torn sack, made on the basis of his visual perception of the scene around him or his psychological self-ascription – I see that I am pushing a cart with a torn sack. At first sight at least, neither of these claims appear to be subject to the sort of error that Shoemaker describes nor is the thought he expresses with “I am making a mess,” when based on such epistemic grounds.

These examples show that, if there is a connection between *de se* thoughts and IEM, it must be indirect, for the thoughts Perry expresses by accepting “I am making a mess” in both versions of the story in the previous paragraph are *de se*. Those that are not are only *de se derivatively*: in making them by using the first-person concept, the speaker identifies himself as the object of other, *fundamentally de se*

<sup>30</sup> Shoemaker suggests that IEM captures some of Wittgenstein’s points about uses of “I” “as subject” vs. uses of “I” “as object” in the *Blue Book*.

<sup>31</sup> Pryor (1999) offers an alternative propositional characterization, free from concerns that this linguistic characterization – useful as a starting point – might raise, such as this: “If this is the explanation, then I don’t see how any statement at all could avoid being subject to error through misidentification. It would seem to be always possible that the term ‘*a*’ could have meant something other than what it means and that the speaker could then have mistakenly thought that the thing he knows to be *F* is what ‘*a*’ refers to” (Sosa, pc.).

<sup>32</sup> Stanley (2011, 91–3) makes related objections to Recanati.

thoughts. Thus, we should take Recanati's claims on behalf of the perspectivalist, property-like account of *de se* thought based on IEM to concern only the *fundamentally de se*. We will assume that in what follows.

Various writers including John Campbell, Christopher Peacocke, and Crispin Wright have developed an account of IEM suggested by Evans that Wright (2012) calls "the Simple Account." On the Simple Account, non-IEM thoughts are (roughly) thoughts, the structure of whose epistemic justification depends on an identity claim;<sup>33</sup> thus, for instance, Perry's judgment "I am making a mess" in the first version of the story in the second paragraph of this section, which was not IEM, depends on Perry's identity judgment, *I am that person reflected in the mirror*. This is why he might coherently consider that, although the existential "part" of his claim – that someone is making a mess – is correct, he is mistaken in the identification, and it is not in fact he himself but someone else who is making a mess. On the Simple Account, IEM thoughts are negatively characterized as those that are not thus dependent on an identity claim.

This account crucially relies on the thorny notion of *doxastic* justification and on the *basing* relation for our judgments; there are well-known discrepancies among contemporary epistemologists that have immediate resonance for our present issue. Certainly, that a judgment A epistemically depends on a certain claim B cannot require that the subject phenomenologically experiences his coming to judge A as a result of an inference in part from B, for Perry might well lack such inferential phenomenology in the above example of non-IEM thought. Consider Moore's (in-) famous inference, (i) here are two hands, (ii) if there are hands, there is an external world, hence (iii) there is an external world. Given its validity, someone who judges (i) is thus rationally committed to (iii), but there are different ways of understanding such commitments. Pryor (2004) distinguishes two epistemological attitudes we may have with respect to them, a *liberal* and a *conservative* one. On the conservative attitude, having *prima facie* justification to believe (i) requires antecedent justification to believe (iii); the liberal denies this, even though he agrees that evidence against (iii) would defeat our justification to believe (i). I would further distinguish two versions of the conservative attitude; on the most straightforward conservative-conservative version, justification for (i) would require standard a priori or empirical evidence for (iii); on a liberal-conservative one along lines explored by Wright (2004), it is enough if (iii) is a presupposition that one is entitled to make by default.

These views carry over to the status of identity claims that one might discern in the justificatory structure of our singular thoughts. Most philosophers would say that the conservative-conservative attitude is the proper one concerning Perry's identification with the person whose back he sees in the mirror. Consider, however,

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<sup>33</sup> I say "roughly" because there are further cases that are also not IEM but whose justification exhibits a more complex inferential structure, including the cases that Pryor (1999) calls "which-misidentification"; cf. also Recanati (2012) and Wright (2012).

the judgments that we gave earlier as examples of IEM: Perry's physical self-ascription in the original version of the story that he is pushing a cart with a torn sack, made on the basis of visual perception, or his psychological self-ascription that he sees that he is pushing a cart with a torn sack. Shoemaker would consider them as cases only of *circumstantial*, not *absolute* IEM; they are *de facto* IEM, but under weird circumstances, they could be subject to error through misidentification. Imagine, for instance, that the science fiction technologies that fiction contemplates could allow us to block our own visual impressions and receive instead those coming from another body.<sup>34</sup> Under those circumstances, Perry's judgments might be wrong because of the mistaken identification of himself with the body that is the source of the relevant visual impressions.

Now, perhaps the commitment to identifications of this sort that ordinary self-ascriptions like those by Perry based on visual perception in fact carry could be more properly understood along the lines of the liberal-conservative proposal above, as opposed to the conservative-conservative one we found more appropriate for the mirror example: these identities could be presuppositions to which we are entitled by default, without the need to have ordinary *a priori* or empirical evidence for it, but the self-ascriptions would nonetheless epistemically depend on them, and thus they would not be cases of (absolute) IEM but cases of mere circumstantial IEM.<sup>35</sup> The case of the schizophrenic patient might show that perhaps even self-ascriptions of mental acts such as judgments or intentions unexpectedly depend on identifications, but perhaps a liberal view is more adequate here, and then they would count as absolutely IEM.

We do not need to go any further into these issues for our present concerns, which only require awareness of the phenomenon of IEM, regardless of its extent, and the explanation that the Simple Account offers. As we have seen, the explanation appeals to the absence of an identity claim in their justificational structure. We have to note now what it does *not* appeal to: it does not appeal to the absence of a conception of the self in the relevant content of the IEM judgments, unlike Recanati's explanation, with which I am contrasting it here.

Discussing Wittgenstein's suggestions in the *Blue Book* that in its use "as subject" "I" does not refer (for which the Lewis-Recanati view offers an illuminating gloss) Evans (1982, 218) makes the following remark, which gives us a useful distinction: "The word 'identify' can do us a disservice here. In one sense, anyone who thinks about an object identifies that object (in thought): this is the sense involved in the use I have just made of the phrase 'demonstrative identification'. It is quite another matter [...] for the thought to involve an identification component – for the thought to be identification-dependent. There is a danger of moving from the fact that there is no identification in the latter sense (that no criteria of recognition are brought to bear, and so forth) to the conclusion that there is no identification in the former sense. I am not sure Wittgenstein altogether avoids this danger."

<sup>34</sup> In the way imagined by Dennett (1978).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Wright (2012), §§ 7–8; cf. also Peacocke (1983), 139–151, and Peacocke (2008, 92–103).

The same can be said of Recanati's proposal. The Simple Account distinguishes two senses for a thought to have an identification component. In the first sense, the epistemic grounds for the thought include an identity-premise, along either of the lines we have mentioned above, conservative-conservative or liberal-conservative. In the second sense, the thought includes a conception that identifies what it is about. On the Simple Account, having an identification component in the second sense is compatible with a thought being IEM, for being IEM, on this account, is simply *lacking* an identification component in the first sense. This is not so on Recanati's account, as presented so far, for this view purports to explain the IEM of thoughts as their lacking an identification component (also) in the second sense.

What we have seen so far is that the phenomenon of the IEM character of (fundamentally) *de se* thoughts does not lend support to the property account; in the most straightforward way, what accounts for the IEM character is the lack of an identification in the justification grounds, which has nothing to do with whether the content of the state is a full proposition or a property. However, in my final paragraphs, I want to go beyond this, suggesting that, on the contrary, the phenomenon of IEM supports instead a full-proposition account of *de se* thoughts like the one offered by the token-reflexive proposal. In order to do this, I need to suggest an elaboration of the Simple Account that makes it not merely negative and thereby not so simple.

On this proposal, having an identification component in the second sense distinguished by Evans is not just compatible with a thought being IEM but central to the explanation. Remember the case of Neptune discussed in Sect. 1. The reference of "Neptune" is fixed by means of the description "the heavenly body that causes perturbations in Uranus' orbit." On this assumption, the thought *that Neptune causes perturbations in Uranus' orbit* is manifestly IEM, and the explanation is obvious: it cannot be that something else causes those perturbations, because that is precisely what identifies Neptune. On the more elaborated version of the account, this sort of explanation carries over to other cases. If Perry's thought that he is pushing a cart with a torn sack is (circumstantially) IEM, when it is based on his visual perception of the scene before him, this is because he is fixing the reference of "I" for that use as the "point-of-view-location" (Peacocke 2008, 101–2) of that scene (presupposing, which is circumstantially justified, that his own is such a "point-of-view-location"). Similar remarks can be made about the thought that he sees that he is pushing a cart with a torn sack, *mutatis mutandis*.<sup>36</sup>

The Simple Account entails the possibility of thoughts including identification components in the second sense distinguished above, which are nonetheless IEM with respect to them; the suggested elaboration requires it. And it seems to be the case that there are such thoughts. Wright (2012) offers as examples "you are very close" and "he is a long way off," both based on observation and Peacocke (2008),

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<sup>36</sup>I am assuming here that the token-reflexive descriptions given by the meanings of indexicals can be, and typically are to be, further enriched with contextually available information; cf. García-Carpintero (2000, 2006a) for further elaboration.

“this keyboard is black,” again based on observation. On the suggested not-so-simple account, judgments like these are IEM because the reference of the demonstratives is in part fixed on the basis of the content of the relevant visual experiences, which the speaker takes to come from his own body in the ordinary way.<sup>37</sup> Under the liberal-conservative attitude, they are at least IEM when the presuppositions are warranted. Thoughts such as the one expressed by “that is the source of this yellow experience” might well even be absolutely IEM, when the reference of the demonstrative is fixed in the implied way.

Hence, Recanati’s (2007) account of IEM will not do. Recanati (2009, 2012) accepts this; he accepts it even for some first-personal IEM thoughts. Thus, a thought expressed with “my legs are crossed,” based on proprioceptive evidence, is IEM on his original account because the content is just the property of having crossed legs, which the subject self-ascribes. However, it could be a thought such as the one expressed by “it is my legs, not my neighbor’s, that are crossed,” which, given the contrast, cannot plausibly be considered as not including the concept of the thinker’s leg. Nonetheless, it is still (circumstantially) IEM. Recanati now suggests (2009, 259; 2012, §§2.2 & 2.3) that this is only so because the “subject-explicit” thought is derived through a process he calls “reflection” from a “subject-implicit” property-ascription and thus has the same grounds as the latter, lacking in particular any identity-premise: “a judgment is immune to error through misidentification if it is implicitly *de se*, that is, if the subject is not represented in the content of the judgment but his or her involvement is secured by the mode of the grounding experience; yet an explicit *de se* thought may *also* be IEM if it has the same grounds as an implicit *de se* thought.”

But how can this work for demonstrative thoughts? Recanati (2012, §3) makes a heroic attempt at justifying the extension of the proposal to that case – demonstrative thoughts that are IEM with respect to the “position” occupied by a demonstrative concept “explicit” in the thought derive by “reflection” from perspectival thoughts whose referent is given by the context and brought to bear for the evaluation of the thought by the “mode” or “force” of the thought, not as an element of the content. He says: “on the basis of your smell experience, you can judge ‘Skunk!’/‘It is skunky’, or more explicitly: ‘That [which I smell] is a skunk’. In the former case, no mistake can be made as to which object is a skunk since no object is identified: the content is simply the property of being a skunk, and the object this concerns is determined by the experiential mode, leaving the subject no choice. When we make explicit the contribution of the mode by entertaining a more complex content with categoric structure (‘That [which I smell] is a skunk’) immunity is retained: the epistemological situation does not change because no extra evidence is needed to make the more complex judgment.”

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<sup>37</sup> Campbell (1997, 69–70) argues that claims such as “that chair is yellow” are not IEM because the “binding” of sortal and color properties may get things wrong: perhaps the chair is transparent, and it is the wall behind that is yellow. In my view, such “binding” consists in the presence of further unnoticed identity claims in the justificational structure of demonstrative claims: say, *that chair is the source of this yellow experience* – open to liberal, liberal-conservative, or conservative-conservative treatment.

However, as Wright (2012) points out, in the first place, it is obscure how the “mode” or “force” of a perceptual experience with just a “feature-placing” content, *skunky smell*, selects the object or objects in the context to which it is supposed to apply, and in the second place, we can hardly justify the rationality of a transition from an experience with such a content to a claim about a specific physical object of a given sort, to the effect that it has a skunky smell.

It thus seems that the token-reflexive proposal outlined in Sect. 3 offers a better account of the IEM of some first-personal thoughts, capable of generalization to other cases, unlike a proposal which makes a fundamental difference in the behavior of “I” and “now,” in some uses, and all other indexicals. We did grant in Sect. 2 that the Lewis-Sosa account of *de se* thoughts provides a *prima facie* nice solution to the initial problem posed by such thoughts: if no descriptive conception of the subject (including those allowing for *de re* thought on the narrow conception N) is sufficient for them and no such conception appears to be needed, this is because the subject *is not represented as part of the content*; it is brought to bear for purposes of evaluation by the act of judging itself, not by its content. We found in Sect. 3, however, that the view has difficulties with explaining the “informational content” of *de se* utterances. We have seen in this that the alternative token-reflexive account does a better job in explaining IEM. And it is easy to provide an alternative solution to the initial problem, consistent with the token-reflexive theory. The appearance that no descriptive conception is needed in the case of amnesiacs with little self-knowledge was misleading: the proper account of the phenomena of IEM in its full generality does suggest that some descriptive conception is always required. Fortunately, the thin reference-fixing token-reflexive properties on which, according to the account, *de se* talk and thought rely are available even to our amnesiacs.

It is also arguable that the token-reflexive account of *de se* thoughts fits better than the Lewis-Sosa-Recanati account with Sosa’s Fregean take on singular thought presented in Sect. 1. In this section, I have been comparing the token-reflexive account of IEM to Recanati’s account, based on Lewis’s theory of *de se* contents. In the second section, I raised the issue of whether Sosa’s relativist proposal is at bottom the same as Lewis’s (and hence Recanati’s). As we saw, it must be if we just stick to the possible-world representation of the contents that these views provide. As I suggested there, Sosa will probably say that his view requires contents richer than those provided by possible-world representations and that, properly understood, those contents, like the token-reflexive ones, do involve *de se* concepts, individuated along the lines of Kaplanian characters; we can think of such concepts along the more general lines that Burge (1974, 1977) has advanced for demonstrative thoughts. It is still the case that the token-reflexive concepts fit better with the Fregean conception of reference captured by (L) because it ascribes to tokens of “I” ordinary reference-fixing conceptions of their referents. And it is at the very least unclear whether the Lewis-Sosa-Recanati proposal allows for an account of IEM general enough to properly illuminate the phenomenon.

I will stop here. My main goal has been to remind the reader about Ernest Sosa’s suggestive and challenging views on matters that are pretty much alive today and to bring out more recent discussions to give him a chance to tell us more about his present take on the topic.



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