

Introduction: The Problem of Empty Representations

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1. Preamble

Expressions such as proper names ('Neptune'), indexicals and demonstratives ('I', 'that planet'), and perhaps definite descriptions in some of its uses ('the planet over there') are *singular terms*.¹ To put it intuitively, and without placing too much weight on the words we choose at this point, it is the linguistic job of expressions in that category to pick out an object, to bring it into our talk or thought, to call our attention to it for further representational purposes such as saying something about it, asking about it or giving directions concerning it. Thus, consider an assertion made by uttering 'Neptune is the third-most massive planet of the Solar System'. Assertions are centrally evaluated as true; but whether or not our assertion is true depends on how things are with Neptune, the planet itself, irrespective of the fact that we have used 'Neptune' to refer to it (as opposed, say, to 'Neptuno' or 'Poseidon', as we might have done if speaking in Spanish or Greek) or of the notions that speakers might associate with the name.

Without at first sight failing in their representational task, however, some expressions in the category of singular terms apparently fail to designate anything; they include names in myths or fictions, such as 'el Hombre del Saco' or 'Don Quixote', and in failed theories. Take 'Vulcan' as it occurs in (1); or 'that planet' as it occurs in (2), uttered with the demonstrative anaphoric on a previous occurrence of 'Vulcan'; or 'the planet over there' in (3), uttered while signalling to the location where Vulcan was supposed to be with the help of a representation of the Solar System, after stating that Le Verrier thought that there was a planet at such and such location at such and such a time:

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¹ There are corresponding expressions of plural reference (names, indexicals, definite descriptions, or demonstratives for groups or collections of individuals rather than individuals) that create similar problems, but I will not discuss them here.

- (1) Le Verrier thought that Vulcan causes perturbations in Mercury's orbit.
- (2) Le Verrier thought that that planet causes perturbations in Mercury's orbit.
- (3) Le Verrier thought that the planet over there causes perturbations in Mercury's orbit.

We intuitively judge these utterances true; but for them to be evaluable in such a way, the singular term occurring in them must be fulfilling their representational task. The same applies to examples such as (4), and the results of substituting the other singular terms (in similar contexts) for 'Vulcan' there.

- (4) Vulcan does not exist.

The same applies also, even if a bit more doubtfully, to 'Vulcan causes perturbations in Mercury's orbit, if it exists' and corresponding results of substitution. Even if we were to judge the latter sentences truth-valueless, they seem nonetheless meaningful, which once again appears to presuppose that the singular terms in them are dutifully fulfilling their representational jobs. This last point applies also to the simpler sentences 'Vulcan is a planet' or 'Vulcan causes perturbations in Mercury's orbit'.

We have the blueprint for a paradox in the previous paragraphs: on the one hand, to acknowledge the distinctive semantic character of thoughts conveyed by means of singular terms, the objects referred to themselves should figure in a correct characterization of their nature; on the other, the meaningfulness of sentences including empty singular terms suggests that such objects are at most extrinsic to the thoughts they convey. This is, in a nutshell and at its intuitive core, the problem posed by (apparently) empty representations.² It has been discussed in analytic philosophy since the inaugural works of the founding fathers, Frege and Russell; and, as the papers in this collection show, like other central philosophical conundrums it is far from being solved, and the debate still rages.

In the rest of this introduction, I will present in more nuanced theoretical terms how the problem is perceived from the perspective of the current state of the art. I will follow the structure of the volume, and I will be integrating summaries of the chapters as we go along.

2. Foundational Matters: Singular Thoughts and their Attribution

I have used linguistic examples so far for introductory purposes, but mirroring issues arise in the realm of thought; after all, utterances might express what one believes, or intends, etc. Henceforth, I'll speak of *thoughts* in a general way, intending to address

² The parenthetical 'apparently', by the way, should be taken to be implicit in the title for this volume: we needed something sufficiently short and indicative, but we do not mean to prejudice any of the issues under dispute, and as we are about to see one of the lines of thought developed by researchers is that expressions such as 'Vulcan' in fact do refer.

the problem of empty representation both in the semantics of linguistic expressions and mental states, distinguishing issues about them only when it is needed.

An account of empty representations should rely on a general account of singular thought. The contemporary debate on this topic has been shaped by two developments in the 1950s and 1960s: Quine's (1956) success in bringing back the medieval distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* thoughts and thought-ascriptions to the attention of the philosophical community, and the discrediting in the subsequent decade of the descriptivist theories of names and other singular terms suggested by Frege, Russell, and their followers in work by Marcus (1961), Donnellan (1966), Kaplan (1989) and Kripke (1980).

Quine pointed out that the report (5) might be interpreted in two different ways, regimented with the help of the language of First-Order Logic as in (6) and (7). Only one of them, the one regimented by (7)—involving 'quantifying in' a position embedded in the ascription of a representational state—makes Ralph interesting for the FBI:

- (5) Ralph believes that there are spies.
- (6) Ralph believes that $\exists x(x \text{ is an spy})$.
- (7) $\exists x(\text{Ralph believes that } x \text{ is an spy})$.

Interpreting (5) in accordance with (6), it only ascribes to Ralph a general *de dicto* thought; I will assume that a *de dicto* ascription is one whose embedded clause faithfully captures the content of the ascribed thought. In this case, it is an existential thought that Ralph has perhaps formed on the basis of general considerations about the ways of modern states by reading novels and history books, without getting information about any particular spy. Interpreting (5) in accordance with (7) suggests instead that Ralph has a singular *de re* belief about some or other unspecified individual, to the effect that s/he is a spy.

Marcus, Donnellan, Kripke, and Kaplan argued in their turn that singular terms (including definite descriptions, when 'referentially' used) are devices of *direct reference*: the thoughts they contribute to express are individuated immediately by their referents, not by an associated descriptive profile that happens to pick them up. To briefly rehearse the considerations by those philosophers, consider Kripke's deservedly influential points. Even though the descriptive notion the name 'Kurt Gödel' evokes for most of us is that he is *whoever proved the incompleteness theorems*, 'Gödel proved the incompleteness theorems' has a different modal and epistemic profile than the sentence that results from replacing 'Gödel' with 'whoever proved the incompleteness theorems': unlike the latter, the former intuitively appears contingent, not necessary, and known a posteriori, not a priori. Even more compellingly, we can make perfect sense of a slanderous gossip according to which Gödel in fact did not devise the proofs, but stole them from a forgotten colleague of youth, a Smith, whom he then murdered. 'Gödel' does not hence pick out its contribution to what is being told in the gossip by the descriptive profile *whoever proved the*

incompleteness theorems; for then we would not find the story outrageous, but plainly incoherent.

The two developments bring with them two different, albeit related, routes to a conception of singular thoughts. They are compatible with a *prima facie* natural account, on which a singular thought is an *object-dependent* one—one which depends on an individual object for its individuation: it is about an individual object, and no thought which is not about that object could *be* that very thought. This natural characterization leaves many things open, which the proposals suggested by the two routes take some steps to closing. I'll discuss them in reverse order, starting with the one suggested by the *direct reference* route—as I will henceforth call it, distinguishing it from the Quinean *quantifying in* route.

A crucial semantic feature of thoughts is their *intension*: a function yielding their truth-value relative to different *possible worlds*, ways the world might have been. According to Kripke's (1980, 21) way of putting it, names (and the same can be said about the other singular terms mentioned) are (*de iure*) *rigid*. An expression rigidly designates *o* just in case its contribution to thoughts expressed with its help when they are evaluated for truth relative to any possible world is never anything but *o*. Ordinary 'attributive' uses of descriptions are not like that: when we evaluate for truth with respect to different possible worlds the false sentence 'the first Spaniard to win the Tour de France was born in Cuenca', we might count it as true with respect to worlds where F. M. Bahamontes—the actual first Spaniard who won the Tour de France—was born in Cuenca rather than being born in Toledo as in fact he was, but we might also count it as true with respect to worlds where the actual second Spaniard in winning the Tour, L. Ocaña, who was actually born in Cuenca, is in fact the first Spaniard to win the Tour. The person satisfying the description might differ from possibility to possibility, among those where the expressed thought obtains. It is not like this when we evaluate instead 'F. M. Bahamontes was born in Cuenca'.

Kripke contrasts the *de iure* rigidity of names with the merely *de facto* rigidity of descriptions such as 'the smallest prime', which happen to be constructed from a predicate that applies to the same entity relative to every possible world. He explains that the *de iure* variety occurs when 'the reference of a designator is *stipulated* to be a single object' (1980, 21). We should at least extend this characterization to cover other cases we will be interested in. It might not be applicable to referentially used descriptions, if the fact that an expression is used referentially is *pragmatic*, not semantic; for it is at the very least awkward to characterize as 'stipulated' meanings generated, say, as Gricean conversational implicatures. And it is certainly not applicable to the rigidity of representational devices in mental states.

I will borrow Fine's (2007, 43) distinction between facts that are semantic *as to topic* and facts that are semantic *as to status* in order to capture a broader kind of which I take Kripke's notion to be a specific subclass. Facts that are semantic *as to topic* are just those statable in semantic terms ('truth', 'designation', etc); on Fine's view, facts that are semantic *as to status* are those among them 'which belong to the semantics of a given language'. I propose to generalize Fine's notion, allowing for

‘semantic requirements’ (Fine 2007, 50) having other sources than the semantics of a given natural language—sources such as whatever accounts for pragmatic meanings, or the meaning of mental states. To the extent that this expansion can be properly philosophically elaborated, we can say that the *de iure* rigidity of names, and the other singular terms mentioned—in contrast with merely *de facto* rigidity—is then a semantic fact *as to status* concerning those expressions. And a singular thought, on the route suggested by the *direct reference* considerations, is one conveyed by a representational vehicle featuring *de iure* rigid constituents.

This proposal does not characterize singular thoughts directly, but in terms of normative properties of the *vehicles* conveying them. I will return to this; I believe it to be a crucial element of a view hospitable to empty singular representations. A different form of indirectness accrues to the *quantifying in* characterization. Here the idea is that a singular thought is one (*correctly*) ascribable by a *de re* ascription, i.e. one whose ‘logical form’ involves ‘quantifying in’, as in (7). (Quine added a second semantic criterion for *de re* ascriptions involving singular terms: they allow for the valid substitution of co-referential terms.) This way of characterizing singular thoughts is closely related to the previous one, on the usual assumption that variables are by stipulation referential devices (hence *de iure* rigid), whose semantic profile is exhausted by their designating specific individuals relative to assignments; Quine’s substitutivity criterion supports this, because substitutivity should be a valid principle for expressions signifying their referents.

We should handle with care the indirection in the second proposal, nevertheless; for, according to some views, a subject can be truly ascribed the belief that *p*, without really having a belief with the content that *p*. Hawthorne and Manley (2012, 38), however, in their excellent recent study on these issues, defend the connection between *de re* ascriptions and singular thoughts through the following principle:

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 have a singular thought.

It has become standard to invoke the metaphor of *mental files* or *dossiers*, initially introduced in Grice (1969), for the singular elements of mental states’ representational vehicles; Recanati (2013) provides a recent book-length recent discussion, whose main ideas his contribution to this volume applies to our present topic. If there is a language of thought, mental files are its singular terms. As I will understand it, talk of mental files has at most the modest ontological commitments that come with adopting a realist attitude towards folk psychology; for, as I suggest now, arguably folk psychology is committed to something occupying the main role that mental files are supposed to play.

The inference that something is both *F* and *G* from the premises that *a* is *F* and *a* is *G* is valid and non-enthymematic; the suggestion that it *is* enthymematic—i.e. there is an implicit third identity premise identifying the referent of the subjects of the other two—would launch us into a regress (cf. Heck 2012, 154–5, and Recanati 2013,

47–50, for recent discussions). The validity of the argument requires that its premises comprise the information that the two subject-terms co-refer. In formal languages like the one I have been relying on so far this is conveyed by the use of tokens of the same expression-type. In natural languages, the issue is more complex; in some cases it is the same procedure as in formal languages, in others it is conveyed by the use of a pronoun in a formal relation (*c-command*) with the other expression; in still other cases it is a sheer pragmatic matter. Be this as it may, devices for linking meaning-vehicles for the indicated semantic purpose manifestly exist in natural languages too (cf. García-Carpintero 2004). Similar devices must also exist in the case of mental states, because we do carry such valid inferences in thought. A constitutive job for mental files is that of helping to validly perform inferences in accordance to the anaphoric links just rehearsed.³ Thus, someone carrying in thought the inference just mentioned is described as including in the same file the information that the file's referent is *F* and also that it is *G*. To think in two occasions with the help of the same mental file is, by stipulation, to think from a unique perspective on an individual.⁴

The two routes to singular thoughts suggest that they are constitutively different from general descriptive thoughts, so much so that there should not be any descriptive element in their semantic individuation. On the Quinean route, the fact that Ralph thinks on the basis of general considerations that there are spies, and—assuming that there is a way of linearly ordering them by size—is in no doubt that there is a shortest one, by itself only appears to validate the ascription (5) in the *de dicto* interpretation (6). On the other route, the Kripkean arguments deploy cases in which a singular thought about *o* is conveyed, even if no descriptive conceptions associated with the name in fact apply to it; Kripke outlined a causal process triggered by a dubbing, a *communication chain*, which might underpin this.

Russell had famously distinguished two opposing forms of being epistemically related to objects, by description and by *acquaintance* (cf. the references in Robin Jeshion's chapter in this volume). His epistemological assumptions allowed only for a very narrow understanding of the latter relation, but writers following him in thinking that such an epistemic contrast grounds singular thoughts have extended it to encompass 'epistemically rewarding' (Recanati 2013, 20, 37) relations binding the thinker with the object of reference, such as causal psychological relations like perception or memory, or even testimony-based transmission of information. Thus, 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, 101n.) embraces this Russellian view, saying, 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.' Many

³ i.e. to help representing objects as-the-same, in Fine's (2007, 40, 68) sense.

⁴ Pryor (n.d.) convincingly argues that to properly fulfil this constitutive task, mental files should be understood as relational structures that he characterizes with the help of the mathematical notion of a *graph*.

other writers, including Bach, Recanati, Salmon, and Soames have defended similar views. Genoveva Martí (1995, 2007) has clearly articulated the view that a strong form of the theory of direct reference (which I will call ‘Millian’ henceforth) excludes any descriptive features in the semantic characterization of singular thoughts.

Neither of the two routes, however, in fact excludes a weaker form of the direct reference view that Martí distinguishes from the strong one (I will call it ‘Fregean’), on which singular thoughts admit a descriptive individuation component, constitutively playing somehow what Kripke (1980) termed as a *reference-fixing* role. Consider first the *quantifying in* route. On Kaplan’s (1969) account of the truth-conditions of *de re* ascriptions, the *de re* reading (7) of (5) is more fully represented as in (7’). There, ‘R’ stands for an appropriate representational relation between constituents in belief states and their semantic values, one (perhaps involving *acquaintance*) sustaining correct *de re* ascriptions. The Greek variable ‘ α ’ ranges over vehicles for singular representation in mental states, under the assumption that embedded clauses in attitude ascription characterize such vehicles:

$$(7') \exists\alpha\exists x(R(\alpha, x, \text{Ralph}) \wedge \text{Ralph believes that } \alpha \text{ is a spy}).$$

On such a view, *de re* ascriptions roughly describe singular thoughts in indefinite terms, existentially quantifying over some of its representational vehicles. This allows for the representational vehicles themselves to involve descriptive aspects.⁵

On the direct reference route, Kaplan’s (1989) posits for indexicals *character rules*, such as the one for ‘I’ that semantically associates with its uses descriptions like ‘the utterer of this case of “I”’. Discussing them right after the quotation above, Donnellan 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’ (1966, 109). His remarks are clearly in tension: genuine reference, according to the previous quotation, is not in any way *backed* by description; reference with cases of ‘I’ is genuine (this is supported by our two criteria: it is *de iure* rigid, and it validates *de re* ascriptions); reference with cases of ‘I’ is *fixed* by description. Unless we can substantiate the unexplained difference between ‘backing’ and ‘fixing’, it is difficult to find a coherent train of thought here.

There are two further indications suggesting that the direct reference route does not by itself support the Millian strong elaboration (as Martí acknowledges). First, the distinction between *deictic* uses of indexicals, whose reference is determined by means of demonstrations, and *anaphoric* uses, determined instead by means of their link to the previous discourse, 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’. We should not expect any significant difference in the nature of the thoughts expressed

⁵ An omitted complication is that typically some additional information about the vehicles witnessing α is given in *de re* ascriptions, such as that it is for a male, it is demonstrative, etc.

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.⁶ A second indirect consideration comes from referential uses of descriptions, independently of whether the phenomenon is a non-semantic, ‘merely pragmatic’ one; for once more, there the descriptive information appears to be involved in ‘fixing the referent’, in spite of its rigid behaviour.⁷

This is the main divide between theorists of singular thought, already established at the start of these debates. It concerns whether descriptive information might nonetheless figure in a full account of their semantic nature. Millian theorists appeal to some extension of Russell’s non-descriptive *acquaintance* relation to account for them; genuine reference is on their view constituted by some relation (perception, memory, testimony) non-descriptively linking subject and object of reference. Fregean theorists are typically *latitudinarians* or *liberals* who reject this, allowing for singular thoughts with a descriptive backing. Hawthorne and Manley (2012) is a book-length recent defence of the liberal view, which Sosa (1970, 1995) had promoted at an earlier stage in the debates. Liberals agree that in some cases—such as the ‘shortest spy’ example—an ascription of a singular thought might be either pragmatically misleading or plainly false. They, however, provide contextualist accounts, which they claim to be independently motivated: it is just that a *de re* ascription would suggest or entail in the ordinary context that first comes to mind that Ralph has a more interesting characterization of a spy than ‘the shortest one’. The Fregean view is *prima facie* better equipped to account for empty representations, but in the next section we will examine different proposals for Fregeans and Millians theorists to deal with the phenomenon.

In previous work, Robin Jeshion (2001, 2004) questioned acquaintance constraints on singular thought, and she (2002, 2010) developed an ‘acquaintanceless’ account of singular thoughts as an alternative view. Her previous account of singular thought was a psychological one, rejecting any epistemic requirement. Having singular thoughts was for her a matter of deploying mental files that play a *significant* role in the cognitive life of the individual. Discussing a related suggestion by Kaplan (1969), Sosa (1970, 889–90) made a forceful 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

⁶ Similarly, Jeshion (2004), Sainsbury (2005, 95–6), and Salmon (2002a, 517–8) argue for grouping together both descriptive names (names like ‘Jack the Ripper’, ‘Unabomber’ or Evans’s ‘Julius’, whose reference is determined by an associated description) and ordinary proper names into a single semantic category or linguistic kind.

⁷ Following Martí (2008), Recanati (2010, 163) argues that referential uses are devices of genuine reference because the descriptive material does not play any role in determining the referent. I think we should follow Sosa (1995) in denying that the descriptive material is irrelevant: it at the very least points to a descriptive conception on which the former epistemically depend, which does fix the referent. On the presuppositional account of reference-fixing I defend, these cases would be accounted for as cases of *accommodation*.

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 her piece in this volume, Jeshion abandons the Russellian thesis that thoughts about particulars are either genuinely singular or descriptive, this being a mutually exclusive and exhaustive divide. She challenges the neo-Russellian thinkers to explain why we can have, as on their view we do, singular thoughts about entities with which we are only partially acquainted, by being causally related to some of their features, or to other entities causally related to them, or through testimony. (Russell himself famously excluded such possibility.) As she also points out, we seem to have singular thoughts in cases in which not even such weak connections exist; but the most forceful problem for the neo-Russellian she raises is an explanatory one: how exactly does a causal connection of the envisaged kind suffice to put thinkers in position to think singular thoughts about the objects? Jeshion does not reject the distinction between singular and general thoughts, but she concludes that the former category should not be taken to foreclose descriptive features.

Jeshion’s chapter discusses issues concerning singular thoughts that arise in relation to the direct reference considerations; Cian Dorr’s develops points related to the Quinean route. In a previous paper, Dorr (2011) provided an elaborated argument that a priori knowledge of contingent *de re* propositions is a common phenomenon. He relied for that on the contention that, in many contexts, claims with the structure of this are true: it is necessary that, whenever one believes that the first Spaniard who won the Tour de France was born in Toledo, and some person x is the unique Spaniard to first win the Tour de France, one believes that x was born in Toledo. He calls occurrences of descriptions in attitude ascriptions for which a claim like the one just provided for illustration is true ‘exportable’ for the relevant attitude, belief in our example. On the characterization of singular contents ensuing from the *quantifying in* route, such ascriptions are therefore *de re*, and the ascribed attitudes have singular contents. This upshot is of course agreeable to liberal views.

In his contribution, Dorr defends a related claim for proper names, what he calls *Transparency*: the claim that, if x is N , then one believes (or has another attitude) that $\varphi(x)$ iff one believes that $\varphi(N)$. Attitude ascriptions made by means of names are hence *de re*,⁸ and the ascribed attitudes singular given the characterization offered in the *quantifying in* route. In reply to standard objections to this proposal, Dorr elaborates in detail and defends the claim (essential to liberal views) that belief ascriptions are context-sensitive, discussing with much subtlety how such context-dependence should be understood, by contrasting *uniform* and *non-uniform* interpretations of sentences including context-dependent expressions. Belief reports such as (1), of course, create an additional problem for *Transparency*; I will indicate after discussing the next chapter in this collection what appears to be Dorr’s line here.

⁸ Even though also *de dicto*, on the characterization of this notion offered. This is in agreement with Kripke’s (1979) usage, but not with everybody’s

The remaining paper in the initial section on foundational matters, by Peter Pagin, discusses what Geach (1967) called *intentional identity*, a phenomenon at the heart of our present worries which also continues to be a hot topic of research (Braun (2012), Cumming (2013), and Glick (2012) are additional recent discussions). Geach was interested in attitudes correctly ascribed with (8), on a particular reading that would be best captured by (9) if we might disown the ontological commitment associated with ‘ \exists ’ since Quine:

- (8) Hob believes a witch has blighted Bob’s mare, and Nob believes that she (the same witch) killed Cob’s sow.
- (9) $\exists\alpha (W(\alpha) \wedge \text{Hob believes that } B(\alpha, b) \wedge \text{Nob believes that } K(\alpha, c))$.
- (10) $\exists\alpha (\text{Hob believes that } W(\alpha) \wedge B(\alpha, b) \wedge \text{Nob believes that } K(\alpha, c))$.

The interpretation that Geach pointed out is one on which (8) would be true in a world without witches, in which Hob and Nob are nonetheless thinking of the same witch, even though they have not heard of each other’s beliefs. The following scenario—taken from Glick (2012, 387), cf. also Edelberg (1986, 2)—provides an intuitive basis: Hob and Nob live on opposite sides of town, and their social circles do not overlap at all; they have never heard of or encountered each other at all. But Hob and Nob have independently read and been persuaded by the local newspaper’s claim that ‘Samantha, a witch, has been terrorizing the town.’ Each thinks he has discovered the cause of local livestock trouble, though the newspaper story was actually a complete fabrication.

Throughout the years, several writers have expressed scepticism about this reading (see Braun (2012) for a recent expression, and references in Pagin’s chapter), but this seems ill-founded: if it is an actually existent corrupt politician instead of a witch what the newspaper report about, regarding whom Hob and Nob construct their independent beliefs (say, that he bribed Bob’s son and that he wooed Cob’s daughter), we do not have any problem in accepting the *de re* reading formalized by either (9) or (10).⁹

Both in empty and non-empty cases, what seems to ground the relevant reading of the reports is that the mental files in both subjects’ attitudes would be about the same individual, were it to exist. Elaborating on Kripke’s notion of a *communication chain* by means of which he provided a non-descriptivist outline of an account of reference-fixing, Burge (1983, 91–8) develops a notion of ‘quasi-anaphoric links’, and justifies the Geachian intuitions in terms of it. Intrasubjectively, the relations between referential vehicles that mental files are intended to capture constitute such

⁹ Braun (2012, 171–4) assumes that the elucidation in terms of (9) is ontologically committal to witches, and uses the structural similitude with *de re* readings having actual witnesses to “explain” why those of us who have the intuition that (8) is true under Geach’s interpretation are confused. This is peculiar. Our intuition about successful cases are perfectly reliable data for semantic theorizing. Undistinguishable intuitions about referent-absent cases are instead confusions engendered by the similitude with the former, because Braun assumes that such readings are ontologically committal to witches. Better to accept the intuitions in all cases, and seek for an account on which (9)/(10) are not so committal.

links. Intersubjectively, as in Kripke's picture, they are constituted by intentions to use referential devices in accordance with the meaning that corresponding expressions have in the usage of the interlocutors on whom one relies. Unlike in Kripke's story, the links might involve referential expressions other than proper names; and they can ultimately depend on an unsuccessful act of reference (hence the 'quasi', I guess).

Like Burge's, most recent discussions dismiss scepticism, and attempt to develop the idea that (9) or (10) provide a good regimentation of the relevant truth-conditions, understood in such a way that it does not commit us to the actual existence of witches. Most recent proposals are consistent with Burge's appeal to quasi-anaphoric links, in fact providing elaborations of it. Some adopt variants of what Edelberg (2006) calls *realism*: Edelberg (1986) and Cumming (2013) give accounts in terms of an ontology of 'thought-objects', analogous to Fregean senses, which might or might not determine actual referents; Salmon (2002b) posits equally actually existing abstract objects; Glick (2012) and Pagin give modal accounts, taking the quantifier to range over possible objects including non-actual ones. Other recent approaches such as Priest's (2005) and Azzouni's (2010) question instead that quantifiers have the standardly assumed ontological commitments; the first footnote in Dorr's contribution suggests that he might adopt a form of this view to deal with the problem for *Transparency* already mentioned.

In addition to presenting a nicely elaborated version of a modal account of the Geachian intuitions, Pagin's chapter includes an argument manifesting that his view substantially differs from Burge's. The argument purports to show that, putting aside determinism, what he calls *internalism* is incompatible with intersubjective intentional identity—internalism being the view that, in the intrasubjective case, mental anaphora prevails in determining what the referential vehicle is about: if a referential vehicle deployed at a time is anaphoric on one deployed at an earlier time, they are about the same entity, no matter how much the beliefs about that entity have changed in between. Burge's account assumes this, but Pagin rejects it, in favour of the opposite view that he calls *externalism*.

3. Accounts of Empty Representations

In allowing for descriptive features constitutive of singular thoughts, what we are calling Fregean views *prima facie* appear to have adequate resources to account for empty thoughts. However, such proposals should first deal with the Kripkean criticisms, and then show how empty thoughts are to be explained in whatever framework they build up to that end. Millian views, on the other hand, face the more direct challenge from the impressions that representations including empty terms are meaningful and have truth-values. Glüer and Pagin's contribution includes a good summary of previous moves in each of these frameworks with references to recent work, so I will limit myself here to describe the proposals in the five chapters in this section, which are new, original suggestions in this familiar dialectics. Glüer and

Pagin's and Kroon's chapters develop in new directions Fregean proposals; Recanati's and Taylor's elaborate on previous Millian suggestions; Dickie's advances a new idea which cannot be easily catalogued with our two labels.

Over the years, some Fregean strategies have stuck to the 'famous deeds' description we easily associate with proper names, capturing familiar purportedly individuating data about the intended referent (as in the Gödel example), while others ('causal descriptivists') follow Lewis (1983) in turning the sort of characterization that Millians provide for how singular content is established into a descriptive meaning-constituting account. Kathrin Glüer & Peter Pagin's view belongs in the first group, Kroon's in the second.

To deal with the rigidity intuitions, Fregeans have pursued different ideas: to take the descriptions to be rigidified by operators such as 'actual', or to take them to have wider scope than modal operators. In previous work (cf. references in their chapter), Glüer and Pagin have developed a *switcher semantics*, which has affinities with the second option. Their idea is to assign to singular terms two different intensions, a standard 'possibilist' one that picks out in each world the unique satisfier of the associated descriptive information, if any, and an 'actualist' one that gets it always from the actual world; modal operators are then taken to *switch* the evaluation from the standard possibilist intension to the actualist one.

In their chapter here, and after presenting a hypothesis that systematizes the different sort of intuitions concerning empty names that require explanation, Glüer and Pagin extend switcher semantics so as to account for them. The key idea to get 'Vulcan exists' to be false and its negation true is to posit a hidden operator that switches the evaluation of the singular term to yet a third, 'proxy' intension, on which the term receives as value at a world its referent at the closest world where the standard intension assigns one to it. The suggestion is then that when speakers hold intuitions according to which sentences including empty singular terms have determinate truth-values, this is because they take them to refer to perhaps merely possible individuals, inhabiting accessible worlds where they do pick out referents.¹⁰ The proposal is analogous to what one would expect from an account in *two-dimensional semantics* (García-Carpintero and Macià 2006). However, as Glüer and Pagin note, no proposal in that framework has been presented so far with the level of detail they provide.¹¹

Frederick Kroon has been one of the main defenders of the *causal descriptivist* approach offered by Lewis (1983). On this approach, the description constitutively associated with a use of a name *N* will be something like *whatever is picked by the naming practice associated with this very use of N*. In his contribution, he identifies

¹⁰ Pagin's summarized account of intentional identity is in sync with this proposal.

¹¹ Stalnaker's (1978, 92–5) short indications are no counterexample, of course. My own sympathies, by the way, would go in the direction of such a 2-D account, although in my view the two-dimensional framework is not fundamental, but derivative from an account on which descriptive senses play a presuppositional role (cf. García-Carpintero 2000, 2006; and Maier (2009) and Hunter (2012) for recent developments of similar ideas).

what he takes to be the two main problems for Fregean approaches. The *identification* problem raised by Kripke is that we can conceive of situations in which the descriptions do not select the referent of the name. This is a serious problem for the ‘famous deeds’ brand of descriptivism. The causal descriptivist approach is designed to avoid it: in the slanderous Gödel gossip scenario, the object of the gossip does satisfy a description of the suggested form, even though not the ‘famous deeds’ ascribed to Gödel. The *variation* problem lies in that there might be considerable variation in the descriptions that different thinkers relate to a given term. This obviously affects causal descriptivists, and with a vengeance, because the descriptions they provide typically mention particular causal histories, and this feature will differ from use to use.

Given that Kroon thinks (for reasons he helpfully summarizes) that causal-descriptivist proposals are in the best position to account for empty singular terms, here he endeavours to deal with the variation problem, for which he proposes to appeal to *Content Relativism*. This is a proposal made by different writers, according to which some, most, or typical assertions of a sentence do not just *say*, or literally assert, a single content, but a plurality thereof. The solution to the variation problem that Kroon envisages acknowledges first that utterances including names (empty or not) literally express and communicate strictly speaking different contents to different recipients. In each of them, the referents, if any, are determined relative to descriptions that identify naming practices in different terms. This is compatible, Kroon argues, with there being some ways on which different utterances of a given sentence (or just one, relative to different interpreters) can be said to share a single content.

I move now to the proposals in the Millian camp. Neither Recanati nor Taylor embraces one of the two most popular solutions on this approach to the problem posed by empty terms. In his finally published John Locke lectures, Kripke (2013) suggested that fictional names such as ‘Don Quixote’ in fact do refer in at least some of their uses—as, for instance, when we straightforwardly assert ‘Don Quixote is a deservedly famous fictional character’. In such cases, the names do not refer to a person, but to an abstract entity whose existence is somehow dependent on the (equally abstract) content of the fiction initially deploying the name. The Millian suggestion is to extend this view to cover most other intuitively intelligible uses of apparently empty names; cf. Salmon (1998, 2002b). We will come back to proposals of this sort. The other popular Millian line is to appeal to ‘pragmatics’—I use scare quotes here because writers like Recanati and Taylor have a complex view on the relation between semantics and pragmatics; I refer the reader to their chapters. The suggestion will be that, even though in a strict semantic sense utterances including empty terms such as (1)–(4) include an expression devoid of content, and are thereby devoid of content, their users manage to convey alternative propositions. Recanati and Taylor provide new, sophisticated versions of this sort of view.

In previous work, François Recanati adopted an acquaintance account of singular thought. The first part of his chapter outlines some nuances he has introduced in

his most recent contributions, such as his already mentioned book on mental files. An important element is his distinction between conditions for a thought-*vehicle* to be singular, and those for a thought-*content* to be so. The former involve only normative or functional requirements compatible with their being empty, while the latter include a (very liberal) form of acquaintance.¹² Be this as it may, the core of Recanati's contribution is an account of the content of utterances such as (1)–(4), which he takes to be compatible with such views. He invokes the mental files framework, and he appeals to a metarepresentational function that, he claims, mental files have, in addition to allow their owners to think of particular objects: some files ('indexed files') can be used to represent how *other subjects think* about objects, instead of being used to straightforwardly think about objects. The proposal has obvious connections with Frege's reference-shifting account of indirect discourse: understanding 'Vulcan' in (1) does not involve to deploy one's mental file for the intended planet, but to deploy an indexed file *for a file of Leverrier's*.

Ken Taylor's contribution is addressed at explaining how utterances of (1)–(4), in spite of failing to express a determinate proposition, can nonetheless have a cognitive significance and can be 'correctly assertable'. In order to do that, he introduces three pairs of distinctions. He first distinguishes between *objective* and merely *objectual* representations. This is a similar distinction to the one of Recanati's between conditions for a thought-*content* to be singular, and conditions for a thought-*vehicle* to be so. Roughly, acquaintance is only a requirement for the first members in those pairs: a thought-vehicle might be singular (and a representation *objectual*) without succeeding in picking out any object, thereby without being *objective*, or singular *as to its content*. Secondly, Taylor distinguishes *veridical* from *non-veridical* language-games; roughly, those that presuppose objective representations, like assertion, from those that do not, like fiction-making. Empty names can be used in both cases, as (1)–(4) illustrate; Taylor provides a pragmatic account of his own devising of their use in such veridical language-games (on which alternative contents are conveyed), and a sophisticated pretence-theoretic account of their use in non-veridical language-games, which according to him include pure mathematics. Finally Taylor distinguishes *truth* from *truth-similitude*; the latter is the sort of correctness that substitutes for truth in non-veridical language-games, governed by proprietary constraints of its own, which Taylor outlines.

On Imogen Dickie's approach to our issues, a main problem that empty representations pose lies in that beliefs expressed by using them can be as much epistemically justified as their non-empty companions. There are good reasons why for a belief to be justified appears to require that it have truth-conditional content. On assumptions that she labels as 'classical', this leads, according to her, to an unwelcome dilemma: either there are truth-conditions in cases involving empty representations,

¹² The reader will have to evaluate to what extent Jeshion's criticism, in her own contribution that the liberalizations Recanati has thereby introduced make it difficult to usefully classify it together with traditional forms of the Millian view.

but they are descriptive and the thought thereby not truly singular; or the singularity of the thought is understood under the strictures of traditional acquaintance theories, and hence there are no truth-conditions and thereby no proper justification. So she suggests rejecting the crucial classical assumption in question.

This is, on her novel proposal, the assumption that the sort of relation with particulars that is required for singular thought is *theoretically oriented*, as opposed to *practically* oriented. Classical or theoretically oriented acquaintance is one on which thoughts are guided by a ‘template’ that the thought-object is supposed to fit; practical acquaintance is guided instead by a goal or plan that needs not specify in any detail an object at the time when it is devised. The crucial difference between the two forms lies in that, according to her, when the relation fails to pick out a referent, and hence there is no truth-conditional content, the belief can still be justified in the practical case. The core of her chapter is devoted to fleshing out this intriguing proposal, for the case of a specific subclass of demonstrative thoughts: those guided by representational needs of the organism served by attentional mechanisms. This is a proposal that opens new avenues for research, among other things to explore how it can be extended to singular thoughts expressed by means of proper names or other uses of demonstratives.

4. Existence and Non-Existence

The issue of how to understand the predicate ‘exist’ is inextricably linked to issues about empty representations, most directly through the question of what account we should provide of apparently true negative existentials such as (4). The most popular account throughout the years in analytic philosophy is not so fashionable any more: this was Frege’s and Russell’s Kantian contention that ‘exist’ is not a first-order predicate of individuals, nor *existence* a first-order property instantiated by individuals; the predicate rather indicates a second-order property, the existential quantifier: a property of first-order properties, ascribing to them the having of instances. Nathan Salmon’s contribution clearly articulates the reasons why this view is not so popular any more.

In the first place, in the case of Russell, the view was intended to provide an account of negative existentials together with the contention that names such as ‘Vulcan’ or ‘Don Quixote’ are just synonymous with definite descriptions—a view that most philosophers nowadays reject on account of the considerations rehearsed in the second section. Frege provided instead a metalinguistic account of negative existentials, which, as Salmon points out, seems problematic for reasons Frege himself presented against similarly metalinguistic accounts of identity claims. Salmon considers a structurally similar metarepresentational view, on which the lack of reference is not predicated of the name, but of the associated Fregean sense,¹³ which

¹³ An account of this form is suggested, but not elaborated, by Recanati in his contribution below, with mental files taking the place of Fregean senses.

he considers superior but rejects anyway. Secondly, as Evans (1982, 10.1) also notices, it is very simple to define a first-order property of objects for ‘existence’ by means of the existential quantifier, identity, and lambda-abstraction:

$$(11) E(x) \equiv_{df} \lambda x \exists y (x = y)$$

This is a property that does not discriminate among the objects in the domain; but it is handy, for instance, to express tensed denials of existence (‘Socrates existed, but he does not exist any more’) or contingency claims (‘Kripke exists, but he might not have’).

The definition of the existence predicate by means of the existential quantifier cannot by itself account for intuitions about negative existentials such as (4). Perhaps the most straightforward account is a Meinongian one, on which there are objects (such as Vulcan or Don Quixote) that do not exist; but this requires separating existential commitment from the so-called existential quantifier, and in addition making sense of such weird non-existent objects (cf. Priest 2005 for a recent sympathetic account).

On behalf of Meinongian views it should be said, however, that to the non-enthusiast the differences between such views and some allegedly non-Meinongian ones are rather difficult to fathom. Thus, for instance, Priest takes his Meinongian objects to be *possibilia*; an alternative modal realist treatment (such as the one adopted by Pagin in his contribution, to deal with Geachian intentional identity) would take ‘Vulcan’ to denote an existing *possibile*, and would then account for the truth of negative existentials by restricting true predications to the domain of the actual world (as Glüer and Pagin propose in their contribution). Other Meinongians have taken their objects to be the very *abstracta* that, following Kripke (2013), many other contemporary researchers including Salmon take to be straightforward existents. These realist writers could then account for the truth of negative existentials by interpreting them as denying that the objects are *concrete*, say (cf. the outline of von Solodkoff’s chapter); or they can instead just explain away the intuition that they are true in the way Salmon suggests in his contribution.

The debates about the proper interpretation of negative existentials that are thus rehearsed in several of the chapters included in this compilation assume that properly dealing with them requires hard philosophical work. In his contribution, Greg Ray contends that this assumption manifests the extent to which a readily available much easier account is systematically overlooked. He suggests that entirely standard assumptions about the shape of a truth-theoretical semantics inadvertently suffice to solve the problem. Moreover, to adopt the solution it is not necessary to embrace truth-conditional semantics in Davidsonian purity; it is enough to accept that it helps with part of the semantic task. Ray’s point is that, framed in the way he suggests, a truth-conditional theory allows us to prove that, although ‘Vulcan does not exist’ is not fully meaningful, it is true, by canonically proving the following truth-condition and establishing its right-hand-side:

- (12) ‘Vulcan does not exist’ is true iff it is not the case that the referent of ‘Vulcan’ exists.

This is supposed to account for the most straightforward intuitions that, according to Ray, we have about negative existentials. The reader will have to appraise whether, even if Ray shows one way in which it is not mysterious how true negative existentials are possible, the kind of hard work previously described still serves some important philosophical purpose.

5. Fiction

Discourse related to fictions provides the perhaps most indulged occasion for philosophers to confront problems posed by empty representations. In fact, we should distinguish three types of such discourse, which pose their own specific problems. Consider these sentences:

- (13) Mr. Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls.
 (14) According to *Ulysses*, Mr. Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls.
 (15) Leopold Bloom is a fictional character.

Take first an utterance of (13) by Joyce, as part of the longer utterance by him of the full discourse that, with a measure of idealization, we can think constitutes the creation of *Ulysses* by him. It is distinctive of such uses, which following Bonomi (2008) I will be calling *textual*, that they are not intuitively truth-evaluable. The other two uses differ in that they appear to be truth-evaluable. There is, first, the use of sentences such as (13) that we make when we are stating the content of a fiction. I will call these content-reporting uses *paratextual*; according to Lewis (1978) and many other philosophers, they are simply elliptic for intuitively equivalent ascriptions of propositional content such as (14). Finally, I will call such uses of sentences as (15) *metatextual*; they are similarly intuitively truth-evaluable but not directly content-reporting, in that they are not (or at least not obviously) equivalent to propositional content ascriptions like (14).

As I have already indicated, Kripke (2013) argued that a proper account of metatextual uses requires interpreting names such as ‘Leopold Bloom’ in them as referring to fictional entities. The most influential fully developed argument for such realism about fictional entities is van Inwagen’s (1977) Quinean appeal to non-eliminable quantification over, and reference to, such entities in *prima facie* serious, truth-evaluable discourse, such as utterances of (15) and related metatextual uses in contexts of literary criticism. Such *ficta* could then be taken to be Meinongian non-existent entities, concrete non-actual *possibilia*, or (as both Kripke and van Inwagen prefer) abstract existent entities of various sorts, fully fledged Platonic *abstracta*, or rather created artefacts, as in Salmon (1998), Thomasson (1999), and Schiffer (2003). Fictional entities of any of these sorts could also be invoked to account for any of the

other two uses, textual and paratextual, but this requires extra work; for none of those entities can be straightforwardly taken to be the sort of thing capable of eating birds' inner organs. Voltolini (2006) provides a helpful recent exploration of the alternatives

The intuitively obviousness of negative existentials involving fictional names counts against non-Meinongian realist views, a point that Everett (2007) forcefully presses. Everett (2005) provides interesting elaboration on equally well-known indeterminacy concerns about fictional realism, echoing Quine's (1948, 23) indictment of 'the possible fat man in that doorway; and, again, the possible bald man in that doorway. Are they the same possible man, or two possible men? How do we decide? How many possible men are there in that doorway? Are there more possible thin ones than fat ones? How many of them are alike?'

Focusing on metatextual uses leads one naturally to think of the referential expressions in (13)–(15) as in fact referring to some entities, and hence to some form of realism. Focusing instead on textual uses leads to an altogether different, anti-realist picture. When the creator of a fiction uses declarative sentences such as (13) (as, indeed, when she uses sentences of other types, interrogatives, imperatives, etc.), we do not feel tempted to think of her as really performing the speech acts one typically performs with them in default contexts. In such cases, the sentences are used in some form of *pretence*, the way we take the acts that actors perform on stage: they do not need to be drinking whisky, they merely pretend to do so.

Now, if the apparent assertions are merely pretend, perhaps we could say the same of the apparent acts of reference; and in this way perhaps an avenue is opened to account for such uses without the need to posit actual referents for fictional singular terms. Walton (1990) has provided a very elaborated and deservedly influential account of textual uses along such lines, which he then extends to deal with both paratextual and metatextual uses. (As before with the realist picture, the extension is not so straightforward, for there does not appear to be any pretence in assertions of (15). Perhaps a better option would be to combine fictional realism for the latter with a pretence-theoretic account of authors' uses of sentences like (13), but, in addition to the involved profligacy, (14) occupies a problematic middle ground for this ecumenical rapprochement.) Needless to say, no philosophical account is free from objections, and I myself have argued in previous work (2010, 286–7) that, when combined with a Millian view of singular reference as in Walton's work, the account fails.

The four chapters in this section tackle different issues in the just outlined debates, from the two opposing perspectives. In previous work, Sainsbury and Friend have argued for anti-realist approaches to fiction; here Sainsbury critically engages one of the most popular frameworks supplying materials to some of the realist views, the possible worlds accounts, while Friend aims at tackling without realist commitments a problem that appears to be more manageable with them. Wright's contribution is complementary to Sainsbury's, critically examining the prospects of the form of realism that appeals to *possibilia*. Finally, approaching matters from a contrasting

realist perspective, von Solodkoff's contribution confronts the problem posed by negative existentials.

In previous work, Mark Sainsbury (2005, 2009) has offered a general account of the meaningfulness of utterances including names without referents, and a specific account of fictional utterances (of our three types) that does not need to ascribe referents of any sort, existent or non-existent, to fictional singular terms. In his contribution, he critically examines accounts of fictional utterances in terms of possible worlds, influentially introduced by Lewis (1978). They are a natural basis for the form of realism about fictional characters that takes them to be among their inhabitants, even though both non-realists and realists of different persuasions are sympathetic to such accounts. Sainsbury notes first the plurality of fiction operators, with *prima facie* different semantic properties; for instance, 'in the fiction' differs from 'according to the fiction', in that we can truly say 'in *War and Peace*, Leopold Bloom is a fictional character' but not, 'according to *War and Peace*, Leopold Bloom is a fictional character'. Hence, not all of them can be given the same account in terms of possible worlds. Additionally, Sainsbury points out difficulties for any account of them in such terms. Some have to do with the involvement of facts about the actual world in the determination of the content of fictions. Additionally, Sainsbury argues that establishing which worlds constitute the content of a fiction requires in its turn establishing such content, which would give rise to a vicious circularity.

Briggs Wright's contribution examines the indeterminacy problem that Quine's quotation sets up for realist accounts of fictional names that take them to refer to *possibilia*, as perspicuously set up by Kripke. He makes clear the close analogy between Kripke's objection and Unger's well-known 'problem of the many' for reference to entities such as clouds or mountains. This leads Wright to wonder whether any of the most promising proposals to deal with Unger's problem could be adapted to the case of *ficta* conceived as *possibilia*. His examination is negative, thus reinforcing Kripke's conclusion and making stronger the challenge it poses for accounts such as the one offered by Glüer's and Pagin's in this volume, and Pagin's related *externalist* account of Geachian intentional identity.

In her chapter, Stacie Friend pursues further a topic she had already discussed in previous work. She points out that we have intuitions of 'co-identification' about, say, a debate confronting Nabokov, who claims about the main character in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* that, when he wakes up, Gregor Samsa has been changed into a beetle, with other critics, who had claimed instead that Samsa is changed into a cockroach. As she points out, Nabokov naturally 'takes himself to identify the same character that Kafka invented and that his opponents misconstrue'. The connection between Friend's worry and Geach's problem of intentional identity Friend's impressions of co-identification correspond to Geach's (1967, 147) attitudes 'with a common focus, whether or not there is something at that focus'. In fact, we can easily present Friend's case with a claim corresponding to Geach's (8), on the assumption that it should have a form such as (9) or (10):

- (16) Another critic thinks Samsa/a Kafka's character has been changed into a cockroach, but Nabokov believes he/the same character has been turned into a beetle.

Friend's main task is to provide an account of the phenomenon compatible with the anti-realism about fictional characters she has espoused in previous work. To that end, she focuses on accounts that appeal to the 'quasi-anaphoric' links that figure in Burge's account of intentional identity. She argues for 'info-centric' accounts of such links, linking mental files, in contrast to 'name-centric' approaches linking uses of names.

Finally, in her contribution, and after summarizing what she takes to be the merits of the form of fictional realism that posits existent abstract entities as referents for fictional names held by writers like Kripke, van Inwagen, or Salmon, Tatjana von Solodkoff confronts what she takes to be the crucial challenge for such a view. This is the problem (as noted and, emphasized by Everett 2007) of accounting for the intuition that corresponding negative existentials such as 'Leopold Bloom does not exist' are true (when, given this form of realism, taken literally they are false). In response, she advances a sophisticated form of the response according to which we take them to mean variants of such claims as: there is no concrete x such that x is Leopold Bloom.

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