The argument we will present goes along the following lines:

(i) There is a principled distinction, may be just for useful purposes, between context of interpretation and circumstance of evaluation.

(ii) Belief operators are circumstance-shifting operators. Context-shifting operators are used to explain cases of fiction and deference.

(iii) Conclusion: The distinction between relational and notional belief reports, if there is a distinction to be made, cannot be stated in Quine’s terms.

This paper is not at all devoted to the defense of (i), (ii), or (iii). I conceive the possibility of an enraged reaction against (i), (ii) or (iii), though these are, in my opinion, reasonable philosophical theses well known in the literature; but a violent response to these points would be harmless for the purpose of the paper. Our intention is not to show that they are true or even plausible, but just to argue that if you buy (i) and (ii) then you’re necessarily taking home (iii) with you.
The process will take a negative form: it will be sustained that the only way to make (iii) false is to renounce to (ii), or to (i) and (ii). It could be argued that if you drop (ii) then there is no way of having a principled (i), that once you reject that doxastic attitudes correspond to changes of circumstance and deference and fiction examples are cases of context-shifting, then you may not have a principled distinction between circumstance of evaluation and context of interpretation, but we are not interested in taking this stance here.

1  Gee! The Mont Blanc is inside my head!

Mental phenomena are characterized, according to Brentano, by the *intentional inexistence* of a certain object; whatever it is that is believed, desired, wished, wanted, etc. they do not possess *existence* in any proper sense. This is a classic solution to an important philosophical problem, the problem concerning our epistemic relation with the external world. Brentano was convinced, at least at some point, that we could entertain as objects of thought, *intentio*, individuals we could in no possibly sense touch, see, and so on, in normal circumstances for healthy human beings. It is not only the traditional suspicion about the fidelity of our senses what motivates intentional inexistence, but, more relevantly, the reasonable intuition that whenever a human factor is involved, deception is possible. It is not necessary to suppose that there is an evil genius desperately willing to deceive us, we only need to concede that there is a chance of being wrong each time we deal with human matters. *Intentionality*, the phenomenon by which mental states are always directed to or about an object – an intentionally inexistent object –, is the *mark* of the mental.

Chisholm and Quine’s main contribution to this topic is the *linguistic view of intentionality* (Chisholm 1955; Quine 1943). They presented three necessary features of *intentional contexts*, which apparently were to discriminate mental discourse from merely physical discourse. In intentional discourse certain widespread rules of our use of natural language seem to be under suspicion:

1) A simple sentence $S$ is said to be intentional if it contains a substantive $a$ in such a way that neither neither the proposition expressed by a normal utterance of $S$ nor $\neg S$ implies the existence of the object designated by the $a$. 
2) A matrix sentence $S$ is intentional if neither the proposition expressed by a normal utterance of $S$ nor $\neg S$ implies the truth or falsehood of its embedded content sentence.

3) A sentence $S$ is intentional if it contains an expression $e$ such that, for every expression $y$ co-designative with $e$, a replacement of $e$ for $y$ in $S$ may result in a change of the truth-value of $S$. (Chisholm 1956, 126-128).

Quine transformed a little bit this idea of intentionality, but still under the same spirit. A purely designative occurrence of an expression is characterized by the following criteria:

a) Exportation. A purely designative expression under the scope of a certain operator can be existentially quantified, with the existential quantifier taking wide scope.

b) Compositionality. The meaning of a complex expression containing no non-purely designative expressions is only a function of the meaning of its parts.

c) Substitutivity. A purely designative expression can be intersubstituted by another expression with the same designation salva veritate. (Quine 1943, 114, 116, 122).

Quine wanted to exclude contexts involving non-purely designative positions from the realm of logic. Wherever the mark of the mental is present, is psychology what we should appeal to, instead of logic. Alethic and epistemic modalities produce, among others, contexts hospitable for non-purely designative occurrences of several kinds of expressions. It is also important to notice that, according to Quine, the three criteria go hand in hand, an expression that cannot be substituted by another with the same designation cannot be exported either, and the other way around.

Thus, once you admit that there are certain occurrences of natural language expressions that allow for such peculiar uses, the disjunctive seems to be this: either you drop the idea that proper names are purely designative expressions, *alla* Frege, or you follow Quine and leave the house of logic to enter the realms of psychology.

To my knowledge, there is nobody—at least nobody beyond the walls of a psychiatric institution— who has ever opposed Chisholm’s claim that there are certain linguistic expressions that function some-
times as he says they do. Admitting to be trapped in a disjunction as the one mentioned above is a completely different matter. Indeed, there is a whole semantic tradition, maybe inspired by Russell’s logically proper names, who has tried to fight the assumption that those common features of our linguistic practices were to lead necessarily either to semantic dualism or to the consult of a psychology companion. These philosophers stick to the assumption that proper names are directly referential linguistic tools, i.e., that the only contribution of a proper name to the proposition expressed by the utterance of the sentence in which the name is embedded is its reference. So there is nothing like an entity that we grasp which is semantically relevant apart from the object itself that the word denotes. When we use the word “Mont Blanc” or think about the mountain, it is the very mountain that plays a semantic part in the proposition that individuates the content of our thought or utterance, in spite of all its snowfields.

Alethic modalities were recovered for the realm of logic, pace Quine (vid. Quine 1943), by Smullyan’s proposal concerning definite descriptions (Smullyan 1948) and Barcan Marcus’ hypothesis about the direct reference of proper names (Marcus 1993, 11, 37, 226), but the problem persisted for epistemic modalities. Utterances of sentences like ‘Lois Lanen believes that Superman can fly’ may provide cases in which a genuine singular term can be neither exported nor substituted salva veritate. Quine stressed the difference between a relational and a notional reading of expressions like belief reports. Relational belief reports do not contain non-purely designative positions, while notional belief reports do. Certain positions in notional belief reports were occupied by expressions that, embedded in that context, could not be either substituted by any co-designative expression or exported. Guided by his firm convictions about the objectual commitment involved in the use of quantifiers, Quine thought that the difference between the relational and the notional readings could be neatly expressed as a case of ambiguity of scope.

Relational belief reports: \((\exists x) \ [\text{Lois Lane believes that}] \ x \ \text{can fly}\)

Notional belief reports: \[\text{Lois Lane believes that} \ (\exists x) \ x \ \text{can fly}\]

Quine was convinced that this formal approach to the dichotomy was the most appropriate one (Quine 1956), even though he did not want to admit that the verb ‘believe’ was ambiguous. He explicitly rejects semantic dualism (Quine 1969, 151) and so, unable to find a better
solution, he ended up in despair with these contexts (Quine 1981, 113-123).

Recanati, one of the most important direct referentialists, defends that Quine’s desperation was due to a mistake of equivocation. There are some beliefs, *de re beliefs*, for which the presence of the object is necessary. *Exportation* is the key to discriminate *de re, relational, belief reports* from *de dicto, notional, belief reports*. On the other hand, the distinction between transparent and opaque belief reports is not determined by exportation but by failures of substitutivity (Recanati 2000, 121-136). Exportation is possible in cases like the normal utterance of ‘Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly’, although the substitution of the singular term ‘Superman’ by the co-designative singular term ‘Clark Kent’ may alter the truth value of the global proposition. Brian Loar insisted on the same idea, that even in opaque cases, reference was made to some particular individual (Loar 1972). Many examples can be found in which exportation but not substitutivity applies. Some of them could be:

(a) Ralph believes that a certain cabinet member is a spy. (Loar)

(a’) Ralph believes that Johnster is a spy.

(b) It is not Clark Kent, it is Superman that Lois Lane believes to be able to fly. (Philippe de Brabanter & Neftalí Villanueva)

(b’) It is not Superman, it is Clark Kent that Lois Lane believes to be able to fly.

(b’’) It is not Superman, it is Superman that Lois Lane believes to be able to fly.

In (a) it is clear that the subject of the embedded clause can be exported, though it cannot be substituted by any co-designative singular term. We are not allowed to infer from a), for example, cases like (a’), for it is possible for Ralph to believe that there is one member of the cabinet who is a spy without having any particular suspect. Still, this belief is made patently *singular* by the use of the expression ‘a certain’. (b) is even clearer, because in this example we do not have to show that the subject may be exported, it has *already* been exported. The subject of the old subordinate clause is in the first position, outside the scope of the intensional operator. In (b) substitution is obviously blocked, for it may result in a false or a contradictory proposition.
Therefore, exportation and substitutivity should be considered as extensionally different criteria. Exportation marks, for Recanati, *relational* cases, against *notional* ones, while substitutivity determines whether an attribution is *transparent* or *opaque*. De re belief reports, those reports characterized by the necessary existence of the subject of the subordinate clause, are discriminated through the use of exportation. It appears, then, that Quine’s original criterion from 1956 is going to pay a very interesting philosophical rent, even if not the whole budget for our perplexities when confronted with propositional attitude reports. Exportation is not a *solution* for our problems, since it does not provide a regular explanation for cases in which we think that there is a necessary relation between the subject of the attribution and the attributed object of her thoughts, and those in which we do not think so, but at least can be a good criterion to distinguish between them.

2 Non truth-functional functions of propositions.

Chisholm’s second feature of intentional contexts states that intentional operators are not truth-functional. A function of propositions $f$ is truth-functional if the truth-value of the proposition expressed by the utterance of an expression made out of some propositions plus $f$ is only determined by the truth-values of its constituent propositions. This does not happen with belief reports. The truth value of the proposition expressed by my utterance of ‘My sister believes that cows lay eggs’ does not depend on the truth value of what is expressed by the embedded expression, ‘cows lay eggs’, but on whether my sister believe it or not. Certain belief reports pass the tests of exportation and substitutivity, but others do not. This feature of non truth-functionality, however, is fulfilled by 100% of belief attributions. This sounds like a pretty good reason to try and give a chance to this feature as a criterion, and this was the path taken by theorists like Montague, Prior, Hintikka, Kneale, Cohen, Recanati and others. For them, propositional attitude verbs do not express first order relations any longer. Together with their subjects, they are functions of propositions. Nonetheless, there is a considerable distance between these authors’ positions. Some of these divergencies are the key to understand the difference between context-shifting and circumstance-shifting operators.

Hintikka thought that a concept was intentional iff ‘we have to consider several possible situations or courses of events and their
relation to each other in spelling out the semantics of the concept’ (Hintikka 1989, 183). As distinct possible worlds may differ in many ways, intentionality comes in degrees. We need to consider here two of these many ways. A possible world may have a different set of individuals from that of the actual world – *conservation of the existence of individuals* (Hintikka 1989, 189), and individuals from the actual world may split or merge in a different possible world – *conservation of identity of individuals* (Hintikka 1989, 189). Both are allowed by the kind of intentionality we find in belief reports.

Here comes one of the big assumptions of this paper: if *circumstance-shifting operators* are to cover cases of belief reports while *context-shifting operators* are the most appropriate tool for fiction and deference cases, in the way theorists like Recanati pretend, then the first group of operators cannot introduced any alteration in the domain of discourse of the worlds to be considered. When a function of propositions performs a circumstance shift, *conservation of the existence of individuals* and *conservation of the identity of individuals* are taken for granted. The domain will not change from one world to the other. We are not going to argue for this thesis here, even though it is important to understand the second premise of our general argument.

Another piece in favor of our case will be Kaplan’s thesis that there are no context-shifting operators in natural language (Vid. a defense of the same idea in Lewis 1980, 84-85), which obviously refrains any impulse to consider the function performed by belief reports as a context-shift. Even so, the final reason for not to consider belief operators as *context-shifting operators* has to do with one of the main desiderata for philosophical theories about the semantics/pragmatics of belief reports: *semantic innocence*. Since Davidson exhorted the philosophical community not to swallow without questioning the deviant strategy of semantic dualism received from Frege, the idea that, if possible, the meanings of linguistic expressions, their *intensions*, so to speak, should not be altered by their inclusion in different contexts has become a regulative principle. Usually a strategic guidance rather than a constitutive criterion for semantic/pragmatic theories, something like ‘please keep in mind someone like Davidson when you start speculating about the constituents of your propositions’.

Belief operators are, according to Recanati, *circumstance-shifting operators*, they change the parameters in which the embedded proposition must be evaluated, but they do not provide with a new context of interpretation. Belief operators do always change the cir-
cumstances of evaluation, and this is Recanati’s account for Chisholm’s second mark of intentional discourse, but the processes that may block substitutivity and exportation are optional, and are explained in this theory as the result of the intervention of unarticulated constituents (Recanati 2000, Recanati 2002, Jaszczolt forthcoming). Context-shifts are used to explain cases of fiction and deference, and they are, by no means, caused by natural language implemented operators. Again, an interpretation of the notions of circumstance-shift and context-shift willing to accommodate this use of the notions must preclude, for the case of belief contexts, the degree of intentionality attributed by Hintikka. Belief operators must preserve, by themselves, the existence and the identity of individuals.

3 A sketchy argument

So far I have just tried to state the premises (i) and (ii) giving enough information for it to be understood why (iii) was to be inferred from (i) and (ii). At the same time, I have exposed some reasons concerning the relevance of this argument. Now it is time to fulfill the promise made in section 0, in case something under such a heading should be considered seriously.

The final step is to show that Quine’s formulations of relational and notional belief reports are only distinct if we allow the set of individuals of the world in which we are going to evaluate the content-clause to be different from the one of the actual world. This will be easily seen through the comparison of these cases:

(1) The President is necessarily corrupt.

(1’) (∃y) (∀x) (y is the President & x is the President ↔ x=y) & Nec y is corrupt

(1’’) (∃y) Nec (∀x) (y is the President & x is the President ↔ x=y) & y is corrupt

(1’’’) Nec (∃y) (∀x) (y is the President & x is the President ↔ x=y) & y is corrupt

(2) Eight years ago, the President was corrupt.

(2’) (∃y) (∀x) (y is the President & x is the President ↔ x=y) & [Eight years ago] y is corrupt
(2''') [Eight years ago] (∃y) (∀x) (y is the President & x is the President ↔ x=y) & y is corrupt

(3) John believes that the President is corrupt.

(3') (∃y) (∀x) (y is the President & x is the President ↔ x=y) & [John believes that] y is corrupt

(3'') (∃y) [John believes that] (∀x) (y is the President & x is the President ↔ x=y) & y is corrupt

(3''') [John believes that] (∃y) (∀x) (y is the President & x is the President ↔ x=y) & y is corrupt

(4) John believes that John is corrupt.

(4') (∃y) [John believes that] y is corrupt

(4'') [John believes that] (∃y) y is corrupt

(1'), (1'') and (1''') differ even if the sets of individuals for each world considered remain constant, since it is a multiplicity of worlds what we have to consider to determine its truth-value, and the individual which is president and corrupt may vary from one to the other. (2') and (2'')'s truth-conditions, on the contrary, are different only because the president may have changed in eight years. (2')-(2'') and (2''') can only be understood differently if we assume that there could be an individual eight years ago which is no longer among us or the converse¹. This may be reasonable for temporal operators, but it is surely forbidden for doxastic operators in a framework like this of (Recanati 2000), as spelled out above. If we cannot find different individuals in the worlds to be considered to establish the truth-value, we must conclude that the only possible scope ambiguity produced by belief operators and existential quantifiers is the one exemplified by the difference between (3') and (3''). John may know or not know that the individual he believes to be corrupt is the president, but as soon as he believes that an individual is the president and corrupt, there is an individual who is believed by John to be the individual.

¹ This point is made by Johan Van Benthem (Van Benthem 1988, 8)
president and corrupt. Since the use of proper names eliminates this
divergency for the analysis of (4), there is no reason to consider that
(4′) and (4′′) may have different truth-values.

In other words, the chances of (4′) to be truth-conditionally dif-
ferent from (4′′) are those of (2′), (2′′), and (2′′′), and not those of
(1′), (1′′), and (1′′′). But (2′), (2′′), and (2′′′) can be said to differ
only because distinct domains are allowed, which is not the case for
doxastic attitudes.

We do not claim to have provided an argument against the very
notion of belief de re. There are maybe doxastic mental states that
require the presence of its object, as defended by Evans and others.
Our argument is just meant to show that Quine’s characterization of
the distinction relational Vs notional belief attributions is not co-
patible with a framework that distinguishes between circumstance-
shifting and context-shifting operators and defends that belief oper-
ators belong to the first group. The distinction between transparent
and opaque belief reports is not affected at all by our considerations,
since it is not characterized by exportation.

4 A few words for the skeptic

Our conclusion could be rejected by those who either do not agree
that there is a principled distinction between context of interpretation
and circumstance of evaluation, or consider that doxastic operators
are context-shifting operators (vid. Schlenker 2003). They could both
keep the relational/notional distinction as stated in Quine’s terms.

Someone could even be so convinced by Quine’s intuitions about
ambiguity of scope as to think that if the argument were to work,
then some of the premises must be wrong. As I said at the beginning
of the paper, this will not affect the main point of the argument de-
fended here, but, still, I think that something could be said about it. It
is not completely unreasonable to discard Quine’s approach. Scope
ambiguity shows a very particular logical feature of operators’ be-
havior, which we may call specificity if we want, but that is absolu-
tely free from the epistemic burden Quine attributes to it when one
of the operators is a doxastic operator. Think, for instance, in the
classic example of ambiguity of scope. If I say ‘Everyone in the
neighborhood burnt a car’ I may be describing the riot in some Pa-
risien suburban area or an episode in a peaceful community in Min-
nesota that celebrates every thanksgiving burning the oldest car in
the neighborhood and making a barbecue. The ambiguity has to do
with whether there was a smoking car for each and every neighbor or just one for all, it has nothing to do with the epistemic relationship between the neighbors and the car. If this is evident for quantifiers, modal, and temporal operators at least, why should it be different for doxastic operators. The existential quantifier is still the same, where has this weird rabbit come from?

As a final, and certainly more peaceful example, please consider this case in which we can find a propositional attitude operator, an existential quantifier outside its scope (already exported), in a context in which there is no epistemic relation between the subject of the pre-exported ascription and the alleged “object of thought”:

There’s a somebody I’m longing to see [the speaker does not know who that person might turn out to be] (George and Ira Gershwin)

References