

On Singularity
Kenneth A. Taylor
Stanford University

§1. Preliminaries

Two questions about singular or de re thought are seldom as sharply distinguished as they deserve to be. The first concerns singularity of form. The second concerns singularity of content. Though much has been written in recent years about singularity of content, less attention has been given to questions about singularity of form.¹ This was not always so. The question why our thought and talk should take the *form* of thought and talk about objects at all, once occupied center stage for philosophers as diverse as Kant, Frege, and Quine.² Though the Kant-Frege-Quine question has been largely absent from the stage in recent philosophy, if we are to see both what is right and what is wrong about certain prominent views about the nature of singular thought, it is time to shine the klieg lights once again on the form-content distinction.³ The prominent views are the widely endorsed acquaintance condition on singular thought and the less widely endorsed but nonetheless tempting view that Robin Jeshion has recently called semantic instrumentalism. Semantic instrumentalism is the view that singular thoughts about an object can be had on the cognitive cheap merely by manipulating the apparatus of singular reference. Most theorists of singular thought endorse some more or less demanding acquaintance condition on singular thought. As such, they mostly reject semantic instrumentalism. Indeed, most theorists accept some acquaintance condition because they think that semantic instrumentalism could not possibly be true. But one thing that I shall try to show in this essay is that when semantic instrumentalism is restricted to its proper scope, it captures a deep, though only partial truth about the nature of singular thought. And I shall also argue that acquaintance has been oversold has a constraint on the possibility of the de re thinkability of objects. And the key to seeing this all is keeping proper track of the form-content distinction for singular thought.

§2. Objective vs. Objectual

I begin by introducing a distinction inspired by Kant between what I call (merely) objectual representations from what I call (fully) objective representations.⁴ An objective representation is one that refers to a real existent (or expresses a real property). A representation is objectual, on the other hand, if it is “fit” or “ready” for the job of standing for a real existent. I will also say that objectual representations are *referentially fit* and that objective representations are *referentially successful*.

Now a representation can be simultaneously both objectual and objective, both referentially fit and referentially successful. But some representations are *merely* referentially fit, without being referentially successful. The class of merely fit representations is the class of empty or non-referring singular terms. On the view that I shall outline here, it is crucial that merely fit singular representations are still, in one

sense, fully singular. They are fully singular in the sense that they still enjoy, in virtue of their form, singular referential purport. It is just that they purport to refer without succeeding in so doing.

There is a complex relationship between the factors that render a representation objectual, or referentially fit, and the factors that render a representation fully objective, or referentially successful. In a book too long in progress, for example, I argue that referential fitness is a pre-condition for referential success. More crucially, I argue that the factors that render a representation referentially fit are fundamentally different in kind from the factors that render a representation referentially successful. Objectuality is constituted by factors lying entirely on the side of the cognizing subject.⁵ These factors, I claim, are syntactic, role-oriented and internal. To a first approximation, expressions are fit for the job of standing for an object, when they can well-formedly flank the identity sign, can well-formedly occupy the argument places of verbs, can well-formedly serve as links of various sorts in anaphoric chains of various sorts, and can well formedly figure as premises in substitution inferences of various kinds. Referential success, on the other hand, requires something more, something not lying entirely on the side of the subject. Success requires that already fit expressions be, as it were, bound down to outer objects. This happens, I claim, via the interaction of already referentially fit expressions with certain extra-representational causal and informational factors lying by and large outside of the thinking subject.

Both the internal, fitness-making factors and the extra-representational causal and informational factors are *necessary* for successful singular reference. But neither suffices, on its own, for full blown singularity of content. In the absence of extra-representational, causal/informational connections to objects and events in the world, the fitness-making factors would still yield the *form* of thought as of objects, but our thoughts would be devoid of semantic contact with any real existents and therefore devoid of singular propositional content. On the other hand, absent the internal fitness making factors, causal connections to objects and events in the world would be nothing but semantically inert to'ing and fro'ing. The world is awash in information, flowing every which way. But only in very special corners of the universe does the flow of information give rise to reference and to singular thought. Successful singular reference, I suggest, is the work of a distinctive kind of thing – representations, linguistic and mental, that enjoy antecedent referential purport.⁶ Only when the extra-representational flow of information encounters such representations does that flow suffice to make reference happen.

Referential fitness is the work of an interlocking system of representations. It is not a property that accrues to representations taken one-by-one. No isolated representation, all on its own and independently of its connection to other representations, can be “fit” for the job of standing for an object. No expression has standing as a name, for example, except in virtue of playing the right kind of (syntactic) role in a system of interlocking linguistic representations. If referential fitness is a precondition of referential success, then no object can be *successfully designated* except by an expression that already occupies a role in a system of interlocking representations. This fact captures the sole, but important grain of truth in the otherwise misbegotten doctrine of holism and in Wittgenstein's pithy but opaque remark that nothing has so far been done when a thing has merely been named.⁷

Now the class of referentially fit expressions contains a variety of different kinds of expressions, with a variety of different formal and syntactic properties. I have argued that failure to attend to certain merely formal role-oriented properties of the class of referentially fit expressions has led to much premature and misbegotten semantic theorizing.⁸ Consider, for example, the lexical-syntax of the category NAME. Formally speaking, names are a peculiar sort of anaphoric device. If *N* is a name, then any two tokens of *N* are guaranteed, in virtue of the principles of the language, to be co-referential. Co-typical name tokens may be said to be *explicitly co-referential*. Explicit co-reference must be sharply distinguished from *coincidental co-reference*. Two name tokens that are not co-typical can refer to the same object, and thus be co-referential, without being explicitly co-referential. For example, tokens of ‘Hesperus’ and tokens of ‘Phosphorus’ co-refer but are not explicitly co-referential. The fact that tokens of ‘Hesperus’ one and all refer to Venus is linguistically independent of the fact that tokens of ‘Phosphorus’ one and all refer to Venus. It is a correlative truth about names, a truth partly definitive of the lexical-syntactic character of names, that when *m* and *n* are distinct names, they are *referentially independent*. Referential independence means that no structural or lexical relation between distinct names *m* and *n* can *guarantee* that if *m* refers to *o* then *n* refers to *o* as well. To say that any distinct names are always interpretationally and referentially independent, is not to say that distinct names must fail to co-refer. Indeed, we can directly show that two names are co-referential via true identity statements. But referential independence does mean that when two distinct names *m* and *n* do co-refer, their co-reference is a mere coincidence of usage.

The referential independence of distinct names and the explicit co-reference of tokens of the same name type partially defines the lexical-syntactic character of the linguistic category NAME. Linguistically speaking, to be a name is in part to be an expression type such that tokens of that type are explicitly co-referential with one another and referentially independent of the tokens of any distinct type. If one knows of *e* only that it belongs to the category NAME, then one knows that, whatever *e* refers to, if it refers to anything at all, then tokens of *e* are *guaranteed* to be co-referential one with another and referentially independent of any distinct name *e'*, whatever *e'* refers to. A name (type) is, in effect, a set of (actual and possible) name tokens such that all tokens in the set are guaranteed, in virtue of their linguistic character, to co-refer one with another. Call such a set a *chain of explicit co-reference*. It is a linguistically universal fact about the lexical category NAME that numerically distinct tokens of the same name will share membership in a chain of explicit co-reference and numerically distinct tokens of two type distinct names will be members of disjoint chains of explicit co-reference -- even if the two tokens are, in fact, coincidentally co-referential.⁹

Now because they too are devices of explicit co-reference, *mental* names, names in the language of thought, play a number of important and distinctive cognitive roles in episodes of singular thought. And they play those roles even when they are merely referentially fit and not referentially successful. At present, I highlight one such role. In particular, our ability to deploy in thought names and other devices of explicit co-reference is a central source of our capacity for what I call same-purporting thought. I can think of Kiyoshi today and think of Kiyoshi again tomorrow with a kind of inner assurance that I at least purport to think of the same person twice. I do so merely by deploying the (fully disambiguated) name ‘Kiyoshi’ across distinct thought episodes.

If one had no devices of explicit co-reference in one's mental lexicon, it would always be an open question whether, in purporting to think now of a particular *o* and now of a particular *o'*, one has thought of two distinct objects or has thought of the same object twice. It may sometimes, perhaps even often, be an open question for a cognizer whether two of her thought episodes share a (putative) subject matter, but it is surely not always so. I conjecture that this is so precisely because there is a distinguished class of representations that function in thought as devices of explicit co-reference. For such devices, to think *with* or *via* them again is ipso facto to purport to think *of* the same thing again.

Our capacity to deploy devices of explicit co-reference in singular thought episodes is central to the objectuality and referential fitness of our thought. If there were no explicitly co-referential representations, then no two thoughts would ever inwardly purport to be about the same object. But if no two thoughts ever inwardly purported to be about the same object again, then for any new thought episode, it would always be as if one were thinking about an object never previously cognized. The cognizing subject would have, at best, a fleeting cognitive hold on the objects. She could not, for example, *remember* today what she *believed* yesterday.¹⁰ She could not anticipate in thought future encounters with a currently perceptually salient object, as least not *as* encounters with that very object again. More strongly, a mind in which no two thoughts same-purported would seem to altogether lack the capacity for thought as of objects at all. For thoughts as of objects are thoughts as of enduring particulars that may be encountered and cognized again from different perspectives, while being the same again and while being at least on occasion cognized as the same again. But this is precisely what would be lost if no two thoughts ever inwardly purported to be thoughts as of the same object again.

§3. Kantian-Fregean Roots

The distinction between merely objectual and fully objective representations has an ancient and venerable pedigree. Kant was perhaps the first to grasp, albeit through a glass darkly, something like our distinction. Consider Kant's distinction between bona fide *judgments* and merely subjectively valid associations. Kant took the former to purport to be about *objects* and how things are by such objects. He took the latter to concern, roughly, only our own psychology. In *judging* that bodies are heavy, we purport to represent how things are *by the objects themselves*, Kant held. Representing how things are by the objects is different from reporting on the merely subjective regularity that when we lift a body, we *feel* a pressure of weight. Now Kant believed there to be certain purely formal conditions, arising solely from the side of the understanding, on the possibility of mental states enjoying this sort of objective representational purport. It is in his account of those conditions that Kant gets gropingly at something like the notion of an objectual representation. I will not attempt to reiterate Kant's account of the merely formal conditions on the "objective validity" of our judgments here. What bears stressing for our current purposes is that that account is not intended by Kant as an account of how judgments actually *succeed* in reaching actually existent objects. That is because he thought that in order that our judgments actually achieve full-blooded objective validity, as he called it, we need something more than these merely formal conditions from the side of the understanding. We need, in addition, a "given manifold"

of sensory intuition, a manifold that must be “brought under” the necessary synthetic unity of apperception. It is precisely because the understanding contains no manifold of its own, but only the formal grounds of the synthetic unity of an, as it were, alien manifold, that the formal conditions on objective validity which arise on the side of the understanding can suffice only for something like what I am calling the objectuality of judgments, as I call it, and not for their full-blooded objectivity. Relevant here is Kant’s distinction between merely *thinking* an object and *cognizing* an object. In full-blown cognition of an object, there must be both a given intuitive element and a formal conceptual element. In bare thought, devoid of intuitive content, we have, he claims, merely “empty concepts of objects, through which we cannot even judge whether the latter are possible or not -- mere forms of thought without objective validity.”

Now Kant rightly took there to be a constitutive connection between the objective character of our thought and our object-making capacity for thinking with purport of sameness. Kant takes the given of sensation to be a punctate manifold of disunited qualities that are not yet anything to thought and consciousness. Only by conceptualizing the world, that is, by taking the deliverances of sensibility up into a unified consciousness -- and that by “running through” and “synthesizing” them in accordance with the categories of the understanding -- do we achieve cognition of an objective order. Kant’s dark, but suggestive notion of synthesis is central to his views about same-purport. Synthesis is precisely, for Kant, that combinatorial power of the understanding by which it gives rise to representations that same-purport with one another. On this picture, the understanding takes as input disconnected elements of a punctate sensory stream and “unites” them via synthesis under categorially grounded conceptual representations in such a way that they are marked as belonging together. It is precisely by deploying synthetically unified conceptual representations that we are able to think in same-purporting ways about substances and their properties.

Kant was surely correct to maintain that the capacity to think in same-purporting ways is a sine qua non of the objective validity, as he called it, of our thought. But to accept this claim is not to accept either Kant’s peculiar account of the nature of same-purporting thought or his peculiar story about how thought manages to achieve contact with a world of objects. Indeed, Kant’s dark doctrine of synthesis introduces nearly as many problems as it purports to solve. Kant plausibly believed, for example, that same-purporting is inextricably tied up with the deployment of *concepts*. At the same time, he held that concepts are always *general* and never *singular*. This bundle of views promises to deliver an explanation of the possibility of judgments to the effect that one is presented with an instance of horse again, say, but it does not obviously promise an explanation of our capacity to think with same-purport about *individuals*. Indeed, since *singular* representations are one and all sensible and/or intuitive and, therefore, by his lights, non-conceptual and non-discursive, it would seem to follow that singularity is the business of perception and experience not of judgment and thought. If that is right, it is at least puzzling how, on Kant’s view, singular thoughts are even possible.¹¹

Moreover, Kant *seemed* to believe that once synthesis is carried out thoughts that same-purport are *guaranteed* to be about the same object. Such a view seems a nearly inevitable outgrowth of Kant’s misguided transcendental idealism, according to which the objects of our (empirical) cognition lack any mind-independent existence. It would not be too far a stretch to say that transcendental idealism just is, or at least strongly

entails, the view that objects as such are nothing but either constructions out of or projections from relations of same-purport among some privileged class of judgments -- roughly those judgments we would arrive at upon the completion, were it possible, of the ideal system of nature.

But for merely finite cognizers like ourselves who lack omniscience, the view that thoughts that same-purport with one another are guaranteed to be about the same object cannot be entirely and unambiguously correct. For one thing, same-purporting thoughts need not be about *any* object at all. Santa Claus-thoughts, as we might call them, one and all same-purport with one another, but they are about no object.¹² Though the capacity for same-purport is a precondition of the full-blown objectivity of thought, no object is yet given through the mere exercise of that capacity. More importantly, inner relations of same-purport may fail to match external relations of identity and difference. A cognizer may, for example, encounter a particular object but mistake it for another. I may, for example, encounter Joelle but mistake her for her twin sister Marie. In such a context, I may deploy an inner token of 'Marie' in thinking about the young woman I encounter. In that case, my thought will same-purport with many earlier thoughts about Marie. But there is also a sense in which my thought can be said to be about Joelle -- even if it is and purports to be about Marie as well. Despite the fact that there is a sense in which my thought is about Joelle, it clearly does not same-purport with my earlier thoughts about Joelle. Rather, I am in what we might call a divided mental state. I am confusedly thinking, via a tokening of an inner 'Marie,' with respect to that very person now in front of me, who happens to be Joelle, that she is a promising young tennis player. I am, in effect, thinking *of* Joelle *as* Marie, thinking of Joelle with Marie-purport. If my confused thought has at least as much claim to be about Joelle as it does to be about Marie, it follows that it is not necessarily and unambiguously the case that inwardly same-purporting thoughts succeed in being purely and simply about one and the same external object. That inwardly same-purporting thoughts are not guaranteed to be about the same object is a sort of minimal anti-Fregean point.

Like Kant before him, Frege (1960, 1977) also believed that the capacity to think in same-purporting ways is central to our capacity to make cognitive contact with objects. He offered two different theories of same-purport -- one in the *Foundations of Arithmetic* in the course of trying to spell out what the epistemic givenness of number consists in; the other in "On Sense and Reference." In the former work, he says:

If we are to use the sign *a* to signify an object, we must have a criterion for deciding in all cases whether *b* is the same as *a*, even if it is not always in our power to apply this criterion.

The central thought seems to be that an identity statement expresses what is contained in a recognition judgment -- a judgment to the effect that one has been given the same object again. Frege's further thought is apparently that we have succeeded in using a sign to designate a determinate object just in case we have fixed a significance for each identity statement in which a given singular term may occur. We thereby specify, according to Frege, what it is for any two terms to (correctly) purport to stand for the same object. This approach promises to allow for the epistemic givenness of numbers, despite the fact that we have, as Frege says, neither "ideas" nor (sensory) "intuitions"

of them. Numbers are given to us through the use of singular terms. Indeed, Frege seems to endorse the perfectly general claim that the concept of an object in general, as Kant might have put it, is nothing but the concept of that which is given through the use of a singular term. Just as Kant believed that objects are nothing but constructions out of or projections from relations of same-purport among our thoughts, so Frege seems to believe that objects are nothing but the shadows cast by the uses of singular terms, paradigmatically in identity statements.

Strikingly, Frege seems not yet to have grasped the need to distinguish the mere purport of sameness from success at referring to the same again. He denied even the possibility of same-purporting singular representations that entirely lack any reference. He claims that a (complex) *singular* term formed from an “empty” phrase by adjoining the definite article -- as in, ‘the largest proper fraction’ -- is “without content” and “senseless.” But terms that are “senseless” and “without content” would seem to be entirely devoid of referential purport. Only with the eventual emergence of the distinction between sense and reference, does Frege acquire the resources to make something like the distinction I am after. Armed with that distinction, he can allow that there are fully “contentful” singular terms that, nonetheless, stand for no objects. He can allow, that is to say, that expressions that fail to refer can have, nonetheless, fully determinate referential purport. More importantly, Frege can now say both that expressions that share a sense, share referential purport, even if they entirely lack a reference, and that expressions that differ in sense differ in referential purport, even if they do share a reference. Sharing referential purport is not yet sharing a reference -- because of the possibility of sense-having, non-referring names. Sharing reference is not yet sharing referential purport -- because of the possibility of co-referring names that differ in sense.

On my view, neither Kantian synthesis nor Fregean senses play any role in explaining the ultimate source of the capacity for thinking with same-purport. Nonetheless, I fully endorse the Kantian-Fregean insight that any adequate theory of the objective representational content of our thought must explain the difference between merely thinking of the same object again, without any inner purport of sameness, and thinking of the same object again with inner purport of sameness. What Frege sought to explain by appeal to semantic notions, like the distinction between sense and reference, I explain by appeal to the logical-syntax of the language of thought. It is not, as Frege imagined, that each name is associated with a determinate and independent mode of presentation of its referent such that names that co-refer may, nonetheless, present that referent to the thinking subject in two different ways such that it cannot be determined a priori that the names share a reference. Rather, it is just that distinct names are *ipso facto* referentially independent, even if they are coincidentally co-referential. Names are quite distinctive linguistic devices. To repeat a name is *ipso facto* to purport to repeat a reference. To refer again to the same object, but using a different name is, in effect, to refer *de novo* to the relevant object, that is, in a way not “anaphorically” linked with the previous act of reference. And this is so both for shared public languages and for the *de facto* private language of thought.

We are almost ready to say what is right and wrong about the both the acquaintance condition on singular thought and about semantic instrumentalism. But before we can, we need to note one further aspect of the relationship between merely

objectual and fully objective singular representations. By at least two different measures, merely objectual representations and fully objective representations are indistinguishable. First, there are no narrowly syntactic markers of referential success. Consequently, merely referentially fit and fully referentially successful representations play indistinguishable syntactic roles in both language and in thought. Second, we play language and thought games with a common dialogic structure with both the merely referentially fit and the fully referentially successful. In particular, we play entitlement-commitment games with both the merely referentially fit and the fully referentially successful. The syntactic and dialogic similarity between the objectual and the objective can lead the inattentive to posit objects where there are none. One is liable to this mistake if one supposes that wherever we make rationally warranted moves with singular representations in some entitlement-commitment game, we are *ipso facto* getting at, or purporting to get at, how things are by some domain of actually existent objects, as if the objects are somehow given merely through the play of the game. One is liable to think, for example, that in making rationally warranted moves in fictive entitlement-commitment games we are getting at how things are by a domain of *fictional objects* or that in playing mathematical entitlement-commitment games, we are getting at how things are by a domain of *mathematical objects*.

Such mistakes are, I think, one source of a fairly pervasive skepticism about the prospects for a causal/informational theories of reference. For anyone who is prepared to posit a domain of objects wherever there are entitlement-commitment games played with objectual singular representations is liable to think that causal/informational theories cannot explain the nature of our cognitive contact with the plethora of objects she acknowledges. Since we have no causal/informational contact with fictional objects or with mathematical objects, it would seem to follow that the causal/informational theories cannot possibly be a correct general account of how the gap between the merely objectual and fully objective is bridged. The proper response to the line of thought is that there are no such objects, and so the causal/informational theorist bears no burden to explain either the nature of such objects or what their epistemic givenness consists in or our ability to refer to such objects. There are only non-veridical entitlement-commitment games played with merely objectual singular representations. And though there is much work to be done in explaining both what we are doing when we play such games and the cognitive significance of such doings, the existence of such games causes no special problems for the causal/informational theorist.

Though I suspect that a play of merely objectual representations in non-veridical language games may give rise to a certain illusory feel of objectivity, I do not mean to say that moves made with merely objectual representations altogether lack genuine cognitive significance. Indeed, I hold that non-veridical games played with presumptively merely objectual linguistic representations occupy an important place in our mental lives. They are the stuff of which shared imaginings are made. The capacity for shared imaginings is a distinctively human capacity that lies at the very foundation of our ability to produce culture and social life. The production and consumption of fiction is one kind of shared imagining. Pure, as opposed to applied mathematics is, I have argued elsewhere, another. And there are many others as well. We imagine putative places, people, societies, or entire world-orders alternative to the actual. Through shared

imaginings, we represent to ourselves moral and aesthetic ideals nowhere realized in the history of the world. When we do so, we are not, I submit, exploring some platonic nether world of abstract real existents. We often are manipulating, in a more or less constrained fashion, a system of merely objectual representations in a non-veridical manner.

I do not pretend to explore the rich extent and variety of our shared imagining, nor the multiplicity of factors that condition their contents. My aim here is simply to motivate a conjecture. The conjecture is that the very nature of the referential apparatus of language and thought -- the whole apparatus of names, deictics, quantifiers, variables, and anaphora -- is the very foundation of the capacity for shared imaginings. Though that entire referential apparatus is, in one sense, made for talking about real existents, we have the capacity to deploy that apparatus even when no real existents are given to thought. This very capacity, I claim, is at the very foundation of our capacity for shared imaginings.

§4 Semantic Instrumentalism and Acquaintance Revisited.

Return now to semantic instrumentalism and the acquaintance condition. Here is the simple first pass assessment of their truth and falsity. If it is taken as a claim about merely objectual, merely referentially fit representations, semantic instrumentalism is approximately true. But if it is taken as a claim about fully objective representations semantic instrumentalism is clearly false. Objectual representations are free for the thinking up. The cognizing mind profusely and effortlessly stirs up such representations within itself. It often does so in the course of non-veridical language-thought games. But through the mere stirring up of merely objectual representations, no object is so far made available to thought. Where no object is made available to thought, there is at most only the purport of singularity of content and not yet the achievement of singularity of content. Since the factors that render our thought merely objectual do not suffice to make an object available to thought, the acquaintance condition as applied to such representations is neither here nor there. I hope it is clear, though, that to deny that objectuality is subject to an acquaintance condition is not to say that merely objectual representations are entirely devoid of cognitive function and significance.

The more pressing question, of course, is whether an object can be made available to thought, and thought thereby rendered fully objective, in the absence of acquaintance. There is, I think, *something* right about the acquaintance condition on singular thought content. It certainly *seems* right to say that acquaintance with an object would *suffice* to render that object de re thinkable. The real question, however, is whether acquaintance with an object is *necessary* to render it de re thinkable. Though strict Russellian acquaintance has no current advocates, a succession of less cognitively demanding requirements on singularity of content have been proposed in its stead. As the requirements weaken, the plausibility of the proposed acquaintance condition increases. Recall David Kaplan's view that an object as such is de re thinkable only if the thinker is *en rapport* with the object. Weaker even than Kaplanian rapport or Russellian direct acquaintance is ordinary "knowledge wh" -- ordinary knowledge who, what, when or where. In a quite ordinary sense, I *know who* my wife Claire is, *know when* I am writing this sentence, *know which* computer I am writing it on, and *know where* I am now sitting.

But I am not, in Russell's sense, directly acquainted with any of these objects. Moreover, with the exception of my wife, it is unlikely that I possess anything so strong as Kaplanian rapport with these objects either. Now it would be an interesting task to try to specify the weakest possible cognitive hold on an object that suffices for the de re thinkability of that object. One could plausibly argue that what is *necessary* for an object to be available to thought is that one have an epistemic relation to the object at least as strong as the weakest possible relation that would suffice to render the object de re thinkable. I won't take up that task here. That is because I suspect that acquaintance and its progressively more attenuated descendant have been oversold as necessary constraints on the possibility of de re thinkability.¹³ And I want to close this essay by motivating that suspicion.

The philosophical search for the cognitive relations, whatever they are, that would suffice to render an object as such available to thought and thus de re thinkable is, rooted in philosophical worries about the epistemic one-sidedness of reference. David Kaplan, for example, has recently claimed that there could be a pure, natural and primitive notion of de re belief only if we were able to make "perfectly good sense of the claim that George IV has a belief about Sir Walter Scott independently of the way in which he is represented to George." But because the mental representations that mediate our de re attitudes are cognitively one-sided, we cannot, he seems to conclude, make sense of such claims. Those mediating representations are one-sided in the sense that "a thinker could have two such representations of ... the same object, without realizing they are of the same object."

But need the epistemic one-sidedness of all reference cause us to despair about the very possibility that an object as such, rather than a merely one-sided presentation of that object, might be made available to thought? The answer, I want to suggest, is that we should not give in to such despair. That is because the one-sidedness of reference is really a merely syntactic one-sidedness. In particular, it is a reflection of the fact that the inner form and role of name-like and other singular representations is insufficient to guarantee that when two such representations refer to the same outer object, they will ipso facto be syntactically and dynamically linked in our inner mental lives. Just because representations which refer to the same object again are not guaranteed to inwardly same-purport and are therefore not guaranteed to be syntactically and dynamically linked in our inner mental lives, there is the ever-present danger that even a rational mind may sometimes fall into what we might call external incoherence. It is the fact of this ever present danger that leads philosophers like Kaplan to despair over the purity and naturalness of de re belief. But such despair is misplaced and should not lead us to hold de re cognition to such extra-ordinarily high epistemic standards. Even a confused or incoherent thought about an object may still be a thought about that very object.

To be sure, otherwise referentially fit singular representations may begin to lose the grip on the objects. Consider Joelle again. Now imagine that, entirely unbeknownst to me, she is one of a quintuplet. Each time I encounter one of her sisters, I token 'Joelle.' Now suppose that I, as it were, agglomerate all of the information I have about any of the sisters into one huge 'Joelle' file. I think to myself, "My that Joelle gets around." I deploy my inner 'Joelle' in a name-like and fully objectual, fully referentially fit fashion. Each time I deploy 'Joelle' in a thought episode, I thereby think with inward purport of sameness again. But of what object do I thereby purport to think as of the same

again? Are my thoughts about Joelle? Are they about one or the other of her sisters? Is it really determinate whether I am thinking of Joelle or one of her four sisters? Perhaps I think of now one sister as Joelle, now of another as Joelle, and now of yet another as Joelle. Perhaps I think of a mereological sum of Joelle and her sisters. Perhaps there is simply no fact of the matter about who, if anyone, I am thinking of. Perhaps, I do not succeed in having a *de re* cognition at all.

A good theory of the ultimate source and nature of *de re* cognitions should ultimately answer such questions or at least say why, in the nature of things, there can be no determinate answers to them. Moreover, any good theory of *de re* cognitions will have to accommodate the fact that nothing lying merely on the side of the cognizing subject can guarantee that when a thinker is presented with the same again, she will *ipso facto* recognize that she is presented with the same again. Still further, a good theory will accommodate the fact that nothing lying merely on the side of the subject guarantees that when a thinker inwardly purports to think of the same again, she necessarily and unambiguously succeeds in thinking of the same again.

Now I take these correlative facts to be direct consequences of the merely syntactic one-sidedness of reference. The merely syntactic one-sidedness of reference has, that is, the unfortunate consequence that it is an ever present possibility that entirely referentially fit representations may be so incoherently and confusedly ordered in relation to outer objects that their inner deployment in thought episodes gives rise to no *de re* cognitions. But even if we grant that enough external confusion and incoherence can cause inwardly fit representations to lose their hold on outer objects and even if we grant the ever present epistemic possibility that we have fallen into such confusion and incoherence, it simply does not follow that our representations are *actually* so incoherently and confusedly ordered as to make *de re* cognitions impossible. But if the mere standing possibility of confusion and/or incoherence in relation to outer objects in our *de re* cognitions does not suffice to undermine the standing of those cognitions as *de re* cognitions, then there is no reason to conclude that the one-sidedness of our representations in any way threatens the purity and naturalness of *de re* belief.

It would be surprising if it were otherwise. Thinking about an object is one thing. Thinking about that object coherently and unconfusedly is an entirely different matter. It may help to distinguish mere *de re* thinkability from what we might call, following Robert Brandom, epistemically strong *de re* thinkability. For the former, it suffices that our thoughts be determinately bound-down to the objects and thereby rendered semantically answerable to how things are by the objects in a way that is independent of how those objects are presented to us. For the latter something more is needed. We must achieve a tight cognitive grip on the object. Epistemically strong *de re* attitudes are cognitively powerful things. They enable one not merely to think the objects but to recognize the objects that one thinks when they are presented again, under different guises. When we fail to attend to the distinction between mere *de re* thinkability and epistemically strong *de re* thinkability, we are liable to the tempting, but mistaken inference from the one-sidedness of all mental representations to the conclusion that *de re* belief is somehow more problematic than some other more secure and purer notion of belief.

¹ Reference classic and recently prominent papers on singular thought

² Insert Reference to Classic Texts of Kant, Frege and Quine on singularity

³ Reference Jeshion on semantic instrumentalism. (where did this term originate? Kaplan?) Reference Brandom as recent philosopher concerned with form-content distinction. Brandom quote.

⁴ Reference my work where I spell out this distinction more fully.

⁵ Reference my *Referring to the World*

⁶ Contrast my view with Millikan's who wants singularity "on the cheap."

7

⁸ Reference "What's in a Name?" and "The Syntax and Pragmatics of the Naming Relation."

⁹ Diego Marconi (in conversation) objects that the twin properties of explicit co-referentiality of co-typical name tokens and referential independence of type-distinct name tokens does not distinguish names from certain other sorts of expressions. For example, he notes that according to a popular account all tokens of the type 'tiger' refer (rigidly) to the species "tiger." Similarly with the word 'yellow'. So, Marconi worried that my account fails to pick out any *distinctive* property of names. In response, it should be noted that my claim is only that explicit co-referentiality and referential independence *partially* characterize the syntactic category NAME. Names are also expressions that, for example, may well-formedly flank the identity sign and may well-formedly occupy the argument places of verbs. Some totality of such properties jointly constitute a broader, still syntactically characterized class of expressions, the class of SINGULAR TERMS. The category NAME is a distinguished subclass of that class, however exactly the broader class is defined. Included in the class of singular terms are also demonstratives and indexicals –the anaphoric properties of which I discuss below. What I claim, in effect, is that the category NAME consists of the set S of *singular term types* such that: (a) if a term t is a member of S, then tokens of t are explicitly co-referential and (b) if t and t' are members of S such that $t \neq t'$ then t and t' are referentially independent. So my approach requires an antecedent analysis of singular termhood. I haven't offered such an analysis here, at least not a full-blown one. But see Taylor (forthcoming-a). The account of singular terms offered therein bears a certain affinity to that offered in Brandom (1994). The twin properties of referential independence of type distinct tokens and explicit co-referentiality of co-typical tokens does, I think, serve to distinguish names from other singular terms. Another distinguishing feature of the anaphoric character of names is that names may dominate anaphoric chains, but are never dominated within any such chain. Contra Marconi, then, it wouldn't bother me at all if there were other expressions in, say, the category PREDICATE or the category COMMON NOUN that had somehow "correlative" syntactic properties. This wouldn't, though, suffice to make predicates be names or obliterate the important syntactic distinction between names and predicates. But I stress again that it is not my goal here to offer a full blown and explicit analysis of the very idea of a singular term.

¹⁰ For a suggestive and helpful discussion of mental anaphora and its role in identity thinking and content-preservation, see Lawlor (2002)

¹¹ See Manley Thompson (1972) for the classic discussion of this issue.

¹² In complete fairness, I should say Kant can plausibly be credited with some recognition of this fact. Witness in this connection his distinction between merely *thinking* an object and *cognizing* an object. In full blown cognition of an object, there must be both a given intuitive element and a formal conceptual element. In bare thought, devoid of intuitive content, we have, he claims, merely "empty concepts of objects, through which we cannot even judge whether the latter are possible or not -- mere forms of thought without objective validity." Here Kant anticipate the possibility of same-purport in the absence of reference to any object at all. Same purport in the absence of reference amounts to what I have called objectuality without objectivity, referential fitness without referential success.

¹³ Jeshion makes a similar claim.