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Introduction: reference and singular thought

Our first aim in this book is to critically examine some widespread views about the semantic phenomenon of reference and the cognitive phenomenon of object-directed thought. In this chapter we provide an initial case in favor of liberalism—the thesis that neither of these phenomena is tied to a special relation of causal or epistemic acquaintance. And in the two chapters that follow, we consider and reject various arguments against liberalism.

In the second part of the book (Chapters 4–6) we turn to an investigation of various noun phrases in natural language. In particular, we challenge the alleged semantic rift between definite and indefinite descriptions on the one hand, and names and demonstratives on the other—a division that is often motivated by appeals to acquaintance. Drawing on recent work in semantics, we explore a more unified account of all four types of expression. We conclude by drawing out some implications of this account for the traditional categories of reference and singular thought.

1.1 Preliminaries

The discovery of the twin categories of reference and singular thought is widely felt to be one of the landmark achievements of twentieth-century analytic philosophy. On the one hand, there is the distinction between a genuinely referential expression of natural language and one that is about an object only in some looser sense. On the other hand, there is a corresponding distinction between a thought that is loosely about an object, and one whose bond with an object is robust enough for it to count as genuinely ‘singular’ or ‘de re’. We hope to shed light on these two ideas in this chapter.

Two procedural points should be stressed.

First, we are, like most of our readers, philosophers who have become acclimatized to habits and trends in philosophy that make use of the terms ‘reference’ and ‘singular thought’. Our project is not to survey how these and related terms are used in the tradition, as though we were anthropologists studying the practices of a community from the outside. Neither would it serve our purposes to insist on our own quasi-stipulative definitions. Our project is one of critical examination from within. The working assumption of much contemporary philosophy is that the relevant terms carve
meaning and psychological reality at the joints—that is, they are intended to express a semantic natural kind and a cognitive one, respectively. As such, even a critical inquiry would do best to approach them, not by nominal definition, but by carefully investigating candidate kinds and clusters of kinds, to identify what (if anything) best answers to talk of reference and singular thought.

Second, our inquiry will take place primarily within the philosophy of language. But why focus on language when one of our topics is singular thought? To begin with, the category of referential terms affords us with a preliminary grip on a certain kind of content: singular contents are those that are expressed by sentences containing referential terms. And the special category of singular thought is usually taken to involve bearing a cognitive attitude towards a singular content. Moreover, the contents of our thoughts can be studied to some extent by attending to the language with which we ascribe those thoughts to each other. If there are object-directed thoughts of an importantly distinctive type, our reporting practices would seem to offer prima facie good guides to their presence. From this perspective, referential terms give us a window into a certain kind of content, and attitude reports that use them reveal a distinctive kind of mental state. By the end of our inquiry we will have qualified the preceding ideas; but for now they will serve as our springboard.

1.2 Themes from Russell

By way of introducing the relevant tradition, let us begin with two themes from Bertrand Russell.

(i) Logically proper names. We all have a rough and ready notion of aboutness according to which the phrases ‘a certain president’, ‘the president of the U.S.’, and ‘Barack Obama’ can all be used to make claims about a particular individual.\(^1\) And aboutness seems to connect straightforwardly with truth, at least for simple subject-predicate sentences.\(^2\) In the simplest cases, the result of concatenating an expression that is about an object \(o\) with a monadic predicate will yield truth iff the predicate is true of \(o\). All three expressions just mentioned pass this test; no real gap is yet opened up between a special category of reference and the ordinary notion of being about an object.\(^3\)

But Russell held that some such expressions can figure in true and false sentences even if there happens to be no object for them to be about.\(^4\) For the moment, let us call

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1. Here we suppress Russell’s denial (in ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’) that there is, in reality, a particular corresponding to ‘Socrates’: ‘the names that we commonly use, like “Socrates”, are really abbreviations for descriptions; not only that, but what they describe are not particulars but complicated systems of classes or series’ (Russell, ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’, pp. 200–1).

2. See Evans, The Varieties of Reference, p. 49.

3. At least reading the ‘iff’ as a material biconditional.

an expression *meaningful* if it can combine with other expressions to generate variously true and false claims. The crucial mistake of the Meinongian, from a Russellian perspective, is a failure to grasp the complex relationship between *meaningfulness* and *being about an object*. The object that ‘the president of the U.S.’ happens to be about does not enter into its meaning in any constitutive way; indeed according to Russell it can be meaningful without being about any object at all, as in a case where the U.S. has no president.\(^5\)

At the same time, Russell held that there is a category of expressions—that of logically proper names—whose meanings do crucially involve the objects they are about.\(^6\) Such an expression’s contribution to determining claims as true and false must be fixed by the object it is about. In fact, Russell held that the meaning of a logically proper name *just is* the particular that it is about. He also argued that the way in which a name means a particular object is different from the way in which a predicate means a quality.\(^7\) This encourages us to think that there is a special binary relation—call it reference—that relates logically proper names to particulars. This relation differs from the ordinary notion of ‘being about’ and also from the relation at issue when we say ‘“red” expresses redness’. Thus, for example, while ‘The famous ship that sank on April 15, 1912’ is an expression about the *Titanic* and so ‘refers’ to it in some loose sense, it is not a logically proper name, and so the fundamental relation of referring does not hold between its occurrences and that ship.\(^8\) In short, as Gareth Evans put it, Russell ‘challenged the unity of the intuitive category of referring expressions’.\(^9\)

(ii) *Knowledge and discrimination.* A further Russellian thesis about logically proper names is that thinkers who employ them must stand in an intimate epistemic relationship to the objects these names are about.\(^10\) Russell used the term ‘acquaintance’ for the relationship involved here, but this is a term of art. The ordinary use of ‘acquaintance’ connotes no more than a shadow of the relation Russell had in mind, which must involve unmediated presentation. As a result, our Russellian acquaintances are few: they include universals and sense data—and possibly ourselves—but certainly not ordinary physical objects.\(^11\) This thesis about logically proper names is an instance of a more general constraint: nothing can be a basic building block of thought unless one

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\(^5\) See ‘Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description’, p. 122. See also ‘On Denoting’, where he writes that ‘The King of France is bald’ is ‘plainly false’ (p. 484). We will return to this contentious claim in Chapter 5.

\(^6\) See ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’, p. 201; *My Philosophical Development*, p. 168.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 46.

\(^8\) Rather than think of reference as a binary relation between occurrences of expressions and objects, one might instead think of it as a ternary relation between an abstract expression, a context, and an object. The latter would be truer to David Kaplan’s style of presentation.

\(^9\) Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, p. 42.

\(^10\) For example, he writes: ‘A name, in the narrow sense of a word whose meaning is a particular, can only be applied to a particular with which the speaker is acquainted’. Russell, ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’, p. 201. See also ‘On the Nature of Acquaintance’, pp. 130–1, 167–8.

\(^11\) ‘Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description’, pp. 109–12.
is acquainted with it. A language reflecting the structure of thought would be one whose simple terms in a given lexical category correspond one-to-one with objects of acquaintance in a corresponding ontological category.\footnote{See ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’, pp. 194–9; ‘Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description’, p. 117–8, and also \textit{My Philosophical Development}, p. 169, where this principle is qualified with the remark: ‘It is perhaps necessary to place some limitation upon this principle as regards logical words—e.g. \textit{or, not, some, all.}’} And every claim would be built up out of a basic lexicon of such simple terms.

One way to understand Russell’s motivation for this strict constraint is to notice the apparent connection between linguistic understanding and knowledge. Russell held that ‘Socrates’ is not a genuine and logically proper name, because understanding the word ‘Socrates’ involves grasping some kind of description about the man; that is, knowing something about him. But a logically proper name cannot be understood by any kind of definition: it is understood by \textit{knowing the particular itself}.\footnote{A proper name, if it is to fulfil its function completely, should not need to be defined in terms of other words: it should denote something of which we are immediately aware (\textit{My Philosophical Development}, p. 166).} This in turn requires direct awareness of the particular: all other knowledge concerns the ‘inferred world’ rather than the world of ‘data’, which makes it descriptive and indirect.\footnote{See for example ibid., pp. 22–7.} The result, he hoped, is that there is no way to be \textit{wrong} about which particular is at issue in thoughts involving proper names, because if one understands the name, one cannot be in error about what it is a name of.\footnote{As Russell writes: ‘At any given moment, there are certain things of which a man is ‘aware’ . . . If I describe these objects, I may of course describe them wrongly; hence I cannot with certainty communicate to another what are the things of which I am aware. But if I speak to myself, and denote them by what may be called ‘proper names’, rather than by descriptive words, I cannot be in error’ (\textit{On the Nature of Acquaintance}, p. 130).} But if understanding a logically proper name requires us to know which particular ‘before our mind’ we are naming, then it would seem that understanding two distinct proper names rules out the possibility that they refer to the same object (or different objects) without our knowing that they do.\footnote{However, notice that there are important asymmetries of epistemic possibility here (where \( p \) is epistemically possible iff it is compatible with what one knows). Suppose we grant that, given strict acquaintance, one cannot understand two logically proper names that co-refer if it is epistemically possible that they fail to co-refer. Even so, this does not rule out wrongly \textit{taking oneself} to understand two logically proper names, and taking them to be co-referential when in fact they are not. Without some supplementary principles, strict acquaintance does not guarantee the impossibility of unnoticed coreference—or unnoticed lack of coreference.} As a result, if two genuine names ‘a’ and ‘b’ refer to the same particular, ‘a is b’ has no epistemic significance.\footnote{Russell, ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’, pp. 244–6.} (And as an added benefit, Russell’s requirement on understanding rules out the epistemic possibility that someone understands a logically proper name and yet it fails to refer.)\footnote{Though the sort of epistemic accessibility issue mentioned in fn. 16 applies here as well. The acquaintance requirement does not by itself rule out that one wrongly takes a given term to be a logically proper name that one understands.}
However, the requirement that co-reference must always be discriminable in this way puts extraordinarily demanding constraints on what sorts of objects can count as the semantic values of logically proper names. One might have two encounters with an ordinary physical object and on each occasion perform a baptism, without knowing whether the resulting terms co-refer. In general, it seems that logically proper names cannot refer to objects for which one can have epistemically diverse perspectives: if, say, an object is the sort of thing that one can look at from the front as well as from the back, that object will be rendered unsuitable as the referent of a logically proper name.\(^\text{19}\)

Given Russell’s assumptions about understanding, then, his acquaintance constraint seems inevitable. But—as we will see in Chapter 3—some sort of epistemic acquaintance requirement can be motivated with less contentious premises about understanding. For example, it would seem that to understand an expression requires knowing what it means. So if the meaning of a proper name is its referent, understanding a proper name would seem to require at least being in a position to know that it refers. Now suppose, for reductio, that one has a proper name whose meaning is an epistemically distant object like the black hole Cygnus X-1. Knowing what ‘Cygnus X-1’ means will require knowing that it refers to Cygnus X-1, and hence that Cygnus X-1 exists. But insofar as one does not know whether Cygnus X-1 exists, it appears to follow that one does not really understand the name.\(^\text{20}\) (We will return to such arguments in Chapter 3.)\(^\text{21}\)

Since most philosophers have abandoned the radical Russellian form of epistemic acquaintance as a constraint on understanding, our concern in the following three chapters will be to address some of its far less stringent successors in vogue today. However, a small current of contemporary philosophy shares some of Russell’s original motivations and—as a result—some have attempted to craft a notion of semantic value that satisfies his extreme acquaintance desiderata.\(^\text{22}\) They posit a kind of meaning (‘primary meaning’) such that it is always available to a priori investigation whether two things share a meaning of that type. In short, equivalence of primary meaning must always be open to view. It is therefore no surprise that facts about primary meaning are supposed to be fixed by facts wholly internal to the mind.\(^\text{23}\)

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\(^{19}\) Thanks to David Kaplan for this way of expressing it.

\(^{20}\) Russell would not himself put things in exactly this way, as he denies that where ‘N’ is a logically proper name, ‘N exists’ can be a meaningful sentence. (See ‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’, p. 252–3.)

\(^{21}\) Note that the epistemic requirement that one needs to know that \(x\) exists in order to understand an expression that refers to \(x\) does not obviously deliver the epistemic requirement that one must be in a position to know that two referential expressions co-refer when they do. Even if there is some \(x\) such that someone knows that ‘Hesperus’ refers to \(x\) and that ‘Phosphorus’ refers to \(x\), it may not follow that she is in a position to know that ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ both refer to \(x\).

\(^{22}\) See, for example, Chalmers, ‘The Foundations of Two-Dimensional Semantics’; Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis*.

\(^{23}\) However, even this would not suffice for the kind of transparency required; for example, the ‘subpersonal-level whirrings and grindings’ of the devices that underlie our recognitional capacities, while
Along with the majority, we hold out little hope for such a project. Not only are primary meanings often disconnected from ordinary ways of thinking and talking about meaning, but there also seems to be a problem in principle of crafting primary meanings so that the epistemic desiderata that moved Russell are met. For one thing, we adhere to the widely held view that the indiscriminability of phenomenal episodes is intransitive.\(^2\) (Phenomenal episodes are the contemporary successors to 'sense-data'). This in turn suggests that two phenomenal episodes of different types may nevertheless be indiscriminable. Given this, even predicates whose meanings are phenomenal state types need not satisfy strict Russellian acquaintance conditions. Moreover, consider illusions of consciousness—beliefs that a phenomenal episode is present where it is not. If these are possible, one might fail to refer with a putatively logically proper name and not know it; and one might also refer without knowing that one has done so (there being a real danger of illusion). We postpone a proper engagement with reactionary Russellianism to another time.\(^2\)

Russellian acquaintance, then, has been largely jettisoned, and the category of 'logically proper names' has been vastly expanded. But acquaintance-theoretic ideology has lived on in various degenerate forms. Some retain the idea that there is something deep and important about Russell's requirement that to understand an expression whose meaning is an object, one needs to know which object it is. Others adhere to the idea that there must be a special causal connection between an object and a mental representation if the former is to serve as a bona fide referent of the latter. Our own view is that attempts to constrain reference or object-directed thought using some version of acquaintance have invariably been misguided. We aim to vindicate this pessimism in the next few chapters.

1.3 Reference after Russell

Let us now set out some semantic ideas connected with Russell's logically proper names that have been widely brought to bear on their successors.

(i) Object-dependence. First, Russell held that logically proper names are 'meaningless unless there is an object which they designate.'\(^2\) That is, intuitively, a referring expression’s very meaningfulness—again, in the sense of its capacity to successfully contribute to the generation of truth conditions—is somehow bound up with its successfully being about a particular object. However, we cannot simply identify an expression of the internal to the mind, will not fit the bill. See Martin Davies, 'Reference, Contingency, and the Two-Dimensional Framework'.

\(^2\) For exploration of the relevant issues see Williamson, *Identity and Discrimination*.

\(^2\) Though for some critical discussion, see Hawthorne, 'Direct Reference and Dancing Qualia'; Schroeter, 'The Rationalist Foundations of Chalmers’ Two-Dimensional Semantics'; and Yablo, 'Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda'.

\(^2\) *My Philosophical Development*, p. 168.
relevant kind as one that is meaningless unless there is an object that it is about. For we may wish to allow—on some ways of individuating expressions—that one occurrence of an expression can be crucially about a particular object, while another occurrence of that expression is meaningful even though it is not about any particular object. (This is a common view about the pronoun ‘he’: to be meaningful when it is used ‘deictically’, there must be an object that it is about. But it is not being used in this way when someone says, ‘Every boy wishes he did not have to go to school.’) To cordon off this issue, we can put the idea this way. An expression is object-dependent for meaningfulness on an occasion of use iff it is meaningful on that occasion by virtue of there being an object that it is about on that occasion.

(Can we state this idea without using a notion like by virtue of?\textsuperscript{27} It will not quite do to state the idea counterfactually, as in: ‘An expression is object-dependent on an occasion just in case: had there been no object that it was about, it would have lacked meaning’. This works for many cases. But it does not get to the heart of the matter. Suppose an expression is actually used in a fashion that is paradigmatically referential, but the closest possibilities where it is not about an object are possibilities where it is meaningfully put to a different use—one can easily construct such cases using ‘he’. Then, by the counterfactual test, it would not be object-dependent for meaningfulness.\textsuperscript{28} The situation is a familiar one: counterfactual tests are fairly well understood but can rarely play the role of real definitions—at best they are reasonable facsimiles.)

A related idea is that of an expression’s having an object-dependent meaning (on some occasion of use). Let us say that an expression’s meaning is object-dependent on $o$ just in case no expression could have had that very meaning unless it were about $o$. Given the plausible assumption that no expression can be about an object unless the object exists,\textsuperscript{29} this implies that when an expression’s meaning is object-dependent on $o$, then no expression could have had that very meaning unless $o$ existed.

\textsuperscript{27} Some avenues are opened up if we follow Kit Fine in distinguishing facts that are merely semantic as to topic—they pertain to semantic features of things—and facts that are also semantic as to status—they are true ‘wholly consequential upon the meaning of the expressions’ which they concern (Fine, Semantic Relationism, pp. 43–5). We can then introduce a sentential operator ‘It is a semantic-as-to-status fact that’ (p. 135, fn. 7). Equipped with such an operator, we could (as Fine is aware) cash out the idea of object-dependence in terms of it: An expression $e$ is object-dependent for its meaningfulness on an occasion iff it is a semantic-as-to-status fact that a sentence containing $e$ is true on that occasion only if there is some $x$ such that the expression $e$ is about $x$. And a term has an object-dependent meaning on an occasion iff there is some object $x$ such that it is a semantic-as-to-status fact that $e$ is about $x$.

\textsuperscript{28} One might try to improve things by blending ‘occasion of use’ ideology into the counterfactual in a suitable way. This is hard to do, however. For example, suppose, as is fairly standard, occasions of use are treated as world-bound. Then counterfactuals beginning ‘Had there been no object it was about on that occasion of use, then...’, directed at a term that actually succeeds in referring, will have impossible antecedents.

\textsuperscript{29} The consequence flows from the natural assumption that, in general, for a binary relation to be instantiated, its relata must exist.
Roughly, then, an expression is object-dependent for meaningfulness if *having any meaning at all* requires it to be about an object. And an expression has an object-dependent meaning if *having that meaning* requires being about the object that expression is actually about. There are expressions whose occurrences happen to be about objects and yet they are not object-dependent in either way. For example, ‘The first president of the U.S.’ is about George Washington; but it is widely thought not to be object-dependent in either sense. In contrast, Russell’s logically proper names are object-dependent in both ways. Their meaningfulness, as well as the particular meaning they have, consist in their referring to particular private objects.

As noted earlier, the purported class of referential vehicles has expanded well beyond Russellian restrictions; ordinary proper names, demonstratives, and indexicals are now typically held to be referential vehicles. And it is still common to connect the idea of the reference relation with both kinds of object-dependence. But this connection is not inevitable. Some theorists, such as Gareth Evans, have defended views of reference on which referring expressions can fail to be object-dependent in one or even both ways. We will have occasion to examine such views in later chapters.

(ii) *Exhaustiveness and rigidity*. Another idea that has come to be associated with referential terms, especially since the work of David Kaplan and Saul Kripke, concerns their behavior in modal contexts. We can begin with the picture according to which a sentence can be evaluated for truth relative to ways the world might have been (or ‘possible worlds’). Among other things, this procedure determines the truth-value of sentences that result from embedding the original sentence within a modal operator. For example, ‘possibly *S*’ is standardly treated as true just in case *S* is true evaluated at some (accessible) possible world.

Within this framework, the notion of sentences being true relative to worlds will give rise to the notion of expressions being about objects relative to worlds. Recall the contrast between ‘The first president of the U.S.’ and ‘George Washington’. The former picks out (it is, loosely speaking, about) different presidents at different worlds, while the latter picks out the same individual at every world, regardless of whether he is president—or even called ‘George Washington’—at that world. As a result, the truth of ‘George Washington played chess’, evaluated at a given world, will always turn on how things stand with respect to that individual at that world. But the truth of ‘The first president of the U.S. played chess’ evaluated at a world will turn on how things stand with whomever is the first president at that world. And what this shows is that

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30 Not everyone will prefer a metalanguage involving worlds and truth at worlds as the preferred semantic framework for describing modal language. Those who treat modal operators as quantifiers that can bind variables may prefer to treat the semantic contribution of an atomic sentence when unembedded as true simpliciter or false simpliciter, and the semantic contribution of those words within a modal operator as open-sentence-like. (For more on this see Chapters 5 and 6.) Those who prefer a metalanguage of modal operators will not use the apparatus of worlds to illuminate the semantic workings of a modal object language. But all of these approaches will have something like the non-rigid/rigid distinction—after all, they will likely all agree
the contribution of ‘The first president of the U.S.’ to determining the truth or falsity of claims is not fixed by the object it is about. And so, in vindication of Russell, it will not do to think of the meaning of that expression as the man, George Washington.

A rigid use of an expression is dedicated to being about a certain object—it is not about any other object relative to any world. The obstinate kind of rigidity requires a term to be about that object at every world, regardless of whether that object exists at that world. For example, consider the claim ‘George Washington fails to exist’. This claim is standardly taken to be about Washington relative to every world of evaluation, so that relative to a world where Washington does not exist, the sentence is true. (This is why ‘Possibly, George Washington fails to exist’ is true.) But there are weaker forms of rigidity. An expression (on an occasion of use) will be rigid but not obstinately rigid if there is some object o such that it is about o relative to some worlds, and relative to every world, it is either about o or about nothing at all.

There are at least two reasons why an expression might—in principle—be rigid without being obstinately rigid. First, it might pick out o at every world where o exists, but fail to pick out anything at worlds where o does not exist. Call this moderate rigidity. For example, take the expression ‘the man identical to Socrates.’ Now consider a world where Socrates fails to exist. On the standard Russellian treatment of definite descriptions, the proposition expressed by ‘The man identical to Socrates fails to exist’ is false evaluated at that world—since it claims existence with the determiner ‘the’ and denies it with the predicate. It is thus natural for the Russellian about definite descriptions to conclude that ‘the man identical to Socrates’ is only moderately rigid. A second way a term might be rigid but not obstinately rigid is by failing to pick out o even at certain worlds where o exists. For example, one way of treating an expression like ‘Professor Hawthorne’ is to think of it as picking out John only at worlds where he is a professor, and nothing otherwise. Call this weak rigidity.

A further distinction is worth noting. Insofar as an expression rigidly picks out o, it may be that it does so by virtue of the kind of expression it is; or instead thanks partly to extra-semantic facts. Thus ‘the successor of 2’ obstinately rigidly picks out the number 3 thanks to the fact that numbers exist necessarily, but not simply because it is a definite description that picks out the number 3. By contrast, the story goes, it is a semantic rule for ‘3’—at least when it is used as a name—that it is obstinately rigid. In the first case, the rigidity has a metaphysical explanation (this is ‘de facto’ rigidity); in the second case it has a semantic one (this is ‘de jure’ rigidity).

that ‘∃x (x is not the president of the U.S. but could have been)’ is true but ‘∃x (x is not Nixon but could have been)’ is false—though they will articulate that distinction in rather different ways.

32 We do not, of course, intend for this sentence to be read as though ‘fails’ somehow becomes an operator and takes wide scope over the definite description.
33 See the Forward to the 1980 edition of Naming and Necessity, p. 21, fn. 21
How does referentiality relate to rigidity? We can identify two ideas that, working together, would render all referring expressions obstinately rigid.

The first idea is that, regardless of linguistic environment, the meaning of an expression exhausts what is relevant to its contribution to the truth of a sentence. Call this compositionality. The second idea is a Russelian one: the meaning of a referring expression is exhausted by the object that it is about. Call this exhaustivity. (Following the usual practice, when $o$ exhausts the meaning of $e$, we shall say that $o$ is the semantic value of $e$.) If we put these ideas together, we get the following picture. Even when an occurrence of a given referring expression $e$ finds itself within the scope of a modal operator, the fact that $e$ picks out $o$ will be its only contribution to what is considered at worlds of evaluation when the resulting sentence is assessed.

In less picturesque terms, the idea is that a compositional semantics for $e$ will proceed simply by assigning to any occurrence of $e$ the object that it is about. No further information need be encoded. Thus, the fact that the occurrence of $e$ is about $o$ will exhaust $e$’s contribution to compositional semantics. In particular, the interaction of a modal operator with a sentence containing an occurrence of $e$ will be sensitive only to the fact that it is about $o$. This in turn will generate intuitions of obstinate rigidity for referring expressions. (This is a special instance of a more general phenomenon. Let a rigid predicator be a predicate that expresses the same property relative to all possible worlds. Suppose one thought that the semantic life of a predicate consisted entirely in its expressing a property. Then it will turn out that all predicates are rigid predicators. Similarly for the definite article ‘the’: if it has a certain relation between properties as semantic value, then there will be a perfectly good sense in which it is rigid with respect to that relation.)

Of course, insofar as the semantic life of an expression varies from context to context, the idea of exhaustivity will require refinement. The phenomenon of context-dependence raises the question whether, in principle, a referring expression might be about one object when it occurs in an atomic sentence, but about another object when it occurs within the scope of a certain operator. This is consistent with a contextualized version of exhaustivity—that the semantic contribution of a given occurrence of $e$ is exhausted by its reference.

(Consider an example. Suppose we introduce an operator ‘plossibly’, which behaves like ‘possibly’ except that in the scope of ‘plossibly’, any name refers to Plato. The truth-conditions of ‘Plossibly Socrates is identical to Plato’ could be generated in a way that is perfectly compositional, and it would turn out true even though the

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34 If we think of predicates as being about the properties they express, and as having those properties as their meanings, this will certainly not be a sufficient condition for being a referential expression. This point is reminiscent of Russell’s insistence that the way a predicate means a quality is different to the way that a logically proper name means a particular.

35 Of course, there are other packages that deliver obstinate rigidity. Even those who reject exhaustivity can hold that modal operators are blind to trans-referential aspects of meaning.
semantic contribution of one of its parts is a little out of the ordinary. But on standard assumptions about the semantics of natural language, ‘plossibly’ is highly anomalous, since it disallows ‘Socrates’ from having the referent that it normally enjoys. Insofar as one holds that ordinary names always pick out whatever they refer to in unembedded uses, one must insist that natural language modal operators are not like ‘plossibly’: there can be no special principles governing the reference of referring expressions within their scope.

(iii) Variables. Philosophers have sometimes characterized reference by pointing to the semantic behavior of variables and treating it as paradigmatically referential. Of course, it can hardly be said that ‘x’ in an occurrence of ‘∃x(x is happy)’ simply stands in a binary reference relation to a particular object. (Which object would that be?) Instead, the point is that relative to an assignment function, a variable behaves much like a referential vehicle. To begin with, there is the following structural similarity. An occurrence of an atomic sentence formed by concatenating a referential term with a monadic predicate is true iff the predicative occurrence is true of the object referred to by the referential occurrence. And an occurrence of an open sentence formed by concatenating a variable with a monadic predicate is true relative to an assignment iff the predicative occurrence is true of the object assigned to the variable by that assignment.

The similarities may run deeper. Consider a sentence containing a referring term that refers to o, and then the result of substituting that term for a variable. Those who see a deep affinity between variables and referential vehicles may think that every claim about the semantic life of the referring term is also true of the variable, relative to an assignment of o to that variable. Hence, insofar the original sentence has a semantic content, the open sentence will be considered to have that very content relative to that assignment.

These reflections provide another standard route to the notion of singular contents: they are contents of the sort expressed by open sentences relative to assignments of objects to their variables. Relatedly, suppose one holds that any belief attribution with a referential term in its complement clause attributes a belief in a singular content. The corresponding variable-theoretic idea is this: an open sentence of the form ‘John believes that x is F’ will attribute to John a belief in a singular content about Socrates relative to an assignment that assigns Socrates to ‘x’. Coordinately, if a predicate of the form ‘believes that x is F’ is true of John relative to an assignment of Socrates to ‘x’, then John will be deemed to believe a singular content about Socrates. Given the interaction

36. Note that this would not make ‘plossibly’ a monster in David Kaplan’s sense. A monstrous operator is one that operates on the Kaplanian character of an expression (Kaplan, ‘Demonstratives’, p. 511).
37. This further idea precludes, inter alia, Frege’s view that in the context of attitude verbs, names refer to that which is their sense in ordinary contexts.
38. Here we are thinking of ‘Relative to assignment F’ as functioning roughly as a sentential operator.
of existential quantifiers with variables, it follows within this framework that ‘∃x(John believes that x is happy)’ will be true only if there is some x such that John believes a singular content about x, to the effect that x is happy. (However, as we will see, some will want to deny the further step that being belief-related to a singular content is sufficient for having a genuinely singular thought.)

This route to the notion of singular contents has certain advantages over our earlier characterization of them as contents of the sort that are expressed by sentences containing referential terms. First, the latter idea leans very heavily on the locution ‘of the sort’. After all, there may be plenty of objects in the world for which we do not have referential terms, but we may not want to disallow singular contents about those things. This problem is less serious for the variable-theoretic formulation, since for any object in the world there will be an assignment that assigns the variable in ‘x is happy’ to that object.

For some readers there may also be a second advantage. We have in mind those who are unsure about whether any of the putatively paradigmatic referential devices—like names—actually function as such. Such readers may feel more secure about the ternary relation holding between an object, a variable, and an assignment than about the alleged binary relation holding between an object and a referring expression. For them, variables may be preferable as a point of departure for theorizing about singular content.39

(iv) The metaphysics of propositions. Discussions of reference and singular thought are typically undertaken within a framework of realism about propositions, according to which there are abstract objects that people believe and that utterances express. This seems to open up another way to characterize singular contents. Perhaps they are propositions with a special kind of metaphysical structure; indeed, following Russell’s lead, perhaps they literally contain objects as constituents.40 Given that the semantic life of a referential term is especially bound up with a particular object, it is tempting within this framework to say that all and only expressions that refer to Socrates will contribute Socrates himself to a proposition, and the resulting proposition will contain Socrates as a constituent.

One who tries to provide a direct characterization of singular contents in metaphysical terms has a number of complications to confront. First, constituency cannot be thought of merely as parthood, because parthood is transitive. If Socrates is part of a proposition, then so his left kidney. But proponents of the relevant vision do not think

39 However, it is not inevitable that a language use variables, nor even that a lack of variables would make its expressive power impoverished. (See Quine, ‘Variables Explained Away’, pp. 343–7.) Suppose it were to turn out that natural languages do not in any sense contain variables, and that variables occur only in artificial languages. It would then be prima facie embarrassing to rely on variables to anchor our theorizing about singular content.
of the proposition that Socrates is tall as, in the relevant sense, containing Socrates’ left kidney as a constituent. This can perhaps be handled by thinking of propositions set-theoretically and of constituency as set membership, though some will wonder if it can ultimately be metaphysically satisfying to think of propositions as sets.41 Second, a thing can appear as a constituent in the content of a sentence even if it is not referred to by any element in that sentence. For example, it is natural to think of tallness as a constituent of the content of ‘Someone is tall’ as well as of the content of ‘Tallness is a property’. But only the second sentence is usually treated as singular in content, because only the second contains an element that refers to tallness. Thus, the simple constituency test is too blunt an instrument to characterize singular content, especially if we hoped to characterize referring terms in turn as those that semantically contribute objects to singular contents.42

Perhaps these challenges can be met. We have no principled aversion to realism about propositions or to the possibility that they may be structured in interesting ways.43 But we doubt that metaphysical speculations about the structure of propositions are a promising place to start when thinking about the referential structure of language and singular thought. Perhaps, with the best final theory in hand, a directly metaphysical characterization of singular contents will suffice. But we do not want to begin with any such expectation. Still less do we want to rely on any particular metaphysical picture of singular content.

1.4 Singular thought after Russell

We have encountered several interconnected themes about referential expressions. In what follows we will begin by adopting—along with philosophical orthodoxy—the working hypothesis that there is a single semantic natural kind on which most or all of these themes converge. (By the end of the book we will be in a position to reconsider this hypothesis.) Accordingly, ‘referential expression’ will serve as a placeholder term for expressions of the envisaged kind—and ‘reference’ for the relation that holds between such terms and the objects they are about.

41 We say ‘perhaps’ because the reduction of constituency to facts about membership is not straightforward. Suppose one construed ‘Socrates teaches Plato’ as expressing a set that is given by some set-theoretic reduction of the ordered triple <Socrates, teaching, Plato>. Standard set-theoretic reductions of ordered triples will not make either philosopher a member of the resulting set. So if constituency is membership we get the wrong results. Suppose instead we make constituency the ancestral of membership. Then we risk making the number five a constituent of the proposition that Socrates adores Josephine, where ‘Josephine’ is a name for the set of natural numbers. (Thanks to Tim Williamson here.)

42 One fix would be to claim that a proposition p is a singular proposition about o iff (i) o is a constituent of p and (ii) p is the content of some open sentence relative to an assignment of o to some first-order variable in that open sentence. But then we would be no longer characterizing singular propositions simply in terms of their distinctive metaphysical structure; in fact, condition (i) becomes redundant given usual assumptions.

43 For an engagement with issues of this sort, see King, The Nature and Structure of Content.
We intend to approach the special category of singular thought in a similar fashion, so let us begin by sketching some of the usual ideas with which it is associated.

(i) Content. One common desideratum for the relevant psychological kind is parasitic on the notion of a singular content—a singular thought involves (at least) bearing a cognitive attitude to a singular content. A singular content, in turn, can be understood as a content of the sort expressed by sentences containing referential terms, or by open sentences relative to assignments. This idea is connected with some standard ways of detecting the presence of a cognitive attitude towards a singular content. First, if someone understands and sincerely utters a sentence containing a referential term, that is prima facie reason to think she believes the singular content that she expresses. Second, suppose we assume that an ordinary attitude report expresses (at least) a cognitive relation between the subject and the proposition expressed by the complement clause. Then a cognitive attitude towards a singular content would be signaled by a true attitude report with a referential expression in its complement clause, and also by a true report that ‘quantifies in’ (where a variable within the report is bound by a quantifier outside it). That is, we regiment ‘Someone is believed by John to be happy’ as ∃x(John believes that x is happy), which in turn is true iff the open sentence is true relative to some assignment.

(ii) Tags or files. Another way to characterize singular thought involves appealing to the cognitive mechanisms whereby we entertain contents. If one adopts a model on which our token thoughts have linguistic structure, it is natural to hold that singular thoughts are those involving mentalese analogues of referential expressions—call them ‘tags’. On such a picture there are simple unstructured object-representations in our language of thought that refer to particular objects. Another common picture ascribes far more internal structure to the object representations: an object is represented by a ‘file’ that contains various items of information associated with that object. On this view, a file differs from a mere conjunctive description in that a file can represent an individual even if much of the associated information is incorrect. As John Perry puts it: the file gets to be about the source of the relevant information even if it does not satisfy

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44 Appeals to mental files or ‘dossiers’ go back at least to Grice, ‘Vacuous Names’, see pp. 141–4. See also Bach, *Thought and Reference*, pp. 34–44; Perry, ‘A Problem About Continued Belief’, pp. 70–4; and *Reference and Reflexivity*, especially pp. 54–7, Forbes, ‘Cognitive Architecture and the Semantics of Belief’; Recanati, *Direct Reference: From Language to Thought*, chs. 5–6; and Lawlor, *New Thoughts About Old Things*, ch. 4. The metaphor of files has also been put to a distinct but related use in theories of dynamic semantics as a way of modeling how an object may be represented over an entire discourse. (See for example, Heim, ‘File Change Semantics and the Familiarity Theory of Definites’.)

45 Not only does the ‘file’ view differ from the ‘tag’ view in characterizing object representations as complex; it might also be less sanguine about the linguistic structure that the tag view seems to impose on thought tokens. However, these theories are typically entertained and discussed in very schematic form. For example, it remains very unclear whether, for example, there is anything at stake in the decision whether to regard a complex file itself as the object representation, or instead some simple tag within the file. And one might also posit unstructured object representations (with the tag view as we have described it) and yet (against that view) deny that thought tokens have anything like syntactic structure.
that information.\textsuperscript{46} If there turns out to be an important natural kind of representation here, then arguably that which best deserves to be called a ‘singular thought about $x$’ will be a cognitive file dedicated to representing $x$.

There are various motivations for characterizing singular thoughts by means of tags or files. For some, the appeal to cognitive mechanisms simply takes the place of an appeal to singular contents. One might, for example, have a non-hyperintensional picture of contents that does not distinguish the content of a belief that $1$ is odd from the content of a belief that the smallest prime is odd. On such a view it is natural to hold that what makes a thought singular is a matter of how the content is represented, as opposed to the nature of the content itself. Others might accept a singular/non-singular distinction at the level of content but hold that the most interesting distinctions concerning object-directed thought are marked by the presence or absence of the key cognitive mechanism and not by the bearing of propositions attitudes to singular contents.\textsuperscript{47} Here the motivation might be the idea that something like tags or files will have to be appealed to for the purposes of perspicuous psychological explanation: inspired by Frege puzzles, one might hold that the best such explanations will often employ a very fine-grained way of individuating object-directed thoughts. Thus it is not sufficient for two distinct thought-tokens to count as ‘the same singular thought’ that they have the same semantic content. They must also involve the same mental tag or file.\textsuperscript{48}

(iii) \textit{Satisfactional vs. relational.} Still another idea associated with singular thoughts—one that can be combined with one or both of the foregoing ideas—involves the contrast between \textit{satisfactional} and \textit{relational} object-representations.\textsuperscript{49} This contrast has been characterized by reference to the behavior of indexicals, the use of which can exploit a relation between an indexical token and the referent without the speaker having to represent that the relevant relation holds. Kent Bach puts it this way: ‘\textit{De re} modes of presentation . . . determine the contextual relation that something must bear to a thought to be the object of that very thought.’\textsuperscript{50} They determine ‘the object one is thinking of’ not by some imposed descriptive condition, but by means of a relation to that very token representation, whether immediate or remote. Of course, we may be able to provide a descriptive \textit{characterization} of the token-reflexive constraints at work: for example, we might say that the internal analogue of ‘here’ is constrained to pick out the place of the thought token. But, crucially, in exploiting this relation to pick out its

\textsuperscript{46} See ‘A Problem about Continued Belief’, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{47} One might deny that all singular thoughts have singular content if one holds that a thought can be made singular by containing the mental analog of an empty referential term. (See Jeshion, ‘Acquaintanceless De Re Belief’.)
\textsuperscript{48} For more on the importance of such semantic interconnections among thoughts, see Taylor, ‘The Psychology of Direct Reference’ and Fine, \textit{Semantic Relationism}, chs. 3–4.
\textsuperscript{49} Bach is explicit that the presence or absence of relational representation of an object does not line up with the truth or falsity of belief reports where a referential device to that object occurs in that that-clause. (In particular, he rejects the principle of \textit{Harmony}, discussed in our Chapter 2; see ‘Getting a Thing into a Thought’, p. 53.)
\textsuperscript{50} Bach, \textit{Thought and Reference}, p. 13.
object, the thought token ‘does not have to represent its own being in that relation to the object but merely has to be in that relation’.

By contrast, a satisfactional object representation involves thinking of something ‘under a description,’ the satisfaction of which determines the object of the representation.

Bach goes on to insist that the relation exploited by a relational representation must be ‘causal-historical’ and involve ‘a chain of representations originating with a perception of the object.’ One way of understanding this causal condition is that it is a mere stipulation about Bach’s use of ‘relational’ or ‘de re’. In that case, the only question is whether this way of dividing things up is explanatorily useful, or explicates a distinction that was pre-theoretically important and intuitive. As will become clear in what follows, we are doubtful on both points. Alternatively, Bach may be making a substantive claim to the effect that all object-representations that exploit relations (in the way sketched in the previous paragraph) must as a matter of fact exploit causal-historical relations. In that case, we see no reason to accept the claim. For example, one might well imagine that our primary internal representations of here and now are anchored by spatio-temporal rather than causal-historical relations. Or we might imagine that an internal representation can be of a particular place by disposing its bearer to move to that place given various conative attitudes. And so on. (We discuss causal constraints on singular thought further in the next two chapters.)

Here is another concern. It is far from clear whether all object-representations fit smoothly into the relational/satisfactional taxonomy as described. First, consider a mental name introduced by way of a reference-fixing description. This name will pick out the object it does thanks to the description’s being satisfied, and it does not exploit a relation, so it will not count as ‘relational’. On the other hand, arguably a given thought token that deploys that name need not itself represent the crucial descriptive condition—so in that sense it is not clearly ‘satisfactional’ either. And if we go on to suppose that the relevant description actually involves a relation to tokens of the name in question—but one that is not causal-historical—then it seems to have even more claim to being relational, but would not quite fit the bill if the ‘causal-historical’ nature of the relation is criterial to being ‘relational’.

One could say instead that relational object-representations are those that pick out objects without the need for any descriptive conditions represented by the thinker of the thought. But it is far from clear that any of our object-directed representations pass this test. Consider our object-directed representations of Socrates. It may be that causal-historical relations play a crucial role in explaining how such representations pick out Socrates and also that thinkers need not represent such causal-historical relations as obtaining in order for them to do their work. Still, it is plausible that

51 ‘Getting a Thing into a Thought’, p. 55.
52 *Thought and Reference*, p. 12.
53 ‘Getting a Thing into a Thought’, p. 55.
54 Thanks to Rachel Goodman for helpful conversations about this contrast.
such tags pick out Socrates rather than Socrates’ flesh owing to the categorial constraints governing them that are internally represented: we intend to be thinking about the man and not the lump of flesh. More generally still, many metasemantic theorists hold that referential facts are fixed by a delicate balancing act of descriptive associations, causal connections, the relative naturalness/non-gerrymanderedness of candidates, and so on. Such factors together will determine, for example, when and whether any reference shift occurs in a given chain of object-representations. If this is right, failure of any given descriptive association may be quite compatible with referential success. But at the same time, referential success is hardly ever purely relational.

(iv) ‘Believing of’, etc. A final approach characterizing singular thought is one with which we have very little sympathy: namely, that of invoking locutions like ‘believing of x that it is F’ or ‘having x in mind’. Insofar as these express ordinary notions, their acceptability does not track the presence or absence of the kinds of thoughts that theorists typically take to be singular. For example: using the ordinary sense of ‘having in mind’ it made perfect sense for Thurgood Marshall to say: ‘When the Founding Fathers used this phrase [“the People”] in 1787, they did not have in mind the majority of America’s citizens’. But he was hardly pointing out the fact that the Founding Fathers did not have singular thoughts (plural or otherwise) about everyone in the country. Likewise, if he had said ‘The Founding Fathers did not believe of all Americans that they deserved equal rights’, the truth of his claim would have nothing to do with the whether the founders had singular thoughts about all Americans.

Unfortunately, as we will see, philosophers often surreptitiously employ such locutions as terms of art tied to the notion of singular thought. The result is that the line between the ordinary and theoretically-laden uses of these locutions has become hopelessly blurred. (For more on this, see §§2.5 and 3.1.)

1.5 Acquaintance after Russell

The history of the notion of acquaintance has, since Russell, been marked by steady liberalization. The original picture was that genuine reference requires a kind of revelation or unmediated presentation. This extreme requirement is usually weakened in one way or another by contemporary theorists, though most still posit a special relation of epistemic or causal rapport that is necessary for reference and/or singular

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55 For particularly heavy use of the notion of ‘having an object in mind’ see Devitt, Designation. For an account that leans on ‘believing of’, see Soames, Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century, Vol 2: The Age of Meaning, pp. 414–6.
57 When these terms are not explicitly introduced as terms of art, the suggestion is that they are simply used as expressions of natural language, and that readers should exercise their pretheoretic understanding of those expressions. But in fact it often seems that terms of art are in play whose artificiality is masked by the existence of similar expressions in ordinary speech. We recommend assessing the relevant philosophical texts while replacing these expressions with complete neologisms.
thought. (Dissenters include Ernest Sosa, Robin Jeshion, and David Kaplan in some of his later work. 58) We have been told, variously, that the right relation to some object $o$ requires that one ‘knows who/what $o$ is’; 59 that one can recognize or individuate $o$; 60 that $o$ has left a ‘vivid mark’ on one; 61 or that one can employ a singular term whose reference to $o$ is ‘determined solely . . . by (appropriately shaped) causal chains’ ground-ed in $o$. 62 Unfortunately, characterizations of these relations seldom go beyond the oft-hand and picturesque. 63 One gets the sense that theorists are not quite happy to leave such a significant notion unexplored, but at the same time they have not found anything very precise to say about it.

Still, we can divide these requirements into two broad categories: those that are epistemic, and those that are causal.

(i) **Epistemic acquaintance.** One leading proponent of an epistemic constraint has been Gareth Evans, who argued that singular thought requires *discriminating knowledge*: ‘the subject must have a capacity to distinguish the object of his judgment from all other things’. 64 Such a capacity might take the form of being able to identify an object in one’s perceptual field, being able to recognize the object if presented with it, or else (perhaps) being able to distinguish the object descriptively from everything else. An inability to discriminate the relevant object from every other would rule out having a singular thought about that object (even if, for example, the subject had a memory deriving from the relevant object). 65 And while one can master the use of a proper name merely by picking up a social name-using practice, one does not thereby ‘come to a proper understanding of what is said’ in one’s own remarks using the name. Acquiring the object’s name and thereby acquiring a distal causal link to the object is not sufficient for entertaining singular propositions about it. 66 (We focus on the epistemic approach to acquaintance in Chapter 3.)

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59 The ‘knowing who’/‘knowing what’ test is common (though as we shall see in Chapter 3, the relevant knowing-wh expressions are sometimes being avowedly deployed with a quasi-technical meaning). For examples of this test see Russell, ‘Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description’, p. 113; Strawson, *Subject and Predicate in Logic and Grammar*, p. 47; Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ch. 4; Soames, ‘Beyond Singular Propositions?’, p. 518, fn. 5; Recanati, ‘Singular Thought: In Defense of Acquaintance’, p. 151. Others, such as Kaplan in ‘Quantifying In’, speak of ‘knowing x’ rather than ‘knowing who $x$ is’.

60 Evans, op. cit., ch. 4.

61 Kaplan, ‘Quantifying In’, p. 384.

62 Boer and Lycan, *Knowing Who*, p. 128. This view is quite common: see fn. 67 below for some examples.

63 One exception is the work of Igal Kvart: see Kvart, ‘A Theory of Thinker Reference’; ‘Mediated Reference and Proper Names’.

64 Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, 89.

65 Ibid., Chapters 4–6 and 9, and especially pp. 89–92, 115–19, 132–5. Evans argues that the subject cannot exploit the uniqueness condition afforded by his single memory unless he explicitly thinks of the object as ‘the one from which his current memory derives’ (90). We explore this and related issues in Chapter 3.

(ii) Causal acquaintance. By far the most common way of characterizing acquaintance is that it involves some appropriate causal connection with the object of thought.67 Obviously one could be more or less strict: perhaps only perception and memory suffice. But having allowed singular thought to extend beyond the Cartesian theatre, few philosophers want to deny that we can all have singular thoughts about (say) Kurt Gödel. As a result, many allow that the right sort of connection can be supplied by competence with a name that is linked causally, by way of a chain of name-users, to an initial baptism in the presence of the object.68 Here Kaplan famously introduced the analogy of photographs: for a photo to count as of a particular person, ‘the person must serve significantly in the causal chain leading to the picture’s production’.69 The idea is that names and even mental episodes are like photographs in this way: to count as representations of an object, there must be some causal connection to that object, however mediated.

On the other hand, it seems too strong to insist that one’s use of a name be linked by earlier uses of that name to an initial baptism in the presence of the named individual. Take ‘Homer’: for all we know, this name was introduced as a name for the author of the two epic poems, at a time when they were his only remaining traces. But it is counterintuitive to think that whether or not we are actually referring with ‘Homer’—or having singular thoughts about the poet of the Iliad—depends on whether someone actually named him ‘Homer’ in his presence before he died.70

As a result, many theorists have proposed even more liberal variants of the causal-acquaintance idea. For example, Nathan Salmon holds that, coming upon the scene of a murder, a homicide detective can form singular thoughts about the murderer. This is because the detective forms her thoughts using genuine causal traces of the entity in question, so that the ‘entity enter[s] properly into the “genetic” account of how the speaker came to learn the term he/she uses to refer to it.’ On the other hand, if Ralph

67 Among many others, this view has been expressed by Donnellan, ‘The Contingent a Priori and Rigid Designators’; Davies, Meaning, Quantification, Necessity, p. 97; Salmon, Frege’s Puzzle, pp. 179–80, fn. 19; ‘How to Measure the Standard Metre’, pp. 199–214; Bach, Thought and Reference, part I; Neale, Descriptions, p. 18; Fitch, ‘Thinking of Something’; Recanati, Direct Reference: From Language to Thought; Soames, ‘Beyond Singular Propositions?’, p. 518, fn. 5; Beyond Rigidity, pp. 92, 329, 339.

68 While many of those who play up a causal chain picture of acquaintance are inspired by Kripke’s view of the way in which names refer, there is no evidence of a general acquaintance constraint on reference in Naming and Necessity (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).


70 Kaplan makes a similar point about ‘Aristotle’ in ‘Afterthoughts’, p. 605. Of course, there are more complicated cases. Suppose, for instance, that the poet left his work unsigned and an otherwise unknown prankster inserted his own name at the head of each work. This is similar to the Ibn Khan case in Evans, ‘The Causal Theory of Names’, p. 19. Our intuitive verdict for these cases arguably contrasts with our verdict for Kripke’s Gödel/Schmidt case (Kripke, Naming and Necessity, pp. 83–4). Perhaps this is because, regardless of who proved the incompleteness of arithmetic, all the ordinary conventions that tie a name to an individual are still in place between the name ‘Kurt Gödel’ and the individual who, in Kripke’s example, is the imposter. (For example, one could look up official birth records for the individual with that name.) In the envisaged ‘Homer’ scenario, there is no intact and independent chain of name-usage connecting us to the imposter.
believes ‘solely on the basis of reflection on the concepts, that whoever is shortest among spies is a spy’, he is blocked from having singular thoughts involving the shortest spy, even if he introduces a name with a reference-fixing description. In a similar vein, François Recanati allows that we can have singular thoughts about items known only by description, as long as the descriptions are informative as opposed to reference-fixing descriptions. For a description to be informative requires that it has a ‘target’ object that is ‘determined independently of its satisfying the description’. The information (or misinformation) encoded in an informative description is ‘anchored’ in the target object by way of a causal relation, however indirect. It is for this reason that an informative description may incorrectly describe its purported target.

This kind of view only posits a weak causal constraint; and the weaker the constraint, the fewer the potential counter-examples from which it will suffer. But two points are immediately worth noting.

First, to motivate a very weak constraint, one cannot appeal to the original motivations that were offered for acquaintance constraints. To begin with, one must obviously give up the Russelian motivations: certainty of successful reference and discrimination of co-reference. But other more popular motivations must also be abandoned. For instance, many appeal to a special kind of belief-reporting data to motivate acquaintance constraints. In the case just sketched involving Ralph, even if Ralph introduces the name ‘Vladimir’ for whoever happens to be the shortest spy, it sounds wrong to say, ‘There is someone that Ralph believes is the shortest spy’. This fact could be explained by combining the idea that Ralph lacks acquaintance with the thesis that this sort of attitude report ascribes a singular thought. But weakening acquaintance will lead to many cases where the same problem arises. For example, suppose that in the detective case we allow the detective to have singular thoughts about the murderer through the latter’s traces. We will then need some other explanation of the fact that it still sounds wrong to say, ‘There is someone that the detective believes is the murderer’. We will examine these data carefully in the next chapter—but it is worth keeping in mind that as one liberalizes acquaintance in order to handle intuitions about some cases, one will thereby give up the ability to appeal to acquaintance when it comes to explaining our intuitions in other cases.

Another problem for weak acquaintance constraints is this. It is far from clear that thoughts connected to ‘traces’ or ‘informational anchors’ form a theoretically significant category of cognitive states or modes of epistemic access. Indeed, in many cases it is difficult to see how such a taxonomy would even apply. Consider ‘Julius’, whose

71 Salmon, ‘The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly’, pp. 198–9. The original Smith’s murder example is from Donnellan, ‘Reference and Definite Descriptions’, and the ‘shortest spy’ case is from Quine, ‘Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes’ and Kaplan, ‘Quantifying In’.
72 Recanati, Direct Reference: From Language to Thought, pp. 111–2. This relatively liberal restriction also appears to be at work in the notion of a ‘prompt’ discussed by R. M. Sainsbury in ‘Reference and Anaphora’, §3. Sainsbury’s plausible examples of anaphoric reference appear to generate pressure to reject any strict acquaintance condition on reference.
reference we stipulate to be fixed by ‘the individual who invented the zip’. Can we have singular thoughts about the inventor of the zip (assuming there is only one) because we have encountered a trace in the form of his creation? If not, would it be sufficient if we had learned that there was a unique inventor of the zip from someone acquainted with the inventor who nevertheless did not mention any name? Or consider Ralph and the shortest spy. Suppose that Ralph had learned that there is a unique shortest spy from the Spy Census, which would not have indicated this were it not for Ortcutt (there being a tie for second-shortest)? In this case, the source of Ralph’s information is counterfactually dependent on Ortcutt and his height; but we doubt that proponents of even the weakest acquaintance relation would allow Ralph to have singular thoughts about him.

In short, the notion of informational anchoring is shaky at best. At worst it is an *ad hoc* gesture, invoked whenever a theorist wishes to deny the presence of singular thought, towards whatever tenuous causal relation would explain its absence. But why think there is any such relation in the first place? We will focus on that question in the next chapter.

(iii) Split acquaintance. Another way of liberalizing acquaintance constraints is to apply them only to thought and not to language. On one way of fleshing out such a view, there are cases in which one can refer to an individual even if one is not in a position to grasp singular contents about that individual. For example, perhaps one can use ‘Julius’ to refer to the inventor of the zip without being able to token singular thoughts about Julius, because one does not bear the right causal relationship to him or her. But this has some initially unappealing features. To begin with, it appears to require that we give up the intimate tie between sincere assent and belief—a connection adumbrated by Kripke as follows:

If a normal English speaker S, on reflection, sincerely assents to ‘p’, then S believes that p.

In defense of split acquaintance, perhaps this could be replaced by a modified principle, in which the antecedent involves not only assenting to ‘p’ but *fully understanding* it. The

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73 Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, p. 31.
74 After all, there may be no feature of object-representations at all (let alone a causal feature) that explains the range of intuitions related to singular thought. In particular, our intuitions about the acceptability of exported attitude ascriptions often seem more attuned to features of the ascriber’s situation than features of the subject’s situation. If they are context-dependent in this way, there may be no particular feature of the subject’s thought that will suffice to explain the range of intuitions at play. (More on this in Chapter 2).
76 That is, as Kripke puts it, where ‘p’ is to be replaced, inside and outside quotation marks, by any appropriate standard English sentence, and where ‘the sentence replacing ‘p’ is to lack indexical or pronominal devices or ambiguities that would ruin the intuitive sense of the principle’ and where a normal English speaker ‘uses the sentence to mean what a normal speaker should mean by it.’ Kripke, ‘A Puzzle About Belief’, §2.
idea would be that one can utter ‘Julius was inventive’ without understanding it in an appropriately robust way, and nevertheless succeed in expressing a singular proposition. (We will have more to say in Chapter 3 about the notion of robustly understanding a name.)

A related problem is that this view complicates a natural picture of communication on which one expects one’s interlocutors to understand the propositions one semantically expresses. Presumably, if the speaker does not fully understand ‘Julius’, then neither will interlocutors to whom he or she introduces the name. In fact it seems that a whole community of users might successfully employ a name without the requisite level of acquaintance. But the claim that people commonly express propositions that no one can grasp generates tension with the natural idea that meanings of utterances are—in some fairly direct way—parasitic on the contents they are used to communicate.77

Here is another variant on the split acquaintance view. Perhaps believing singular contents about Julius is easy but not sufficient for having bona fide singular thoughts. The latter require something additional, such as grasping a singular content by way of the right kind of cognitive vehicle—a file or tag, perhaps. The question then becomes: why would this latter step require causal acquaintance with Julius? Surely one can form the relevant cognitive vehicle, individuated internally, without the right causal connection to the purported referent. (This presumably happens in cases of illusion.) But it seems at least prima facie odd to deny that someone who both believes the relevant singular content about Julius and associates it with the right kind of internal vehicle to refer to Julius, nevertheless is in no position to have a genuine singular representation about Julius. We will return to this point in §2.4. For the most part, however, we will set aside concerns that are local to the split acquaintance view.

(iv) Liberalism. The thesis that there is no general acquaintance restriction on reference or singular thought we will call liberalism. Three points of clarification are in order.

First, liberalism is compatible with a variety of views about what sorts of cognition best deserve to be called ‘singular thought’. Some liberals will hold that a singular thought is simply the bearing of a propositional attitude to a singular content. Others will hold that the most natural kind in the neighborhood is a type of thought involving a special class of internal vehicles like ‘tags’ or ‘files’. Still others will hold that these distinctions coincide, or that they correspond to different joints of equal theoretical interest. What liberals have in common is that they think none of the important joints in the vicinity are governed by general acquaintance constraints. (That said, liberalism is

77 Evans takes note of this issue in Evans, The Varieties of Reference, p. 400. For a useful discussion of the connection between the meanings of words and the meanings of speakers, see Grice, Studies in the Way of Words, ch. 6.
perfectly consistent with—and is indeed likely to accompany—the thesis that reference and singular thought often involve exploiting causal relations.)

Second, liberalism is compatible with various other constraints on singular thought in cases where one is not exploiting causal connections. For example, some may hold that one must in such cases exploit a reference-fixing description; others may allow the use of referential vehicles that do not exploit causal relationships or function like descriptive names; and still others may deny that singular thoughts must be realized by states involving any mental analog of a referential expression.\footnote{A liberal could, for example, take her cue from Salmon (who is not a liberal) in holding that if one has a general belief of the form, ‘The murderer is insane’, one will automatically have a second and distinct belief in the singular proposition involving the murderer himself. (For him, this is modulo the requisite acquaintance relation.) See ‘The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly’.}

Third, liberalism is compatible with various views on the truth of exported belief reports, such as ‘The shortest spy is such that Ralph believes that he is a spy’. Thus, a liberal may insist that this report can be true only if Ralph has a singular thought about the spy. (Indeed, the liberal may think that the best candidate for ‘singular thought’ is a phenomenon defined by the truth of such ascriptions.) Or a liberal could deny any interesting connection between singular thought and such belief reports. We will look more closely at exported ascriptions in the next chapter.

1.6 Should auld acquaintance be forgot?

Our first goal in this book is to argue that there is no good reason to impose acquaintance constraints of any sort on reference or singular thought. (This will pave the way for our second goal, which is to promote a certain approach to the semantics of descriptions, demonstratives, and names.) Acquaintance, in our view, is a dispensable relic of a bygone era in the philosophy of language and mind.

In arguing for liberalism we will adopt the working hypothesis that the terms ‘reference’ and ‘singular thought’ do pick out a semantic and a psychological natural kind, respectively—and that each exemplifies to some extent the confluence of themes discussed in §1.3 and §1.4 above. (We will revisit this working hypothesis in the book’s concluding remarks.) Of course, some theorists will emphasize one or another of these themes to a greater degree.\footnote{Thus, in postulating constraints on singular thought, some are primarily making claims about the conditions for standing in various attitudes to singular contents, while others are primarily concerned with the conditions for tokening inner representational vehicles of a special type, such as ‘tags’ or ‘files’.} But our aim in the next few chapters is not to take a stand on which of these themes deserves emphasis. Our aim is to challenge the idea that acquaintance constraints apply to any kind of object-representation that is of sufficient theoretical interest to deserve the title ‘singular thought’.

(i) Caveats. Here are some related claims that we are not making. (a) We are not denying that, for example, linguistic reference often exploits a causal or epistemic connection.
(b) We are not denying that there are any acquaintance constraints when it comes to various subclasses of object-representation, delineated by a taxonomy of mechanisms or modules. For example, perhaps object-representations that occur in a particular vision module in humans always represent an object due, in part, to causal relations between it and the object represented. Or perhaps, more generally, causal interaction is a necessary condition on successful perception, and therefore on referential intentions mediated by perceptions.\footnote{There may be exceptions. Perhaps one perceives a hole when only its lining is causally active; or perhaps one perceives a statue when only the lump is causally active; or perhaps one can perceive an absence of bananas without the absence exercising a causal influence.} We have no desire to argue with claims made at this level of specificity. (c) We are not rejecting anyone’s right to announce that they will reserve the term ‘singular thought’ for cases where an appropriate causal or epistemic connection is at work.\footnote{A natural way of reading Bach, for example, is that a causal acquaintance constraint is simply built into his conception of singular thought: see §1.4.ii above. Consequently, to avoid a terminological dispute, our disagreement with Bach may be thought of as concerning whether his taxonomy of thoughts is more theoretically useful and better cuts psychological reality at the joints than one on which the key notion is not burdened with a causal condition.} We would simply point out that such a stipulation would trivialize the claim that singular thought requires acquaintance, and we see no reason to think that the stipulated term would delineate an interesting kind from the point of view of a general theory of meaning and representation.

Our target, then, is acquaintance proposed as a substantive and general constraint on meaning, thought, or understanding. This is the idea often expressed with (albeit vague) slogans like ‘Reference and singular thought require acquaintance’.

(ii) Burden of argument. We are liberals primarily because we see no reason to accept an acquaintance constraint, and we have never encountered a specific proposal that seemed at all plausible.\footnote{We do offer some positive considerations in favor of liberalism in Chapter 2, at least for those who wish to retain a close connection between exported belief reports and singular thought.} In general, we are completely puzzled by the kind of policing or gate-keeping that goes on when philosophers make speeches of the form, ‘In order to have a genuine singular thought/have a genuine \textit{de re} thought one must satisfy constraints X, Y, and Z.’ Such claims are invariably either true and uninteresting—because some special use of ‘singular thought’ has been stipulated—or else false on any good precisification.

Those who postulate substantive acquaintance constraints are taking on an argumentative burden, and we will be examining their positive arguments in Chapters 2 and 3. However, we suspect that some of those who find acquaintance constraints plausible are not leaning very heavily on those positive arguments. They may simply find it natural to generalize from certain paradigm cases of reference in which causal or epistemic relations do play a significant role in securing reference: and certainly many ordinary uses of names and demonstratives are like this. But one should not fixate on a restricted range of cases. When one thinks through a sufficient variety of examples, a
general acquaintance constraint is not *prima facie* compelling after all. To illustrate this point, we offer in what follows a sample of cases where standard heuristics suggest that reference and singular thought are present, but where this or that candidate acquaintance relation is absent. For now we will be focusing on causal acquaintance constraints: we will set aside epistemic acquaintance until Chapter 3.

To detect the presence or absence of singular thought in the following cases, some readers will proceed via judgments about the truth of exported belief reports, or reports with referential terms in their complement clauses.\(^83\) (We shall, for now, assume with semantic orthodoxy that names, demonstratives, and simple indexicals are referential terms.)\(^84\) Others will proceed via judgments about whether subjects can use a referential expression and grasp the propositions they express with it. And still others will ask themselves whether tags or files are present in the subject’s psychology, and whether these succeed in referring. Readers are free to consider their own preferred heuristics, as long as those heuristics do not import an assumption of causal acquaintance: we continue to assume that those who postulate an acquaintance constraint on singular thought intend to put forward a substantive claim. For this reason we recommend against diagnosing the presence or absence of singular thought by asking oneself whether the speaker ‘knows who \(x\) is’ or ‘believes of \(x\) that she is \(F\)’ or ‘has \(x\) in mind’. As we mentioned above and will be arguing further in later chapters, these expressions have been hijacked for a theoretical use in the philosophy of language—and terms of art cannot be mined for diagnostic, pretheoretical intuitions. (Meanwhile, the original ordinary expressions homonymous with these terms of art are of no special use when it comes to identifying singular thought.)\(^85\)

We have grouped our discussion of such cases, rather arbitrarily, into eight broad ways of achieving reference: by reverse causal chain, by decomposition, by character, by convention, by conspicuity, by proxy, by conjecture, and by depiction.\(^86\) (As will be clear, many of our examples are variations on cases from the literature.) While we do not pretend that every case causes trouble for every causal acquaintance constraint that has been proposed, we can think of none so lenient it can properly handle them all.

(ii) Reverse causal chains. Those who take there to be a causal acquaintance constraint on singular thought typically suppose that the object of thought must in some way causally

\(^83\) A special word of warning concerning belief reports in these cases. As we argue in Chapter 2, the acceptability of exported belief descriptions is heavily context dependent. As a result, in many of the cases that follow, it will be possible to construct exported belief ascriptions that are not acceptable as well as those that are. It serves our purposes well enough to notice that it is easy to flesh out the context in ways that generate acceptable reports. As we shall see, the negative data are of no special importance since they can just as easily be generated in cases where candidate acquaintance relations are present.

\(^84\) The second half of this book will complicate this assumption significantly, but not in a way that threatens the thesis operative in the following examples; *viz.* that singular thoughts are typically expressed when sentences contain proper names and demonstratives, and that singular thoughts are typically ascribed when proper names and demonstratives appear in the complement clauses of attitude ascriptions.

\(^85\) See ch. 2, §2.5, ch. 3, §3.1, ch. 4, §4.1.

\(^86\) We by no means suppose that this taxonomy is exclusive or exhaustive.
impact the subject. But as Ernest Sosa and Robin Jeshion have pointed out, sometimes the causal chain runs in the opposite direction. For example, in 1512, Henry VIII ordered the construction of a great warship to be called *Henry Grace à Dieu*. Suppose he knows that his order will be carried out on time, but is given no reports of the progress of the ship on the principle that no news is considered to be good news. After the expected date of completion, he makes plans to visit the harbor. Surely he succeeds in referring to the ship if he says ‘I plan to see *Henry Grace à Dieu*.’ Moreover, we would not withhold an exported ascription: there is a warship such that King Henry believes he will see it. But his causal link to the ship leads in the wrong direction for him to satisfy a standard causal acquaintance constraint. Neither is any of his information about the ship ‘derived’ from it.

(iv) Reference by decomposition. In the ordinary sense of ‘perceives’, one can surely perceive an object even if parts of it are hidden. One can perceive a dog without perceiving its organs or hidden surfaces, and one can see a city without seeing many of the buildings of which it is composed. Moreover, when one is perceptually confronted with an object, it often seems that one can name—and have singular thoughts about—both the parts that are perceived and the parts that are not. For example, suppose a mechanic points at a car and says, ‘Let me see that engine’. We would not want to deny that there is a particular engine such that the mechanic wants to see it. And yet there may be no causal relation here to speak of.

Might one suggest that it is sufficient for acquaintance with a to be causally connected to something that is mereologically related to a? This threatens to make the condition quite vacuous: if we are all both causally and mereologically related to the biosphere, it will follow that we are all acquainted with each other.

(v) Reference by character. Suppose we adopt a roughly Kaplanian account of indexicals. Then there is a linguistic rule for every indexical—its ‘character’—that determines its reference with respect to a context. Must this kind of rule be restricted to specifying some causal relation between the referent and the speaker or the token of utterance? If not, the anti-liberal who proposes a causal constraint will have to maintain that we are somehow barred from properly using these terms as vehicles for expressing singular thoughts in cases where we are not causally connected to the object determined by the character.

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87 They both describe examples where one names something before bringing it into existence. (Sosa, ‘Propositional Attitudes De Dicto and De Re’, p. 889; Jeshion, ‘Descriptive Descriptive Names’, p. 609; ‘Ways of Taking a Meter’, p. 300). Kaplan even mentions such examples in ‘Quantifying In’, 214. However, we do not wish to take a stand on whether it is possible to have singular thoughts about as yet non-existent objects: see the following footnote.

88 Intuitions may waver a little as to whether Henry can refer to the ship before it is built. This is because many of us have presentist intuitions according to which, in the broadest natural sense of ‘exists’, only the present exists. (See see ch. 2, §2.5.) But presentism is no threat to liberalism. Meinongians aside, we can all agree that only existing things can serve as relata to the reference relation.

89 For an affirmative answer, see Devitt, *Designation*. 
The problem, as Colin McGinn pointed out decades ago, is that some indexicals refer to objects that have no causal effect on us.\footnote{McGinn, ‘The Mechanism of Reference’, p. 160. However, McGinn himself is a proponent of the split acquaintance view: see p. 167.} For example, whatever linguistic rule determines the referent of a given utterance of ‘tomorrow’ cannot involve the speaker or the token being causally affected by the interval of time referred to. (In conversation, a proponent of acquaintance suggested—half in jest—that we can refer to tomorrow because it ‘touches’ today.)\footnote{Obviously, acquaintance with \(o\) had better not be conferred by the fact that \(o\) touches something with which one is acquainted, lest we thereby count as acquainted with everything touching the Earth.} One would need substantial positive motivation to accept ‘today’ but not ‘tomorrow’ as a pure indexical that can express singular contents.\footnote{One might be attracted to treating ‘yesterday’, ‘today’, and ‘tomorrow’ as partly descriptive but involving reference to the present moment; e.g. they are elliptical for ‘the day before the day it now is’, ‘the day it now is’, and ‘the day after the day it now is’, respectively. However, we think it would be misguided to motivate this by the idea that ‘yesterday’ decomposes into ‘yester-’ and ‘-day’; compare the archaic use of ‘yesteryear’.} Moreover, we have no hesitation using ‘tomorrow’ in the complement clauses of attitude ascriptions, or endorsing the relevant exported ascriptions. Related points can be raised for terms referring to other spatial or temporal regions.\footnote{Do the referents of ‘here’ and ‘now’—assuming these function as referring devices—have causal effects on us? Even the case of ‘I’ is not straightforward: what causal relationship does one bear to oneself? Both McGinn (op. cit.) and Wettstein have emphasized the oddness of the view that the linguistic rules that govern ‘I’ and ‘now’ would determine referents by way of causal relations (Wettstein, Has Semantics Rested on a Mistake?, p. 73).}

At any rate, the proponent of a causal acquaintance constraint faces a difficult choice: she must either (a) cast about for an additional non-causal relation that suffices for acquaintance; (b) let semantic theory dictate on issues in speculative metaphysics, such as whether we are causally related to the current moment; or else (c) suspend judgment on whether we have thoughts about the present time or place, pending a consensus on the metaphysical issue. None of these options seems particularly appealing.

Finally, let us extend our inquiry to merely possible indexicals. Must the linguistic rules for indexicals \textit{in principle} operate via those relations that are allegedly necessary for acquaintance? Imagine a language community containing many tribes, each of which has a fairly well delineated geographical region to call its own. They have a term, ‘Cheef’, which they use in a paradigmatically referential way. Its rules determine that it refers to whatever individual is chief of the location in which the utterance occurs. Just as ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’ can suddenly shift their referents at midnight without one’s knowing it, ‘Cheef’ shifts its referent as soon as one crosses the boundary from one tribe to another. (We can suppose that various tests on the linguistic intuitions of the community, having to do with embedding in modal and attitude contexts, bear out our classification of the term.) Is this \textit{in principle} a defective term, so that such a community could not succeed in their referential intentions?

\footnote{Consider also the second-person pronoun. Suppose that Smith knows on general grounds that he has a local Member of Parliament and writes her letters. Among other things he writes, ‘You are not doing enough to prevent the takeover of small shops by large chains.’}
(vi) Reference by convention. A similar point can be made about proper names. Consider a community that assigns every newborn a number, by way of a secret algorithm that takes time and place of birth as inputs.\footnote{A similar example—used to make a different point—can be found in Wettstein, op. cit., p. 5.} Thereafter one is referred to by the corresponding numeral: say ‘9200386’.\footnote{A given numeral, of course, could serve both as the name of a number and the name of an individual, just as many individuals are named ‘John’.} Moreover, if the number is miscalculated it is assumed that one’s true name would be the correct output of the algorithm. In short, the intention of the community is to exploit the algorithm to generate names, in place of baptism. There is no such thing as baptism, by their lights: there is a fact of the matter about one’s true name, which is settled by the community’s strong convention plus facts about the time and place. Surely a community with such linguistic conventions is possible. Now suppose a member of such a community is discussing a distant relative with whom she has had no direct causal contact. Instead of exploiting a causal chain of name-uses—as we would—this individual attempts to exploit a convention involving an algorithm. Does she succeed? On the one hand, it is implausible to insist that she cannot have a singular thought about that individual. On the other hand, it is implausible to suppose that she succeeds despite her linguistic intentions and those of her whole community, by unwittingly tapping into some kind of causal chain.

(vii) Reference by conspicuity. Paradigmatically, a speaker accompanies a demonstrative with an act of pointing at an object or otherwise rendering it salient by shaking it, gazing at it, or aiming a flashlight beam at it. But in a wide range of contexts no complement gesture is required. As Evans puts it, ‘a speaker can exploit some extreme or heightened salience which an object has anyway (without his bringing it about)’.\footnote{This quote and flashlight example are from Evans, The Varieties of Reference, p. 312.} An object can be made conspicuous in any number of ways.\footnote{Consider these pointing-free demonstratives: i. ‘This is beautiful (said with closed eyes during a musical performance).’ ii. ‘It is more impressive than I imagined!’ (as the speaker comes within view of Mount Everest). iii. ‘He really beat me (Jimmy Carter to Rosalyn, waking up in the night after his debate with Reagan).’ The last example is from Wettstein, who notes that relevant cues ‘are not limited to those provided by the context of utterance . . . [and] can be provided by what the addressee knows about the speaker’s interests, desires, history, and so on.’ (Wettstein, Has Semantics Rested on a Mistake?, pp. 78–9.)} We need take no position on the question whether gestures and other salience cues themselves ‘determine reference in the sense of making it the case that a certain [object] is being referred to’ or whether they merely enable the audience to identify the referent that has been determined by the intentions of the speaker.\footnote{Bach, ‘Intentions and Demonstrations’, p. 144. Bach defends the latter view, as does Kaplan in ‘Afterthoughts’. See inter alia Reimer, ‘Do Demonstrations Have Semantic Significance?’ for the former view.} What concerns us is whether the mechanisms by which the reference of a demonstrative expression is fixed must involve a special causal relation to the object. We see no prima facie reason to think that they must.\footnote{Contra e.g. Devitt, Designation, pp. 42–3.}
Suppose Jones learns in some indirect fashion that his old friend Smith is now engaged to a woman (perhaps via learning the general fact that everyone in a group to which Smith belongs is engaged) and that there is a virus afflicting women in Smith’s town. Jones calls Smith and (before Smith speaks) says: ‘Is she all right?’ The simple fact that Jones knows that Smith’s fiancée will be foremost on his mind at this time appears prima facie sufficient for Jones to be able to refer to her.

Here is a second case. John crosses over a summit to the other side—a location David has never seen. David calls out: ‘Can you see the city from there?’ John replies that he can indeed see the city ‘from here’, and they go on talking about that location. Must David be within sight of the location to have referred to it, or to grasp what John is saying? (What if he is blind: what would count as sufficient aural or tactile contact with a location?) A causal acquaintance constraint yields counterintuitive results.\(^{101}\)

(viii) Reference by proxy. Deferred demonstratives—whereby one refers to an object absent from the perceptual scene by exploiting some salient prop—appear every bit as referential as ordinary demonstratives. On the face of it, a speaker expresses the same proposition when she says, ‘That is my friend’ whether she is (a) pointing at Bob; (b) pointing at a door through which Bob has just left; or (c) pointing at a photograph of Bob. Even if one somehow convinces oneself that the relevant linguistic device refers to the prop in (b) and (c), it remains natural—by the lights of standard heuristics—to think that there are associated singular thoughts directed at Bob that are being communicated.\(^{102}\)

Does this phenomenon ever involve flouting acquaintance constraints? As we have seen, only the weakest sort of acquaintance restriction allows that the homicide detective is acquainted with Smith’s murderer, or that we can come to have singular thoughts about someone just by seeing his footprints in the snow. But pointing to the grisly scene and the footprints, the detective can say ‘He’s insane,’ referring to the murderer. (And as we will see in the next chapter, there will be plenty of contexts where subsequent exported belief ascriptions will be acceptable.) Similar examples abound. One points to a beautiful office and says, ‘That person is lucky to have such a nice office’. Or one points to a heavily vegetated island and says, ‘Those people never go hungry’. Again, prima facie, there seems no reason to deny the semantic well-functioning of referential terms and intentions in these cases. But, as we will see, the project of weakening acquaintance in such a way that it both accommodates these cases

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101 These cases bear some similarity to those in McGinn, ‘The Mechanism of Reference’, pp. 60–4.
102 We are not ourselves very partial to the view that linguistic reference is to the prop. Here is Emma Borg: ‘[T]he sort of sharp distinction between deferred and nondeferred case . . . never really existed. Once we recognize that I can refer to you by pointing at your arm, or at just that part of you that is visible through a door that is slightly ajar, or at the tail of your coat as you leave the room, or at your image in the mirror, or at your photograph, or at your shadow, etc., the idea of drawing a semantic distinction at any point on this scale comes to seem quite hopeless’ (Borg, ‘Deferred Demonstratives’, p. 226). Along these lines, one might say that reference by proxy is just a special case of reference by conspicuity: the prop helps make the relevant object conspicuous.
and still does the theoretical work that motivates it (see Chapter 2) appears quite hopeless.

(ix) *Reference by postulation.* We can begin with an example famously discussed by Kripke. In 1846, Urbain Leverrier reasoned that certain perturbations in the orbit of Uranus could be elegantly explained by postulating the presence of a new planet in a specific celestial location. He sent his results to the Berlin Observatory, which discovered the planet with a telescope in less than half an hour: Leverrier had predicted its location to within 1 degree.\(^{103}\) Now let us add the fictitious supposition that before the planet had been seen, Leverrier stipulated that the name ‘Neptune’ would refer to whatever planet was the perturber. We might also imagine him pointing at the location where he had determined the planet should be, though unable to see it with his weak telescope, and saying, ‘That is the cause of the perturbations!’ There seems no *prima facie* reason to deny that Leverrier succeeds in referring to the planet with ‘Neptune’ or ‘that’, despite the lack of perceptual contact. As John Herschel put it in 1846, speaking before Neptune had been found with a telescope:

> We see it as Columbus saw America from the shores of Spain. Its movements have been felt, trembling along the far-reaching line of our analysis, with a certainty hardly inferior to that of ocular demonstration.\(^{104}\)

The acquaintance lover might object that in this case the reference has been fixed in a way connected to causal traces, and insist that the perception of perturbations in the orbit of Uranus put Leverrier and Herschel in sufficient causal contact with Neptune. But there are other cases of reference by postulation where this point cannot be made.

Consider, for example, a variant on an example due to Robin Jeshion.\(^{105}\) In 1870, Mendeleev stated that it was possible to predict the properties of certain elements even though no samples of those elements had yet been discovered. He made predictions for, among others, an element he called ‘eka-aluminum’. Five years later, samples of eka-aluminum were discovered by Lecoq de Boisbaudran and named ‘gallium’. Here again, it seems that Mendeleev succeeded in referring to the element in speech and in thought, and we are happy to say (for example): ‘In 1870 there was a substance such that Mendeleev thought samples of it would soon be discovered’. Apparently, reference to a substance-kind requires no prior acquaintance with its terrestrial instances.\(^{106}\)

\(^{103}\) Similar calculations were made independently by John Couch Adams.

\(^{104}\) From a speech given on the 10 September 1846, to a meeting of the British Association in Southampton. For more on Herschel, see Standage, *The Neptune File*.

\(^{105}\) See ‘Donnellan on Neptune’, p. 113; ‘Ways of Taking a Meter’, p. 300.

\(^{106}\) This example is more problematic for the anti-liberal than the fact that we can refer to abstract objects like numbers even though they have no causal connection to us; see e.g. Putnam, ‘What Is Mathematical Truth’, p. 59.) The anti-liberal’s typical response to that point is to posit a kind of mental connection with abstract entities in order to promote an appearance of unity in the theory. But usually reference to natural substance-kinds like water and gold is thought to operate very much like reference to ordinary objects—paradigmatically, someone perceives an instance of the kind and introduces a referential device by ostension, and then others who pick up that term by way of a chain of uses can do so as well.
Finally, consider ‘God’, which is arguably a proper name. (If it were short for some definite description like ‘the all-powerful, all-knowing…’ it would be hard to explain the controversy among theists about which among these attributes God enjoys.)

Atheists hold that ‘God’ fails to refer, while theists typically hold that humans have causally interacted with its bearer. But suppose it turns out that there is exactly one all-powerful, all-knowing, and completely benevolent spirit whom we will meet in the afterlife; and yet this spirit has not causally interacted with the universe. (Perhaps the universe has always existed, or was created by much lesser beings who have themselves always existed.) It seems that on this scenario, ‘God’ refers to the great spirit, and theists have correctly held that God exists, but wrongly thought that God has interacted with the universe. Once again we have referential success unmediated by causation.

(x) Reference by depiction. Imagine Leverrier with a map of the fixed stars like that on the cover of this book, working out the path of the postulated planet and adding a mark with the intention of representing it in its current location. Suppose Leverrier points to the mark and says ‘That is the perturber.’ The mark then is a perfectly adequate prop for demonstrative reference. If there is no reason to deny that Leverrier’s mark represents the planet, why deny that his demonstrative does so?

Here again the acquaintance lover may hold that this case involves causal traces that are sufficient for acquaintance. But consider another example. The seventeenth-century cartographer John Speed mapped the coastline of the British Isles. Suppose he is told by sailors about the coastline of a large, unexplored island. He draws an accurate map of the coastline of this island, then points at an area on his map representing an area within the island that is well beyond sight of the coastline and says, based on purely general considerations: ‘It is windy here’ or ‘It is windy at that location’. Even if no one has had any causal contact with the place he’s pointing to, it would seem odd to deny that part of Speed’s map represents that very place, that he has a belief about it, or that he has just referred to it. And yet this part of the island has not had even an indirect causal effect on him.

Of course, maps need not be set down on paper or pencil. People frequently make rough egocentric mental maps, using a few proximate landmarks to set the axes. We cannot think of any reason to deny that such representations could serve as devices allowing a sort of deferred demonstration.

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107 See, for example, Whitehead’s Process and Reality, Hartshorne’s Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes, and Kushner’s When Bad Things Happen to Good People. One might propose that the definite description involved itself makes reference to descriptions or attributes, as in ‘the best candidate for satisfying the description, “the all knowing, etc.”’, or ‘the being that has the most of the following attributes: being all-knowing, etc’. Such a proposal appears implausible enough for us to ignore it here.

108 On using maps as props for deferred demonstration where acquaintance is not at issue, see e.g. Evans, Varieties of Reference, pp. 161, 162; Kaplan, ‘Demonstratives’, p. 491; Recanati, ‘Are Here and Now Indexicals?’, §3.2.
An acquaintance constraint on reference can seem natural if one assumes that any representation of an object must be causally connected with that object somehow. And this in turn can seem tempting if one takes the case of photographs as paradigmatic. A photograph only counts as of so-and-so if that individual plays an important causal role in its production. \(^{109}\) (Thus Kaplan called his view the ‘photograph model’ of naming. \(^{110}\)) But why model mental or semantic representation after photography? Even among less technological types of graphic representation, there doesn’t seem to be any corresponding constraint.

Consider what it takes for a given painting to count as a depiction of someone. An artist can, apparently, choose to depict anyone that she can uniquely identify. There need not be any particular causal link or relation of similarity between the portrait and its subject. Take, for example, Salvador Dalí’s portrait of Juan de Pareja, assistant to Velázquez. What makes it the case that his painting is a depiction of Juan de Pareja rather than, say, Charles V? It is certainly not a matter of resemblance. Neither do we worry about the robustness of Dalí’s informational link to the subject. The painting counts as a portrait of Juan de Pareja—simply because that is what Dalí intended it to be.

Just as a cartographer can represent regions with which he had no causal interaction, it seems that a painter can depict things based only on general information or even speculation. A forensic artist might piece together evidence to create a portrait of the culprit. Seeing a mountain, an artist can imagine and depict—however inaccurately—the other side. Another might portray an event from prehistory such as the discovery of fire, \(^{111}\) or the emergence of a galaxy whose existence is inferred from a general theory of the formation of the universe. With the right intentions, these portrayals will all count as depictions of their intended subjects. And we see no reason to deny that the representational contents of these images—assuming they have contents—will involve the objects that are depicted, or that they can be used as props for deferred demonstratives. \(^{112}\) If an artist can represent a subject on a cloth canvas, it would seem, she can also represent that subject on the canvas of imagination.

Why hold that our powers of representation are limited by the causal connections that photography exploits? The relatively artificial fashion in which objects are depicted by

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\(^{109}\) It would be a mistake to think that light bouncing off the relevant object is literally required: think of a silhouette in which the represented object serves only to block light from a distant source, but reflects no light of its own in the direction of the camera. The precise causal role that an object must play in producing photographs of it is unclear.

\(^{110}\) Kaplan, ‘Quantifying In’, §9.

\(^{111}\) While Magritte did not seriously intended to depict the historical event with his *The Discovery of Fire*, Piero di Cosimo’s *The Forest Fire* has been argued to have a more serious intent in that respect. (Thanks to Tim Williamson here).

\(^{112}\) Of course, since photographic representation involves a causal link, even a liberal should acknowledge that to demonstrate a person in absentia by way of a photograph is to exploit a causal relationship between the referent and the photograph; and reference would fail if there were no such causal link.
film is unlikely to be the best model for the way in which objects are represented by mental states—and the expressions we use to give voice to them. As Dalí expressed it: ‘What is a television apparatus to man, who has only to shut his eyes to see the most inaccessible regions of the seen and the never seen, who has only to imagine in order to pierce through walls?’

1.7 Gameplan

At the beginning of this chapter we presented a number of features associated with referential terms. Those familiar with recent traditions in analytic philosophy will recognize that these features are standardly associated with a cluster of putatively special expressions in natural language—among them names, demonstratives, and pure indexicals. Insofar as one takes the various features we have discussed to converge on these terms, one can very easily feel that a semantic natural kind is coming clearly into view. And many see an even richer and more dramatic confluence of themes: a natural psychological kind corresponding to the semantic kind, and an acquaintance constraint that governs both the understanding of referential expressions as well as the grasping of singular thoughts. To what extent is such optimism warranted? Our aim in this book is to undertake some critical self-examination.

(i) Procedural points. Let us be clear about certain ways that our inquiry is limited or conservative.

First, with the semantic mainstream, we assume that intuitions about the truth and falsity of sentences at contexts are a reasonable guide to their semantic content. We thus will be setting aside views that utterly divorce the truth conditions of sentences at contexts from ordinary judgments of truth and falsity: for example, views on which ‘There is nothing in the fridge’ is always false when there are atoms in the fridge.

Second, we assume for the most part that declarative sentences, as uttered at contexts, are typically assessable for truth and falsity. We thus do not in any systematic way explore views that claim that the semantic contents of such utterances are fragmentary or skeletal, requiring extra pragmatic supplementation in order for questions of truth–value to arise. However, much of what we say could be adapted to such frameworks. (In particular, our search in Part II for the semantically referential

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114 See e.g. Cappelen and Lepore, *Insensitive Semantics*. For critical discussion see Cappelen and Hawthorne, *Relativism and Monadic Truth*, ch. 2.
115 As Scott Soames puts it, the idea is that the semantic content of an utterance is frequently ‘only a skeleton, or partial specification’ of a proposition; but ‘whether it is a complete proposition or not’ it ‘interacts with an expanded conception of pragmatics to generate a pragmatically enriched proposition that it is the speaker’s primary intention to assert’ Soames, ‘The Gap between Meaning and Assertion’, p. 5 of the ms. See also Bach, ‘Conversational Impliciture’ and the literature arising in connection with Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*. There are many related views in the neighborhood, depending on how exactly one delineates the line between semantics and pragmatics.
expressions of natural language could arguably be adapted to a search for those expressions that we typically use to communicate singular contents: see §4.10.i.)

Third, we will be setting aside certain questions in foundational semantics that are pertinent to a fully satisfying story about reference. These include: What is the difference between the way a referential term is related to the object to which it refers, and the way a predicate is related to a property it expresses? And how must the metaphysical ground floor of reality be configured for a binary reference relation to arise between an object and an occurrence of a term? These are good questions, but they lie outside our domain of inquiry.

Instead, we aim to accomplish three tasks: (a) to exhibit the inadequacy of modern successors to Russell’s ideas about acquaintance; (b) to challenge the standard taxonom y of referential terms in natural language by exploring a more unified semantic approach to several of the expressions we use to talk about particular individuals; and (c) to reconsider the categories of reference and singular thought in light of the foregoing.

(ii) Synopsis. Here is our plan for the rest of the book. In the next chapter we defend liberalism in the face of two general types of argument. The first of these claims that an acquaintance constraint is required to explain certain kinds of belief-reporting data, and the second uses acquaintance to appease our intuitions about certain cases of apparently unwarranted epistemic advance. In both cases we argue that upon closer examination the relevant data are actually better explained by liberalism. In Chapter 3 we turn our attention to various forms of epistemic acquaintance, arguing that none of them provides plausible condition on reference or singular thought.

The liberalism defended in Part I does not provide much positive insight into which natural semantic relation best deserves to be called ‘reference’. But it does fit nicely with a certain semantic picture of the various expressions that we use to talk about particular individuals—a picture we present in Part II. In Chapters 4–6 we examine a range of noun phrases in natural language, inquiring whether there is an interesting referential/non-referential distinction among them. In particular, we look at specific indefinite descriptions, definite descriptions, demonstratives, and names. We suggest that liberalism allows for a unified picture of all these expressions on which they single out objects by way of restricted quantification that is sometimes covert. If we are right, none of these noun phrases paradigmatically fits the profile of a referential term, though they all admit of uses that exhibit many of the traits associated with reference. On our preferred framework, this phenomenon is due to the presence of what we call a singular restriction on the existentially quantified domain.

In the Afterword, we re-evaluate our central questions, examining the possibility that no expressions of natural language are paradigmatically referential—the only dedicated vehicles of reference are cognitive object representations of a special kind. If this view is correct, it lends additional theoretical significance to the category of singular thought.