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Vindicating Evans: A Defence Of Evans' Theory Of Singular Thought

Dylan A. Hurry, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Stainton, Robert J., *The University of Western Ontario*

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Abstract

A singular thought can intuitively be understood as a thought that is directly about a particular thing, e.g., a non-conceptual thought about B.B. King, Mont Blanc, or your most beloved pet. The consensus within the singular thought literature has been that Gareth Evans (1982) develops a theory of singular thought throughout his posthumously published work *The Varieties of Reference*. However, Evans never claims to be developing a theory of singular thought, nor does the locution ‘singular thought’ appear more than a handful of times throughout the work. The singular thought literature lacks any substantial exegetical engagement with the theory of singular thought that Evans argues for — including an account as to why Evans should be interpreted as offering a theory of singular thought, as well as how he should be so interpreted. The interpretation of Evans that I wish to argue for is one according to which a singular thought (for Evans) is an object-dependent thought, the thinking of which requires the satisfaction of Russell’s Principle. Liberalism is the thesis that there is no general acquaintance constraint on singular thought. Many contemporary Liberalists, including semantic instrumentalists and cognitivists, are quick to argue that Evans’ theory of singular thought is incorrect. What I seek to demonstrate is that, armed with a proper understanding of Evans’ theory of singular thought, most recent Liberalist critiques of Evans are unsuccessful because they either misevaluate or misidentify the explicandum with which Evans was concerned.

Keywords: Gareth Evans, Singular Thought, Singular Reference, Acquaintance, De Re Thought

Summary for Lay Audience

A singular thought can intuitively be understood as a thought that is directly about a particular object, e.g., a thought about your most beloved pet or Elvis Presley. The academic consensus is that Gareth Evans (1982) develops a theory of singular thought throughout his work *The Varieties of Reference*. However, the literature on singular thought lacks any substantial engagement with the theory of singular thought Evans argues for. The interpretation of Evans that I wish to argue for is one according to which singular thoughts are object dependent and require for their understanding the satisfaction of Russell's Principle — according to which someone must be able to distinguish an object in order to be able to think about it. Liberalism is the thesis that there is no general acquaintance constraint on singular thought, which includes a rejection of Russell's Principle. Many contemporary Liberalists are quick to argue that Evans' theory of singular thought is incorrect. What I seek to demonstrate is that, armed with a proper understanding of Evans' theory of singular thought, most recent Liberalist critiques of Evans are unsuccessful because they either misevaluate or misidentify the phenomena with which Evans was concerned.

This dissertation is dedicated to

Celine Frances Godreau

(1961-2019)

and

Jeremy Jay' Roy Clark

(1977-2020)

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Contents

Abstract	ii
Summary for Lay Audience	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Contents	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	I
Chapter 2: What Is Singular Thought?	3
§I Russell and Frege's Vacation to Mont Blanc	3
2.1.1 Introduction	3
2.1.2 Frege and His Puzzle	10
2.1.3 Russell and His Propositions	20
§II Some Conceptions of Singular Thought	32
2.2.1 Singular Thought as Type of Content	32
2.2.2 Singular Thought as Relational Thought	36
2.2.3 Singular Thought and Mental Files	41
§III The Contemporary Philosophical Landscape	44
2.3.1 The Nature of Singular Thought	44
2.3.2 Acquaintance Theorists Versus Liberalists	44
2.3.3 Communication Based Singular Thought	46
Chapter 3: Gareth Evans Versus Liberalism	50
§I The Varieties of Reference	50
3.1.1 Evans: Background and Aims	50
3.1.2 Evans' Analysis Of Singular Thought	56
§II Contemporary Liberalism	68
3.2.1 Rejecting Russell's Principle	68
3.2.2 Vindicating Evans	75
Chapter 4: Conclusion	86
Bibliography	87
Curriculum Vitae	92

Chapter I: Introduction

A singular thought can intuitively be understood as a thought that is directly about a particular thing, e.g., a non-conceptual thought about B.B. King, Mont Blanc, or your most beloved pet.¹ The contemporary philosophical interest in singular thought largely derives from two sources. First, debates in the philosophy of language about the nature of reference and the semantics/pragmatics of propositional attitude reports is one source of interest in singular thought.² Second, debates in the philosophy of mind concerning the nature of mental content and the rise of content externalism have largely been responsible for a sustained interest in the topic as well.³ However, the topic is of philosophical interest for a variety of additional reasons – debates concerning singular thought engage with a host of metaphysical, epistemological, and aesthetical issues.⁴

The consensus within the singular thought literature is that Gareth Evans develops a theory of singular thought throughout his posthumously published work *The Varieties of Reference* (1982). His view is most often characterized as a version of the Standard View, according to which an epistemic acquaintance condition needs to be satisfied in order for someone to be able to entertain a singular thought. However, Evans never claims to be developing a theory of singular thought, nor does the locution ‘singular thought’ appear more than a handful of times throughout the work. This leaves us with the unusual exegetical difficulty of interpreting Evans as arguing for a theory of singular thought despite the fact he himself does not characterize his position in these terms. The singular thought

¹ Singular thoughts are sometimes referred to in the literature as ‘relational,’ ‘*de re*,’ or ‘referential,’ thoughts. Descriptive thoughts, by contrast, are sometimes referred to as ‘notional,’ ‘*de dicto*,’ or ‘conceptual,’ thoughts. Exactly what the distinction between singular and descriptive thoughts is is debated in the literature. In fact, the very existence of singular thoughts at all is a matter of contention.

² For example, see Quine (1956), Strawson (1959), Donnellan (1966, 1970), Kripke (1972/1980), and Kaplan (1977/1989a).

³ See Putnam (1975), Burge (1977), and Lewis (1979).

⁴ For example, (i) if singular thoughts are object-dependent and relational in nature then it would appear that apparent thoughts about non-existence things do not qualify as singular, providing us with a metaphysical anti-Meinongian argument, (ii) if singular thoughts are inherently *de re* and we can communicate them to one another then externalism about both semantic and mental content is rendered more viable, therefore connecting the debate to more epistemic debates concerning the validity of contingent *a priori* or necessary *a posteriori* truths, and (iii), as Stainton has suggested to me, when one is in love with someone they are in love with someone in particular and not a descriptively identical doppelgänger, or when one buys a piece of art they are usually interested in its authenticity as *the* piece of art and not merely a descriptively identical duplicate – this ties the debate concerning singular thought into issues in aesthetics. If one were to discover that the person they were in love with had been replaced by a descriptively identical doppelgänger surely they would feel as if they had been wronged.

literature lacks any substantial exegetical account as to why Evans should be interpreted as offering a theory of singular thought, as well as how he should be so interpreted. The interpretation of Evans that I wish to argue for is one according to which a singular thought is a Russellian (i.e., object-dependent) thought, the thinking of which requires the satisfaction of Russell's Principle.⁵

Liberalism is the view that there is no general acquaintance restriction on singular thought.⁶ Liberalism is the main thesis that is defended throughout *The Reference Book* by Hawthorne and Manley (2012), although semantic instrumentalists (Kaplan 1989, Harman 1977, Borg 2007) and cognitivists (Jeshion 2010) also defend the Liberalist thesis that acquaintance is not a necessary condition for singular thought.⁷ Many contemporary Liberalists are quick to argue that Evans' theory of singular thought is incorrect. What I seek to demonstrate is that, armed with a proper understanding of Evans' theory of singular thought, most recent Liberalist critiques of Evans are unsuccessful because they either miscalculate or misidentify the explicandum with which Evans was concerned.

Evans' tragic and untimely passing in 1980 meant that he has been unable to respond on his own behalf to the growing number of Liberalist critiques of his position. I hope that I will convince you to share in my frustration that none of the proponents of Liberalism, a self-consciously anti-Evans position, engage with Evans' actual position. For example, although Jeshion (2010), one of the principle proponents of cognitivism, says that "the most sustained and richest theory containing a principled analysis of acquaintance as a necessary condition on singular thought can be found in Evans" (14, fn. 33), she herself fails to engage with the philosophical nuances of Evans' position in any substantial way. Likewise, despite devoting over half of their chapter on epistemic acquaintance critiquing Evans (who they consider as one of the principle proponents of epistemic acquaintance), Hawthorne and Manley (2012) altogether fail to even mention several theoretical terms that are imperative to an understanding of Evans' theory of singular thought.

⁵ According to Russell's Principle, "in order to be thinking about an object or to make a judgement about an object, one must know which object is in question — one must know which object it is that one is thinking about" (Evans, 1982, 65).

⁶ Hawthorne and Manley (2012) are responsible for the 'Liberalist' terminology, but several distinct views are united under the heading through their unified rejection of an acquaintance condition on singular thought (see Goodman and Genone 2020).

⁷ Some of the most notable liberalists include Harman (1977), Kaplan (1989), Sainsbury (2005), Borg (2007), Jeshion (2010), and Hawthorne and Manley (2012).

Chapter 2: What Is Singular Thought?

§I Russell and Frege's Vacation to Mont Blanc

2.1.1 Introduction

Although there is no evidence that Bertrand Russell and Gottlob Frege ever vacationed together at Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in the Alps located on the border between France and Italy, they certainly exchanged a series of letters to each other about Mont Blanc towards the end of 1904 that have since been published posthumously (see Frege 1980). The correspondence began during the summer of 1902 and consisted of Russell revealing to Frege his discovery of the famous paradox that proved disastrous to the logicist project as Frege had presented it in his *Basic Laws of Arithmetic* (1893). Russell's devastating news came just as Frege was finalizing the second volume of *Basic Laws of Arithmetic* (1903), which was published the year following the beginning of their correspondence — the paradox still intact to Frege's dismay. The bulk of their exchange primarily consisted of a series of letters spanned over a two year period. The overarching aim of their correspondence was assessing the viability of various solutions to the paradox that Russell had unveiled. However, in the letters they touch upon a number of other issues within philosophical logic, the foundations of mathematics, metaphysics, and the philosophy of language. Perhaps most interestingly, it sheds light on some ways in which their respective approaches to these issues radically differ. The majority of the exchange took place during the period in which Russell had finished and published his second book, *Principles of Mathematics* (1903). The initial correspondence from 1902-1904 occurred prior to the advent of Russell's theory of descriptions and it provides some additional insight into his reservations about Frege's distinction between the *Sinn* and the *Bedeutung* of an expression, prior to the concerns that were infamously expressed later on in 'On Denoting' (1905).⁸

If their correspondence was primarily concerned with possible solutions to Russell's

⁸ Throughout the remainder of this discussion, I will translate '*Sinn*' as 'sense' and '*Bedeutung*' as 'Meaning' (capitalized so as to remind us it is a technical term). '*Bedeutung*' has been variously translated 'nominatum,' 'semantic value,' 'denotation,' 'meaning,' 'reference,' 'significance,' and so on. I will follow Evans (1982) in translating '*Bedeutung*' as 'Meaning' so as to (a) facilitate any cross referencing with *Varieties of Reference*, and (b) to more aptly mirror Russell's own use of the term 'meaning' throughout his correspondence with Frege.

Paradox, and it is unlikely that Frege and Russell ever vacationed together at Mont Blanc, then what is the relevance of this section to the overall dissertation itself? Well, in the course of their correspondence they address their respective positions concerning the nature of judgement and propositions (in the technical sense in which they use the term), using thoughts about Mont Blanc as their toy example. In what way do thoughts and judgements about Mont Blanc involve Mont Blanc? Are such thoughts and judgements only indirectly about the highest mountain in the Alps, or is there a philosophically important sense in which such thoughts and judgements are more directly about Mont Blanc? If propositions, the objects of judgement and thought, are structured complexes (which, as we shall see, both Russell and Frege take them to be), then in what sense is Mont Blanc a constituent of the propositions that seem to be, in some sense, about it? These are among the questions concerning the nature of thought, judgement, and propositions that emerge throughout the correspondence between Russell and Frege. The positions they respectively advocate serve as a natural foil to one another, and both have been tremendously influential on subsequent thinking about the nature, structure, and content(s) of both thought and propositions.

Therefore, the correspondence between Russell and Frege about Mont Blanc serves as a natural starting point for the present inquiry. There are several additional reasons why it makes sense to begin with Russell and Frege. First, as we shall see, it helps us in understanding the nature of Russellian Propositions, which provides the theoretical scaffolding that has underpinned many subsequent notions of an intimately related notion: that of *de re* (or singular) content. In coming to understand the sense in which Russellian Propositions are Russellian, we will likewise come to an initial understanding of why the orthodox Fregean conception of propositions (or *Gedanke*) as structured complexes of senses seems to entail that there is no such thing as Russellian Propositions. This will expedite our excavation of the notion of *de re* content in Section Two, which has been the dominant conception of singular thought within the literature: crudely, the dominant conception is that a singular thought is a thought that has *de re* content. Second, a brief examination of Frege and Russell's respective positions concerning the nature of propositions and thought is important as it is the historical foundation for subsequent theorizing about the nature of singular thought itself within the analytic tradition. Insofar as the early days of analytic philosophy can be called a school, one of the principle tenants of this school in practice was that philosophy should methodologically proceed via an analysis of propositions. In seeing the ways that the notion of singular thought relates to Russellian

propositions, and in seeing the way that Russellian propositions relate to the original interests of the pioneers of analytic philosophy, we can come to see the sense in which an inquiry into the existence and/or nature of singular thought is relevant to the discipline in a broader sense. Lastly, the present dissertation is a defence of Gareth Evans' theory of singular thought. Evans' position not only presupposes a prior familiarity with Frege and Russell's positions in their respective details, but his own position involves an ingenious synthesis of various elements from both Frege and Russell.

Influenced by the crises in the foundations of mathematics that occurred throughout the nineteenth century, Frege and Russell were both motivated to pioneer and develop their respective logicist programs. Simply put, the logicist attempts to demonstrate via the (then) newly found predicate calculus that the truths of arithmetic can be wholly derived from a purely logical notion of number and a small set of logical axioms. Kantian, Hegelian, and Millian variations of idealism were the norms of the late nineteenth century, and it was against the background of these idealist philosophies and their related accounts of the foundations of mathematics and logic that both Russell and Frege were motivated to adopt their anti-psychologistic stance and make the move towards what they considered a more palatable and rigorous logical and mathematical realism. This move towards an anti-psychologistic realism goes hand in hand with the development of their logicist programs, since according to both thinkers it is paramount that we distinguish logical content (and, *ipso facto* arithmetic itself, qua the logicist program) from any psychological elements, since the truths of logic are to be taken as objective and mind independent. For example, as Russell states in *Philosophy of Mathematics* (1903):

To have meaning, it seems to me, is a notion confusedly compounded of logical and psychological elements. Words all have meaning, in the simple sense that they are symbols which stand for something other than themselves. But a proposition, unless it happens to be linguistic, does not itself contain words: it contains the entities indicated by words. Thus meaning, in the sense in which words have meaning, is irrelevant to logic. (47)

Similarly, in his introduction to *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884), we find Frege claiming as one of his three fundamental principles the thesis that we always need to “separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective” (x). Russell and Frege argue that in failing to distinguish the logical from the psychological their idealist opponents had been led to posit metaphysically obscure and fundamentally flawed accounts of the

nature of arithmetical and logical truth — e.g., Kant’s analysis of arithmetic as a subset of synthetic *a priori* knowledge.

How do Frege and Russell attempt to keep the subjective and objective separated during their logical investigations? First, they posit that the act of an assertion is itself a very different thing than its content — i.e., what is asserted. When I assert that 2 is an even number, I assert the content *2 is an even number*.⁹ I do not assert the idea that 2 is a number, even though I may have such an idea. Second, this content is to be understood as an *objective content*, something Russell labelled a proposition, while Frege, rather confusingly, used the German expression *Gedanke*, often translated as ‘Thought’.¹⁰ Russell’s propositions and Frege’s Thoughts served similar functions: both were taken to be the contents of what was asserted, what was believed, what was either communicated or lost in translation, and so on. Propositions were conceived of as objective mind independent entities, the truth of which depended on nothing mental.

These pursuits into the foundation of mathematics led both Frege and Russell to consider propositions as a means through which to advance their logicist programs against the idealist tendencies of their day. In order to provide a thorough analysis of mathematics and the propositions of mathematics, they were driven deeper into questions and concerns of a more semantical character: What is the nature of reference/aboutness? What is the relationship between truth and language? Is truth a property or something entirely different? What is the nature of Meaning, and, more importantly, is there an important respect in which the psychological sense of Meaning ought to be demarcated from the logical sense?¹¹ These are the precise kinds of questions we see Russell and Frege addressing in their correspondence between 1902 and 1904. In order to answer them, they both posited a

⁹ This is, of course, an oversimplification. But for our present purposes it should suffice.

¹⁰ The German word ‘*Gedanke*’ is often translated as ‘Thought’ with a capital ‘T’ so as to indicate its intention as a term of art.

¹¹ It is important at this stage to point out that we ought not anachronistically read *our* understanding of semantics back into Russell and Frege. However, it is certainly true that the questions they pursued were of a general semantical character even by modern standards. In the history of analytic philosophy, Frege and Russell are often characterized as belonging to the period now known as Ideal Language Analysis, since they are concerned not as much with natural language and its numerous ‘imperfections’ (as they would characterize them), but rather in the nature and structure of these objective entities, propositions, with which they were concerned with analyzing. Due to Frege and Russell’s overarching goal of justifying their respective logicist programmes their emphasis is on formal languages first and foremost, and, as a result, they are apt to talk of language as something primarily formal and abstract, akin to the predicate calculus with which they were engaged with. Within such a mindset, it is easy to talk about *sentences* expressing propositions rather than *utterances*. For a contemporary audience, however, thinking of utterances as the primary vehicles for the expression of propositions makes more sense.

structured propositionalism — that is, an account where propositions are to be considered as structured complexes themselves containing simpler constituents. According to Russell (1903), propositions are complexes of concepts (properties and relations) and things/objects, while for Frege (1892, 1918) they are complexes of senses. Although they both posited a structured propositionalism for similar needs, this is where the similarities end and the differences begin between Frege and Russell. They were both logicians arguing for a type of propositional realism and anti-psychologism, but it is in the details of how they developed their respective propositionalism that the differences become most acute.

As their correspondence pertaining to the discovery of Russell's Paradox unfolded, one of the topics under discussion became the nature of judgement, the object of a judgement, and the nature of this object. Let us proceed by introducing the key passages of the correspondence itself, and then continue on by examining in more detail the motivations behind Frege and Russell's respective positions. On November 13th 1904, Frege wrote the following to Russell:

I agree with you that 'true' is not a predicate like 'green.' For at bottom, the proposition 'It is true that $2 + 3 = 5$ ' says no more than the proposition ' $2 + 3 = 5$.' Truth is not a component part of a thought [*Gedanke*], just as Mont Blanc with its snowfields is not itself a component part of the thought [*Gedanke*] that Mont Blanc is more than 4000 metres high.¹² (1980, 163)

He then goes on to explain that on his view the Meaning of a term such as 'Mont Blanc,' i.e., Mont Blanc itself, is not part of the sense of the word, "for then it would also be a component part of the thought [*Gedanke*]" (163). Frege's main motivation for thinking that Mont Blanc cannot be part of the proposition is that such a view is susceptible to what has come to be known as Frege's Puzzle — a puzzle derived from an apparent inability to substitute coreferential terms *salva veritate* in certain contexts (more on this below). On December 12th of that year, Russell replies:

Concerning sense and meaning, I see nothing but difficulties which I cannot overcome... I believe that in spite of all its snowfields Mont Blanc itself is a component part of what is actually asserted in the proposition 'Mont Blanc is more than 4000 metres high.' We do not assert the thought, for this is a private

¹² It should be noted that by "the proposition 'it is true that $2 + 3 = 5$ ' says no more than ..." Frege really means "the proposition expressed by the sentence 'It is true that $2 + 2 = 5$.'" Unfortunately, the correspondence took place in German, and '*Satz*' is usually rendered as 'Proposition,' while '*Gedanke*' is rendered as 'Thought.' I would have preferred 'sentence' and 'proposition,' respectively.

psychological matter: we assert the object of the thought, and this is, to my mind, a certain complex (an objective proposition, one might say) in which Mont Blanc is itself a component part. If we do not admit this, then we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc. This is why for me the *meaning* of a proposition is not the true, but a certain complex which (in the given case) is true ... I see the difference between sense and meaning only in the case of complexes whose meaning is an object. (169, his italics)

Russell's main problem with Frege's sense/Meaning distinction is epistemically based. If we are to hold that sentences express propositions and these propositions determine Meaning or aboutness, then we introduce a tertiary entity between ideas and objects that Russell thinks only introduces unnecessary difficulties. For example, Frege never really gets into the specifics of how propositions determine Meaning. As we shall see (see 2.1.2 below), he also remains quite ambiguous as to whether or not there can be propositions containing syntactic constituents that have no Meaning (e.g., whether or not empty proper names can express a sense that itself does not determine a Meaning). Russell, even prior to the advent of his theory of descriptions (1905), found these epistemic gaps unpalatable. However, prior to his theory of descriptions he was willing to admit some sort of distinction between sense and Meaning, as indicated in the passage quoted above. Prior to 1905, Russell advocated his theory of denoting complexes, according to which some expressions have both a Meaning and a denotation (1903b, 306). Nonetheless, even this distinction between Meaning and denotation does not map neatly onto Frege's distinction between Meaning and sense — despite Russell's indication to the contrary in the quoted passage above.

Russell's insistence that propositions about Mont Blanc directly contain the mountain as a constituent is the foundation for subsequent Russellianism(s). Contemporary Russellianism is a broad cluster of views that has grown out of Russell's notion that, in a certain sense, the Meaning of a word is the object which the word refers to. The word 'Mont Blanc' means Mont Blanc. Furthermore, some thoughts are about Mont Blanc in the literal sense of having the mountain itself as part of their propositional content. Russell's theory of Meaning is therefore considerably Millian in character (in the Kripkean sense), in the sense that in the strict logical notion with which Russell was concerned with what we are talking about when discussing Meaning is a word's denotation. That being said, the concept of denoting had a special theoretical significance for Russell that was foreign to Mill's (1843) own use of the term 'denotation'. It was this theoretical use of denoting that Russell came to

reject upon the formulation of his theory of descriptions (rather ironically, in a paper called ‘On Denoting’).

For the Russellian, it is a relatively straightforward affair to say what a singular thought is: a singular thought is a thought that has as its content a Russellian (or singular) proposition. Russellian propositions are complexes which have as their constituents objects in addition to properties and relations. Non-Russellian propositions are precisely those propositions which are not Russellian, that is, propositions that do not contain objects as constituents. When I entertain the Russellian proposition *Mont Blanc is 4,000 meters high*, I am thinking *of* Mont Blanc that *it* is 4,000 meters high. For the Fregean, those who hold that propositional contents are senses or modes of presentation of objects, it is considerably more difficult to state what a singular thought is — especially if singular thoughts are to be conceived of in a Russellian fashion as containing the objects themselves as propositional constituents. If the Fregean is willing to admit terms that have a sense but no Meaning, then it is unclear in what sense thoughts that are genuinely about worldly things differ from thoughts that are not (other than in their truth value). This is one of the reasons why Russell states that if we deny the Russellian conception of propositions, “then we get the conclusion that we know nothing at all about Mont Blanc” (1903b, 169). Gareth Evans (1982) has posited a non-orthodox reading of Frege in which Fregean propositions can be conceived along broadly Russellian lines. Evans argued that Frege’s theory entails that there are *de re* (or object dependent) senses. The extent to which this account is ascribable to the historical Frege himself is a matter of considerable debate (see 2.1.2 below).

On the orthodox reading of Frege, which seems most in line with the passage quoted above concerning Mont Blanc, what are the theoretical commitments that are motivating him to claim that Mont Blanc is not itself a part of the proposition expressed? We have also yet to address the epistemic conditions that Russell thinks must be satisfied in order for us to entertain Russellian propositions about particular objects. Russell held that we can only think about those entities with which we stand in a relation of acquaintance — i.e., one can only know the Meaning of the words of which they have stood in the relation of acquaintance to these Meanings themselves, as Russell would put it. Following Russell, the vast majority of contemporary analytic philosophers have argued that there is an epistemic constraint, such as acquaintance, that needs to be satisfied in order for one to have a singular thought.¹³ Perhaps

¹³ See Burge (1977), Lewis (1979), Evans (1982), Bach (1987), and Recanati (1993) for the classic defences of an acquaintance condition on singular thought. I will address the contemporary conceptions of epistemic constraints on singular thought in more detail throughout Section Two and Section Three.

most interestingly, Russell adhered to a theory of acquaintance during the period prior to the advent of his theory of descriptions as well as the period following its development. In the years prior to the theory of descriptions, he demarcated denoting from acquaintance, whereas after 1905 he came to reject his theory of denoting altogether — being replaced by his distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description. As he developed his notion of knowledge by description, Russell engaged in what Kaplan (2012) has called a ‘resetting of the parameters’ in regards to the nature and scope of the things with which we are acquainted. In doing so, Russell *ipso facto* resets the scope of entities that are capable of being constituents of propositions: e.g., post-1905, Russell is unable to claim that Mont Blanc is a constituent of Russellian propositions: a claim that strikes many as intolerable. In the period during which the correspondence with Frege took place, Russell was quite willing to hold that we are acquainted with macroscopic objects such as Mont Blanc. However, in formulating his theory of descriptions as a tool capable of solving a number of logical puzzles, his theoretical commitments caused him to adopt what Evans (1982) has called the Cartesian assumption. After adopting the Cartesian assumption, Russell claims that we are not acquainted with ordinary objects and can only know them by description. It is the Russell of 1903 that most acquaintance theorists take their lead from, finding the Cartesian assumption he adopts after 1905 too unpalatable. It is to these topics that we shall now turn.

2.1.2 Frege and His Puzzle

In ‘On Sense and Meaning’ (1892), Frege argues for a bifurcation of his previously homogenous notion of content (*Inhalt*) into two distinct semantic notions – sense (*Sinn*) and Meaning (*Bedeutung*).¹⁴ Although the distinction was first introduced in ‘Function and Concept’ (1891), Frege’s main arguments for the distinction appear subsequently in his follow up ‘On Sense and Meaning.’ Frege’s main argument is that without distinguishing the sense of an expression from its meaning two puzzles remain intractable: (1) the puzzle of informative identity statements differing in cognitive significance, and (2) a failure in substituting coreferential (coextensive) terms *salva veritate* in intensional (or opaque) contexts.

¹⁴ In his *Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884), for example, Frege often uses ‘Inhalt’, ‘Sinn’, and ‘Bedeutung’ interchangeably.

In what follows, I will briefly outline Frege's main arguments concerning how his sense/Meaning distinction is able to accommodate the aforementioned puzzles.

At the beginning of 'On Sense and Meaning,' Frege states that "equality gives rise to challenging questions which are not altogether easy to answer. Is it a relation? A relation between objects, or between names or signs of objects? In my *Begriffsschrift* I assumed the latter" (157). For example, an equality statement such as $a = a$ seems relatively unproblematic and straightforward: it appears to state that an object is identical to itself, and, given an acceptance of Leibniz's law of identity, seems knowable *a priori*. In this sense, it seems intuitive to take the relation of equality to be one that holds between objects. However, consider an equality statement such as ' $a = b$,' when a and b are, in fact, coextensive. In such a statement, it seems less straightforward to take it as a relation between objects, since equality statements of this second sort "often contain very valuable extensions of our knowledge and cannot always be established *a priori*" (157). Therefore, in his *Begriffsschrift* (1879), Frege opted to "assume the latter," that is, to consider identity relations to hold between the names or signs of objects, rather than between the objects themselves. This metalinguistic solution is attractive, as it suggests that in assessing relations of the sort $a = b$ (when true), the relation that is asserted is "that the signs or names ' a ' and ' b ' designate the same thing, so that those signs themselves would be under discussion" (157). This explains why an identity statement such as $a = b$ can be informative, because rather than merely asserting that an object is identical to itself, it asserts that ' a ' and ' b ' are coreferential expressions.

However, in 'On Sense and Meaning' Frege rejects his earlier *Begriffsschrift* solution, claiming that it gets the subject matter of statements wrong, as identity statements of the sort $a = b$ are not merely meant to inform our interlocutors that the signs are coreferential, but that the objects talked about, the subject matter of our discourse, are in fact one and the same. Therefore, in making an identity statement such as 'Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus,' the relation is held to hold between the objects the evening star and the morning star. Consequently, in order to (a) maintain the proper subject matter of our discourse, and (b) account for the informativeness of many identity statements, Frege suggests that "It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, written mark), besides that to which the sign designates, which may

be called the Meaning of the sign, also what I should like to call the *sense* of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained” (158, his italics).¹⁵

By introducing his distinction between sense and Meaning, which amounts to a bifurcation in the the content of our expressions, Frege is able to maintain that although ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ are coreferential expressions designating the same object (namely, Venus), an identity relation asserted to hold between them (or rather, it) can be informative because of the different senses, or modes of presentation, associated with ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus.’ Whereas the name ‘Hesperus’ may be associated with the sense *the evening star*, ‘Phosphorus’ may be associated with the sense *the morning star*. As a result of expressing different senses, these names differ in their cognitive value: explaining how ‘Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus’ is (potentially) more informative and *a posteriori*, while ‘Venus is identical to Venus’ appears merely tautological and therefore *a priori*. This is how Frege’s distinction accounts for the first puzzle pertaining to the informativeness of identity statements while nevertheless avoiding his previously metalinguistic solution and satisfying our intuitions regarding the proper subject matter of such identity statements.

In order to solve the second puzzle concerning an apparent inability to substitute coextensive terms *salva veritate* in intensional contexts, Frege makes a number of ingenious maneuvers. First, he extends his sense/Meaning distinction from expressions such as proper names to include declarative sentences as well (one example of the remarkable homogeneity found within Frege’s systematic theory of language). According to Frege, such sentences express Thoughts, which he clarifies as being “not the subjective performance of thinking but its objective content, which is capable of being the common property of several thinkers” (162n7). Such Thoughts were characterized in the previous section as Fregean propositions. Frege argues that if we substitute a proper name within a declarative sentence with another that designates the same Meaning while nonetheless expressing a different sense, then, in ordinary non-intensional contexts, the overall Meaning of the sentence does not change. However, since the same person could simultaneously take one of the Thoughts expressed to be true while taking the other to be false, then the Thoughts must have something that distinguishes them besides their Meaning in order for this difference in

¹⁵ It is important to note that although the German word ‘Eiganname’ is often translated as ‘proper name,’ Frege used the term in an unusually broad sense for anything “if it is a sign for an object” (1892b). Definite descriptions would likewise be considered as proper names for Frege, on this reading. Perhaps most surprisingly, since Frege takes The True and The False to be objects designated by declarative sentences, he also considers them to be proper names (see 1892a 163).

cognitive significance to be accounted for. Frege posits that for these reasons we should take the Thoughts expressed themselves as the senses of declarative sentences. He then urges that it is only when we are concerned with the truth value of the Thought expressed that we inquire into the Meaning or *Bedeutung*. For this reason, he thinks that it is natural to take two binary truth values, The True and the False, to be the Meanings of declarative sentences. Second, by introducing the sense/Meaning distinction at the level of sentences, Frege then accounts for the puzzle concerning intensional contexts by suggesting that when they occur as subordinate clauses themselves, e.g., in the context of ascribing propositional attitudes, the Thought usually expressed by the subordinate clause is, in that special context, the Meaning of the overall clause.

For example, consider the following argument:

- (1) Frege believes that Hesperus is dim
- (2) Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus
- (2*) Frege does not know that Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus (implicit premise)
- (3) Therefore, Frege believes that Phosphorus is dim (given substitutivity principle)

In a possible world in which (1) and (2) are both true, this nevertheless seems like an invalid inference, given (2*). Contrast the above argument with the following:

- (4) Hesperus is dim
- (5) Hesperus is identical to Phosphorus
- (6) Therefore, Phosphorus is dim

Our intuitions here most likely tell us that this is indeed a valid inference from (4) and (5). Therefore, in intensional contexts such as those containing propositional attitude verbs like 'believes', the principle of substitutivity pertaining to coextensive expressions seems to violate intuitions concerning argument validity.

In order to maintain the principle of substitutivity, Frege draws a distinction between the customary sense/Meaning of an expression, and the indirect sense/Meaning of an expression. The indirect Meaning of an expression is its customary sense. Frege maintains that in intensional contexts, the expressions occurring within the scope of the 'that'-clause have as their indirect Meaning their customary sense. This allows Frege to maintain that in intensional contexts, the principle of substitutivity of coreferential expressions is not

violated, instead there occurs a shift in an expressions Meaning.¹⁶ Let us reconstruct the previously invalid argument above now utilizing Frege's notion of indirect Meaning:

- (7) Frege believes that *the evening star* is dim
- (8) The sense of 'Hesperus' (i.e., *the evening star*) is not identical to the sense of 'Phosphorus' (i.e., *the morning star*)
- (9) — ?

By suggesting that in intensional contexts expressions, such as 'Hesperus', no longer refer to their customary Meanings (in this case, Venus), but instead to their customary sense (in this case, *the evening star*), Frege effectively blocks the opportunity to exploit the principle of substitutivity to construct invalid arguments such as (1)-(3) above. Therefore, coreferential terms are substitutable *salva veritate* in all contexts, but expressions which are normally coreferential undergo a shift in Meaning in apparently intensional contexts – allowing Frege to overcome the second puzzle as well as the first.

In addition to utilizing his bifurcation of his sense/Meaning distinction to offer a solution to Frege's Puzzle, Frege also indicates in several places that it is capable of dealing with issues pertaining to empty names and names occurring in fictional discourse. In works of fiction, poems, and plays, it is common to use names that have no actual Meaning, e.g., uses of the name 'Odysseus' throughout Homer's *Odyssey*. On any Millian theory of naming, according to which the meaning, or semantic content, of a name is the object itself, such uses of non-referring names seem particularly puzzling. Insofar as we follow the tradition of translating '*Bedeutung*' as 'Meaning,' then in this sense Frege is remarkably Millian — if it were not for the fact that post-1892 he posits senses as an additional type of content. Armed with his theory of sense, Frege can claim that in uses of fictional or empty names, though the name has no meaning, it still expresses a content as it nevertheless possesses a sense (163). In fact, Frege even claims that "it would be desirable to have a special term for signs intended to have only sense" (163n8).

In his posthumously published 'Introduction to Logic' (1906), Frege reiterates his

¹⁶ Consider the following passage from Frege (1892):

That in the cases of the first kind the meaning of the subordinate clause is in fact the thought can also be recognized by seeing that it is indifferent to the truth of the whole whether the subordinate clause is true or false...One has the right to conclude only that the meaning of a sentence is not *always* its true value, and that 'morning star' does not always stand for the planet Venus, viz. when the word has its indirect meaning. An exception of such a kind occurs in the subordinate clause just considered, which has a thought as its meaning. (166)

position concerning whether or not Mont Blanc is a constituent of the thoughts sentences express:

Proper names designate objects, and a singular thought is about objects. But we can't say that an object is part of a thought as a proper name is part of the corresponding sentence. Mont Blanc with its masses of snow and ice is not part of the thought that Mont Blanc is more than 4000m. high; all we can say is that to the object there corresponds, in a certain way that has yet to be considered, a part of the thought. (187)

Frege then elaborates on how the Meaning of proper names as they occur as constituents of a sentence relates to the contribution the names make to the Thought expressed, regardless of whether or not the name is empty:

Proper names are meant to designate objects, and we call the object designated by a proper name its meaning. On the other hand, a proper name is a constituent of a sentence, which expresses a thought. Now what has the object got to do with the thought? We have seen from the sentence 'Mont Blanc is over 4000 m high' that it is not part of the thought. Is then the object necessary at all for the sentence to express a thought? People certainly say that Odysseus is not a historical person, and mean by this contradictory expression that the name 'Odysseus' designates nothing, has no meaning. But if we accept this, we do not on that account deny a thought-content to all sentences of the *Odyssey* in which the name 'Odysseus' occurs. Let us just imagine that we have convinced ourselves, contrary to our former opinion, that the name 'Odysseus,' as it occurs in the *Odyssey*, does designate a man after all. Would this mean that the sentences containing the name 'Odysseus' express different thoughts? I think not. The thoughts would strictly remain the same; they would only be transposed from the realm of fiction to that of truth. So the object designated by a proper name seems to be quite inessential to the thought-content of a sentence which contains it. (191)

In claiming that 'the thoughts would strictly remain the same' regardless of whether or not the name 'Odysseus' is empty or not, Frege seems committed to (a) sentences containing empty names being capable of expressing genuine Thoughts, and, relatedly, (b) it being indifferent to the content of a Thought whether or not the name has a Meaning. Hence, on face value, his bifurcation of content into a sense component and a Meaning component seems to account for puzzles concerning so called empty names.

However, it remains a contested issue within the literature on Frege as to (a) whether or not the historical Frege actually held that proper names can express senses whilst nevertheless not designating a Meaning, and (b) independently of the views of the historical Frege, whether or not the philosophical system he espoused is capable of accommodating such a view. For example, Gareth Evans (1982) claims that Frege's "willingness to ascribe sense to terms with no semantic value is only dubiously coherent" (9). Evans (1982) and McDowell (1984) argue that in several places Frege seems committed to the position that only sentences containing proper names with a Meaning are capable of expressing genuine Thoughts. McDowell and Evans argue that in several places Frege seems committed to the idea that sentences containing the fictional name 'Odysseus' are only capable of expression 'mock,' as opposed to genuine, Thoughts. Consider the following remarks from Frege's 'Logic' (1897):

Names that fail to fulfill the usual role of a proper name, which is to name something, may be called mock proper names. Although the tale of William Tell is a legend and not history and the name 'William Tell' is a mock proper name, we cannot deny it a sense ... Instead of speaking of 'fiction,' we could speak of 'mock thoughts.' ... The logician does not have to bother with mock thoughts, just as a physicist, who sets out to investigate thunder, will not pay any attention to stage-thunder. When we speak of thoughts in what follows we mean thoughts proper, thoughts that are either true or false. (130)

The stance Frege expresses in this passage sits uneasily with what was previously quoted from his 'Introduction to Logic.' In the latter, Frege seems quite willing to utilize his distinction between the sense and the Meaning of an expression to account for Thoughts expressed by sentences containing empty names — claiming that they are capable of expressing genuine Thoughts. However, in 'Logic,' Frege seems to consider sentences containing empty names as only being capable of expressing 'mock thoughts,' and that such Thoughts are not 'thoughts proper.' Passages such as those in Frege's 'Logic' support Evans' (1982) reading of Fregean senses such that Frege's "willingness to ascribe sense to terms with no semantic value is only dubiously coherent."

The notion of sentences containing empty names being capable of expressing genuine Thoughts also sits uneasily with Frege's original expositions (albeit brief) of what senses are in 'On Sense and Meaning' (1892). For example, Frege states that 'modes of presentation' are contained within senses (158). It is not entirely clear what Frege meant by

this metaphorical notion and how the relation of ‘containment’ is to be cashed out, but it is clear that Frege held that the same object can be ‘presented’ or ‘illuminated’ in multiple ways. Frege states:

The sense of a proper name is grasped by everyone who is sufficiently familiar with the language or totality of designations to which it belongs; but this serves to illuminate only a single aspect of the thing meant, supposing it to have one.

Comprehensive knowledge of the thing meant would require us to be able to say immediately whether any given sense attaches to *it*. To such knowledge we never attain. (158, my italics)

Assuming for a moment that we possess the vantage point of this omniscient observer that Frege describes, we would be able to say which modes of presentation belong to which objects. This suggests a direct link between the objects (or Meanings), which the modes of presentation are modes of presentation *of*, and the senses wherein these modes of presentation are contained. On this reading, it would hardly make sense for Frege to hold that empty names are capable of expressing a sense containing a mode of presentation of a Meaning that, by definition, does not exist to be presented! As Evans (1982) puts it, “It is really not clear how there can be a mode of presentation associated with some term when there is no object to be presented” (22).

Evans uses this textual evidence to suggest that in order to charitably reconstruct Frege’s ‘official’ position concerning empty names we should take Frege’s talk of mock Thoughts quite seriously. Evans states that “Frege pointed in the direction in which we should look for a way of understanding the case where a singular term is empty, namely as involving some sort of *pretence* or *appearance* of thought-expression rather than the real thing” (30, his italics). On this reading, Frege grafted his notion of sense onto his semantical theory as it existed prior to 1892 (when Meaning and sense were used interchangeably by Frege to discuss what would strictly become an expressions Meaning after 1892), in order to solve puzzles arising from differences in the cognitive significance of coreferential expressions. Evans suggests that overall Frege “departed very little from the ‘Russellian’ model of the functioning of singular sentences which he had embraced before 1890” (30). According to this Russellian model, a term is significant only insofar as it has a referent, or Meaning (12). If this reading of Frege is correct, then despite the fact that Mont Blanc itself is not a constituent of Thoughts expressed by sentences containing the name ‘Mont Blanc’, the Thoughts themselves are constitutively dependent on Mont Blanc. This would suggest that

there may be much less disagreement between Russell and Frege than their initially appears to be. On this reading, the Thoughts expressed by sentences containing non-empty singular terms would be object dependent in the Russellian vein. However, if the Orthodox Reading of Frege is correct, according to which it makes sense to ascribe senses to expressions that nevertheless fail to have a Meaning, then it seems that Russell's worry about the epistemic gap this opens up remains intractable, for the Thoughts grasped by us about Mont Blanc would remain the same regardless of whether or not 'Mont Blanc' were an empty name.

Now that we have seen Frege's original motivations for bifurcating his previously homogenous notion of content, and how he attempts to solve a number of puzzles with his distinction between sense and Meaning, we now come to the incumbent question as to the nature of Fregean senses. Unfortunately, though Frege has given us brief explications of what senses are, he never really gives a detailed account. Perhaps the most thorough treatment is to be found in Frege (1918). He frequently tells us the functions that senses are meant to serve, but nevertheless resists ever going into any substantial depth about the nature of senses themselves. Nonetheless, there are several brief characterizations of senses that Frege provides us with:

(i) Senses as abstract objects. Perhaps the most metaphysically demanding exposition of the nature of senses is to be found in Frege (1918). Frege conceives of senses as imperceptible and timelessly true abstract entities that exist in a third realm — distinct from the subjective realm of psychology and its ideas and the perceivably objective realm of physical objects. Such entities are 'grasped' by us, but are ontologically independent of our grasping them. This conception, of course, is open to the objection from causal efficacy. This conception of sense is fine and dandy, but leaves it dubiously mysterious as to how we 'grasp' such timelessly true and imperceptible abstract objects

(ii) Senses as modes of presentation. During his original exposition of senses (1892a), Frege states that it is natural to think signs are connected to senses, "wherein the mode of presentation is contained." However, Frege does little to aid our understanding of the sense in which the mode of presentation is contained in the sense of a sign. As Evans puts it, none of Frege's various metaphors of senses as modes of presentation or as illuminating Meaning from different sides "makes the relation between sense and Meaning entirely clear ... it seems to me to be possible to dispense with them" (1982: 15). As we will see in Chapter

Three, Evans attempts to rework aspects of this way of conceiving of senses in his notion of Ideas, or ‘ways of thinking’ about an object.

(iii) Senses as definite descriptions. In his initial exposition of what a sense is, Frege included a now infamous, and perhaps unfortunate, footnote. In the footnote Frege claims that “in the case of an actual proper name such as ‘Aristotle’ opinions as to the sense may differ. It might, for instance, be taken to be the following: the pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great” (1892a: 158). Taken in isolation, this footnote strongly suggests that senses are to be characterized as definite descriptions. This is the foundation for the descriptivist reading of Frege, a reading that has been variously attributed to Frege, but perhaps no such attribution is as famous as Kripke’s (1980). However, there is little textual evidence within Frege’s works that suggests he actually held a staunch descriptivist theory of senses. It is more likely that Frege found descriptions to be a helpful way of helping his audience understand the phenomena he was grasping at. Evans (1982) even goes so far as to claim that “there is absolutely nothing in the texts to support the claim that he held that the way of thinking of any object *must* exploit the subject’s knowledge of some description uniquely true of it” (18). In fact, an aspect of Evans’ project throughout *The Varieties of Reference* is investigating the viability of non-descriptive modes of presentation.

(iv) Senses and propositional attitude psychology. As we briefly saw above, the connection Frege establishes between the sense expressed by sentences when they occur as subordinate clauses, especially within propositional attitude reports, and the cognitive significance that they possess for a thinker who grasps the Thought expressed by uses of such clauses, is essential to his own solution to Frege’s Puzzle. Evans (1982) has suggested that although Frege’s linking of senses with the “notions employed in ordinary propositional-attitude psychology” does not in itself explicate the notion of sense that Frege had in mind, it does impose a constraint upon any such conception of senses (18). Evans has called the link to propositional attitude psychology that Frege employed the Intuitive Criterion of Difference. Evans expresses the Intuitive Criterion as follows:

The thought associated with one sentence S as its sense must be different from the thought associated with another sense S' as *its* sense, if it is possible for someone to understand both sentences at a given time while coherently taking different attitudes towards them, i.e., accepting (rejecting) one while rejecting (accepting), or being

agnostic about, the other. (1982: 18-19, his italics)

The Intuitive Criterion serves as a potential method of individuating senses — at least at a preliminary level. These interpretations of Fregean *Sinn* have been immensely influential within the theory of reference, the semantics of names, and the various conceptions of singular thought found throughout the literature. Of particular importance for our purposes is the fact that they were formative on the development of Gareth Evans' own theory of singular thought.

2.1.3 Russell and His Propositions

As we saw above, Russell (1903a) argued that propositions are structured complexes composed of more basic constituents — such as objects, properties, and relations. Russellian propositions are those that contain objects themselves as constituents. For example, if I were to utter the sentence “Mont Blanc is more than 4,000 meters high,” I would assert a Russellian proposition that contains as its constituents the object *Mont Blanc* and the propositional function *4,000 meters high*. As we also noted above, Russell takes propositions to be the objects of thought, arguing that it is imperative to distinguish the object/content of a thought from the psychological process of thinking said thought. Whereas a thought content (proposition), can be the property of several thinkers, a particular instance of a psychological process cannot. For example, in the sense of thought content, x is able to entertain the same thought as y , whereas in the sense of thought process, it seems highly improbable that y 's process of thinking can be possessed by x in the requisite sense.

Although Russell thinks that thought contents are sharable, he holds that there are constraints on which thoughts any particular thinker is able to entertain. Russell argues that there is an epistemic constraint governing whether or not any given thinker is able to understand or entertain a particular proposition, or thought content. He also holds that there are instances in which it may appear as if a given sentence expresses a Russellian proposition containing an object as a constituent when it, in fact, does not. Interestingly, these two points, (1) that there is an epistemic constraint governing the understanding of propositions, and (2) that the surface grammar of a sentence is misleading in regards to the propositional content that it expresses, were maintained by Russell even after he formulated his infamous theory of descriptions (1905) and rejected his earlier (1903) theory of denoting. The primary difference is that after rejecting his theory of denoting, Russell eventually adapted a stricter

notion of the *kind* of objects with which we are acquainted (something Kaplan has called a resetting of the parameters of acquaintance), and he also rejected the notion that descriptive phrases are capable of contributing an *object* to the proposition expressed. Instead, qua his theory of descriptions, Russell took descriptive phrases to express quantificational propositional contents, while only what he called ‘logically proper names’ (e.g., demonstratives such as ‘this’ and ‘that’) were capable of being used to express genuine Russellian (or object dependent) propositions.

Russell’s resetting of the parameter as to both (a) the scope of the objects of acquaintance, and (b) the linguistic means of contributing such objects to the propositions expressed, was largely due to what Evans (1982) has called Russell’s Cartesian Assumption: which is, roughly, the notion that if someone takes themselves to be entertaining a genuine thought about some particular object, then they cannot be mistaken (see Evans 1982). Russell’s Cartesian Assumption is at least partially a consequence of his attempt to make his theory of descriptions applicable to Frege’s Puzzle insofar as it involves ordinary proper names. It is the way that Russell tries to amalgamate his Cartesian Assumption with his own earlier (1903) thoughts about acquaintance and Russellian propositions that makes his theory of acquaintance seem unpalatable to a contemporary audience.

Since Russell’s (1903) theory of denoting and his (1905 and subsequent) reasons for rejecting it have been tremendously influential on the subsequent reference and singular thought literature, it will do us well to examine them. According to Russell (1903), someone is able to entertain a proposition only if they are acquainted with the constituents/Meanings of the proposition. In the posthumously published ‘Points About Denoting’ (1903b), Russell states that “it is necessary, for the understanding of a proposition, to have *acquaintance* with the *meaning* of every constituent of the meaning” (307, his italics).¹⁷ For example, the Meaning of ‘Mont Blanc’ is the actual mountain in the alps, while the Meaning of ‘4,000 meters tall’ is the property of being 4,000 meters tall. Assuming I am acquainted with both the object and the property in this particular case, then Russell would hold that I am able to understand the proposition [itself a Meaning, namely the mind independent proposition itself] *Mont Blanc is 4,000 meters high*. Russell thinks that an expression’s Meaning, our acquaintance with its Meaning, and our ability to successfully communicate its Meaning are notions that are intimately interrelated. Consider the following passage from ‘On Meaning

¹⁷ Unfortunately, prior to 1905, Russell offers little insight in terms of what constitutes standing in an acquaintance relation to an object.

and Denotation' (1903c):

If we say, for instance, "Arthur Balfour advocates retaliation," that expresses a thought which has for its object a complex containing as a constituent the man himself; no one who does not know what is the designation of the name "Arthur Balfour" can understand what we *mean*: the object of our thought cannot, by our statement, be communicated with him. But when we say "the present Prime Minister of England believes in retaliation," it is possible for a person to understand completely what we mean without his knowing that Mr. Arthur Balfour is Prime Minister, and indeed without his ever having heard of Mr. Arthur. On the other hand, if he does not know what England is, or what we mean by *present*, or what it is to be Prime Minister, he cannot understand what we mean. This shows that Mr. Arthur Balfour does not form part of our meaning, but that England and the present and being Prime Minister do form part of it. Thus the *meaning* of the two propositions is different: a man may know either without knowing or even understanding the other. (315-316, his italics)¹⁸

In this example, Russell thinks that although we may *know who* Arthur Balfour is, that is, we know the Meaning of 'Arthur Balfour,' if our interlocutor does not know who Arthur Balfour is, then they are unable to understand the proposition we express in saying "Arthur Balfour believes in retaliation." However, she may nevertheless be capable of understanding the proposition expressed by the sentence "The present [in 1903] Prime Minister of England believes in retaliation," even if the denoting phrase 'the present Prime Minister of England' and the proper name 'Arthur Balfour' appear to be *about* the same object, namely, Arthur Balfour. Russell's reasoning is that although she may not be acquainted with Arthur Balfour, the Meaning of 'Arthur Balfour,' she may nevertheless be acquainted with the cluster of concepts that make up the denoting phrase 'the present Prime Minister of England.'

According to Russell's theory of denoting, certain clusters of words within a language that he called 'denoting phrases' (or, alternatively, 'descriptive phrases') possess a peculiar property he called denoting. According to Russell (1903a):

A concept *denotes* when, if it occurs in a proposition, the proposition is not *about* the concept, but about a term connected in a certain peculiar way with the concept. If I say, "I met a man," the proposition is not about *a man*: this is a concept which does

¹⁸ It is perhaps worth noting that the criterion for individuating Meanings presented here is remarkably similar to Frege's method of individuating senses via the Intuitive Criterion of Difference.

not walk the streets, but lives in the shadowy limbo of logic-books. What I met was a thing, not a concept, an actual man with a tailor and a bank-account or a public-house and a drunken wife. (53)

According to the theory of denoting, in the case of phrases such as ‘a woman,’ ‘the so-and-so,’ ‘some woman,’ etc., we need to distinguish between the Meaning of the expression and its denotation (1903b, 306). Russell states that:

A phrase such as “the present Prime Minister of England” *designates* an entity, in this case Mr. Arthur Balfour, while it *expresses* a meaning, which is complex, and does not, as a rule, include the entity designated as a constituent; the relation of the meaning expressed to the entity designated is that of *denoting*. The meaning may be called a *description* of the entity, and the phrase may be called a *descriptive phrase*. (1903c, 318, his italics)

According to Russell, a descriptive phrase such as ‘the present Prime Minister of England’ expresses a complex Meaning insofar as it contains parts, while its denotation is simple: namely, Arthur Balfour (1903b, 306). In this sense, ‘The present [in 1903] Prime Minister of England believes in retaliation’ expresses a proposition that does not contain Arthur Balfour as a constituent, but instead contains the denoting complex expressed by the denoting phrase. According to Russell’s own taxonomy of propositions, such a proposition would not be considered properly Russellian, since it contains a denoting complex as a constituent instead of the denoted object itself. Our ability to denote objects without being acquainted with them is achieved through the use of descriptive phrases (306). For example, Russell says that “given a particular class, e.g., the Solar System, we infer that it has one centre of mass; thus we can denote *the* centre of mass in question, without being acquainted with it” (306). This is the sense in which Russell is willing to agree with Frege that in some instances he is able to see “the difference between sense and meaning only in the case of complexes whose meaning is an object” (Frege, 1980, 169). It is unclear, however, whether or not Russell realized that his distinction between Meaning and denotation does not map neatly onto Frege’s distinction between sense and Meaning.

There are a number of important caveats to Russell’s theory of denoting. First, Russell says that “a proposition will only be said to be *about* a term [object] if that term [object] is a constituent of the denotation” (1903b, 307, his italics). Russell elaborates:

...If I ask: Is Smith married? and the answer is affirmative, I then know that “Smith’s wife” is a denoting phrase, although I don’t know who Smith’s wife is. We may

distinguish the terms with which we are *acquainted* from others which are merely denoted. E.g., in the above case, I am supposed to be acquainted with the term *Smith* and the relation *marriage*, and thence to be able to conceive a term having this relation to Smith, although I am not acquainted with any such term. (306, his italics)

Here Russell draws a sharp distinction between those objects with which are are acquainted and those which we reach only through the logical property of denoting. This is his explanation as to why the locution ‘Smith’s wife’ may be a meaningful phrase *even if* one does not know who Smith’s wife actually is. If one knows that Smith’s wife is Triphena, that is, if one is acquainted with Triphena, then all the merrier, for then they are able to grasp the Russellian proposition that contains Triphena herself — otherwise, they grasp the proposition containing the denoting complex itself.

The second main caveat of Russell’s theory of denoting is that he questions the homogeneity of what Evans (1982) has since called the intuitive category of referential expressions (or singular terms). As we saw in the above section on Frege, Frege’s theory of language was remarkably homogenous. Words, sentences, etc., are all said to express senses and designate Meanings. Frege’s semantics of sense and Meaning is able to treat sentences, definite descriptions, proper names, demonstratives, and so on in a homogenous manner because Frege considers each of these expressions as as belonging to his technical category of Proper Names (*Eiganname*). However, for Russell, it turns out that descriptive phrases and proper names semantically behave in ways that bear little resemblance to one another. The Russell of 1903 takes a staunchly Millian stance on the Meaning of proper names: if there is no object, then there is no Meaning. If there is a Meaning, there must be an object. Furthermore, to *know* this Meaning, one must be acquainted with it (as he illustrates in the quoted passage above). Descriptive phrases, on the other hand, are capable of being perfectly intelligible regardless of whether or not one is acquainted with the object they denote. This is because they express denoting complexes and contribute these complexes to the proposition expressed. One can understand a denoting complex without having knowledge of what it denotes, as Russell illustrates in the quoted passage above concerning the centre of mass in the Solar System. Therefore, to tie this in with our previous discussion, so long as both Frege and Russell are acquainted with Mont Blanc, they are capable of successfully communicating with one another *about* Mont Blanc with the name ‘Mont Blanc.’ If Russell had presumed Frege did not know what Mont Blanc was, he could have used the descriptive phrase ‘the tallest mountain in the alps’ instead, which would have contributed the denoting complex to

the proposition expressed, a complex that would have been perfectly intelligible to Frege despite his (in this example) unfamiliarity with Mont Blanc.

However, by 1905, Russell had grown dissatisfied with his theory of denoting, and developed his now famous theory of descriptions. First, whereas in 1903 Russell argued that denoting phrases are capable of contributing denoting complexes to the proposition expressed, from 1905 onwards Russell suggests that what descriptive phrases contribute propositionally is, in fact, quite different than what is suggested grammatically by a denoting phrase. In the theory of descriptions, denoting complexes disappear altogether upon proper semantical analysis of the propositions that denoting phrases express. Instead, they are taken to express quantificational propositions (which purport the unique instantiation of some property in the case of definite descriptions). Russell's approach to the analysis of propositions became more sophisticated so as to suggest that we must engage in a more robust transformative analysis of sentences to reveal the true logical form of the proposition that they express. That being said, despite the ways in which his theory of descriptions was a rather radical departure from his earlier theory, he carried several aspects of his earlier theory over: the most important being his notion of acquaintance as a special epistemic constraint on which propositions one is capable of grasping. This brings us to the second major departure from his earlier theory of denoting. Whereas in 1903 Russell seemed happy to contrast entities which are merely denoted from those with which we are acquainted, post-1905 Russell's notion of acquaintance becomes a more fully developed notion that serves as the foundation to his theory of knowledge.

Russell's departure from his theory of denoting began in (the rather ironically titled) 'On Denoting' (1905), wherein Russell advances his theory of descriptions, and rejects his earlier theory of denoting, for two main reasons.¹⁹ First, the theory is able to dismantle a number of otherwise philosophically perplexing puzzles without the need to posit non-existent Meinongian objects or Fregean senses (i.e., it is ontologically parsimonious). Second, the theory explains how we are able to have knowledge of things beyond the objects with which we are immediately acquainted (i.e., it is epistemically fruitful). However, prior to

¹⁹ It should perhaps be noted that although prior to his theory of descriptions Russell often used the locutions 'descriptive phrase' and 'denoting phrase' interchangeably, beginning in 1905, his use of 'denoting phrase' begins to fade out of use altogether. The reason is likely that his previous use of the locution 'denoting phrase' too heavily suggests the logical property of denoting — the very thing that Russell abandoned following the development of his theory of descriptions.

considering any of these phenomena in any detail, I will briefly outline Russell's treatment of descriptions more generally.²⁰

Russell is concerned with descriptions such as 'the Present King of France,' 'a man,' 'the first person born in the twentieth century,' etc. Some descriptions are ambiguous, or indefinite, and usually are of the form 'a-so-and-so,' while others are definite, and of the form 'the-so-and-so.' Grammatically, indefinite and definite descriptions alike often occur in the subject position of a sentence, such as 'the Present King of France is bald.' Hence, descriptions superficially appear as if they should be analyzed in a way similar to other linguistic expressions capable of occupying similar grammatical positions. Frege (1892), as we saw above, assimilates definite descriptions into his category of Proper Names (*Eigennamen*), and treats them as singular terms that express a sense which determines a Meaning. Russell (1905), on the other hand, thinks that expressions such as 'the Present King of France' are actually disguised quantificational phrases. At the level of logical form, descriptions function quite differently than their grammatical form suggests. According to Russell, a phrase such 'all humans are mortal' means $\forall x(Hx \supset Mx)$; or in natural language (pretending algebraic variables frequently occur in uses of natural language), *if x is human then x is mortal*. Likewise, although the phrase 'the Present King of France is bald' intuitively suggests the following logical form, Ba , where B is the property of being bald and a is the object denoted by 'the Present King of France,' Russell suggests that it ought to be analyzed as a quantificational expression as well, namely, $\exists x(Fx \wedge (\forall y)(Fy \supset x = y) \wedge Bx)$; or in natural language, roughly, *there is exactly one x such that x is King of France and x is bald*. Notice that in these logical constructions the definite article 'the' is eliminated, and only a bound variable occurs instead of an object proper. It subsequently makes no sense to ask for the Meaning of 'the present King of France' in isolation from the sentence in which it occurs, as the function of this phrase, what it ultimately contributes to the proposition expressed by the sentence of which it is a syntactic constituent, is not a grammatical nor a logical subject (or object), but rather a quantificational phrase that specifies the existence of some unique object satisfying a number of properties. Likewise, a sentence such as 'the present King of

²⁰ Much of my outline of Russell's theory of descriptions will follow the general approach and terminology that he adopts in his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (1919). The reason for this, is that 'On Denoting' is riddled with terminological confusions and misleading uses of the term 'denoting phrase' and 'meaning' or 'mean,' – often at the detriment of making a thorough engagement with that work a rather daunting exegetical exercise more aptly suited for an exploration in the history of analytic philosophy proper. For our present purposes, that of outlining the theory of definite descriptions first introduced in 'On Denoting,' adopting the clearer exposition of Russell (1919) is more beneficial.

France is bald' is no longer taken as containing a denoting phrase that expresses a denoting complex, since at the level of logical form the proposition expressed does not contain *a man* (e.g., Louis the XIV if it were uttered in 1700) as a correlate to the phrase 'a man.'

Russell (1919) claims that a "theory may be tested by its capacity for dealing with puzzles, and it is a wholesome plan, in thinking about logic, to stock the mind with as many puzzles as possible, since these serve much the same purpose as is served by experiments in physical science" (108). Russell utilizes his theory of descriptions to solve five different puzzles, puzzles that he largely inherited from Frege (1892) and Meinong (1904). The puzzles are as follows:

- (1) Informative identity statements
- (2) Failure of the substitution of coreferential expressions in certain contexts
- (3) The problem of empty names / descriptions
- (4) Law of the excluded middle
- (5) True negative existential statements

As we saw above, Frege attempted to solve puzzles (1) through (3) by positing senses in addition to Meanings. However, in certain contexts Frege's theory violates the law of the excluded middle – namely, whenever an empty name occurs in a sentence, as for Frege the Meaning of a complete declarative sentence is determined by the Meaning of its parts. Given that the sentence 'Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca' contains the name 'Odysseus,' which expresses a sense, but fails to determine a Meaning, it follows that the sentence as a whole lacks a truth value, since the referent of a declarative sentence is either the True or the False. Meinong, on the other hand, attempted to account for puzzles (3) through (5) by claiming that every denoting phrase denotes, even if it denotes a non-existent object. Russell's earlier theory of denoting also commits him to a similar position as Meinong, for if a denoting phrase has Meaning it expresses a denoting complex, and on Russell's earlier theory it is difficult to see how a denoting complex would have Meaning if it itself does not denote. As Russell (1905) himself puts it, "One of the first difficulties that confronts us, when we adopt the view that denoting phrases *express* a meaning and *denote* a denotation, concerns the cases in which the denotation appears to be absent" (46, his italic). In addition to being ontologically bloated, Meinongian theories purportedly violate the law of non contradiction, as the descriptive phrase 'the round square' denotes *the round square*, since every denoting phrase denotes for Meinong (1904). Russell came to consider these results intellectually insufferable, and seems to have found his newfound theory's ability to handle puzzles (1)

through (5) without the need to posit any extra entities or violate any logical laws one of its chief merits.

Consider Frege's Puzzle, which, as we saw above, is the apparent inability to substitute coreferential expressions *salva veritate* in certain contexts. Frege attempted to solve this puzzle by positing senses in addition to Meanings. However, in order to handle this puzzle amongst others without positing any additional entities or semantic types, Russell suggests that there is a difference between *primary* (wide scope) and *secondary* (narrow scope) occurrences of definite descriptions. On this account, 'Frege believes that the evening star is dim' can either be represented with narrow scope as (i) or with wide scope as (ii) :

(i) Frege believes: $\exists x(Ex \wedge (\forall y)(My \supset x = y) \wedge Dx)$

or

(ii) $\exists x(Ex \wedge (\forall y)(My \supset x = y):$ Frege believes (Dx)

Let us consider (i). (i) contains the property *being the first heavenly body visible in the evening* but this property is not the same as the property *being the first heavenly body visible in the morning* so the expressions are not coreferential and the puzzle cannot even get off the ground. This is just one example of how Russell's theory of descriptions is surprisingly powerful and capable of solving a number of logical puzzles, including (1) through (5) listed above.

Despite the fact that Russell replaced his theory of denoting with his theory of descriptions, his earlier notion of acquaintance continued to serve a prominent role overall. By this stage, Russell defined acquaintance as having a "direct cognitive relation to that object, *i.e.* when I am directly aware of the object itself" (1910, 108). Furthermore, Russell claims that:

The fundamental principle in the analysis of propositions containing descriptions is this: Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted... *it is scarcely conceivable that we can make a judgment or entertain a supposition without knowing what it is that we are judging or supposing about.* We must attach some meaning to the words we use, if we are to speak significantly and not utter mere noise; and the meaning we attach to our words must be something with which we are acquainted. (1912, 32, my italics)

The italicized portion is what Evans (1982) has labelled 'Russell's Principle,' and, as we shall in Chapter Three, one of the main aims throughout Evans' *The Varieties of Reference* is a sustained defence of the application of this principle. The importance of the principle for Russell is that it provided the basis for his foundationalist epistemology. Although all

knowledge is grounded in acquaintance, the importance of knowledge by description is that it enables us to “pass beyond the limits of our private experience” and think about things with which we have no acquaintance (32).²¹

It seems as if instead of his theory of acquaintance being a *consequence* of his theory of descriptions, or something that originated and developed alongside it, that it was an aspect from his earlier period/his theory of denoting that he *carried over* post-1905, despite the fact he categorically rejects the theory of denoting. Consider these two passages from ‘On Denoting’ (1905), both of which are worth quoting at length to illustrate this point:

The subject of denoting is of very great importance, not only in logic and mathematics, but also in theory of knowledge. For example, we know that the centre of mass of the solar system at a definite instant is some definite point, we can affirm a number of propositions about it; but we have no immediate *acquaintance* with this point, which is only known to us by description. The distinction between *acquaintance* and *knowledge about* is the distinction between the things we have presentations of, and the things we only reach by means of denoting phrases. (41, his italics)

and,

One interesting result of the above theory of denoting²² is this: when there is anything with which we do not have immediate acquaintance, but only definition by denoting phrases, then the propositions in which this thing is introduced by means of a denoting phrase do not really contain this thing as a constituent, but contain instead the constituents expressed by several of the words of the denoting phrase. Thus in every proposition that we can apprehend (i.e., not only in those whose truth or falsehood we can judge of, but in all that we can think about), all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance. (55-56)

Each of these quoted passages would have been as happily at home contained within Russell’s *Principles of Mathematics* (1903) as they would have been post 1905. Of course, part of this is due to the fact that Russell is still using the locution ‘denoting phrase’ in 1905, which is a misnomer on his part, since he is, in fact, rejecting the theory of denoting. However, despite this rather misleading mistake of his, what he says about the role of acquaintance remains rather untouched despite the fact he had replaced his theory of

²¹ Throughout the years Russell often changed his mind as to which things we are acquainted with – although the list typically includes sense data, universals, our own mental states, and perhaps ourselves.

²² Think: theory of descriptions here. It is a bit of a misnomer that Russell is still using the locution ‘theory of denoting’ to describe his view by this point in the paper — since he has rejected that theory.

denoting with his theory of descriptions.

So, if Russell's theory of descriptions serves a similar role epistemically as his theory of denoting, then what is so significant about it? Well, the fact that the theory of descriptions is capable of handling a number of logical puzzles that the theory of denoting cannot. But the epistemic role that the theory of descriptions serves is not one of the benefits that Russell gained in rejecting his earlier theory of denoting, it is simply a benefit of the theory of denoting that he decided to carry over and add on as an aspect of his theory of descriptions, or so I have argued. What does this entail about his theory of acquaintance post-1905? It suggests that the amendments he made to the theory of acquaintance were made in order for this theory of descriptions to have the widest possible application. For example, one of the logical puzzles that Russell was attempting to solve was Frege's Puzzle. His theory of descriptions solves that quite readily as we saw above. But, as Frege noted, the puzzle arises just as easily for coreferential proper names as it does for coreferential definite descriptions (which are, on Frege's account, Proper Names as well). Russell likely realized that in order to extend the applicability of his theory of descriptions era solution to Frege's Puzzle so as to include cases involving proper names, he would have to either (a) reject the notion that proper names are capable of contributing objects to the proposition expressed [that is, that the Meaning of proper names is the object named], or (b) reject that our ordinary conception of proper names is adequate. Russell chose the latter.

As such, the notion of acquaintance continues to function as the metasemantic foundation for Russell's Millian theory of naming according to which the Meaning of a name is its referent or bearer, as it had in the period through which he subscribed to his theory of denoting. On Russell's account, we are able to name only those objects with which we are acquainted. Russell claims that when we are acquainted with an object and use a proper name to talk about it, "the proper name has the direct use which it always wishes to have, as simply standing for a certain object, and not for a description of the object" (1912). Any names satisfying this function are known as logically proper names according to Russell. However, given that during this period Russell (1905-1918, perhaps far later) adhered to an austere sense-data theory of perception, according to which we are never really acquainted with macroscopic objects like Mont Blanc, Frege, the external world, or other minds. These things, according to Russell, are only knowable via description. As a result, Russell concludes

that most of the ordinary proper names that we use are in fact truncated or disguised definite descriptions.²³

Throughout the remainder of the dissertation, many of the technical notions developed by Frege and Russell that we have considered will continue to resurface as well as providing the theoretical scaffolding for many of the contemporary debates and positions. In the next section, for example, we'll see that the dominant conception of singular thought is still broadly Russellian in character: singular thought considered as a type of content. Furthermore, the theory of singular thought that Evans develops throughout *The Varieties of Reference* is not only heavily rooted in both Frege and Russell, but presupposes a great deal of familiarity with their works.

²³ Russell had a number of epistemological and metaphysical reasons that motivated him to advance this claim. However, for the sake of brevity I am merely providing an overview.

§II Some Conceptions of Singular Thought

2.2.1 *Singular Thought as Type of Content*

The overall aim of the present section is to briefly outline various conceptions of singular thought that have emerged in the philosophical literature. In the previous section, we saw the ways in which the technical notion of a proposition emerged from the writings of both Frege and Russell. Furthermore, we saw two different conceptions of singular, or object dependent, propositions. In our discussion of Frege, a possible reading of Fregean *Sinn* emerged according to which they are object dependent modes of presentation, or *de re* senses.²⁴ In Russell, we saw the development of the notion of singular propositions, i.e., propositions containing objects as constituents. The key difference between a Fregean and Russellian account of singular propositions is that, for the Russellian, such propositions literally contain such individuals, whereas for the *de re* Fregean, they are merely dependent on individuals. Following Frege and Russell, many theorists have continued to think of singular thoughts along broadly propositional lines as thoughts that have as their content object dependent singular propositions. In this subsection, I hope to more clearly outline the contemporary understanding of singular thought as a type of content, before moving on to competing conceptions that have become more popular in recent years.

One advantage of the ‘singular thought as singular content’ view is, upon inputting any given thought, the theory is theoretically able to function as a sort of decision procedure which outputs whether or not the thought is singular or not. For example, compare the two following cases:

Case 1: I am watching something small fly through my yard and think to myself, “that must be a bumblebee due to its size.”

Case 2: I am sitting inside my house and think, “there are bumblebees in London.”

Most singular thought theorists are willing to admit that these two cases represent two

²⁴ Such a reading was labelled the ‘non-orthodox reading of Frege’ so as to indicate that the orthodox reading of Fregean *Sinn* is not cashed out in object dependent terms. Instead, the orthodox reading of Frege is along broadly descriptivist lines.

different kinds of thought. The first case is supposed to be a paradigmatic instance of a singular thought, since I am thinking *of* something that *it* is a bumblebee. The second case is generally taken to be paradigmatic of a general thought, since rather than being about any particular (or singular) bumblebee, it is about the property *bumblebee in London*, to the effect that it is instantiated.

If the distinction between singular and general thoughts is granted as a genuine distinction, then it remains for theorists to determine the criterion we ought to use to determine whether any given thought is singular or general (presupposing for our present purposes that the answer here must be bivalent). The singular thought as singular content theorist argues that what distinguishes the type of case as expressed in Case 1 above from those expressed in Case 2 is that they each express different kinds of contents.²⁵ These contents can be explicated via the propositional semantics provided by someone such as Russell. The proposition expressed by the embedded sentence in the first case can be rendered as the following ordered pair:

(1) $\langle a, \textit{Bumblebee} \rangle$

which is an ordered pair containing the object *a*, and the property *bumblebee*. It simply represents that *a* instantiates the property *bumblebee*. In other words, a first-order function: which in this instance hopefully outputs the value True (unless my eyesight and judgement is failing in our current example). The proposition expressed by the embedded sentence in the second case can, conversely, be rendered as the following in Lambda Calculus:

(2) $\lambda x. [\textit{Bumblebee}(x) \bullet \textit{InLondon}(x)]$

which states that the property *bumblebee* is instantiated by something in London. In other words, it expresses a general proposition (or, alternatively, a second-order function in standard logic).

The ‘singular thought as singular content’ view gives us a way to demarcate singular thoughts from general thoughts on the basis of what kind of proposition the thought expresses. To return to our example from the previous section involving Mont Blanc,

²⁵ As we shall see in proceeding sections, there are views that demarcate singular from general thoughts via features other than content (e.g., by functional role, metasemantic properties, etc.).

thoughts about Mont Blanc are singular if, and only if, they express propositions containing Mont Blanc as a constituent. Likewise, since my thought about *a* (the bumblebee) contains *a* as a constituent, in this instance on the grounds that I am able to identify the object perceptually, it satisfies the singularity condition.

This brings us to an interesting feature of the singular content conception of singular thought: namely, such a characterization seems to commit this view to the idea that singular thoughts are object dependent. How could my thought be about *a*, the bumblebee, if *a* did not exist? Conversely, it seems quite obvious that I could think that there are bumblebees in London even if this turns out to be false — I would merely be thinking a property is satisfied in a certain domain when it is, in fact, not. However, how could I be thinking *of* something that *it* is a bumblebee if *it* did not exist?

The fact that this particular conception of singular thought entails that such thoughts are object dependent is a feature of it that is often used to critique the view itself. If a hallmark of thought is intentionality, and if Brentano (1874) is correct in arguing that a mark of intentionality is intentional in-existence, then it seems that demarcating two purportedly distinct kinds of thought via object dependent features seems altogether misguided.²⁶ As Goodman and Genone (2020) put it, “several theorists have argued that some ‘empty’ cases share with referentially successful singular thoughts some relevant range of conceptual, epistemic, or cognitive features such that they should be classified the same way” (3). Instead of delineating thoughts in terms of content, perhaps we should demarcate singular from general thoughts via features that are intrinsic to the mental, so to speak, or by their functional role. This is, broadly speaking, the direction that some Liberalists, especially cognitivists, pursue (see 2.2.3 below).

Additionally, some philosophers have taken aim at the singular thought as singular content view on the grounds that it fails to “give us traction with questions about what enables thinkers to think singular thoughts” (Goodman, 2018). Jeshion (2010), for example, thinks that the view that singular thoughts have singular content does little in regards to explaining the cognitive and epistemic capacities involved in thinking such thoughts, and, as a result, fails to be explanatorily adequate. In other words, if we take singular thoughts to be attitudes to towards singular contents, it may tell us what is entertained in thinking a singular thought, but not how it is so entertained. Therefore, as Goodman and Genone (2020) state,

²⁶ See Sainsbury (2005), Crane (2011), and Taylor (2010) for criticisms of the singular thought as singular content conception along these non-object dependent grounds.

the theory is limited. Even worse for the conception of singular thought as singular content, if any alternative theory is able to uniformly answer the ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions, then, given the law of parsimony, there seems little reason to endorse the view that singular thought is singular content. This will, by and large, be the approach that cognitivists take (see Chapter Three).

However, although we will not consider these criticisms of the content conception in greater depth until Chapter Three, a few brief responses on behalf of the content theorist are warranted. First, in the theory of reference, it is common to distinguish between the semantical question versus the metasemantical question, or, as Marti (1995) puts it, the question pertaining to the contribution of reference from that of the mechanism of reference. Extending this framework to that of a theory of thought (as is commonplace), it is perhaps too stringent for us to expect the conception of singular thought as singular content to account for both the contribution and the mechanism behind such thoughts in one broad stroke. The content conception gives us a clear explanation of what is contributed in instances of singular thought, just as a referentialist semantics tells us that an object is what is contributed to propositions expressed by utterances containing a non-empty proper name. On most versions of referentialism, the account as to the mechanism of this contribution is that history of that name and the interlocutors exist in some sort of causal-historical chain with the object so named. Likewise, many singular thought as content theorists have amended their theory by appealing to various relations we stand in with various objects in order to account for the mechanism of singular thought. They claim that singular thoughts are irreducibly relational. We cannot, therefore, account for singular thoughts solely in virtue of what is contributed, but need to also consider the mechanism through which such contents are entertained. The suggestion, then, is that we need to consider epistemic and causal factors in our theory of singular thought, and not solely which kind of content is being entertained. In fact, Russell himself was an early advocate of such a view. The contribution of a singular thought was understood to be a Russellian proposition, while the mechanism that explained such a thought was supposed to be acquaintance with the requisite constituents of said thought. We will consider the relational conception of singular thought in more detail in the proceeding section.²⁷

²⁷ For the idea that singular thoughts are irreducibly relational, see McDowell (1984), Evans (1982), Taylor (2000), Braun (2005), Bach (2010), and Recanati (2010).

That being said, even those theorists that argue against the content conception can agree that it is nonetheless a useful way to initially characterize the debate. Goodman and Genone (2020) summarize this point nicely:

Although this [the singular thought as singular content conception] definition has lost popularity ... it remains a useful starting point, for it makes clear what are arguably *for everyone* central features of the distinction between *singular thought* and *descriptive/general thought* ... Another way of putting the point is that, by everyone's lights, the theoretical notion of *singular thought* is used to capture a contrast, at the level of *thought*, analogous to the contrast in *language* between two different kinds of "singular term": those that are *descriptive* (like definite and indefinite descriptions) and those that are *referential* (like names, demonstratives, and indexicals). (6-7, their italics)

The gist of what Goodman and Genone are pointing out is that whether or not one ultimately agrees with the conception of singular thought as singular content, the initial way it explains the divide between Case 1 type instances and Case 2 type instances is a plausible starting point for any theory of singular thought. I alluded to this point earlier when I mentioned that most singular thought theorists are willing to admit that these two cases represent two different kinds of thought. An obvious way of explaining this difference is in terms of their content, and if we disagree with this conception, then we need to explain why an alternative account accommodates the explicandum to a greater extent than the content conception is capable of.

2.2.2 *Singular Thought as Relational Thought*

There have been two main attempts to individuate singular thought without appealing to content. The first involves the mechanism through which an object of thought is determined. Some philosophers (most notably Bach and Evans) have appealed to causal and/or epistemic relations and mechanisms in order to demarcate singular thoughts from general thoughts. The second involves an appeal to the functional role of singular thoughts. In this section, I will briefly outline the singular thought as relational thought conception, illustrate a way that it can be paired with the content conception to overcome the objection that the content conception is limited, and introduce a few of the main critiques the relational theory has faced. I will then examine the attempt to demarcate singular from general thoughts via their functional role in section 2.2.3 below.

There are two primary types of relations that philosophers have appealed to in order to offer an account what differentiates singular thought from general thought. The first type of view claims that the requisite relation is a causal one, with theorists such as Bach (1987) claiming that “the relation that makes something the object of a *de re* thought is a causal relation” (12). The second type of view claims that the requisite relation is an epistemic one, such as the possession of knowledge that enables the thinker to discriminate the object of thought from all other objects (see Evans 1982).²⁸ Both accounts claim that singular thought is a cognitive phenomena that is irreducibly relational.²⁹

By appealing to either a causal or epistemic relation, the singular thought as relational thought conception is readily able to offer us an explanation as to mechanism of how singular thoughts are entertained. For example, consider the two cases introduced in the previous section:

Case 1: I am watching something small fly through my yard and think to myself, “that must be a bumblebee due to its size.”

Case 2: I am sitting inside my house and think, “there are bumblebees in London.”

These cases were intended to capture the intuitive sense in which a singular thought differs from a general thought. By appealing to either a causal or epistemic relation, the relational theorist argues that we are able to demarcate Case 1 type thoughts from Case 2 type thoughts in virtue of whether or not such relations hold. In Case 1, I am causally related to the bumblebee through my perceptual faculties. Alternatively, it could also be said that an epistemic condition is satisfied, since I am capable of spatially locating the bumblebee, and therefore possess discriminating knowledge of the bumblebee. However, in Case 2, it seems that I am neither causally related to any particular bumblebee in London, nor am I able to discriminate any one bumblebee in London from another on the basis of the thought

²⁸ This is one way to formulate what Evans’ (1982) has called ‘Russell’s Principle.’ Since the nuances of Evans’ position are rich and many, and since I’ll be covering his view in great detail in Chapter Three, the remainder of this brief outline on the relational conception will primarily focus on Bach’s causal-relationalism, since it is, in many ways, the simpler view — while nevertheless capturing the general approach of relational views in general.

²⁹ The view that singular thought is dependent on the satisfaction of either a causal or epistemic relation is the contemporary descendent of Russell’s notion of acquaintance. This will be explained in more detail in section 2.3.2 below.

content entertained in Case 2 alone. Such a thought therefore qualifies as general or descriptive in nature.

Now consider the following cases:

Case 3: I am sitting inside my house and think, “some bumblebee in London is faster than the rest.”

Case 4: I am sitting inside my house, and having just watched a documentary on a famous bumblebee [named Bee], think to myself, “Bee must be the fastest in all of London!”

Whereas in Case 2 it seems plausible I am not thinking of any bumblebee in particular, instead thinking that the property *bumblebee in London* is instantiated, in Case 3 it seems as if I am thinking of some particular bumblebee in London that it is faster than the rest (let’s presume there is a fastest bumblebee in London who is called Bee). However, unless I’ve been to London and have seen Bee myself, or have heard that Bee is the fastest bumblebee in London, etc., then it seems that I cannot claim to stand in a causal relation to Bee. It also seems problematic to suppose that an epistemic relation is satisfied in the instance in which I’ve neither been to London nor heard of Bee, for then it would not be the case that I am thinking *of* Bee that he is the fastest, but instead would be thinking that some property (fastest) is uniquely possessed by one bumblebee in London. Which object that is is determined by the fact it satisfies some description, but as Kripke (1980) has illustrated, the epistemic and modal behaviour of descriptions suggests that in Case 3 the content of my thought would remain unchanged whether or not there even was a fastest bumblebee in London, but this is not the case in Case 4. Even if it turns out that Bee is not the fastest bumblebee in London, in Case 4 it seems as if my thought would still be about Bee — such thoughts are rigid. Conversely, in Case 3 it would make no sense if I heard that the fastest bumblebee in London is not the fastest bumblebee in London, but in Case 4 it is still coherent to claim that Bee is not the fastest bumblebee in London.

Bach (1987) thinks that the contrast between general thoughts and singular thoughts can be captured via the distinction between thoughts that are determined satisfactionally and those that are determined relationally (as noted above, he takes the requisite relation to be a

causal one).³⁰ He writes:

Since the object of a descriptive thought is determined satisfactionally, the fact that the thought is of that object does not require any connection between thought and object. However, the object of a *de re* thought is determined relationally. For something to be the object of a *de re* thought, it must stand in a certain kind of relation to that very thought. (12)

In Case 3, I am merely thinking of whichever bumblebee happens to *satisfy* the description, whereas in Case 4 I am having a *de re* thought about Bee in virtue of standing in a causal *relation* to Bee himself. Bach thinks that the way a thought's object is determined provides a way to delineate singular from general thoughts.

It should be noted that it is entirely consistent to hold that what differentiates singular from general thought is whether or not the *content* of the thought is itself singular or general, whilst also maintaining that it is either a causal or epistemic *relation* that enables thought content(s) to be singular. Whereas the content conception considered in the previous section gives us an explanation as to the contribution of singular thought, the relational conception gives us an explanation as to the mechanism. The relational conception thereby gives the content theorist the ability to respond to the criticism that their theory is limited. Conversely, it is also conceptually possible for these two different conceptions to be divorced from one another. It is arguable that a thinker is able to entertain a singular content without standing in either a causal or epistemic relation with the object of thought (as we shall see below, this is sufficient for a theorist to be called a *Liberalist*, and this constitutes one of the biggest disputes within the contemporary literature), and it is also possible to hold a relational theory of singular thought without necessarily thinking that singular thoughts are propositional attitudes towards a singular content (they may, for example, be attitudes towards mental files or tags). However, the dominant theory in the philosophical literature, what I will call the *Standard View* (see below), is that singular thoughts have singular contents, and that these contents are subject to an acquaintance condition — which is often cashed out in causal or epistemic terms as briefly outlined above.

A particularly influential hybrid of the content/relational conception has been put forth by Burge (1977) according to which singular thought involves bearing a nonconceptual contextual relation to a particular object. On this account, singular thoughts are inherently

³⁰ It should be noted that the causal view extends beyond only instances of perceptual acquaintance with an object. Bach (1987), for example, argues that communication chains can also satisfy the requisite causal criterion for singular thoughts to be communicated and entertained amongst interlocutors.

indexical in nature, and are most aptly characterized via their relational nature.³¹ As we saw above, Evans (1982) and McDowell (1982) have similarly argued that singular thoughts are object-dependent (or ‘Russellian’) thoughts.³² Descriptive thoughts, on Burge’s account, are inherently conceptual, involving conceptual conditions which act as satisfaction criterion enabling us to pick out which object we are thinking about (if any).³³ Kaplan (2012) likens such descriptive conditions as those that enable us to ‘search’ for the object satisfying such conditions. For example, the descriptive or conceptual content of the thought <the greatest pupil of Plato> may be satisfied uniquely by Aristotle, and in a sense be *about* Aristotle, even if the bearer of the thought has never stood in the appropriate contextual relation to Aristotle.

At this stage, it may be helpful to summarize what we have discussed so far about the relational conception of singular thought. The singular thought as relational thought conception is capable of serving two distinct functions. First, it can provide us with a standalone theory as to *what* a singular thought is: it is a thought that is determined via standing in a special relation to the object(s) of thought. Second, it can provide us with a theory as to the mechanism of singular thought — or *how* a singular thought is entertained. Some philosophers have used the relational conception for either of these purposes, others have used it for both.

However, although the relational conception is able to account for the mechanism of singular thought, something that the content conception was unable to do alone, the theory has been critiqued for several reasons. First, like the content conception, the relational conception is open to the objection that there are object *independent* singular thoughts (see Jeshion 2002, Sainsbury 2005, and Crane 2011). It is hard to see how one could stand in a relation to something that does not exist. Second, the notion that singular thoughts are dependent on the satisfaction of either a causal or epistemic condition has itself been critiqued. Liberalists claim that there are no such conditions on singular thought, and that

³¹ However, Evans (1982) has suggested that although bearing a contextual and causal relation to an object is a necessary condition for entertaining a singular thought, such a relation alone is not sufficient. Evans requires that in addition to bearing a contextual and causal relation to an object the bearer of the thought also needs to possess what he calls discriminating knowledge of the object.

³² Evans calls object-dependent thoughts *Russellian Thoughts* — a kind of thought such that if the object of the thought never existed the thought would not have existed either. The similarity to Burge’s suggestion is as follows: one cannot bear a contextual relation to a particular object if there is no object to bear such a contextual relation to. Hence, if we characterize the content of *de re* thought in terms of such a relation, *de re* thoughts turn out to be object dependent as Evans and McDowell have argued.

³³ This distinction largely owes itself to Bach (1987), who argues that whereas singular thoughts have relational conditions, descriptive thoughts have satisfaction conditions.

this entails the relational conception should be abandoned altogether. For example, Hawthorne and Manley (2012) argue that the claim that a causal relation is necessary for singular thought “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?” (23). The general thrust of the various critiques of the relational conception is that it gets the mechanism story wrong — singular thought is not dependent on causal or epistemic relations. Obviously, if the relational conception gets the mechanism story wrong, then the entire story it is trying to tell is erroneous. How could we demarcate general and singular thoughts along the satisfactional-relational axis if singular thoughts are not irreducibly relational? Liberalists argue against the relational conception and claim that (a) descriptively mediated thoughts can sometimes be singular, (b) there are non-relational accounts of the mechanism that more aptly capture the mechanism behind singular thought, and (c) there is simply no principled reason why we need to invoke either a causal or epistemic constraint.

2.2.3 Singular Thought and Mental Files

In the previous section, I noted that there have been two main attempts to individuate singular thought without an appeal to content. The first involves appealing to the purportedly relational nature of singular thought. The second involves an appeal to the functional, conceptual, or cognitive role of singular thoughts. The general idea is that what is distinctive about the psychological, conceptual, and cognitive role of singular thoughts is that they employ mental files (see Goodman and Genone 2020). The notion of a mental file within the philosophical literature is traceable to Grice (1969), but several philosophers (e.g., Perry (1980), Recanati (1993), and Jeshion (2010)) have developed the notion in important ways.³⁴ In this section, I will outline how the mental files framework has been used to individuate singular thought in a way that is not dependent on either the content or the relational conception(s). In particular, I will be concerned with briefly outlining a view that Jeshion advocates called *cognitivism* — a type of Liberalism towards singular thought that is based on a mental files framework.

Prior to outlining Jeshion’s cognitivism, it is important to note that the notion of

³⁴ Other proponents of a mental file account of singular thought include Powell (2010) and Crane (2011).

mental files has been developed in ways that are compatible with a relational conception of singular thought as well as in ways that are antithetical to such a conception. For example, both Recanati (2012) and Jeshion (2010) take mental files to be clusters of predicates that one believes to be co-instantiated, with Jeshion claiming that “mental files bind together our information about individuals they are about and individuate our cognitive perspective on those individuals” (129). However, there is disagreement regarding how the mental files framework is to be implemented into a theory of singular thought. Recanati argues that although mental files are an important aspect of singular thought, an acquaintance condition still needs to be satisfied in order for someone to be able to think a singular thought. Therefore, like the content conception, the mental files conception of singular thought is not necessarily mutually exclusive with the relational conception. However, throughout the remainder of this section I’ll briefly outline Jeshion’s view, which dispenses with an acquaintance or relational condition altogether.

Cognitivism is Jeshion’s view that singular thought is constitutively from and through a mental file. The gist of the idea is that when I think of Bee as the fastest bumblebee in London, I am thinking of Bee *through* a mental file that binds together any predicative information I may have about Bee (e.g., that he’s a bee, that he’s the fastest in London, that he has a limited lifespan, etc). Importantly, however, the descriptive content I store in my Bee-file is (a) distinct from the file itself, and (b) capable of mischaracterizing Bee (e.g., my Bee-file still retains its identity criterion even if some of the descriptive content is incorrect, insofar as the majority of the information stored within it is predicable of Bee).

An additional claim made by the cognitivist is that the formation of a mental file is subject to a significance condition. According to the significance condition, “a mental file is initiated on an individual only if that individual is significant to the agent with respect to her plans, projects, affective states, motivations” (ibid., 136). For example, say I am watching a BBC documentary on the bumblebee population in London, and how one particular bee, Bee, is the fastest. Surely it is significant to my aims (e.g., following along and enjoying the television program, using my newfound bumblebee knowledge to impress my friends, etc.) that I can track the information about Bee that the documenters are conveying. It is important that I, for example, track that they are talking about the *same* bumblebee, and that instances of anaphora throughout the documentary refer back to Bee, and so on. Jeshion argues that the way I do this is by the formation of a mental file, in this case, my Bee-file.

Jeshion claims that the “significance condition on singular thought replaces an acquaintance condition on singular thought” (ibid., 136).

Tying all of this into our previous discussion, we can therefore take Jeshion’s significance condition to be an account of the *mechanism* of singular thought, while the mental files themselves are an account of what is *contributed* in thinking a singular thought. When Sting sits at home and watches the BBC documentary on Bee, any singular thoughts he has of Bee are constitutively file based. The mechanism that explains the formation of these Bee-thoughts is that Bee was significant to his plans, projects, affective states, motivations, etc. Contrast this with the Standard View, according to which Sting’s thoughts are about Bee because he is causally or epistemically related to Bee in a way that enables him to think thoughts that have singular content, roughly of the form <Bee, __>.

Jeshion’s cognitivism represents one of the most thoroughly developed Liberalist alternatives to the Standard View on singular thought precisely because it offers as an explanation as to both the contribution and mechanism of singular thought. Whereas, as we shall see, other proponents of Liberalism (Kaplan (1989a), Hawthorne and Manley (2012), Borg (2007), etc.) have arguments as to why we should *not* adopt the Standard View, Jeshion develops a theory that accounts for both the mechanism and contribution of singular thought. In this sense it could be said that whereas more varieties of Liberalism are destructive in nature, demonstrating why we should not be Standard Theorists, Cognitivism is constructive in nature, offering us a more fully developed alternative that is potentially capable of accounting for the same explicandum as the Standard Theory. Additionally, it claims to be able to account for intuitions about both acquaintanceless and object *independent* singular thought. It is for this reason that a lot of attention will be devoted to analyzing cognitivism as one of the main anti-Evans positions that we will discuss in Chapter Three.

For now, we will turn our attention to a survey of the contemporary debates within the philosophical landscape — many of which are intimately related to the various conceptions of singular thought that we have considered throughout the present section(s).

§III The Contemporary Philosophical Landscape

2.3.1 *The Nature of Singular Thought*

Now that we have had an overview of several conceptions of singular thought, it is time to consider the main debates within the contemporary philosophical landscape, many of which we have already encountered in one form or another.

There are three primary philosophical issues regarding singular thought. First, what is the hallmark of singular thought that distinguishes it from descriptive/general thought? Once we distinguish between thought as a mental state (i.e., the process of *thinking*) from the content of such states (i.e., what is actually *thought*), then it remains to determine what differentiates singular thought from descriptive thought. This can be thought of as an ontological question about the nature of singular thought itself — i.e., what is it? In the previous section we considered several ways analytic philosophers have attempted to individuate singular thought: qua a type of content, a special relation, or as thought from and through a mental file (see the previous section for a more detailed examination of each of these attempts to individuate singular thought).

2.3.2 *Acquaintance Theorists Versus Liberalists*

The second philosophical issue regarding singular thought goes back to Russell's idea that in order to think about a particular object one needs to be acquainted with that object. Many philosophers have followed in Russell's footsteps and argue that some sort of acquaintance condition has to be satisfied in order to think a singular thought about an object.³⁵ However, unlike Russell (c. 1912), most subsequent philosophers in the so-called acquaintance 'tradition' have held that we can be acquainted with the macroscopic objects of everyday life (such as Bee or Mont Blanc), and thereby reject the Cartesian Assumption that motivated Russell to develop such an austere notion of acquaintance (see 2.1.3). As Hawthorne and Manley (2012) put it, "the history of the notion of acquaintance has, since Russell, been marked by steady liberalization" (19). In fact, it could be argued that the contemporary usage

³⁵ Philosophers who have argued for some version of an acquaintance condition on singular thought include: Russell (1912), Donnellan (1977), Burge (1977), Lewis (1979), Evans (1982), McDowell (1984), Bach (1987, 2010), and Recanati (1993, 2010, 2012).

of the term ‘acquaintance’ bears little resemblance to Russell’s original notion at all — that is, the various views that have come to be lumped under the ‘acquaintance theorist’ heading are so broad that it is hardly a helpful idiom when it comes to clarifying the theoretical commitments of any given view.³⁶ Some views bear more resemblance to Russell’s original notion than others, and it can be said that the various acquaintance based views in the contemporary literature bear little more than a family resemblance to one another. What I propose is distinctive about modern acquaintance theorists in the singular thought literature is that they argue that in order to think a singular thought about an object some sort of special causal or epistemic condition needs to hold.³⁷ However, for the sake of continuity with the existing literature, I will continue to use acquaintance talk — it is simply important to remember that within the contemporary literature positing either a causal or epistemic constraint on singular thought is sufficient for the acquaintance theorist title, rather than a commitment to the more epistemically austere view of Russell (c. 1912).

With that brief terminological remark out of the way, we can now consider the second main debate within the contemporary landscape: whether or not we can dispense with an acquaintance constraint on singular thought altogether. The Standard View, named so as to distance it from the unnecessary baggage that comes along with acquaintance talk, claims that a necessary causal and/or epistemic condition needs to be satisfied in order for someone to be able to entertain a singular thought. Liberalism is the view that there is no general acquaintance restriction on singular thought.³⁸ Liberalism is the main thesis that is defended throughout *The Reference Book* by Hawthorne and Manley (2012), although semantic instrumentalists (Kaplan 1989, Harman 1977, Borg 2007) and cognitivists (Jeshion 2010) also defend the Liberalist thesis that acquaintance is not a necessary condition for singular thought.

As we saw above, any well rounded theory of singular thought has to account for both (a) what is semantically contributed in an instance of singular thought, and (b) the

³⁶ See the newly released volume *Acquaintance* (2020), edited by Knowles and Raleigh, for more on the legacy of Russell’s notion of acquaintance for contemporary philosophy — including disputes pertaining to whether or not there is any unifying use of the expression.

³⁷ Contemporary acquaintance based views have appeared under various headings in the most recent philosophical literature: Hawthorne and Manley (2012) distinguish epistemic acquaintance theories from causal acquaintance theories, Dickie (2015) calls the modern varieties ‘extended acquaintance’ views, while Goodman (2018) calls them causal externalist views.

³⁸ Hawthorne and Manley (2012) are responsible for the ‘Liberalist’ terminology, but several distinct views are united under the heading through their unified rejection of an acquaintance condition on singular thought (see Goodman and Genone 2020).

metasemantic mechanism through which such semantic contents are contributed, otherwise the theory is open to the objection that it is limited. The prevailing view has been that an acquaintance condition is required in order to have a singular thought, since the satisfaction of an acquaintance condition is purported to explain how one is able to entertain a singular thought. For example, if I am causally and spatially related to an object, say the pen beside me on my desk, then in virtue of these relations I am able to think about this particular pen. In this sense, you could say that I am acquainted with the pen. However, if there are genuine instances of singular thought in the absence of either a causal or epistemic constraint grounding such thoughts, then it would appear that the Standard View should be rejected. This latter strategy is, generally, the route that Liberalists take in order to substantiate their position. For example, suppose I use the description ‘the smallest pen in London’ to fix the referent of the proper name ‘Horace’ — are my subsequent thoughts about Horace singular or not? Perhaps it begs the question to assume these are ‘Horace-directed’ thoughts about Horace at all, but there is at least an intuitive sense in which such thoughts seem Horace-directed. If we concede that descriptively introduced referential terms are capable of securing genuine aboutness, then it would appear to do this in the absence of any acquaintance condition being met. In this instance, the descriptively introduced referential term was the mechanism behind my Horace-thought, rather than any special kind of relation to Horace. Hence, Liberalism is broadly the view that the Standard Theory gets the mechanism story wrong. We will see various attempts to substantiate Liberalism in Chapter Three.

2.3.3 Communication Based Singular Thought

Lastly, the third philosophical issue within the contemporary landscape is concerned with the relationship between singular thought and language.³⁹ Natural language has a number of peculiar and fascinating psychological properties. Language enables us to entertain thoughts that we would otherwise be unable to entertain or communicate. For example, it seems intuitively reasonable that it is through language that I am able to entertain and communicate the thought that Schopenhauer wore blue jeans, despite the fact that I’ve never been

³⁹ It should be noted, for the sake of historical interest, that the contemporary debates about singular thought within the analytic tradition largely arose out of debates within the philosophy of language concerning (a) the semantics of singular terms, and whether to go the referentialist or descriptivist route, and (b) propositional attitude reports and the occurrence of referentially opaque terms.

perceptually acquainted with Schopenhauer, or the fact that jeans and Schopenhauer did not historically co-exist. Furthermore, language is a tool which we can use to talk about particular things – e.g., the coffee cup across the room, Schopenhauer, the Moon, etc. As a competent speaker of a natural language, I can arguably use what Evans (1982) calls the intuitive category of referring expressions to refer to particular things.⁴⁰ For example, I am able to use a variety of English expressions such as ‘this,’ ‘Schopenhauer,’ ‘the cup across the room,’ etc., to refer my interlocutor to something in particular. Such expressions appear to belong to the class of *singular terms* – i.e., natural language expressions that are conventionally used to refer to particulars.⁴¹ It seems plausible that our competence with singular terms within our language is part of what enables us to entertain and communicate singular thoughts about particulars that would otherwise remain inaccessible or uncommunicable. Such thoughts will be called *communication-based singular thoughts*, so as to contrast them with singular thoughts that may be grounded in perception, memory, and so on.

Although most philosophers accept the existence of communication-based singular thought, it is disputed which kinds of linguistic expressions themselves are apt for the job of communicating genuinely singular thoughts, and the underlying explanation of how this occurs. Demonstratives (e.g., ‘this,’ ‘that’) and indexicals (e.g., ‘here,’ ‘I’) seem particularly well suited to accomplish the task of grounding communication-based singular thoughts, while the issue seems more complicated if the expressions utilized are proper names (e.g., ‘Schopenhauer’), definite descriptions (e.g., ‘the fiercest critic of Hegel’), incomplete descriptions (e.g., ‘the table’), blind descriptions (e.g., ‘the first person born in the 22nd Century’), empty names (e.g., ‘Vulcan’), fictional names (e.g., ‘Walter White’), deferred demonstratives or pronouns (e.g., ‘that person’ or ‘him’ while pointing at an empty chair usually occupied by a particular person), descriptive names (e.g., ‘by ‘Horace’ I mean ‘the so-and-so’’), or even bare predicates (e.g., ‘suit’, to refer to a particular cooperate executive). Determining which expressions are capable of communicating singular thoughts is one of

⁴⁰ It is important to note that the set is called the ‘intuitive category’ because certain members of this set may, for a variety of distinct theoretical reasons, not properly belong to the actual category of referring expressions at all. For example, on Russell’s (1905) account, descriptions are not referring expressions at all, instead being rendered as quantificational phrases at the level of their logical form.

⁴¹ Which expressions properly belong to the category of singular terms is one of the main controversies in the philosophy of language. However, Evans (1982) has noted that the *intuitive* category of singular terms can at the very least be determined via a shared (a) grammar, and (b) function. These terms typically occur as the grammatical noun phrase and their primary function is their ability to be used as tools of reference.

the issues which continues to generate the greatest interest within the contemporary literature.⁴²

The debate concerning communication-based singular thought is intimately related to the debate concerning whether or not a necessary acquaintance condition should be rejected. As discussed above, one strategy employed by Liberalists is to argue that descriptively introduced referential terms (DIRTs) are capable of generating singular thoughts ‘on the cheap,’ without the need for any additional causal or epistemic conditions being satisfied. The fundamental idea behind semantic instrumentalism, a sub-variety of Liberalism, is nicely captured by Kaplan (1989a) when he states:

A special form of knowledge of an object is neither required nor presupposed in order that a person may entertain as object of thought a singular proposition involving that object ... What allows us to take various propositional attitudes towards singular propositions is not the form of our acquaintance with the object but is rather our ability to manipulate the conceptual apparatus of direct reference.
(536)

As Jeshion explains it, the idea is that the very apparatus of direct reference enables us to engage in ‘cognitive restructuring,’ such that we’re able to think novel singular thoughts solely in virtue of exploiting the mechanisms of direct reference via DIRTs. If this is true, then it follows that the Standard Theory is false.

To summarize: the main debates within the contemporary philosophical landscape involve (a) the nature of singular thought, (b) whether or not acquaintance is a necessary condition for singular thought, and (c) the connection between natural language and singular thought, including whether or not descriptively introduced singular terms are capable of generating singular thoughts. It should be noted that these debates are not mutually exclusive from one another. For example, if one argues that there are descriptively mediated singular thoughts, she may justify this conclusion without appealing to a pre-established attempt to reject an acquaintance condition; or use this conclusion to independently argue that we should reject an acquaintance condition; or, having already rejected an acquaintance condition, use that conclusion in an attempt to justify the existence of descriptively mediated singular thoughts. However, the most divisive split is whether or not one is a Liberalist. Whether or not one is a Liberalist determines which stance one is likely to take on any number of the other issues. This can be gleamed via the following table:

⁴² See Jeshion (2010), Recanati (2012), Dickie (2015), and Goodman and Genone(2020).

Type of View	Are there object independent singular thoughts?	Is acquaintance a necessary condition?	Are there descriptively mediated singular thoughts?
Standard View	No	Yes	No
Liberalism	Yes	No	Yes

Whereas rejecting acquaintance as a necessary condition is sufficient to be a Liberalist, most Liberalists also reject that singular thoughts are object dependent, and argue that there are descriptively mediated thoughts — though these are not necessary for the position. The reason these views tend to go in tandem is usually because an endorsement of descriptively mediated singular thoughts is likely to coincide with intuitions about both acquaintanceless and object dependent singular thoughts.

In the next chapter, I will reconstruct Gareth Evans' position on these three issues. It may eventually turn out that, as a matter of fact, Evans' theory of singular thought is altogether false and misguided. What I seek to demonstrate throughout the remainder of this dissertation is that none of the most recent Liberalist critiques of Evans have succeeded — they are guilty of either misevaluating or misidentifying the explicandum with which Evans was concerned.

Chapter 3: Gareth Evans Versus Liberalism

§I The Varieties of Reference

3.1.1 *Evans: Background and Aims*

By the time of his untimely and tragic passing at the age of thirty-four, August 1980, Evans had been working for several years on a book about reference. However, at the time of his death it was left unfinished, and significant portions of the work were pieced together, edited, and eventually presented for publication by his close colleague and friend, John McDowell.⁴³ The resultant work of these efforts was *The Varieties of Reference* (1982)⁴⁴ — a philosophically rich and dense work that covers an array of topics related to the philosophy of perception, action theory, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mind. My aim throughout the present section is to present an account of Gareth Evans’ theory of singular thought. This account will then be defended on the behalf of Evans from a number of recent Liberalist critiques. I will begin by outlining the general background necessary to understand Evans’ theory, the aims for which he developed it, and the general themes that permeate and unite the work. The most crucial thesis advanced throughout *The Varieties of Reference* is that a number of singular terms require for their understanding the satisfaction of what Evans calls *Russell’s Principle*, which we first encountered in 2.1.3. According to Russell’s Principle, “in order to be thinking about an object or to make a judgement about an object, one must know which object is in question — one must know which object it is that one is thinking about” (65). A large portion of Evans’ project is explicating the relevant sense of ‘knowing which’ involved. Evans utilizes his defence of Russell’s Principle to argue that a number of insights from the theory of reference have been erroneously used to establish conclusions in the theory of thought.

Despite the wide range of aforementioned philosophical topics covered in VOR, his interest in these topics largely stemmed from and are united by a singular source: his intent to develop a comprehensive account of the phenomena of reference (1982, 3). Evans’ professional engagement with the theory of reference goes back as far as his first published

⁴³ McDowell consulted a number of sources in order to make the editorial choices that he did: the unpublished manuscripts, lecture transcripts, marginal notes, previously published material from Evans, etc.

⁴⁴ Hereafter VOR.

piece, ‘The Causal Theory of Names’ (1973), in which he argues both the descriptivist and causal-theory metasemantic accounts of proper names are incorrect. Whereas the descriptivist account is insufficient because it fails to mention the requisite causal connections required to establish the referent of a proper name, the causal-theory account fails because it is too simplistic and cannot accommodate the phenomena of reference-shifting — e.g., when ‘Madagascar’ began to refer to the island, Madagascar, rather than its original referent, Africa. Evans’ general point is that since the mainland is the causal source of uses of the name ‘Madagascar,’ the causal-theory by itself seems to entail that even when it eventually was used to refer to Madagascar the semantic content would still be Africa, since that is the referent established by the original baptismal event. Evans argues that instead of seeing the causal-theory and descriptivism as entirely antithetical to one another, a Hegelian synthesis can be achieved, whereby the reference of a proper name is determined by whichever object is the dominant causal source of the information one has about the referent. Evans’ ability to unite two disparate positions is a skill that is fundamental to the position that emerges throughout VOR.

One of the main reasons we considered the views of both Frege and Russell in such depth in Chapter Two is because several elements he drew from their texts are imperative to understanding the foundations of Evans’ philosophy. Evans himself devotes a large portion of Part One of VOR explicating the views he extracts from Russell and Frege, and several of the technical notions we considered in Chapter Two find a place within Evans’ mature theory of singular thought and singular reference, albeit in a revised form. These include: Russellian acquaintance, object dependent thoughts, logically proper names, Fregean senses and modes of presentation, mock thoughts, and, most importantly, Russell’s Principle. As we saw in Chapter Two, Russell and Frege diverged on many key issues, and an element of Evans’ ingenuity is illustrated through his attempt to synthesize seemingly incompatible elements of Russell and Frege. For example, Evans argues that Fregean *Sinn* and object dependent (or Russellian) thoughts are compatible and jointly occurring phenomena. As Evans himself puts it, “the fact that one is thinking about an object in a particular way can no more warrant the conclusion that one is not thinking of the object in the most direct possible fashion, than the fact that one is giving something *in a particular way* warrants the view that one’s giving is somehow indirect” (62, his italics). Evans argues that demonstratives and other kinds of singular terms require for their understanding that one think of the

object in a particular way, and that this entails that such thoughts are, in fact, object dependent.

Whereas Frege and Russell were responsible for inaugurating the linguistic turn in analytic philosophy, whereby an analysis of language was given priority over an analysis of thought, Dummett has argued that Evans can be read as reversing this priority. In *Origins of Analytic Philosophy* (1993), Dummett elaborates:

Some recent work in the analytical tradition has reversed this priority, in the order of explanation, of language over thought, and holds that language can be explained only in terms of antecedently given notions of different types of thought, considered independently of their linguistic expression. A good example of this new trend is Gareth Evans' posthumous book, which essays an account, independent of language, of what it is to think about an object in each of various ways, and then seeks to explain the different verbal means of effecting reference to an object in terms of these ways of thinking about it. (4)

Although it is incorrect to claim that Evans thinks that “language can be explained *only* in terms of antecedently given notions of different types of thought” (my italics), as Dummett suggests, it is nevertheless true that Evans' inquiry into the phenomena of singular linguistic reference evolved in such a way that (a) he was inevitably led to a consideration of singular thought independently of any linguistic concerns, (b) he drew conclusions about singular reference from those he established about singular thought. Whereas Quine (1956), a proponent of the linguistic turn, was motivated in part by the behaviourism prevalent at the time so as to consider overt linguistic acts, such as propositional attitude *reporting*, as the primary means through which to at least attempt to individuate *de re* thought, Evans rejects that propositional attitude *reports* are themselves a reliable means through which to attribute *de re* thoughts to an individual (see Section 5.3 of VOR in particular). This quasi-rejection of the linguistic turn is reflected in the fact that Part Two of VOR is entirely dedicated to an analysis of *thought*, considered as a phenomena distinct from language, while it is only in Part Three that he considers *linguistic* phenomena proper.

Evans was primarily educated at Oxford, eventually coming to hold an academic position there himself, and was heavily influenced by fellow senior Oxonians such as P.F. Strawson and Michael Dummett. From Strawson (1959), he inherited the project of developing an account of how we are able to identify which particulars we refer to with our use of referring expressions. Evans (1982) suggests that Strawson has “stayed with an

essentially Russellian bifurcation between ‘demonstrative identification’ (knowledge by acquaintance) and ‘descriptive identification’ (knowledge by description)” (65).⁴⁵ A large part of VOR is concerned with whether or not these two modes of identification are exhaustive, and if not, what other modes of identification need to be identified. From Dummett (1973), Evans inherited the project of “trying to understand what would justify the application of the Fregean models to natural language, and with that understanding, trying to come forward with a better view of the functioning of ordinary English referring expressions” (ibid., 41). As we saw in Chapter Two, Frege held a two tiered semantics that distinguishes the semantic value of an expression from its cognitive value. Part of Evans’ project is determining the extent to which this model can be applied to ordinary English expressions such as indexicals, definite descriptions, and proper names; and, more specifically, determining the role of Fregean senses in a theory of natural language and a theory of thought.

One the main themes throughout the VOR is that we must remain skeptical of attempts to apply conclusions from the theory of reference to the theory of thought. Evans’ work is guided by what I label *Evans’ Guiding Question*, which asks whether a fundamental difference in the ways referring expressions of ordinary language function ultimately rest upon fundamental differences in the ways in which it is open to us to think about particular objects. Evans spends a great deal of VOR arguing that many referring expressions differ from one another precisely because of the ways in which it is open for us to think about particular objects. What unites the varieties of reference is that in order to be said to be able to *think* about a particular object the thinker must be able to satisfy Russell’s Principle. Evans states that:

The difficulty with Russell’s Principle has always been to explain what it means ... In order to make Russell’s Principle a substantial principle, I shall suppose that the knowledge which it requires is what might be called *discriminating knowledge*: the subject must have a capacity to distinguish the object of his judgement from all other things ... We have the idea of certain sufficient conditions for being able to discriminate an object from all other things: for example, when one can perceive it at the present time; when one can recognize it if presented with it; and when one knows distinguishing facts about it. (89, his italics)

⁴⁵ It is important to note that Evans states that Strawson himself seems to recognize that recognition based identification is a viable third option that goes beyond the traditional Russellian dichotomy suggested here.

In the terminology previously established in Chapter Two, Russell's Principle is the epistemic acquaintance condition that Evans defends throughout VOR.

The defence of Russell's Principle is so central to VOR that Evans states that "adherence to Russell's Principle is fundamental to the view of Russellian reference to be advanced in this book" (84). There are various modes of identification that Evans argues are capable of satisfying the constraint imposed by Russell's Principle, including demonstrative identification, descriptive identification, self identification, and recognition based identification (however, Evans never claims this list to be exhaustive). Evans claims that although the class of modes of identification is internally heterogenous, they are nonetheless unified by having to satisfy the demands of Russell's Principle:

What unifies the different modes of identification recognized is conformity to the requirement which the Principle imposes; but the important differences between them are revealed by always pressing the question 'How is it, in this case, that the subject can be said to know which object his thought concerns?' (84-85)

Evans argues that the different ways through which Russell's Principle can be satisfied explains the variegated ways in which different kinds of singular terms enable someone to entertain singular thoughts. A demonstrative utterance, for example, may enable the hearer to spatially locate the object, which would constitute a means of discriminating the object and thereby satisfying Russell's Principle. An utterance involving a proper name, on the other hand, requires for its full understanding not only that one knows which proper name using practice they intend to be partaking in, but also that the intended referent "is the object which the speaker is *aiming at* with his use of the name" (402). In either of these instances we could then credit those individuals with a singular thought about the relevant object. Some of Evans' arguments in favour of Russell's Principle will be discussed in detail below (3.1.2).

Besides his spirited defence of Russell's Principle, another one of Evans' main aims is to argue for the existence of Russellian thoughts as well as Russellian singular terms. For Evans, a Russellian Thought is a thought that "simply could not exist in the absence of the object or objects which it is about" (71). Evans states that "if any given line of thought in this book could be said to be its main plot, it is, on account of its generality, this one" (136). In addition to arguing that some thoughts are Russellian in this stringent object dependent sense in which we encountered in Chapter Two, Evans also argues "that many of the referring expressions of natural language are Russellian — that their significance depends on their having a referent" (85). According to Evans:

A term is a Russellian singular term if and only if it is a member of a category of singular terms such that nothing is said by someone who utters a sentence containing such a term unless the term has a referent — if the term is empty, no move has been made in the ‘language-game.’ To say that nothing has been said in a particular utterance is, quite generally, to say that nothing constitutes *understanding* the utterance. (71, his italics)

Evans argues that there are two ways a singular term can be Russellian. Firstly, various uses of singular terms depend upon grasping Russellian thoughts for their understanding. Since these thoughts are themselves Russellian, and the singular terms in question supervene on these thoughts for their understanding, it follows that such singular terms are themselves Russellian. Secondly, there are some singular terms, namely proper names, such that if there is no referent, then nothing is said or semantically contributed to the propositions expressed by utterances containing them. If there is nothing said, then there is no substantive notion of understanding what is said that can be gleaned, and such singular terms are therefore also Russellian.

So far we have encountered the two main themes of VOR: (1) a sustained defence of Russell’s Principle (epistemic condition), and (2) a sustained defence of the existence of Russellian (object-dependent) thoughts and singular terms. The theory of singular thought that Evans develops throughout VOR can therefore be seen as a version of the Standard View that we encountered in Chapter Two. The philosophical brilliance of VOR is in the way that Evans attempts to connect these two themes. The way Evans thinks they are connected can, broadly speaking, be discerned from the way he structures the content of the work itself. Part Two of VOR is primarily concerned with defending Russell’s Principle and arguing for the existence of thoughts that are Russellian. Evans argues that if a subject can be credited with entertaining a Russellian thought about an object, then they must not only be in possession of information derived from the object, but they must also be in possession of discriminating knowledge that satisfies Russell’s Principle. As we shall see below, these two conditions are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for thinking a singular thought about an object. Part Three of VOR argues for the existence of Russellian singular terms. Evans argues that someone can be in a position to use a singular term to *refer* to an object and *say* something without being able to *think* about the object referred to — this latter ability is what he often refers to as *understanding* an utterance, and it is crucial to note that the notion of understanding at play here is a technical one that Evans develops throughout

VOR. Evans, elaborating about this distinction between *saying* and *understanding*, says:

I hold that it is in general a necessary condition for understanding an utterance of a sentence containing a Russellian referring expression, say ‘*a* is *F*,’ that one have a thought, or make a judgement, about the referent, to the effect that it is being said to be *F*. This is not a necessary condition for making such an utterance in such a way as to say of the referent that it is *F*. The divergence arises because of the possibility that a subject may exploit a linguistic device which he does not himself properly understand. Given the divergence between the requirements for *understanding* and the requirements for *saying*, it would be absurd to deny that our [presumably, those interested in Evans’ project] primary interest ought to be in the more exigent conditions which are required for understanding. (92, my brackets)

Evans argues throughout VOR that understanding the thought expressed by an utterance containing a Russellian singular terms(s) requires the satisfaction of Russell’s Principle.

3.1.2 Evans’ Analysis Of Singular Thought

The theory of singular thought that emerges throughout VOR is dense and nuanced. Part of the difficulty in ascertaining Evans’ theory of singular thought is that the locution ‘singular thought’ only appears a handful of times throughout the entirety of VOR, mostly in connection to a theory of singular thought that emerged as a result of several arguments and views that Kripke helped pioneer in his influential work, *Naming and Necessity* (1980). Despite the fact that Evans himself avoids characterizing his own theory as being about singular thought, the blurb on the back of VOR states, “The work is guided by the view that an understanding of how singular thoughts relate to objects is essential for a proper treatment of the linguistic devices by which such thoughts are expressed.” I assume this blurb was written by the editor of VOR, McDowell, who himself uses the locution ‘singular thought’ to mean what Evans means by ‘Russellian thought’ — “a thought that would not be available to be thought or expressed if the relevant object, or objects, did not exist” (McDowell 1982, 204). This raises the question of whether or not ‘singular thought’ is what Evans himself meant by the locution ‘Russellian thought.’ Additionally, in the contemporary philosophical literature, Evans’ position is often characterized as one of the main theories of singular thought, with Jeshion (2010) going so far as to claim that “to date, the most sustained and richest theory containing a principled analysis of acquaintance as a necessary condition on

singular thought can be found in Evans” (14, fn. 33). Therefore, the academic consensus largely seems to be that Evans’ develops a theory of singular thought throughout VOR.

The interpretation of Evans that I wish to argue for is one according to which a singular thought (for Evans) is a Russellian thought, the thinking of which requires the satisfaction of Russell’s Principle. Whereas the idea that Russellian thoughts are singular thoughts should be taken as definitional for Evans, the idea that singular thoughts satisfy Russell’s Principle should be read as a hypothesis — that is, if someone is thinking a singular thought, then, *ex hypothesi*, they’re in possession of discriminating knowledge of that object. In the terminology established previously in Chapter Two, this is to characterize Evans’s position as a version of the Standard View, according to which singular thoughts are (a) object dependent [i.e., for Evans, Russellian], and (b) constrained by the satisfaction of an acquaintance condition [i.e., for Evans, Russell’s Principle]. This reading of Evans will not, I hope, be particularly controversial, especially since Evans’ theory of singular thought is most often characterized as a version of the object-dependent/acquaintance variety.⁴⁶ However, despite this being the way Evans is frequently characterized, the singular thought literature lacks any substantial exegetical engagement with the theory of singular thought that Evans argues for throughout VOR, including a detailed account of *why* Evans should be interpreted this way, and specifically *how* he should be so interpreted. Most interestingly, despite the lack of this crucially important exegetical work, many contemporary theorists are quick to argue that Evans’ theory of singular thought is incorrect. I will argue that, armed with a proper understanding of Evans’ theory of singular thought, the contemporary Liberalist critiques against Evans are not successful.

As we saw in the previous section, one of the most crucial positions advanced throughout VOR is that a number of singular terms require for their understanding the satisfaction of what Evans calls Russell’s Principle, which states that in order for a subject to be credited with a thought about a thing, the subject must be in possession of information that enables them to discriminate (or identify) the object their thought is about.⁴⁷ Critics of

⁴⁶ For characterizations of Evans’ view along these lines, see Bermudez (2005), Jeshion (2010), Dickie (2015), and Goodman and Genone (2020).

⁴⁷ Throughout VOR Evans discusses a number of different modes of identification which he argues are capable of satisfying Russell’s Principle: descriptive identification, demonstrative identification, recognition-based identification, and self-identification — though it is also clear that he does not intend this list to be exhaustive. Evans devotes entire chapters to demonstrative, recognition-based, and self identification, but not to descriptive-identification, stating that “we have a fairly clear idea of what description-based identification amounts to. But we have a much less clear idea about the other kinds of identification” (136).

Evans often target his defence and application of Russell's Principle as a necessary condition for having a singular thought. Evans states that, "in order to overthrow Russell's Principle, one would have to show that this general capacity to think of an object ... can be possessed entirely in the absence of any discriminating conception of that object" (75). This is, in fact, the strategy that most opponents of Evans pursue — including the Liberalist critiques that we will consider below.

One way to gain a better understanding of the reasons that motivated Evans to defend Russell's Principle is to understand an attempt to overthrow it that Evans labels 'The Photograph Model of Mental Representation,' a theory of thought that Evans suggests emerged from those influenced and inspired by insights from Kripke's theory of reference. In *Naming and Necessity* (1980), Kripke argues against the view that the semantical value of a proper name is a uniquely identifying description, as well as the related view that proper names refer via their expression of such descriptions.⁴⁸ One argument against descriptivism that Kripke developed is known as the semantic argument. Let us presume that the only description that Polly associates with the name 'John Lennon' is *the greatest songwriter of the 20th century*. However, unbeknownst to Polly, the actual object that satisfies this definite description is George Gershwin, not John Lennon. Does Polly's use of the name 'John Lennon' refer to John Lennon or George Gershwin? It would appear that the descriptivist would have to claim the latter, which Kripke then argues is a *modus tollens* of their position.

Kripke then attempts to offer "a better picture than the picture presented by the received views" (1980, 93). According to Kripke, Polly's use of 'John Lennon' refers to John Lennon in virtue of a causal chain of communication, consisting of semantically parasitic uses of the name 'Lennon' to refer to Lennon, that causally terminates in an initial baptismal event. The idea is that at some point someone fixed the reference of the name 'John Lennon,' perhaps, by holding Julia's newborn baby in 1940 and uttering "I shall name this newborn 'John Lennon.'" Insofar as Polly's use of the name 'John Lennon' is causally traceable to such a baptismal event (perhaps an omniscient observer is able to do this), then this is the metasemantic fact that explains why her use of 'John Lennon' has the semantic value that it does — i.e., the referent John Lennon. Kripke states that "it is not how the speaker thinks he got the reference, but the actual chain of communication, which is relevant" (93).

⁴⁸ Kripke develops three main types of arguments in order to illustrate that the descriptivist thesis of proper names is false: modal, semantic, and epistemic arguments. However, for the sake of brevity, I will only outline the semantic argument.

Evans suggests that Kripke's metasemantic explanation as to how a name can be used to *refer* to a particular object inspired some philosophers to argue that perhaps a similar metasemantics could be adapted to account for how a subject *thinks* about a particular object. According to Evans, proponents of the Photograph Model of Mental Representation (hereafter PM)⁴⁹ claim:

The causal antecedents of the information involved in a mental state, like the causal relation Kripke was concerned with, are claimed to be sufficient to determine which object the state concerns. (The name 'Photograph Model' is apt, because we do speak of a photograph's being a photograph *of* one object rather than another solely on the basis of which object was related in the appropriate way to its production. (78, his italics)

and that:

What determines which particular object a mental state represents is facts about the mental state's causal ancestry, quite independent of anything we could recognize as discriminating knowledge, on the subject's part, of the object in question — facts, indeed, of which the subject himself may be quite unaware. (83)

The general argumentative strategy by proponents of PM is to show that a causal relation to the object of thought is sufficient for someone to have a singular thought about that object, despite the fact that Russell's Principle, which requires discriminating knowledge, remains unsatisfied.⁵⁰

In the previous section I noted that Evans argues that it is important to not hastily apply results from the theory of reference to the theory of thought. After discussing the PM, he states that "deliverances of untutored linguistic intuition may have to be corrected in the light of considerations of theory" (1982, 76), and that despite the fact that many aspects of Kripke's theory of *reference* are fundamentally correct, it cannot just be assumed that they apply to *thought*. Evans claims that "it should be of interest to see ... how few of the fundamentally correct doctrines about reference which have been based on the rejection of Russell's Principle have needed to be so based" (120). Although Kripke's arguments may show that something such as Russell's Principle does not need to be satisfied in order for

⁴⁹ In Chapter Two, proponents of the Photograph Model were referred to as Causal Acquaintance Theorists.

⁵⁰ Important early progenitors of the PM, or related views, are Kaplan (1968), Geach (1969), Donnellan (1970), Devitt (1974), and Harman (1977). For example, Evans notes that in Kaplan (1968), for example, "quite independently of Kripke, the idea had been emerging that causality had some important role to play in determining what objects our thoughts and beliefs are about" (77). However, Evans suggests that Kripke's (1980) arguments and influence had the most to do with the development of the PM.

someone to *refer* to or *say* something about an object, Evans thinks that without a more fully developed theory of singular thought it is an open question as to whether Kripkean styled arguments can show that Russell's Principle does not need to be satisfied in order for someone to *think* about an object. Evans attempts to illustrate that those aspects of Kripke's theory of reference that are fundamentally correct are compatible with a theory of thought that adheres to Russell's Principle as a necessary condition for thinking about an object.

In order to grasp Evans' theory of singular thought, it is crucial to understand two interrelated notions that he develops throughout VOR.⁵¹ First, the notion of *ways of thinking* about an object, which Evans calls *Ideas*.⁵² Ideas are the theoretical entities that are capable of satisfying Russell's Principle — i.e., if one has an Idea that enables them to individuate an object from all other objects, then the Idea satisfies Russell's Principle. Second, his notion of the *informational system*, which Evans claims is the 'substratum of our cognitive lives' (122). People (and other organisms) are constantly in a state of receiving, storing, recalling, and transmitting information that we receive about the world, and the substratum which unites the information received through perception, stored in memory, and transmitted in communication is the informational system. Evans argues that there is a certain type of thought, ones he calls *information based thoughts*, that are dependent on the objects from which the information derives for their existence — such thoughts are, therefore, Russellian. We now have the technical vocabulary that enables us to succinctly state Evans' theory of singular thought. A subject can be entertain a singular thought if, and only if:

- (i) the subject has a thought containing an Idea that satisfies Russell's Principle
- and
- (ii) the object from which the information derives is the same as the object identified by that Idea

In other words, possession of (a) an Idea of an object that satisfies Russell's Principle, and (b) information derived from the same object, are individually necessary and jointly sufficient

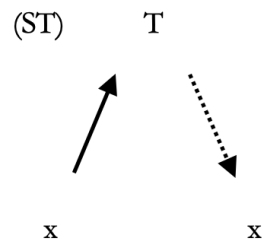
⁵¹ The first notion, that of Ideas, is the primary subject matter of Chapter Four in *The Varieties of Reference*, while the second notion, that of the informational system, is the primary subject matter of Chapter Five.

⁵² Evans capitalizes the term so as to indicate that he intends to use it as a technical term. He also notes that Ideas cannot be equated with Fregean Senses. Evans says:

We cannot equate an Idea (a particular person's capacity) with a Fregean sense, since the latter is supposed to exist objectively (independently of anyone's grasp of it). But there is a very close relation between them. Two people exercising their (numerically different) Ideas of an object many thereby 'grasp' the same Fregean sense. What this means is that they may think of the object in the same way. (104, fn 24)

This indicates that it is, in fact, problematic to read Evans as himself being a proponent of *de re* senses (as many do), since throughout VOR he is primarily concerned with arguing for the existence of *de re* Ideas.

conditions for thinking a singular thought about an object. We can also represent this visually as ST:



where x is an object and T is a thought, ST illustrates the way a thought has to be related to an object in order for it to be a well grounded singular thought according to Evans. The solid arrow represents an *informational channel*, the channel through which we receive information about an object, and is what enables thoughts about the object to be information based. The dotted line represents an Idea, or way of thinking, about an object that enables us to identify it. Since in this instance the solid arrow and dotted arrow both involve x , T is a singular thought about x . Throughout the remainder of 3.1.2, I will offer some textual evidence for this reading of Evans, as well as illustrating four ways that Evans thinks a thought can fail to be singular (which, as we shall see, includes an account of why the Photograph Model discussed above as well as contemporary Liberalist accounts of singular thought are mistaken).

Evans introduces his notion of an information-based thought by describing a kind of thought that is dependent on information one has received from an object:

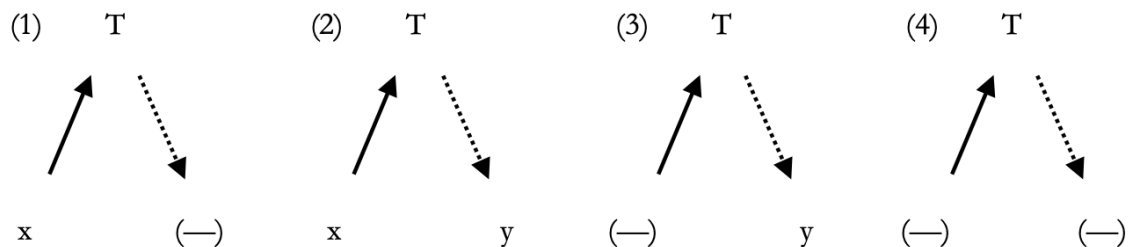
Our particular-thoughts are very often based upon information which we have about the world. We take ourselves to be informed, in whatever way, of the existence of such-and-such an object, and we think or speculate about it. A thought of the kind with which I am concerned is governed by a conception of its object which is the result neither of fancy nor of linguistic stipulation, but rather is the result of a belief about how the world is which the subject has because he has received information (or misinformation) from the object. (121)

For example, imagine Schopenhauer is sitting in his backyard, and, upon receiving information through his perceptual faculties, takes himself to be informed of a large predatory bird that is flying through the sky above him. Schopenhauer remembers this episode, and subsequently decides to tell his landlady not to allow his prized poodle out into the backyard for fear that *that* large predatory bird may come and threaten the safety of the

poodle. The landlady then takes herself to be informed of the existence of a large predatory bird that may potentially be a threat to the small animals throughout the neighbourhood, and she may wonder whether what Schopenhauer saw was a hawk, an eagle, or some other object altogether. In both of these instances, Schopenhauer and the landlady take themselves to be informed of the existence of an object because of information they have received — in Schopenhauer’s case, by means of perception, and in the landlady’s case, through testimony. Insofar as nothing was amiss (e.g., Schopenhauer’s perceptual faculties were functioning normally and he was speaking sincerely to his landlady), we may take them both to be in possession of information derived from the object.

Alternatively, it could be the case that Schopenhauer had ingested a rather large dose of psilocybin mushrooms earlier in the day and, unbeknownst to himself, hallucinated the bird; or, alternatively, perhaps Schopenhauer, being the bitter pessimist that he is, lied about his sighting of a bird of prey so as to invoke fear in his landlady. In either of these scenarios, although the subject takes themselves to be informed of the existence of such-and-such an object because of information they have received from it they are mistaken: there is no object from which the information derives. In the instance in which Schopenhauer was hallucinating, it surely *seemed* to him that he was having an information based thought about a bird of prey. He even took himself to be in possession of an Idea, or way of thinking, about it such as *that bird up in the sky*. However, in this instance we can take Schopenhauer to be informed of the existence of a concrete object no more than we can objectively consider ourselves to be falling out of bed when we experience an instance of hypnagogic jerk.

According to Evans, information based thoughts are “liable to a quite distinctive failing: that of being ill-grounded (the clearest examples of this always come when the information on which the episode is based has no source)” (134). Evans identifies four ways that an information based thought may be ill-grounded, which he illustrates via the following diagram:



where x is an object, T is a thought, the line (—) represents that there is no object, the solid arrow represents an informational channel, and the dotted line represents an Idea, or a purported means of identifying the object. In the scenarios where Schopenhauer is either hallucinating or lying to his landlady, we have an instance of type (4): there is no object from which the information derives, nor is there any object identified by the subject's Idea. Now, modifying our example slightly, imagine that Schopenhauer is lying to his landlady, but that, coincidentally, there actually is an eagle flying around the neighbourhood eyeing potential pets to befriend. In this instance, there is no object from which the testimonial information the landlady received derives, since Schopenhauer just made it up to traumatize her. However, when the landlady proceeds to worry that the bird of prey may wreck some havoc on the neighbourhood pets, is she thinking of the eagle that happens to actually be flying in the vicinity? If she turns on the local evening news, hears about an eagle attack in her area, and thinks to herself, "that eagle flying around our place earlier today is to blame," does she think something true? Evans thinks that, in such an instance, we should be reluctant to say that she had thought something true. In this case, we are faced with an instance of type (3), in which the object identified by the Idea is not the same as the one from which the information derives.

So far, this account of thoughts of type (3) and (4) is not problematic for proponents of the Photograph Model, since there is no object from which the information causally derives. Their theory would also entail that the subject could not be credited with a singular thought about the object. However, Evans thinks that there are instances of type (1) and (2), where the subject is in possession of information causally derived from an object, but that, due to their lack of an Idea that satisfies Russell's Principle (or alternatively, one that does not locate the same object from which the information derives), they cannot be credited with a well grounded singular thought. Evans identifies at least two ways one can have information derived from an object while nevertheless being unable to think about said object: due to a lack of uniqueness, and due to what he calls 'garbling and distortion' (133).

Imagine a scenario where Schopenhauer is sitting in his loft facing a corner that has two windows that are perpendicular to one another. He looks out the window on his right, and sees an eagle fly upwards into the sky and out of sight, and then several seconds later sees an eagle fly downwards past his left window. He takes himself to have witnessed the flight path of one eagle. However, unbeknownst to him, he received perceptual information derived from two eagles that look identical to one another. Several days later, forgetting that

the flight path of ‘the’ eagle was obstructed by the corner wall between the two windows, he reflects to himself about how majestic that eagle he saw the other day was: which eagle is he thinking of? If we are inclined to ascribe to Schopenhauer a singular thought about one eagle over the other, by which means are we to do so? How is this thought content to be individuated? Either there is a principled explanation as to why we should take Schopenhauer to be thinking of one eagle over the other (I cannot think of one),⁵³ or Schopenhauer cannot be credited with a singular thought about *either* eagle. Evans’ explanation for this latter conclusion is that Schopenhauer’s Idea, say, *that eagle that flew by my window*, does not enable him to discriminate one eagle from the other, despite the fact that he’s in possession of information derived from both eagles. This is an instance of type (1), in which the subject has information derived from an object but does not possess a mode of identification that identifies any object uniquely (therefore failing to satisfy Russell’s Principle).

Let’s return to the scenario above with Schopenhauer’s landlady in order to illustrate an ill-grounded thought of type (2). Imagine a scenario where Schopenhauer goes outside, looks up, and sees what he takes to be an eagle flying through the sky. However, unbeknownst to him, it was a littered promotional tote bag from American Eagle that is merely shaped like an eagle. He runs inside and warns his landlady that there is an eagle in the area, and that the neighbourhood pets should be carefully supervised. The landlady goes around and warns all of the tenants in the building of the eagle that is flying around looking for unsuspecting prey. However, it turns out that there is, in fact, an eagle in the area. In this instance, although her thought is grounded in an information link to an object (i.e., the tote bag), and her mode of identification (i.e., *the eagle flying around the neighbourhood*) picks out an object, Evans thinks that we cannot credit the landlady with a singular thought about either the tote bag nor the eagle — the mode of identification is not related to the subject’s informational channel in the right way (an instance of type 2).

So under which circumstances can someone be credited with thinking a singular thought about an individual? Evans says that:

The notion of an information-based particular-thought involves a duality of factors: on the one hand, the subject’s possession of information derived

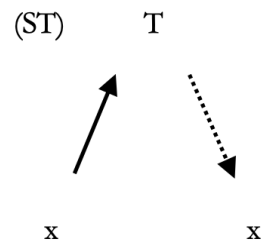
⁵³ A proponent of the Photograph Model will claim that whichever eagle is the causal source of *that* thought will be enough to individuate it, but this seems like an *ad hoc* gesture. In this instance, it seems genuinely indeterminate as to which eagle the thought is about. Evans attempts to account for this intuition by claiming that causal-links are, by themselves, insufficient for determining which object the thought is about. His hypothesis is that only through the satisfaction of Russell’s Principle would the thought be determinately *about* one eagle over the other.

from an object, which he regards as germane to the evaluation and appreciation of the thought; and, on the other hand, the subject's satisfaction of the requirement imposed by Russell's Principle — his identification of the object which his thought concerns. (138)

Evans argues that someone can be credited with a singular thought only if these two factors locate the same object. He elaborates:

Finding the *target* of an information-based particular-thought would involve tracing back the causal routes by which the relevant information is derived from the relevant object. Finding its *object* would involve employing the mode of identification which the subject employs in the thought (exploiting the answer to the question 'In virtue of what does the subject know which object his thought concerns?'). Only if these two procedures locate the same object can the subject be credited with an information-based particular-thought about that object. (139)

Again, we can represent this diagrammatically as:



Here, the object identified by the employed mode of identification is the same as the one from which the information derives.

As an example of a successful instance of ST, let's consider a case of demonstrative identification, which Evans calls "the mother and father of all information-based thoughts" (145). According to Evans, a demonstrative-thought includes a continual informational-link with the object, with the subject's ability to spatially locate the object constituting discriminating knowledge of the thing (since one way to individuate spatio-temporal objects is by their spatial location).⁵⁴ Let's return to the first scenario above where Schopenhauer is sitting in his backyard and spots an eagle flying through the sky. He receives perceptual information about the spatial location of *that* eagle, and thinks to himself, "that's such a majestic bird." In this instance, the object identified by his demonstrative that-Idea is

⁵⁴ Evans develops the notion of an informational-link so as to replace what he considers to be the vague notion of perception (see p.144 in particular for developments of this idea).

the same as the object that is the source of the information, and as such represents a successful attempt at tokening a singular thought.

What is essential for Evans' account is an intuition that he shares with proponents of the Photograph Model, one that is expressed by Kripke when he states that "it is not how the speaker thinks he got the reference, but the actual chain ... which is relevant" (1980, 93).⁵⁵ This 'outside-in' model of cognition is imperative to understanding Evans' theory of singular thought, as it is the "fact of an informational connection of a certain kind, not upon the thought or idea of that connection" that singular thoughts rely on for their aboutness (1982, 173).⁵⁶ This dependence on an informational connection is intimately related to why Evans thinks that singular thoughts are Russellian, or object dependent, for if there is no object with which he is connected there is no thought about *that* object. However, as we have seen, Evans thinks that this informational connection is necessary but not sufficient: the way of thinking about the object that the subject employs must also enable them to satisfy Russell's Principle.

Demonstrative thoughts are the paradigmatic instances of singular thought, and as Evans puts it, "the difficulty has always been that of providing a principled way of proceeding beyond the demonstrative paradigm" (64). Throughout VOR, Evans attempts to illustrate that those instances of singular thought that go beyond the demonstrative paradigm nevertheless share several essential characteristics with it — namely, those provided by ST above. To reiterate — a subject can be entertain a singular thought if, and only if:

- (i) the subject has a thought containing an Idea that satisfies Russell's Principle
- and
- (ii) the object from which the information derives is the same as the object identified by that Idea

In order to refute the theory of singular thought that emerges throughout VOR, the Liberalist is tasked with refuting both of the conjuncts. As we shall in the next section, the problem with Liberalist critiques is two-fold. First, insofar as they deny (ii), they misidentify the explicandum with which Evans was concerned. Evans, like the various singular thought theorists before him, was concerned with developing a theory of object-dependent thought

⁵⁵ Though Kripke is talking about linguistic reference here, it is this model applied to thought instead which captures the intuition that Evans shares with proponents of the Photograph Model.

⁵⁶ Evans also expresses this idea using a visual metaphor: "It is the fact that I have my gaze fixed upon a thing, not the idea that I have my gaze fixed upon something, that determines which object is the object of my thought" (173, fn. 44).

(*de re* thought). As we have seen, the only reading of ‘singular thought’ as a phenomena for Evans is one according to which such thoughts are Russellian — and they are Russellian because they depend upon an informational channel derived from the object itself. Without such an informational channel, it is unclear how a thought is *about* an actual concrete object other than just by ‘fancy or stipulation’ (as Evans would put it) or satisfactorily (as Bach (1987) would put it). The Liberalist could still claim that singular thoughts are object dependent, but it is unclear to Evans how since their object-involving capacity would merely be by luck rather than from being related to the object in the right way. Second, insofar as the Liberalist denies (i), which the Photograph Model also denies, then they miscalculate the explicandum. It is a hypothesis of Evans’ theory that instances of singular thought satisfy Russell’s Principle, and the instances of singular thought that the Liberalist puts forth to counter Evans either (a) involve denying (ii) and therefore misidentify the explicandum, or (b) grant (ii), but are instances in which Russell’s Principle has, in fact, been satisfied.

§II Contemporary Liberalism

3.2.1 *Rejecting Russell's Principle*

We first encountered Liberalism in Chapter Two — the thesis that there is no general acquaintance restriction on singular thought.⁵⁷ The liberalist substantiates this thesis by arguing that there are genuine instances of singular thought in the absence of either a causal or epistemic acquaintance condition being met. Liberalism has its roots in the semantic instrumentalism of Harman (1977) and Kaplan (1989), according to which we can freely manipulate the apparatus of direct reference in order to produce singular thoughts about objects we would otherwise be unable to think about.⁵⁸ However, although it is historically rooted in semantic instrumentalism, it is important to note that liberalism is the broadest rejection of an acquaintance condition, and encompasses several distinct views besides semantic instrumentalism (e.g., Jeshion's cognitivism).⁵⁹ For our purposes, what matters most is that all liberals are committed to a rejection of Evans' defence of Russell's Principle.

The strategy that I will be pursuing throughout the remainder of Chapter Three is the following. First, in 3.2.1 I will briefly explain semantic instrumentalism and the claim that descriptively introduced referential terms (DIRTs) can be used to generate acquaintanceless singular thought 'on the cheap.' DIRTs give rise to a semantic argument against Evans' theory of singular thought that I'll call the argument from semantic content accessibility — one of the primary argumentative strategies that philosophers have used against Evans (for two notable and more recent examples, see Borg 2007 and Hawthorne and Manley 2012). I will then proceed to outline Jeshion's cognitivism, a descendent of semantic instrumentalism, which attempts to overcome semantic instrumentalism's perceived shortcomings while nevertheless still attempting to overthrow Russell's Principle. What is distinctive about Jeshion's cognitivism is that it opposes Evans' theory independently of any semantical considerations. The general argument is that cognitivism is a superior theory of singular thought when compared to acquaintance based accounts. Second, in 3.2.2, on the behalf of

⁵⁷ Some of the most notable liberalists include Harman (1977), Kaplan (1989), Sainsbury (2005), Borg (2007), Jeshion (2010), and Hawthorne and Manley (2012).

⁵⁸ A few of the most prominent semantic instrumentalists have since changed their mind. Kaplan (2012) has abandoned semantic instrumentalism in favour of an acquaintance condition that he derives from Donnellan, while Soames (2002) claims that although Kripke was once a semantic instrumentalist, he too has since given up the position.

⁵⁹ Whereas semantic instrumentalism entails liberalism, liberalism does not entail semantic instrumentalism.

Evans, I will illustrate the ways in which semantic instrumentalist and cognitivist arguments fall short of refuting Evans' theory of singular thought.

In the preceding sections, we saw how Kripke's semantical analysis of proper names was in part what facilitated the development of the Photograph Model. However, Kripke's insights also helped facilitate the development of semantic instrumentalism — a view that is quite antithetical to the Photograph Model. Kaplan (1989) argues that:

A special form of knowledge of an object is neither required nor presupposed in order that a person may entertain as object of thought a singular proposition involving that object ... What allows us to take various propositional attitudes towards singular propositions is not the form of our acquaintance with the object but is rather our ability to manipulate the conceptual apparatus of direct reference. (536)

For example, adapting an example from Kaplan, suppose I fix the referent of the name 'Stella-1' with an attributively used definite description such as the 25th furthest super-inhabitable planet from Earth. The semantics of direct reference suggests that my use of 'Stella-1' now refers to the 25th furthest super-inhabitable planet from Earth (presuming it exists). It seems that I can now meaningfully assert counterfactuals about Stella-1, such as claiming that it could have been the 15th furthest super-inhabitable planet instead. Since I am able to meaningfully understand assertions about Stella-1, it seems like a natural step to claim that I am also able to think about Stella-1, despite an acquaintance condition remaining unsatisfied. It seems as if our ability to manipulate the apparatus of direct reference is capable of influencing our cognition, with Kaplan (1989) claiming that DIRTs "constitute a form of cognitive restructuring; they broaden the range of thought" (560). Proper names introduced in this manner are known as descriptive names, and constitute one of the primary avenues that liberalists pursue in order to overthrow acquaintance conditions, since descriptive names and other DIRTs seem to entail that there are acquaintanceless singular thoughts.⁶⁰

In Chapter Two, we considered several conceptions of singular thought and noted that any theory of singular thought ought to be able to account for both the contribution and the mechanism of such thoughts. The Standard View is one according to which the satisfaction of some sort of causal or epistemic condition enables someone to grasp a

⁶⁰ Besides descriptive names, similar arguments can be developed using dthat expressions and deferred demonstratives. Other notable examples of descriptive names in the literature include Kripke's (1980) 'Jack the Ripper' and 'Neptune,' as well as Evans' (1982) 'Julius.'

singular content — this latter ability being what demarcates singular from general thought(s). Semantic instrumentalism puts pressure on the Standard View because it attempts to show that all that is required for singular thought about an object is the mental tokening of a name that refers to that object. This seems to imply that the Standard View gets the mechanism story wrong, since one can mentally token a name that refers to an object without being acquainted with the object referred to through a use of that name. Therefore, semantic instrumentalism strongly suggests that if we countenance that a descriptively introduced singular term is capable of expressing a singular content, then understanding utterances containing that DIRT is sufficient for a subject to grasp a singular content, thereby enabling the subject to have a singular thought about that object. To come at the point another way, Jeshion (2010) writes that “sentence-understanding should be sufficient for grasping what the sentence expresses” (111). This link between sentence understanding and grasping the thought expressed has been labelled *semantic content accessibility* (SCA).⁶¹ Jeshion (2002) elaborates that according to SCA:

For all expressions E in the language L, and all sentences S in L expressing some proposition P, if an agent A has semantical understanding of all the expressions E contained in S, then if A were apprised of all the relevant contextual information, A could have an attitude having P as its content. (61)

Liberalists argue that Evans’ view commits him to a denial of SCA, which they argue is a *modus tollens* of his position. For example, according to Hawthorne and Manley (2012), “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” (24). The argument from semantic content accessibility constitutes one of the primary ways that Liberalists have attempted to undermine Evans’ theory of singular thought (we will consider this reading of Evans, and whether it is problematic for his position, in section 3.2.2 below).⁶²

Whereas semantic instrumentalism attempts to overthrow Russell’s Principle by analyzing the semantical behaviour of singular terms and their influence on cognition, Jeshion (2002, 2010) builds on the insight that ‘mental names sustain singular thought’ and develops a view she calls cognitivism that can exist independently of semantical considerations. This is a potentially more powerful way to refute Evans’ theory of singular

⁶¹ See Kripke (1978), Jeshion (2002), and Goodman (2018) for discussions of semantic content accessibility.

⁶² For criticisms of Evans along these lines, see Jeshion (2002), Borg (2007), and Hawthorne and Manley (2012).

thought, since even if we grant Evans' denial of SCA his theory may be inadequate regardless of its implications for semantics.

Cognitivism is Jeshion's view that singular thought is (a) constitutively from and through a mental file, and (b) subject to a significance condition. Concerning singular thought and mental files, she writes:

One thinks a singular thought by thinking *through* or *via* a mental file that one has about the particular object. By contrast, descriptive thoughts occur *discretely* in cognition, disconnected from any mental file. Such thoughts play a role in inferential relations, but there is no special organizational structure that governs their occurrence in cognition ... On the view I am proposing, thinking of individuals from mental files is constitutive of singular thoughts. We think singular thoughts about individuals if and only if we think of them through a mental file. (2010, 129-130, her italics)

The gist of the idea is that when Schopenhauer's landlady thinks of the eagle as the bird of prey surveying the neighbourhood, she is thinking of the eagle *through* a mental file that binds together any predicative information she may have about it (e.g., that it's an eagle, that it's within the geographical vicinity, that it has a finite lifespan, etc). Importantly, however, the descriptive content she stores in her eagle-file is (a) distinct from the file itself, and (b) capable of mischaracterizing the eagle (e.g., her eagle-file still retains its identity criterion even if some of the descriptive content is incorrect, insofar as the majority of the information stored within it is predicable of that eagle).

The general idea behind the cognitivist framework is that "what distinguishes *de re* thought is its structural or organizational role in thought; acquaintance, and any evidential or epistemic relation, is inessential" (Jeshion 2002, 67). What is unique about the cognitive role of singular thought is that it employs mental files, which can be characterized by three primary functions they serve for cognition: a bundling-function, an identity-function, and a singularity-function. Whereas the first two functions are common to most conceptions of mental files, the singularity-function is unique to cognitivism: "thinking about an individual from a mental file is constitutive of singular thinking about that individual" (132). Jeshion is explicit that her claim that singular thought is thought from and through a mental file should not be read as shifting the topic or as marking new terminology, it should be interpreted "as a theoretical conjecture or stance on the *nature* of mental files and singular thought" (130). For example, if Schopenhauer is thinking a singular thought about an eagle in the sky, it is

only because he is thinking through a mental file, and not because he is entertaining an object dependent content or in possession of information derived from the object.

Besides the view that thinking of individuals through mental files is constitutive of singular thought, the second main feature of cognitivism is that the formation of a mental file is subject to a significance condition. According to the significance condition, “a mental file is initiated on an individual only if that individual is significant to the agent with respect to her plans, projects, affective states, motivations” (ibid., 136). Jeshion claims that “cognition does not withhold from forming mental files and mental names on individuals simply because of the presence or even the awareness of a gap in our epistemic relation to the object of thought. Cognition is, rather sensitive to significance” (2010, 21). Only if the significance condition is satisfied will cognition open a mental file for an object. For example, say Schopenhauer is reading an article in the paper on the ever increasing eagle population in Frankfurt, and how one particular eagle, Baldy, is the most dangerous. Surely it is significant to his aims (e.g., protecting his prized poodle) that he can track the information about Baldy that the article is conveying (perhaps flight routines, times in which Baldy tends to prey, etc.). It is important that Schopenhauer, for example, track that they are talking about the *same* eagle, and that instances of anaphora throughout the article refer back to Baldy, and so on. Jeshion argues that the way Schopenhauer does this is by the formation of a mental file, in this case, his Baldy-file. Additionally, Jeshion claims that the “significance condition on singular thought replaces an acquaintance condition on singular thought” (ibid., 136).

Jeshion’s cognitivism represents one of the most thoroughly developed Liberalist alternatives to the Standard View on singular thought precisely because it offers as an explanation as to both the contribution and mechanism of singular thought. Jeshion’s significance condition is an account of the *mechanism* of singular thought, while the mental files themselves are an account of what is *contributed* in thinking a singular thought. In this sense it could be said that whereas most varieties of Liberalism are destructive in nature, demonstrating why we should not be Standard Theorists, Cognitivism is constructive in nature, offering us a more fully developed alternative that is potentially capable of accounting for the same explicandum as the Standard Theory. Jeshion’s cognitivism is the perfect foil to Evans’ theory of singular thought, since she disagrees with Evans’ account of both the mechanism and the contribution of thinking singularly.

The significance condition also enables us to see what distinguishes cognitivism from semantic instrumentalism. Jeshion states that the production of mental names is not under

agential control, but rather cognition's control (2010, 125). She argues that we cannot simply introduce a DIRT at will and thereby come to have singular thoughts about its referent; rather, only when an individual is *significant* to an agent can that agent have a singular thought about that individual. Most objections to the plausibility of DIRTs rest on intuitions that we cannot just freely choose to refer to (or think about) a thing by exploiting some attributively used definite description to fix the referent of a singular term. Jeshion's cognitivism attempts to respect these intuitions against DIRTs by arguing that agents cannot just enter new belief states at will with the 'stroke of a pen.' However, Jeshion argues that it is a false dilemma to think that if we deny the 'free name introduction' of traditional semantic instrumentalism we must therefore be acquaintance theorists.

There are a number of other distinctive features about the cognitivist framework that are in its favour — most of which are purportedly problems for Evans' theory. First, many philosophers have held that we are capable of having singular thoughts about objects that we are neither causally nor epistemically related to. Cognitivism accounts for this by arguing that an object may satisfy the significance condition in ways that do not involve epistemic or causal features. Second, a major complaint that has been raised against both the content and relational conceptions of singular thought is that they entail that singular thoughts are object dependent, preventing the possibility of object *in*dependent thought. Cognitivism overcomes this perceived difficulty because what is distinctive about singular thought is not that it is characterized relationally or in terms of singular content, but rather that the agent is thinking from and through a mental file. My Santa-Claus-file, for example, contains quite a bit of descriptive content that my childhood self thought was uniquely co-instantiated by some object, and such a file was subject to a significance condition ('the jolly man that drives an airborne sleigh and leaves gifts in exchange for cookies and milk' is surely a descriptive statement that would be significant to a child's affective state(s)). Third, it is thought that the cognitivist framework provides an account of singular thought that is more empirically respectable than the existing alternatives. The mental file terminology has also been utilized in cognitive science and linguistics, and therefore seems like a more empirically tractable *kind* of phenomena. When we discuss mental files, we are talking about something that is theoretically individuated via features that are intrinsic to the mental, and, as such, presumably a phenomena that is capable of eventually being studied in a controlled experimental setting. Contrast this with the notion that singular thought is an attitude

towards an object dependent content — how are we to parse this notion out in terms that would be more experimentally tractable?

That being said, despite all of the reasons in favour of cognitivism, there are a number of issues with the view. Firstly, are there actually object *independent* singular thoughts? Evans, as we have seen, takes the object dependent aspect of singular thoughts to be almost definitional — singular thoughts just are object-dependent thoughts. This is in line with the history of the singular thought literature going all the way back to Russell. Perhaps, then, cognitivists could be charged with the philosophic crime of equivocation, or with misidentifying the explicandum, as a number of philosophers have recently urged.⁶³ However, Jeshion herself states that the claim that thinking of individuals through mental files is constitutive of singular thought “should *not* be understood as marking new terminology (i.e., my claim is not “what I mean by ‘mental file’ is an organizational structure from which singular thought is achieved”). The claim should rather be construed as a theoretical conjecture or stance on the *nature* of mental files and singular thought” (130, my italics). So much for the attempt to charge the cognitivist of the lesser crime of talking past their opponent! Second, the cognitivist motivates their view by arguing that the condition that needs to be satisfied in order for someone to have a singular thought is not causal or epistemic, but is instead the significance condition. However, Evans (1982) thinks that in order to think of an object, one must satisfy what he calls Russell’s Principle. If we can demonstrate that Russell’s Principle is, in fact, satisfied in the thought experiments the cognitivist uses to substantiate their position, then we shall have demonstrated that this in and of itself does not constitute a rebuttal to Evans’ view. We could then argue that the cognitivist is guilty of miscalculating the explicandum. Lastly, it remains to be determined how literally the file metaphor should be taken. More needs to be said on what constitutes thought from and through a mental file, how mental files are to be empirically studied, how they fit into the general models of the mind of contemporary cognitive science, psychology, and neuroscience, and what mental files themselves are. As Goodman and Genone (2020) ask, “is it indeed the case that there is a unified cognitive, functional kind posited by psychologists, linguists, and philosophers when they employ the notion of a ‘file?’” (10).

⁶³ See, for example, King (2020), Reimer (2020), Pepp (2020), and Sainsbury (2020), who each argue, in their distinctive way, that many of the contemporary debates about singular thought do not constitute genuine disagreement due to the fact that the various interlocutors are guilty of talking past one another.

In the next section, I will proceed to vindicate Evans from both the argument from semantic content accessibility and cognitivism.

3.2.2 *Vindicating Evans*

In 3.1.2, I reconstructed the theory of singular thought that emerges throughout *The Varieties of Reference*. According to this reading of Evans, a subject can entertain a singular thought if, and only if:

- (i) the subject has a thought containing an Idea that satisfies Russell's Principle
- and
- (ii) the object from which the information derives is the same as the object identified by that Idea

In the previous section(s), I outlined the Liberalist thesis that there is no general acquaintance constraint on singular thought. Liberalists are committed to a denial of both of these conjuncts, since they are both versions of a general acquaintance condition. One of the most prominent strategies used by Liberalists to deny (ii) is to illustrate how we can generate singular thoughts 'on the cheap' by manipulating the apparatus of direct reference — *in absentia* of any informational channel derived from the object of thought.⁶⁴ Liberalists argue that Evans' attempts to avoid this maneuver commits him to a rejection of the principle of semantic content accessibility, which they then argue constitutes a *modus tollens* of his position. Another prominent Liberalist strategy, developed by Jeshion (2002, 2010), is to argue that cognitivism is a superior theory of singular thought when compared to any acquaintance based account. Evans' theory is a version of the Standard Theory, according to which singular thoughts are both object dependent and require for their tokening the satisfaction of an acquaintance condition, in this instance Russell's Principle. Cognitivism opposes the Standard Theory's characterization of singular thought by arguing that it should instead be characterized by its functional role in cognition, which is best understood as thought from and through a mental file. These files are initiated only if an object is significant to cognition. Cognitivism is, therefore, an attempt at a wholesale rejection of Evans' theory of singular thought, since it attempts to deny (i) and (ii) simultaneously. Throughout this section, I will argue that these Liberalist critiques of Evans fail because they either misidentify or misevaluate the phenomena with which Evans was concerned.

⁶⁴ See Jeshion (2002), Borg (2007), and Hawthorne and Manley (2012).

Evans' (1979) often quoted remark that "we do not get ourselves into new belief states by 'the stroke of a pen' (in Grice's phrase) — simply by introducing a name into the language" (202) is a prime expression of his reluctance to allow descriptive names to be genuine sources of novel singular thought about an object. Evans was well aware of semantic instrumentalism and the threat it posed for his advocacy of Russell's Principle (see 1982, 74). In section 3.1.1, we saw that one of the main themes throughout VOR is that we must remain skeptical of attempts to apply conclusions from the theory of reference to the theory of thought: semantic instrumentalism represents one of these attempts. Evans gets us to consider the descriptive name 'Julius,' introduced into the language via the definite description *the inventor of the zip*. Evans claims that although descriptive names very rarely occur naturally in language, "it would appear to be always possible to create descriptive names by stipulation, as we envisaged 'Julius' to have been introduced into the language" (49). Two questions about descriptive names are (a) whether or not such names should be considered as referring expressions, and (b) whether or not such names are capable of generating novel singular thoughts about an object. As we will see, although Evans and the semantic instrumentalists are in agreement about (a), they are in disagreement in regards to (b).

Evans agrees with Russell's analysis of definite descriptions (see Chapter Two), according to which definite descriptions are not genuine members of the category of referential terms. On a Russellian analysis, what is semantically expressed by an utterance of a sentence containing a definite description is not a singular proposition, but is a quantificational claim that there is some property that is uniquely instantiated. However, Evans, in agreement with many of the fundamental points of Kripke's (1980) semantical analysis of proper names, disagrees with the Russellian analysis of ordinary proper names as disguised definite descriptions. The referentialist analysis of a descriptive name such as 'Julius' would seem to suggest that it is a rigid designator, referring to the same object in all possible worlds in which that object exists. Evans agrees with this analysis, claiming that "if there is a unique inventor of the zip, then 'Julius' *refers to* that person, and in exactly the same sense as that in which a Russellian name refers to its bearer" (50, his italics).

So how does Evans' analysis of descriptive names differ from semantic instrumentalism? Even though Evans is willing to grant that such names are referring expressions, he thinks that they are not Russellian singular terms since they do *not* require the existence of a referent for their understanding. Examples of Russellian singular terms for

Evans include demonstratives, indexicals, and ordinary proper names, where, put crudely, no referent equals no understanding. Descriptive names, on the other hand, are non-Russellian singular terms — i.e., they do not require the existence of a referent for their understanding. Evans claims that, unlike ordinary proper names, knowledge of the role of the referent fixing description is required in order to understand uses of descriptive names. He claims that:

In the case of descriptive names there is a public, semantical connection between the name and the description: the sense of the name is such that an object is determined to be the referent of the name if and only if it satisfies a certain description. Anyone who understands the name must be aware of the reference-fixing role of the description. (48)

If someone is unaware of the reference-fixing role of the description, then it seems difficult to see the sense in which they understand the name — since, by stipulation, the name only refers to whichever object satisfies the descriptive content. Unlike ordinary metasemantic baptisms, in which a description may be referentially used to fix the referent, in the case of descriptive names the description is being used attributively. There is no independent means through which to think of the referent, and, most importantly, no channel through which to receive information about the object.

Say, for example, that ‘Julius’ turns out to be an empty name after all. On a standard referentialist analysis, utterances containing it would fail to have a meaning, given the principle of compositionality and the standard referentialist analysis of proper names. Evans argues that ordinary proper names, those not introduced by stipulation, do indeed function in this way. If there is no object referred to by a use of a name, then there is no sense of understanding that name.⁶⁵ However, Evans claims that even if ‘Julius’ turns out to be empty,

⁶⁵ A common objection to this point is that there seems to be a definitive sense in which the name ‘Santa Claus’ can be understood despite the fact that it is empty. However, if we are to presume a general referentialist treatment of proper names, according to which proper names semantically contribute their referent to the proposition expressed by utterances containing them, it is difficult to see how to reconcile our intuitions about being able to understand names such as ‘Santa Claus’ within such a framework.

There seem to be two general options available for the referentialist: (1) ‘Santa Claus’ does, in fact, refer — however, it doesn’t refer to an actually existing concrete object, but either a Meinongian, abstract, or possible object; or (2) fictional names such as ‘Santa Clause’ function rather differently than ordinary proper names, and they either contribute a metalinguistic description to the proposition, or our use of them occurs with the scope of a pretence. The latter is the route that Evans (1982) pursues in order to accommodate our intuitions about the meaningfulness of empty names. However, all of these options are littered with philosophical difficulties (see Hurry 2016). The meaningfulness of purported empty or fictional names is a global difficulty that all referentialist analyses of proper names face — it is not a problem that only uniquely arises for Evans theory.

there is still a sense in which the *thought* expressed by ‘Julius is *F*’ is the same as the thought expressed by ‘the inventor of the zip is *F*’, despite the fact that ‘Julius’ and ‘the inventor of the zip’ behave differently within the scope of intensional operators. Since definite descriptions do not require a referent in order for utterances containing them to be meaningful, Evans suggests the same applies to descriptive names. Evans elaborates:

In saying that the thought expressed by ‘Julius is *F*’ may equivalently be expressed by ‘The inventor of the zip is *F*,’ I think I am conforming to common sense. Someone who understands and accepts the one sentence as true gets himself into exactly the same belief state as someone who accepts the other. Belief states are distinguished by the evidence which gives rise to them, and the expectations, behaviour, and further beliefs which may be derived from them (in conjunction with other beliefs); and in all these respects, the belief states associated with the two sentences are indistinguishable. (50)

Evans is here appealing to the notion that anyone who understands a descriptive name must be aware of the reference-fixing role of the description in order to substantiate his functional analysis of belief states in the quoted passage above.

In 3.1.2 we considered a passage from VOR in which Evans explains the type of thought with which he is concerned:

Our particular-thoughts are very often based upon information which we have about the world. We take ourselves to be informed, in whatever way, of the existence of such-and-such an object, and we think or speculate about it. A thought of the kind with which I am concerned is governed by a conception of its object which is the result neither of fancy nor of linguistic stipulation, but rather *is the result of a belief about how the world is which the subject has because he has received information (or misinformation) from the object.* (121, my italics)

As I noted above, in the case of descriptive names there is no independent means through which to think of the referent, and, most importantly, no channel through which to receive information about the object. It is, therefore, challenging to see how such thoughts could be information based. However, as established in 3.1.2, a singular thought for Evans just is a thought that is Russellian (object dependent), and the Russellian status of such thoughts was explained in terms of their being information based. The semantic instrumentalist argues that we can introduce novel singular thoughts about an object by introducing a name by stipulation, but it is difficult to ascertain the sense in which such a name is capable of

expressing a Russellian thought — especially if Evans is right in his suggestion that such names are not even themselves Russellian singular terms. While discussing the ways in which descriptive thoughts are different than information based thoughts, Evans claims that:

Essaying of information-based, then, are liable to a quite distinctive failing: that of being ill-grounded (the clearest examples of this always come when the information on which the episode is based has no source). It follows that *even when the mode of identification employed exploits individuating facts about an object*, an information-based thought cannot be regarded as working like a descriptive thought (of which thoughts that would be expressed with the name ‘Julius’ were our paradigm examples). An information-based thought has a liability which corresponds to nothing in the case of a pure descriptive thought. (134-135, his italics)

Furthermore, since the belief states generated by our use of descriptive names seem to be functionally equivalent to those generated by our use of the description used to fix the referent, and, since the latter are paradigmatic instances of descriptive thought, it is hard to see why the mere association of a name with that description would somehow be sufficient to enable someone to generate a novel singular thought.

If the semantic instrumentalist is unable to explain the process through which DIRT introduction enables one to not only express a singular content, but also entertain an object dependent thought, then it would appear that they are possibly interested in a phenomena quite distinct from that which interested Evans. Reimer (2020) has recently argued along these lines that the drift between semantic instrumentalists (e.g., Kaplan) and Evans does not constitute a genuinely substantive debate. According to Reimer:

The two philosophers are arguing past one another insofar as they appear to be interested in different phenomena. Thus, while Evans is interested in mental states, *beliefs* in particular, Kaplan is interested in *semantic contents*. Perhaps, then, Evans is right in thinking that descriptive names are *not* a potential source of novel singular *mental states*, while Kaplan is right in thinking that such expressions *are* a potential source of novel singular *semantic contents*.” (50, her italics)

As an example of a divergence between semantic contents and mental states, Reimer asks us to consider an instance where you are standing in the middle of a store, close your eyes, point to a stack of magazines in the corner, and utter, “I am going to buy *that* one.” There seems to be a sense in which you both do and do not understand what you have just said — you realize you have plausibly expressed a semantic content, but you do not know which

content you have expressed until you open your eyes. Perhaps the store clerk witnessed the entire episode, and is herself able to apprehend the singular thought you have expressed before you are able to. Understood in this way, the Liberalist attempts to overthrow Evans' theory of singular thought by an appeal to DIRTs is a result of misidentifying the explicandum with which Evans was concerned: object dependent thought.

Perhaps surprisingly, even semantic instrumentalists themselves seem to characterize their stance on singular thought and singular content in a way that is quite bizarre if we do not read them as being interested in distinct phenomena from the one that interested Evans. Consider the following passage from Borg (2007):

I'm going to reject wholesale the idea that there are epistemic (or indeed any other substantial) kinds of constraint on *singular content*. The claim will be that, whatever is special about having a *singular thought*, it is not to be explained in terms of the kind of relationship an agent has with an object. This, then, will be one instance of the more general advocacy of minimal semantics, for it will thus turn out that it is no job of a semantic theory to tell us, in any substantial way, which objects in the world expressions hook up to, nor indeed whether or not certain expressions succeed in hooking up with an object at all. *Finding out this sort of thing is a task which goes well beyond the remit of the language faculty.* (169, my italics)

Notice the way that Borg switches between her use of 'semantic content' and 'singular thought,' while claiming that finding out 'which objects in the world' expressions hook up to goes well beyond the remit of the language faculty. From Evans' perspective, this is the exact kind of seesawing between language and thought that he advises us to be wary of. Evans' theory of singular thought is entirely congruent with the notion that the task described by Borg goes well beyond the language faculty — but that is precisely why he thinks we need a theory of singular thought! If that is not the task that a theory of singular thought is attempting to carry out, then it is problematic to read Evans and Borg (and other semantic instrumentalists) as unequivocally talking about the same phenomena when they use the expression 'singular thought.'

Jeshion's cognitivism is a Liberalist position that is skeptical towards some of the intuitions that drive semantic instrumentalism. In the previous section, I noted that she thinks an agent cannot simply introduce a DIRT at will and thereby come to have a singular thought about its referent — according to her theory, only when an individual is significant to an agent can that agent have a singular thought about that individual. The explanation is

that only when an individual is significant does cognition initiate the opening of a mental file, and singular thought is claimed to be thought from and through such files. By rejecting the ‘free name introduction’ of traditional semantic instrumentalists, Jeshion’s cognitivism presents itself as a more powerful Liberalist objection to acquaintance accounts such as Evans’, since it is not subject to the same difficulties, nor does it rest on the same semantical considerations, as semantic instrumentalism. Instead, Jeshion sets cognitivism up as a better theory of singular thought *qua* theory of singular thought.

There are several misgivings I would like to express about cognitivism. They can be grouped into two primary categories. The first category involves the conception of mental files as being constitutive of singular thought. Evans’ theory can quite naturally accommodate the mental files framework. In fact, there is a notion of mental files at play within VOR that Evans calls ‘controlling conceptions of an object.’ It is Jeshion’s characterization of mental files as serving a singular-function that Evans would object to — and, as we will see, Jeshion’s identification of singular thought as mental files leaves her susceptible to the argument that she is misidentifying the explicandum. The second category involves the significance condition that Jeshion argues must be satisfied in order for a mental file to be initiated (i.e., a singular thought). Her significance condition is an attempt to make her theory more agreeable compared to a more liberal semantic instrumentalism, yet the account of cases she countenances as satisfying the significance condition is so broad that the theory borders on the unpalatable. In this sense cognitivism is guilty of misevaluating the explicandum. I will now consider each of these objections in turn.

Jeshion (2010) claims that mental files can be characterized as serving three primary functions. First, the identity-function: each mental file is “a repository of information that the agent takes to be about a single individual” (131). I may, for example, have a Frege-file, and each time I think through this Frege-file, I take myself to be thinking of the same object. Second, the bundling-function: mental files are “vehicles for bundling together an agent’s fund of information about a particular individual,” and “provide an economical and efficient means of sorting, retrieving, and adding information on a particular individual” (131). Imagine I am reading the preface to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and, upon reading the name ‘Frege,’ my Frege-file is triggered in cognition and I store the information that Frege was an influence on Wittgenstein within this folder. Several weeks later, I may be reading through a logic textbook, and yet again encounter the name ‘Frege.’ I may then reopen the same Frege-file as before and now store information in it about Frege’s

significance for the development of predicate calculus. Lastly, Jeshion argues that although most mental file theorists take identity and bundling to be the only basic functions of mental files, there is a third function that has hitherto gone unrecognized. According to the singular-function, “thinking about an individual from a mental file is constitutive of singular thinking about that individual” (132).

Evans (1982) is one of those theorists that recognizes only bundling and identity functions for mental files. Part of the substratum of the informational system is what Evans calls controlling conceptions, which can be thought of as dossiers or mental files. According to Evans, one of the central features of our system of gathering information from individuals is “the fact that we group pieces of information together, as being from the same object — that we collect information lines into bundles” (126). Evans would resist Jeshion’s claim that mental files can be further characterized by a singular-function, since it is not thought from and through a mental file that is constitutive of singular thought, but is rather the Russellian status of such thoughts. It is only when the object identified by the Idea the subject employs in thinking about an object is the same as the object from which the information derives that the subject can be credited with thinking a singular thought (see 3.1.2 above). Evans would recognize the importance of the functional role of mental files in cognition, yet he would also think that singular thought cannot be categorized by functional role alone.

There are two concepts that Evans (1973) develops that are helpful in seeing why the singular-function is an inadequate characterization of singular thought: source and dominance. Information we take to be co-instantiated by an object is stored together in the same mental file. The first question we can ask about any given piece of information is about its source. In an ideal circumstance, the information we receive is true of same object that our Idea designates. However, there are also instances in which (a) the information is sourceless, or (b) the object that is source of the information is different than the object identified by our Idea (we considered cases such as these above). The second question we can ask about information is which object is the information dominantly about. Evans thinks that “a cluster or dossier of information can be dominantly of an item though it contains elements whose source is different” (16) — for example, in the cases in which there is a shift in reference and/or misidentification of an object.

Consider our previous example where Schopenhauer identifies *that* eagle in the sky and thinks that it represents a possible threat to his prized poodle. In this simple example,

Schopenhauer may open a mental file on *that* eagle, which we can label as his Baldy-file. In the scenario where he had ingested psilocybin mushrooms and was hallucinating, the information stored in his Baldy-file is sourceless. Yet he is still thinking through an occasioned mental file. The next afternoon, he may be out in his yard again, and upon looking up, spots an eagle. Taking himself (erroneously) to be re-identifying the same eagle, he stores information he is receiving about that eagle within his Baldy-file. Let's presume he re-identifies this same eagle over a span of several weeks and continues to amass greater amounts of information about it. Here we would have an instance in which the information stored in a file is dominantly of an object that is not the source of the file. The difficulty with cognitivism's singular-function is that Schopenhauer's thought from and through his Baldy-file is definitionally singular in each instance where (a) he is not thinking of any object (since there is no object from which the information is derived), and (b) he is thinking of an object through his Baldy-file that is itself not the source of his Baldy-file. In the latter case, the object is mistakenly re-identified as the object which initiated the opening of his Baldy-file, and if the singular-function is correct, thought through and from such a file would enable a singular thought — though since it is through the original Baldy-file, this thought would be about the nonexistent Baldy instead of the object that is the dominant source of the information stored in the file. Yet this should strike us as an absurd consequence, particularly if we are following in the singular thought tradition originating from Russell where we are concerned with developing a theory of when we are thinking *de re* thoughts about particular objects in the external world. This is, after all, the tradition which Evans is participating in and why he characterizes singular thoughts as object dependent. In this sense, it seems that contrary to her stated intention, Jeshion's notion of singular thought as thought from and through a mental file *should* be seen as marking new terminology.

Jeshion intends her significance condition to replace an acquaintance condition on singular thought, overcome the shortcomings of semantic instrumentalism, and explain the Liberalist intuition that we can have acquaintanceless singular thoughts. The significance condition states that “a mental file is initiated on an individual only if that individual is significant to the agent with respect to her plans, projects, affective states, motivations” (2010, 136). Consider the following case Jeshion describes as an instance of an agent having a singular thought:

In 1859, on the heels of his successful prediction of Neptune, Le Verrier postulated that there exists another new planet, an intermercurial planet that would account for

the discrepancy between what classical mechanics predicted as the perihelion of Mercury and the observed perihelion of Mercury. He named that planet “Vulcan” and for over 50 years, he and astronomers worldwide searched for telescopic evidence to support his conviction. From 1859 until approximately 1910, many professional and amateur astronomers claimed that their telescopic sightings of black spots traversing past the sun were sightings of Vulcan. Le Verrier died in 1877 thinking he had discovered Vulcan. Of course, it turned out he was wrong. The rise of General Relativity in 1915 essentially put an end to the search for Vulcan because the new theory cleanly explained the observed perturbations in Mercury’s orbit by understanding them as a byproduct of the sun’s gravitational field. (116-117)

Jeshion rightfully claims that if Le Verrier can be successfully credited with a thought about Vulcan then it would be an instance of an acquaintanceless singular thought. In support of the purported intuition that it *does* in fact count as an instance of singular thought, she develops the cognitivist framework. Since Vulcan is significant to Le Verrier with respect to his plans, projects, affective states, motivations, and so on, the significance condition is met and a mental file is triggered. The singular-function of mental files then dictates that Le Verrier is having a singular thought about Vulcan.

It is difficult to understand how the significance condition is substantive, since it would seem to entail as singular many thoughts which our intuitions strongly suggest are not — e.g., hallucinating that you’re being chased by a tiger may be just as significant as being chased by a veridical tiger. Furthermore, Jeshion claims that “names, *qua* names, carry significance” (138). Yet this seems to entail that descriptive names, fictional names, empty names, and so on all pass the significance condition. If Jeshion’s cognitivism was intended to be a more robust version of Liberalism and less problematic than semantic instrumentalism it is challenging to see how.

On the contrary, it seems more plausible to claim that all of Le Verrier’s thoughts about Vulcan are entirely descriptive, since Le Verrier has no independent means through which to think of Vulcan other than through the descriptions he erroneously take to apply to *it* (erroneous because there is no object). Le Verrier has stored information that he thinks is co-instantiated by the same object in his Vulcan-file — and, from a cognitive point of view, this is explained by the bundling and identity functions. However, thinking through this file itself does not distinguish singular thought from descriptive thought, as the singular-function suggests, since all of Le Verrier’s ways of thinking about the purported object through the

dossier is purely descriptive.

One could, of course, argue that Le Verrier's use of 'Vulcan' refers not to an actually existing concrete object (as he thought it did), but instead to some possible, nonexistent, or abstract object. Evans' own strategy for dealing with empty names is derived from Frege. He claims that "Frege pointed in the direction in which we should look for a way of understanding the case where a singular term is empty, namely as involving some sort of pretence or appearance of thought-expression rather than the real thing" (1982, 30). However, getting into these suggestions brings us well beyond the scope of this dissertation. For now, what I will note is that despite the fact that all of these suggestions as to how to handle purportedly empty and fictional names are riddled with philosophical difficulties (see Hurry 2016),⁶⁶ it seems intuitively odd to claim that Le Verrier's use of 'Vulcan' refers to an entirely different ontological kind than the kind he intends to refer to. Rather, it seems that he is mistaken in thinking that he is thinking singularly of a thing.

⁶⁶ For example, if we take 'Vulcan' to refer to a Meinongian object, such objects are typically individuated by their properties. This would entail that each time Le Verrier thinks of Vulcan as possessing a new property, he is thinking of a new object (see Zalta, 1983). If, instead, we take 'Vulcan' to refer to an abstract object, which is more palatable, then the question remains as to when the abstract object came into existence (see Thomasson, 1999). It would seem that Le Verrier's intention to think about Vulcan would importantly be linked to when Vulcan comes into existence. However, if thinking *of* Vulcan is supposed to be singular and not merely descriptive, then it would appear that Le Verrier's initial singular thought about Vulcan would constitute the creation of Vulcan. Yet this seems utterly bizarre.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that armed with a proper understanding of Evans' theory of singular thought, several Liberalist arguments fail because they either misidentify or misevaluate the explicandum with which Evans was concerned. Following in the tradition inaugurated by Russell, Evans was concerned with developing a theory of object dependent, or Russellian, thought. Throughout *The Varieties of Reference*, Evans argues a subject can think a Russellian thought if, and only if, (a) the subject has a thought containing an Idea that satisfies Russell's principle, and (b) the object from which the information derives is the same as the object identified by that Idea. The Liberalist is tasked with refuting both of these conjuncts. However, as we have seen, their attempts are unsuccessful. First, in their attempts to deny (b), they misidentify the type of thought that interested Evans. In this sense, it seems like a genuine possibility that the Liberalists are talking past Evans. Second, Jeshion attempts to deny (a) by arguing that it is not Russell's Principle that needs to be satisfied, but rather the significance condition. But the significance condition seems to countenance as singular thoughts that our intuitions strongly suggest are not — in this sense, cognitivism misevaluates the explicandum.

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Curriculum Vitae

Dylan A. Hurry

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Education

2021: Doctor of Philosophy, Philosophy, Western University (London, ON, Canada).

- Advisor: Robert J. Stainton
- Dissertation: “Vindicating Evans: A Defence of Evans’ Theory of Singular Thought”

2016: Master of Arts, Philosophy, Carleton University (Ottawa, ON, Canada)

- Advisor: Eros Corazza
- Thesis: “A Referential Analysis of Fictional Names” (passed with distinction)

2014: Bachelor of Arts (first class standing), Honours Philosophy and Psychology, University of Prince Edward Island (Charlottetown, PE, Canada).

Areas of Specialization

Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Mind, and History of Analytic Philosophy

Areas of Competence

Metaphysics, History of Philosophy (18th and 19th Centuries)

Publications

Corazza, Eros, Dylan Hurry and Ryan Rafferty. 2016. “On Naming: Frege Deconstructed vs. Perry Reconstructed.” In P. Stalmaszczyk & L. F. Moreno (eds.) *Studies in the Philosophy of Language and Linguistics*. Frankfurt- Heusenstamm: Onto-Verlag: 107-121.

Presentations

“Frege’s Puzzles for Theories of Content,” Western University’s PGSA Colloquia (March 2018)

“A Referential Analysis of Fictional Names,” Carleton University Thesis Defence (April 2016)

Awards and Honours

Ontario Graduation Scholarship, Western University (2016-2017)

Dean's Entrance Scholarship, Western University (2016)

Chair's Entrance Scholarship, Western University (2016)

Senate Medal for Outstanding Academic Achievement, Carleton University (2016, nominated)

Departmental Scholarship, Carleton University (2014-2015)

Domestic Entrance Masters Scholarship, Carleton University (2014-2015)

Dean's Honours List, University of Prince Edward Island (2013-2014)

Dean's Honours List, University of Prince Edward Island (2012-2013)

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant (September 2016 - May 2019)

Western University

Duties: Grading, Proctoring, Office Hours, Class Activities, Guest Lecture

Course(s): Basic Logic, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Mind, Business Ethics, Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge

Teaching Assistant (September 2014 - April 2016)

Carleton University

Duties: Grading, Proctoring

Course(s): Introduction to Logic, Meaning of Life

Teaching Assistant (January - May 2014)

University of Prince Edward Island

Duties: Grading

Course: Introduction to Philosophy