Do Acquaintance Theorists Have an Attitude Problem?

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Abstract:
This paper is about the relevance of attitude-ascriptions to debates about singular thought. It examines a methodology (common to early acquaintance theorists [Kaplan 1968] and recent critics of acquaintance [Hawthorne & Manley 2012], which assumes the behavior of ascriptions can be used to draw conclusions about singular thought. Although many theorists (e.g. [Recanati 2012]) reject this methodology, the literature lacks a detailed examination of its implications and the challenges faced by proponents and critics. I isolate an assumption of the methodology, which I call *the tracking assumption*: that an attitude-ascription which states that *s* Φ's that *P* is true iff *s* has an attitude, of Φ-ing, which is an *entertaining* of the content *P* (with *entertain* used in a stipulated sense). I argue the tracking assumption must be rejected, not because it has deflationary consequences, but because it leads to unstable commitments. I also show there are independent reasons to reject it, because ordinary attitude ascriptions underdetermine even the *truth-conditions* of the mental-states they ascribe. However, I argue, this does not involve rejecting the claim that attitude-ascriptions express relations between agents and contents. Instead, they state different relations depending on contextual factors other than the nature of the mental-states ascribed.

Keywords: Singular thought, *de re* thought, attitude-ascriptions, acquaintance, reference, contextualism.

This paper is about the relevance of attitude-ascriptions to debates about *singular thought*. I aim to shed light on two competing approaches. The first, represented recently by Hawthorne and Manley [2012], uses the behavior of attitude-ascriptions to draw conclusions about singular thought. The second rejects this methodology [Recanati 2012; Crane 2012]. But the literature is missing a detailed examination of the challenges facing both approaches, and a clear account of *why* attitude-ascriptions should or should not be used as a guide to the nature of singular thought.

Here is an illustration of what the literature lacks. Hawthorne & Manley [2012] argue for *liberalism* about singular though—the view that there are no substantive epistemic constraints

on singular thought—with arguments based in significant part on the behavior of attitude-ascriptions. They show that ascriptions whose truth-conditions are to relate an agent to a singular content can be true in cases epistemically so diverse as to make it doubtful that any unified account of the epistemology of singular thought could capture them [Hawthorne & Manley 2012: ch.1 & 2].

A common reaction, expressed recently by Recanati [2012: 151-3], is that using ascriptions to theorize about singular thought is a mistake. This methodology yields an epistemically indiscriminate theory of singular thought. But, its special epistemic properties were what made singular thought interesting in the first place. Thus, Recanati [2012: 152] urges, this methodology causes us to 'lose sight of the distinction we were trying to account for'.[1]

This reaction leaves central questions unanswered. First, if Hawthorne & Manley leave us with a notion of singular thought we cannot recognize, what is wrong with this? Their *point* is that the singular/descriptive thought distinction is not underpinned by the epistemic differences traditionally assumed, so how can the loss of the distinction we envisaged be an argument against their view? We need an explanation of *why* taking attitude-ascriptions as evidence is unworkable. Providing this is my first aim: I trace the implications of Hawthorne & Manley's methodology, and argue any approach taking on a key assumption about the relationship between attitude-ascriptions and the attitudes they ascribe results in an unstable theory (in a sense to be explained).

Second, although many theorists reject the behavior of attitude-ascriptions as data, we can't simply leave this behavior unexplained. We can't let our theory of singular thought

[1] Recanati's [2012: 152] central example: 'Ann is a 6-year-old girl, whom John has never met and whose existence he is unaware of. But John believes that every 6-year-old can learn to play tennis in ten lessons. So, meeting Ann, I [truly] tell her: 'John thinks you can learn to

float free from our practices of ascription without explaining the disconnect. If *de re* ascriptions can be true where the presence of singular thought is *not* what explains this, then what does? What are the truth-conditions of ordinary ascriptions? Is the dominant view that they state relations between agents and contents false? My second aim is answering these questions. I argue there are reasons apart from an unstable theory of singular thought to reject the claim that ordinary attitude-ascriptions systematically track the contents of the mental-states they ascribe.[2] I argue, attitude-ascriptions *do* state relations between agents and contents, but they underdetermine *even the truth-conditional content* of the attitudes they ascribe.[3] On my view, attitude-ascriptions relate agents to contents by relations whose natures are governed, in context, by factors such as the speaker's beliefs about the objects of the thoughts attributed, her beliefs about her audience's beliefs about them, and common knowledge concerning them.

My overall aim is to trace the implications of two methodological positions that may in themselves be familiar. In the process, I hope to illustrate why existing engagements with the question of how *de re* attitude ascriptions should, or shouldn't, constrain a theory of singular thought have been insufficient.

1 The Traditional Picture

We cannot meaningfully ask how the behavior of attitude-ascriptions is relevant to singular thought without first introducing the notion of singular thought.

1.1 Singular Thought and 'Acquaintance'

[2] There is precedent for this view in Bach [1987, 1997], but he focuses on problems arising from substitution data. See the end of section 3.3 for one reason this difference is important.
[3] Thus, my view is different to Kaplan's [1969] view that *de re* ascriptions are 'transparent'. Again, see the end of section 3.3.

In essence, the distinction between singular and general thought is between two ways a thought can pick out an object.[4] Assuming a thought picks out a particular object, there are two ways it could do this. My thought that the 42nd president of the USA is from Arkansas picks out Bill Clinton. Likewise, face-to-face with Clinton, I could think, *he* is from Arkansas. Both thoughts pick out Clinton—they are true/false (at the actual world) depending on whether Clinton is from Arkansas. However, they do so differently. The first picks out Clinton because he satisfies a description. The second picks him out because of some practical, causal and/or informational access its thinker has to him.

It's common to present this distinction as one between mental-states with different kinds of *content*.[5] That descriptive thoughts pick out their objects through a relation of *satisfaction* is represented with:

1) $\exists x$ [42nd President (x) & ($\forall y$) (42nd President (y) $\rightarrow$ (x = y)) & from Arkansas (x)]

which contains only properties and quantifiers.[6] Since singular thoughts don't pick out their objects by *generalizing over objects,* they have contents constitutively involving those objects:

2) from Arkansas (*a*) [7]

[4] By 'thought' I mean a mental-state, not an abstract object.
[5] This construal has become less popular because it implies singular thoughts are object-dependent (see, [Sainsbury 2005; Crane 2012; Bach 2010] for its rejection). These issues can be set aside here.
[6] Bach [1987] introduced the terminology of *satisfactional* vs. *relational* thoughts.
[7] '*a*' is an individual constant contributing Clinton to the truth-conditions of the content. Russell thought singular propositions *contained* objects but I leave it open that that they may rather contain object-dependent concepts (thus the language of 'constitutive involvement').

Glossed as a distinction of content, it's clear the singular/general thought distinction is *semantic*.[8] But, traditionally, it is also believed to be *epistemic-cum-cognitive*. Having a thought with the content of (2) is traditionally believed to require some special, epistemic/cognitive relation to its object.[9] If I'm face-to-face with Bill Clinton and think, *he* is from Arkansas, I exploit my access to him to think about him. Not so with descriptive thought. If I formulate the descriptive content in (1) I have a thought about Clinton, regardless of where I am and he is. My thought doesn't require an independent epistemic/cognitive relation.

The epistemic/cognitive relation that makes singular thought possible is often called *acquaintance* but, with or without this terminology, the traditional wisdom is that a special epistemic/cognitive relation to *o* is required to think singular thoughts about *o*.[10] Call this the *epistemic constraint on singular thought* (EC):

(EC) In order for a subject *s* to think a singular thought about an object *o*, *s* must bear a special epistemic/cognitive relation to *o*

A central question is, 'What *kind* of epistemic/cognitive relation is required?' Or, 'What *is* acquaintance?'

1.2 Singular-ascriptions

[8] I use 'semantic' in the broad sense that any truth-conditional distinction is semantic. I am not saying the singular/general thought distinction is *linguistic*.

[9] I use 'epistemic/cognitive' to mark some flexibility in the nature of this relation. At a minimum, 'epistemic' is used loosely in this context, since many deny that the relation in question requires knowledge of the object of singular thought.

[10] Those holding an acquaintance constraint include, Russell [1912], Kaplan [1969], Burge [1977], Donnellan [1977], Evans [1982], Lewis [1983], Boer and Lycan [1986], Bach [1987], Salmon [1986a, 1987], Recanati [1993, 2010, 2012], Soames [2001].

So, how do attitude-ascriptions play a role? A famous example illustrates.[11]

Our friend, Ralph, is innocent of espionage. We explain a practice in which individuals' identities are disguised to allow covert information-gathering—that is, that there are *spies*! Ralph now believes:

3) There are spies!

So, (4) is true:

4) Ralph believes that there is someone who is a spy

Nonetheless, (5) isn't:

5) Someone is such that Ralph believes he is a spy.

(5) asserts that Ralph believes some *particular* person is spy; (4) merely attributes belief in spies.

On the traditional view, the basic form of an attitude-report is to express a relation between an attributee and a content.[12] Iff an attitude-ascription expresses a relation between an agent and a *singular content*, we'll call it a *singular-ascription*.

(5) is a singular-ascription; (4) isn't. The difference is seen in (6) and (7) (representing the truth-conditions of (4) and (5)):

[11] The example is from an exchange between Quine [1956] and Kaplan [1969].
[12] In (4) and (5) the relation is *belief*, but this claim goes for other attitudes too.

6) Ralph believes: (∃x) [is a spy (x)]

7) (∃x) [Ralph believes: (is a spy, x)]

(4) relates Ralph to a quantificational content, whereas (5) relates Ralph to the content expressed by the open sentence '*x* is a spy', with *x* given an assignment.

Ralph, intrigued by espionage, wants to know more. Russian spy training, you tell him, is incredibly effective. The Russians produce the world's best spies. Ralph acquires a belief, the product of inference, which could be truly reported by (8):

8) Ralph believes that the world's best spy is Russian

However, (9) might be false:

9) The world's best spy is such that Ralph believes that *he* is Russian.

The content of (8) is:

10) Ralph believes: ((∃x) [the world's best spy (x) & Russian, x])

The descriptive material 'the world's best spy' is *part* of the content Ralph is related to by the ascription. In (9), it is interpreted to fall outside the scope of the belief operator:[13]

[13] That is, on one of (8)'s two readings. I'll return to the ambiguity in (8) in section 1.4.

11) (∃x) [the world's best spy (x) & Ralph believes: (Russian, x)]

(9) relates Ralph to the content expressed by '*x* is Russian', where the value of *x* is supplied by evaluating 'the world's best spy' at the actual world: a singular content.

Under what circumstances *would* the singular-ascriptions be true? Imagine Ralph sees Richard lurking suspiciously around the neighborhood and surmises he is a spy. This could license the truth of (5). For (9), imagine Ralph has a neighbor, Robert, whom he believes is Russian. What Ralph *doesn't* know is that Robert is the world's best spy. This could make (9) true.

In these contexts, the story goes, the singular-ascriptions are true because Ralph bears the right relation to the object of his thought—he satisfies EC. If this is right, the possibility of a certain kind of explanation emerges. If satisfying EC is a condition on a singular-ascription's truth, then we can investigate the *nature* of EC by looking at the conditions under which singular-ascriptions are true.[14]

1.3 Commitments of the Traditional Picture

I'll call the picture implicit in this explanation *the traditional picture*. Although it has been challenged in various ways by various figures, it has exerted considerable influence on the singular thought literature. Specifying its commitments and their implications will allow us to isolate a problematic assumption, which should be recognized and rejected.

[14] For examples of traditionalists arguing this way, see Quine [1956], Kaplan [1969], Donnellan [1977: 20-1, 22-5], Devitt [1981: 224-29]. Also, *indirect* forms of this kind of argument are ubiquitous. It is common to argue for conclusions about singular thought by arguing it is intuitively true/false that some agent believes/thinks, etc. that *a* is F or believes *of a* that it is F. These intuition-based arguments trade on speaker intuitions about the truth/falsity of singular-ascriptions.

The traditional picture involves four commitments. The first is that singular thoughts are mental-states with singular content [Russell 1912; Evans 1982; McDowell 1984, 1986; Recanati 1993]. The second is EC.[15] The third is that attitude-ascriptions express relations between agents and contents [Burge 1980; Fodor 1981; Salmon 1986b; Soames 1987, 1988, 1995; Crimmins and Perry 1989; Crimmins 1992].[16] The final commitment concerns the relationship between attitude-ascriptions and mental-states they ascribe. I call it *the tracking-assumption*.

The tracking-assumption is the assumption that, in relating an agent to a content by a relation like *believing, thinking* etc., an ascription states the agent's mental-state is one of entertaining that content. So, if you report:

12) Ralph believes that *a* is F

the truth-condition on this is that Ralph has a belief whose content is '*a* is *F*'. Thus, if a singular-ascription is true, the attributee's mental-state is a singular thought.

You might wonder why this is an *assumption* rather than a straightforward fact about the truth-conditions of attitude-ascriptions. Here is why. As philosophers of mind, one thing we do is assign mental-states with contents. In doing this, we engage in the project of mapping these states according to the representational properties in virtue of which they amount to intentional stances of believing, wondering, etc., that are about the world. Remembering this, we should recognise it is an *open question* whether our natural-language

[15] See footnote 10.
[16] It is consistent with this that propositional attitude reports involve 'unarticulated constituents', or express multi-place relations where one relata is a 'guise'. When combined with the fourth commitment, such views still entail that the truth of singular-ascriptions require the presence of singular thought.

constructions about beliefs, thoughts, etc., track this way of assigning contents to mental-states.

To make the tracking-assumption's status *as* an assumption perspicuous, let's stipulate a notion: *entertaining*. *Entertaining* is the relation you bear to a content when that content is appropriately assigned to your mental-state as part of this project in the philosophy of mind.[17] What is an open question is whether the relations stated by attitude verbs like 'believes', 'thinks', 'doubts', track the relation of *entertaining*:[18]

(*The tracking-assumption*) An attitude-ascription stating that *s* ***Φ***'s that *P* is true iff *s* has an attitude, of ***Φ***-ing, which is an *entertaining* of the content *P* [19]

The traditional picture entails the possibility of a neat, simple method for investigating the epistemology of singular thought. By looking at conditions where singular-ascriptions are

[17] 'Entertaining' is sometimes used to pick out *occurrent* thinking, but not here. In my stipulated sense, an agent who *entertains* a content P need not *occurrently* think P.

[18] For a similar outlook on the relationship between natural language and thought content see Evans [1982]. But Evans does not stipulate a sense of 'entertains' or make the current point about attitude verbs.

[19] The question of who holds the tracking assumption is complicated, because it is often taken as an entailment of the relational conception of belief reports. I hope to bring out why it is *not* an entailment. Those cited as endorsing the third commitment can arguably be thought to endorse the tracking-assumption unless they explicitly deny it. Kaplan [1956], Quine [1969], and Hawthorne & Manley [2012] do. Given the way they treat data from attitude-ascriptions as premises in their arguments, so do Donnellan [1977] and Devitt [1981]. Some authors here ought not to endorse the tracking-assumption, given their other commitments, but haven't rejected it. Burge [1977] warns against confusing *de re belief* with *de re belief reports*, but Burge [1980] commits to a relational conception of attitude-ascriptions without denying that believing that P entails having a mental-state with the content, P. Perhaps he would reject the tracking-assumption if asked, or perhaps he holds that strictly *false de re* reports can be used to report descriptive beliefs. Bach [1997] and Eaker [2009: 208-9] specify and *reject* assumptions similar to the tracking assumption: the *specification assumption* (that belief-reports specify belief contents) and the *explanatory function assumption* (that 'believes that' descriptions capture the role in reasoning or 'cognitive architecture' of the ascribed state).

licensed, we find out what it takes to satisfy EC. If some proposal about EC is at odds with the way singular-ascriptions pattern, we can use this data to adjust our account of EC.

1.4 Recognising Singular-ascriptions

To apply this method, we must be able to recognize singular-ascriptions in ordinary discourse.

There are two superficially different forms singular-ascriptions take. Some have a singular term in their complement clause; some quantify into belief contexts.[20]

With the assumption that indexicals and demonstratives are singular referential terms and definite descriptions aren't, (13) relates Lucy to a singular content:

13) Lucy believes that *he* (*pointing to Clinton*) is from Arkansas

but (14) doesn't:

14) Lucy believes that the 42nd President is from Arkansas

However (14) is ambiguous. If the descriptive material is taken to fall within the scope of the belief operator, (14) relates Lucy to a general content; if outside, it relates Lucy to the singular content expressed by the open sentence, '*x* is from Arkansas', with *x* assigned as the individual satisfying 'the 42nd president' at the actual world.

The second reading is represented with:

[20] This is a bit misleading: really, wide scope reports have a singular term in their complement clause.

15) (∃x) [the unique 42nd President (x) & Lucy believes: (from Arkansas, x)]

Read as (15), (14) instantiates the other form a singular-ascription can take.

Philosophers often use 'believes of' (and related locutions)[21] as a stipulative tool marking that a report should be given 'wide-scope' reading.[22] However, features of context can also indicate this.

Imagine Jim, Sally and Daisy are members of an Arkansas blue-grass band called The Little Rock Fiddlers. Lucy knows them from her local bar, but doesn't know they are members of the band. But, you and *I* know this, and you wish to report to me that Lucy believes Jim is from Arkansas, Sally is from Arkansas, and Daisy is from Arkansas. You could use (16) to do so:

16) Lucy believes all the Little Rock Fiddlers are from Arkansas

Given Lucy doesn't know Jim, Sally and Daisy are band members (and we know she doesn't know) (16) cannot be interpreted as truly relating Lucy to the universal generalization that the band members are from Arkansas. Rather, its felicity and truth are accounted for by the reading on which its content is:

17) (∀x) [band member (x) → Lucy believes: (from Arkansas (x)]

[21] As in, 'NN believes of the F that it is G'.
[22] Given these locutions are uncommon in natural language [Hawthorne & Manley 2012): 53-6] and their philosophical use comes close to *stipulating* a thought is singular, relying on intuitions about them is a suspicious strategy.

Here, features of context disallow narrow-scope interpretation, and license the report's interpretation as a singular-ascription.[23]

2 A Problem for the Traditional Picture

The traditional picture faces a problem. *Whatever* our conception of EC, there are true singular-ascriptions violating it. This puts pressure on traditionalists to loosen their epistemology of singular thought. Although the traditional picture may be viewed as an idealization, with several theorists departing from it in different respects, this is not merely a *theoretical* problem. This pressure has exerted a real influence on the literature, contributing to a historical trajectory towards more permissive conceptions of EC.

2.1 A Complication, and the Traditionalist's Response

Let's begin with a traditional version of EC: for singular thought, direct perceptual contact is required.[24] This is easily challenged. Let's say Lucy has never been face-to-face with President Obama. Nonetheless (18) is true:

18) Lucy believes Obama is from Hawaii

If EC says singular thought requires direct perception, (18) should be false.

[23] This interpretive strategy relies on a principle of charity in interpretation.
[24] I don't need to precisify this because my point is that whichever notion of acquaintance we start with, the behaviour of singular-ascriptions puts pressure on it, so the components of the traditional picture are in tension.

However, the traditionalist can accommodate (18) and keep her picture intact. If (18) is true, then Lucy *must* satisfy EC—we just need to conceive EC more permissively. Lucy has seen Obama on television and in the newspaper. If an epistemic relation involving direct or *indirect* perception enables singular thought, this licenses (18), and keeps the traditional picture intact.

2.2 Maintaining the Traditional Picture

I propose to see where the reasoning from section 2.1 leads. In each case considered, pressure on the traditional picture is created and the option arises to hold it intact by loosening EC.

Names:

Imagine Lucy has heard about a man named 'Gilbert'. She has heard he's an outgoing character who throws lavish parties. As such, (19) could be true:

19) Lucy believes that Gilbert is a delightful host

Furthermore, the friend who told Lucy about Gilbert could truly report to *him*:

20) I've told Lucy about you and she believes that you are a delightful host.

Since Lucy lacks even indirect perception of Gilbert, we need to readjust EC.

The resources for adjustment are found in Kripke [1980], who argues the reference of a name is not determined by the speaker's knowledge of the object to which she refers, but by

the causal history of the name's uses.[25] This story might account for the truth of (19) and (20): possession of a name enables grasp of a singular content involving its referent. Thus, direct or indirect perceptual contact, or possessing a name for an object are cases of acquaintance with it. The traditional picture remains intact.

Causal, representational chains:

The loosening of EC doesn't end here. Imagine you have recounted stories of Gilbert to Lucy, but never using his *name*. She has collected much information about Gilbert, but never heard his name. Do we have the intuition that (19) and (20) are therefore false? No. We should therefore adjust EC again.

We could do so as follows. On Kripke's view, one can refer to an individual by tokening its name *because* one's tokening is part of a causal chain of referential acts leading back to the name's referent. In our current case, Gilbert isn't mentioned by name, but there is a causal chain of representational acts (involving the right kinds of intentions) leading back to him.[26] Perhaps *this* licenses the truth of (19) and (20). Thus, a still more permissive version of EC emerges.

Causal, informational connections:

There are cases that don't involve chains of representational acts, but license singular ascriptions.

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[25] Kripke's [1980] 'semantic argument' is that one can make reference with a name even with no correct, identifying description of the referent available.

[26] This is Bach's [1987] view of how communication enables singular thought (but he isn't moved to it by the tracking-assumption). Devitt [1981] holds a similar view, and is moved by the tracking-assumption.

Imagine Gilbert is victim to a robbery. He notices footprints leading to his fire escape and surmises this is how the burglars entered. You happen to know Gabby is the perpetrator. When you hear about Gilbert's inference about the footprints, you truly report to Gabby:

21) Gilbert knows that you broke in through the fire escape.

It may be tempting to object that (21) cannot be true, for, if it was, Gabby ought to leave town immediately. But, consider the felicity of (22):

22) Gilbert knows you broke in through the back door. It's only a matter of time before he finds out it was you!

There is no feeling of tension between the claims here, and we would expect one if the first sentence entailed Gilbert knew who Gabby was.

So, how can the traditional picture accommodate (21)? By broadening our conception of the *kind* of causal connection that satisfies EC. Gilbert's encounter with Gabby's footprints puts him in causal contact with her, but the connection doesn't involve *representational acts*. However the footprints are a source of *information*, so perhaps an *informational* causal connection satisfies EC.[27]

(21) is a singular-ascription with a singular term in its content-clause, but the same point applies to reports featuring quantification into belief contexts. Imagine there were three burglars involved in the robbery: Gabby, Gregor and Giovanna. The burglars are known to

[27] Sawyer [2012] defends a similar view, calling it a 'trace-based' conception of acquaintance.

each other only by nationality: Gabby is the American, Gregor the Russian, Giovanna the Italian. Gregor entered the penthouse through the back door. Gabby kept watch out front. Giovanna waited in the getaway car. Gilbert has ascertained that there were two perpetrators at his apartment and is concerned to keep track of how the crime was orchestrated via footprints. He's doing a good job of keeping track of Gabby and Gregor's movements with respect to each other. He infers one of them entered through the back door while the other watched out front. Later, the burglars are discussing the robbery. Giovanna, in reporting their failure to cover up their movements, truly reports to Gabby:

23) Gilbert is on to us. He knows that the Russian came in through the back door.

or:

24) Gilbert knows you kept watch while the Russian got the diamonds

It's clear from the context that Gilbert has no beliefs about the nationalities of the burglars, so (23) and (24) are interpreted as singular-ascriptions. The need to adjust EC is confirmed.

Names without a causal connection:

Our adjustments so far have loosened EC, but have all involved causal relations. However, this can be challenged.

A wealthy, irresponsible acquaintance of ours isn't present for his child's birth. Egomaniac that he is, he insists on naming the child in absentia ('The child will be called 'John'!'). Lucy is told about this and forms a belief, which could be truly report with (25):

25) Lucy believes that John will one day inherit a great deal of money

To maintain the traditional picture, we can look for an explanation of the truth of (25) appealing to Lucy's possession of a name for John,[28] but one that doesn't give a causal account of the significance of this.[29] Perhaps possession of a name without a causal connection suffices to satisfy EC.

A final case:

Consider a case where there is no causal connection to the object of thought, and also no name.

Our wealthy, peculiar friend, Gerard, is childless. He has conceived a desire to appoint an heir but wants to leave his money to a stranger. So, you, Gerard and I hatch a plan. Gerard will leave his money to either the first male or female child born tomorrow at St Mary's Hospital. A coin-flip will decide. You and I will go to the hospital tomorrow and toss a coin. If our coin-flip comes up heads, the male child will be Gerard's heir; if tails, it will be the female child. Gerard, being peculiar, has convinced himself the flip will come up heads. The next day, you and I find the first-born male and female babies. It turns out the boy's

[28] Some have claimed descriptive names have different meaning to names introduced by baptism [Donnellan 1977]. But many reject this. Jeshion [2009, 2012] holds singular thought is possible in these cases. She does impose substantive constraints on name-introduction but I stipulate that Jeshion's conditions are satisfied in our case. For good measure, let's also stipulate that 'John' goes on to be used by some group of speakers in referential communication.

[29] Our acquaintance is John's father, and this is a causal connection, but the use of the *name* 'John' doesn't provide a causal connection with John: the chain of its uses is causally disconnected from John.

mother is French. As we're preparing for the coin-toss, you comment to me on Gerard's peculiar belief:

26) Even though nobody could know how this will turn out, Gerard believes the French woman's baby will end up inheriting the money.

Given Gerard doesn't know the male baby's mother is French, (26) must be interpreted as an exported report.

Here, there's no causal connection between Gerard and the baby and no name used. But what constraint could the traditionalist posit to accommodate this? (26) forecloses any account of EC in terms of causation, the possession of referring terms, or both. More worryingly, though, if some account of EC is offered to accommodate this case, it's difficult to see how it would not be vacuous—to see why it wouldn't *always* be possible for an agent identifying an object by description to satisfy EC. Consequently, singular thoughts are always possible and there is no epistemic distinction between thinkers satisfying EC and those who don't. But this amounts to *denying* EC.

3 Consequences: An Unstable Picture

This dialectic suggests EC is not just loose: rather, it suggests that wherever an object is identified descriptively, it's possible to entertain a singular thought about it. This shows the traditional picture's assumptions entail its own collapse. This might seem to entail we should endorse *liberalism*. However, liberalism is also unstable.

3.1 Collapse of Traditionalism

The traditional picture involves the tracking-assumption and EC. EC holds singular thought requires some distinctive epistemic-cum-cognitive relation to its object. For this claim to be meaningful, the relation must be *different* from the relation involved in thinking a descriptive thought. But our examples suggest the relations licensing singular-ascriptions are no different to those licensing general ascriptions. So, assuming the tracking-assumption, the traditionalist is forced to relinquish EC.

Is this too quick? Perhaps the traditionalist need not give up EC—she can just diversify it, endorsing a loose, *disjunctive* account. But this response fails. Firstly, our final case shows more than diversity among cases satisfying EC: it shows that descriptive identification suffices for satisfying EC. But, even setting this aside, a highly disjunctive account of EC would pose problems for traditionalism. Imagine the traditionalist claiming that, although her account of EC is disjunctive, cases satisfying it are unified in *being mental-states with singular content*. But this is at odds with her original commitments. Traditionalism begins with a commitment that singular thought is not just a *semantic* category, but also an *epistemic/cognitive* category. To adopt a highly disjunctive account of EC is to give this up. The problem is that the cases claimed to be singular do not have an independent *epistemic/cognitive* principle unifying them. A simple analogy illustrates. Say I claim to have discovered a new chemical element, which can be identified by physical appearance. If it becomes apparent that substances with diverse chemical makeup share this appearance but I insist my claim of a chemical discovery is not impugned, I would be amiss. If we accept the conception of EC required by the tracking-assumption, it's unclear what sense there is to the claim that singular thought is an epistemic/cognitive kind.

3.2 Instability of Liberalism

A possible conclusion is that EC should be abandoned—*liberalism* is correct. The liberal claims that singular thought is not an epistemic/cognitive kind, but merely a semantic kind. Singular thoughts are attitudes to singular contents, with no unified nature beyond that.

The worry is that, without an epistemic or cognitive distinction between singular and general thought, there is no robust distinction remaining between different ways a thought could pick out an object. But the liberal does not deny there *is* a distinction between singular and general thought—she merely denies EC. The liberal posits a theoretical distinction without a difference.

The liberal claims there is no way to distinguish the epistemic-cum-cognitive demands of singular from descriptive thought. From the perspective of our initial singular/descriptive thought distinction, this looks puzzling. Our initial distinction was between thoughts that are about an object because the object satisfies a descriptive condition and thoughts that pick out an object in some other way. The belief that makes (26) true is about *whomever* happens to be the first male child born at St. Mary's on a particular day. Thus, in what sense can we meaningfully say it *doesn't* pick out its object because it satisfies a descriptive condition? Without an epistemic/cognitive distinction between singular and general thought, there remains no meaningful distinction between a thought that picks out its object descriptively and non-descriptively.

The liberal might respond resolutely, insisting the distinction between attitudes whose *contents* are singular vs. descriptive remains intact—just divorced from epistemic/cognitive baggage. The central notion here is *semantic*: some mental-states have singular contents, others don't.[30] But, this only reveals what's most troubling about the liberal's position. She

[30] This is Hawthorne & Manley's claim, if I understand them.

fails to recognize that there could not *be* a semantic distinction between singular and general *thought* without an accompanying epistemic/cognitive distinction of *some* kind.

The singular/general *thought* distinction has its home in a theory of mind.[31] We assign contents to mental-states as part of a larger project of mapping those states according to the representational properties in virtue of which they are states of believing, wondering, etc., about the world. Given this, there could not be a semantic distinction *at the level of thought* not underpinned by a distinction between representational mechanisms involved in the relevant states. The distinction of content is *used to map* these differences, so couldn't apply without them. For it to make sense to claim the content of a mental-state is singular, the thinker must stand in a relation to the object of thought such that different representational, conceptual mechanisms are employed than when an object is thought of descriptively. This difference *justifies* using the singular/general distinction in a theory of mind. Without it, we ought to give up the distinction.[32]

Let me reiterate. To claim an attitude has a certain content is to claim it is an attitude of a certain mental *kind*. To justify the distinction between, say, Gerard thinking a singular versus a general thought about the first male child born at St. Mary's, there must be some difference *independent of the semantic distinction itself* between how Gerard is placed *vis-a-vis* the object in the two cases. The liberal claims there is no difference. But then the insistence that there is a difference of content is arbitrary.

3.3 The tracking-assumption

[31] This is not to say that the singular/general *content* distinction has its home in the theory of mind: it is employed in various contexts (language, perception, etc.)—I'm not claiming any one is its 'proper' home.

[32] Liberals are not willing to do this. Hawthorne and Manley [2012: 25] claim that singular thought is a 'psychological natural kind'.

The traditional picture is unstable: it maintains EC but can't give a satisfying account of it. Liberalism replaces this instability with another: liberals hold there *is* a distinction between mental-states with singular and general content, but this is a distinction without a difference.

A possible reaction is to *give up* the singular/general thought distinction, concluding the behavior of attitude-ascriptions proves it illegitimate.[33] However, if we think this distinction is theoretically useful and has a legitimate role in our philosophy of mind, we should look for another aspect of traditionalism to reject.[34] The debate between traditionalists and liberals focuses on EC, but this might be the wrong place to focus. To yield a theoretically stable position, the tracking-assumption turns out to be a good candidate for where to focus suspicion.

We have seen that the tracking-assumption is indeed an *assumption*. Given a relational conception of attitude-ascriptions, the truth of singular-ascriptions entails the attributee is related to a singular content, but does *not* entail she is related to that content by the relation of *entertaining* (the relation borne to a content when it is appropriately assigned to specify the conceptual/representational mechanisms involved in one's mental-state). In the next section, I argue there is independent evidence *against* the claim that the truth of '*s* believes that P' entails that *s* has a belief which is an *entertaining* of the content *P*.

Let me pause, though, to address a possible response to the foregoing challenge.[35] It may be tempting to think a view on which singular-ascriptions are 'transparent'—in that they permit substitution of co-referential terms and don't specify the *way* an agent thinks of the

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[33] This is *not* the position taken by the *liberal*. This is the source of instability in her position.
[34] The question of why the singular/descriptive thought distinction *is* legitimate is important and insufficiently addressed. I leave defense of this claim for another time but, here, I note my commitment to the view that the singular/descriptive thought distinction is worth preserving, alongside sympathy with some aspects of, e.g., Jeshion's [2014] critique of common presentations of it.
[35] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to address this response.

object of thought—avoids the challenge here.[36] If an attitude-ascription, 's believes that *a* is F', merely states that *s* has a belief that *a* is F, but not *how s* thinks of *a*, then how does its truth entail that *s* thinks a singular thought with respect to *a*? However, a conception of wide-scope reports on which they withhold information about *modes of presentation* still presupposes they relate agents to singular contents. On this view, the transparent reading of the ascriptions, 's believes that the G is F' or 's believes that a is F', relate an agent to the truth-conditional content expressed by the open sentence, 'x is F', with the variable assigned a value by an expression evaluated outside the scope of the belief operator. This is a singular truth-conditional content.[37] Unless the tracking-assumption is rejected, even granting nothing *beyond* this truth-conditional content is specified, this means true *de re* reports require the existence of singular thoughts—they just don't specify *which* singular thoughts (that is, which *notion* or *mode of presentation* is in use).[38]

To avoid the challenge presented here, we need a view on which the truth-conditions of attitude-ascriptions underdetermine *even the truth-conditional content of the mental-states they ascribe.*[39]

This point illustrates why there is value in explicitly identifying the tracking-assumption in the terms I have here and denying it: doing so highlights conflations between issues concerning the transparency/opacity of belief-reports and those concerning the relationship

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[36] For example, Kaplan's [1969] view, on which singular-ascriptions quantify over modes of presentation without specifying them.

[37] Kaplan conceives of his own suggestion this way. He thinks the truth of these ascriptions requires the attributees to have a 'vivid name' even though *which one she has* is unstated.

[38] Transparent reports do not specify which *fine-grained* way an attitude picks out its object, but they do have truth-conditions according to which the content of the attitude ascribed is singular.

[39] There is precedent for denying the tracking-assumption in Bach [1987, 1997]. But, since Bach focuses on problems arising from failures of substitution, the issue discussed in the last two paragraphs may be obscured.

between the truth-conditional content of attitude-ascriptions and the truth-conditional content of the mental-states they ascribe. This further motivates the current project.

4 Against the Tracking-assumption

This section has two aims. First, I present evidence that the tracking-assumption is false by arguing that '*s* believes that P' does not entail that *s entertains P*. There are many kinds of relation one could bear to a content. For example, here is a relation to the singular content expressed by '*a* is *F*': *entertaining* a general content whose truth at the actual world depends on whether '*a* is *F*' is true. Whether standing in this relation suffices for the truth of the singular-ascription, '*s* believes that *a* is *F*' depends on the relation expressed by the verb 'believes'. I argue that 'believes' is context-sensitive, stating different relations in different contexts. In many contexts, the relation expressed by 'believes' is looser than the tracking-assumption presupposes: it does not require an agent to *entertain* the content to which it relates her.

In denying the tracking-assumption, we should not leave the behavior of ordinary attitude-ascriptions unexplained. The second aim is to illustrate what factors *do* govern the truth of ordinary ascriptions. I claim ordinary ascriptions are governed by the speaker's beliefs about the objects of the thoughts she is attributing, and her beliefs about her audience's way of thinking about that object.

4.1 Against the tracking-assumption: Kaplan's Pseudo *de re*

Kaplan [1989] points to a phenomenon he calls the *pseudo de re*. Imagine Jack has recommended a shady mechanic. You have discovered the mechanic uses stolen parts and charges for work not done. But Jack is convinced the mechanic is honest. You can truly report to me:

27) Jack thinks the lying SOB who fixed my car is honest

There are two ways (27) could be interpreted, depending on whether 'the lying SOB who fixed my car' is taken to fall within the scope of the attitude verb. (27) could relate Jack to a general content or a singular content. But, the *kind* of considerations telling in favour of one reading over the other are problematic for the tracking-assumption.

If we interpret the descriptive material in the scope of the attitude verb, we misrepresent Jack's belief: he doesn't think the mechanic is a lying SOB. This forces an exported reading, relating Jack to a singular content.

Why does this speak against the tracking-assumption? The narrow-scope reading can't be right because it isn't faithful to Jack's belief. The speaker has picked out the mechanic via a description *she* believes he satisfies, not one Jack does. What *forces* the exported reading is that (27)'s way of picking out the mechanic tracks the *speaker's* way of thinking about the mechanic, not Jack's. We adopt an exported reading precisely because the ascription is *not* tracking *Jack's* way of thinking. Intuitively, the informational content of (27) is that Jack thinks the mechanic, who *the speaker believes to be a lying SOB*, is honest. Since the point-of-view captured by (27) is the *speaker's*, it would be odd to maintain the ascription commits to

Jack's thought being singular.[40] So we shouldn't think the ascription designates a relation that entails *entertaining*.[41]

To reinforce this, imagine a case where Jack's beliefs are held fixed, but the speaker's are varied. Imagine you *don't* know about the mechanic's dishonesty. Another friend is looking for a mechanic, so you pass on Jack's recommendation. You report *the same belief of Jack's* using (28):

28) Jack thinks the mechanic with the shop at 57th and Ellis is honest

The only thing varied here is *your* belief about the mechanic's honesty.

If the tracking-assumption is true, although (27) and (28) report the *same belief*, (28) entails this belief is singular, whereas (28) does not.[42] The only variation between the cases is the *speaker's* beliefs about the object of Jack's belief. (27) conveys the *speaker's* negative opinion of the mechanic (without implying Jack shares it). (28) doesn't. This makes the truth of (27) a bad reason to think Jack has a singular thought about the mechanic.

There are two relevant points here. First, rather than think (27) entails that Jack has a singular thought, it's more reasonable to think (27) *underdetermines the truth-conditional content entertained by Jack*. This does not entail giving up the view that attitude-ascriptions state

[40] Taylor [2002] says similar things, claiming *de dicto* ascriptions don't specify 'notionally rich contents' of beliefs. On his view, the device for specifying the *attributee's* point of view is the 'fulsome de re': e.g., 'Jones believes of Venus, which he thinks is identical with Mars, that …'. Since he merely claims ordinary reports withhold *notionally rich contents*, it's not clear where his position falls with respect to whether singular ascriptions require singular thoughts for their truth.

[41] Note, I treat this kind of case differently to Kaplan [1989: 155-6 n.71] himself. Unlike him, I *do* think these cases expose 'issues of sufficient theoretical interest' to pursue: I think they motivate a form of contextualism about attitude reports, which rejects the tracking assumption.

[42] Imagine Jack is aware the mechanic's shop is located at the corner of 57th and Ellis.

relations. (27) relates Jack to a singular content, but the relation stated does not require that Jack *entertains* the content expressed by the complement clause. Second, this view does not leave the behavior of attitude-ascriptions mysterious. Rather, (27) illustrates that *one* factor governing the behavior of ordinary ascriptions is the *speaker's* beliefs about the object of the attitude ascribed.[43]

It should also be noted, though, that there is a *sense* in which this discussion is misleading. In fact, if the tracking assumption is denied, the so-called 'wide-scope interpretation' of (27) is not forced, since the 'narrow-scope interpretation' could potentially be true even though Jack does not entertain the content stated by the complement clause. In this sense, the semantic underdetermination thesis I argue for supersedes the wide/narrow scope distinction *for certain cases*.[44]

4.2 Common knowledge, or knowledge of audience beliefs

Many cases exhibit similar features. In (27), the description by which an object is picked out reflects the speaker's beliefs. In many cases, however, the way an object is picked out reflects the speaker's beliefs about her *addressee's* beliefs, or common knowledge.

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[43] Compare Eaker's [2009: 219] claim that belief-ascriptions have diverse purposes: not all belief ascriptions aim at 'explanation and prediction of a subject's reasoning and behavior'.

[44] I hesitate to make this as a general claim because there may be *cases* where denying the tracking assumption doesn't deflate the wide/narrow scope distinction. Take the ascription, 'Jim believes every senator is at the meeting'. By moving to a wide-scope interpretation, on a traditional view, we lose the possibility of using this report to attribute Jim's belief in the claim that there are no senators who aren't at the meeting. Whether the narrow/wide scope distinction is superseded *for this case* by denying the tracking assumption depends on whether this informational content can always (in all contexts) be conveyed without using a belief-ascription that relates Jim to this very content. There may be contexts where attitude verbs express strict relations (requiring their attribute to *entertain* the content to which she is related) and these may be contexts where this is not possible. My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to address this question.

Imagine Gemma and Susan are at one of Gilbert's parties. There's a writer at the party whom Susan recognises. Their friend Jim read this writer's work and told Susan about the success he believes she will achieve. However, Susan has reason to believe Gemma wouldn't recognise the writer on sight. Picking out a salient feature of the writer's appearance to identify her to Gemma, Susan reports:

29) Jim believes that the woman in the red jacket will win the next Booker Prize.

(29) doesn't commit to Jim thinking of the writer as the wearer of a red jacket. Susan uses this description because it reflects her expectations about Gemma's way of identifying her. Like (27), (29) is only true when interpreted in exported form. Assuming the tracking-assumption, this reading entails Jack's belief is singular. However, this is arbitrary given that the factor governing the use of the description that forces this reading is Susan's belief about Gemma's beliefs.

Again, a case in which Jim's beliefs are held fixed reinforces the point. Imagine Gemma *has* heard of the writer: she knows her in the way Jim does (as the author of the novel reviewed in *The New Yorker*) and Susan knows this. Susan reports Jim's belief to Gemma with (30):

30) Jim thinks the author of the novel reviewed in *The New Yorker* will win the next Booker Prize

The fact that (30) is appropriate here but not in the previous case surely doesn't entail a difference in the truth-conditional content Jim *entertains*. This is clear, because (30) and (29) report the same belief.

This additional evidence against the tracking-assumption suggests that the truth-conditions of attitude-ascription are sometimes governed by the speaker's beliefs about her audience's way of thinking (or by common knowledge between speaker and audience).

4.3 An Analogy with indirect speech reports

Ordinary ascriptions, I argue, relate thinkers to contents, but by different relations in different contexts, some that underdetermine the content *entertained* by the attributee. Thus, a singular-ascription can be true, despite the fact that the attributee does not *entertain* the content to which she is truly related by that ascription.

This position gains support by considering other expressions relating agents to contents. Consider indirect speech reports. Just as the tracking-assumption is false, it's also false that indirect speech reports of the form, '*s* said that P' require for their truth that the utterance reported is of a sentence with the semantic content P.[45]

Cappelan & Lepore [1997] use the following examples to illustrate.[46] Imagine Francois utters (31):

31) Chartreuse is Maria's favorite color

[45] This point was first made by Ziff [1972]. An anonymous reviewer pointed this out.
[46] Cappelan & Lepore [1997] argue that indirect speech reports are context sensitive. Cappelan & Lepore [2005] argue for a more radical version of this.

In reporting this utterance to an audience I have reason to believe is unfamiliar with 'chartreuse', I could point to someone's chartreuse dress and truly utter (32):

32) Francois said that the color of that dress is Maria's favorite color

Similarly, imagine that Orel, as he demonstrates opening a door, utters (33):

33) I did *this*

This utterance could be truly reported with (34):

34) Orel said that he pushed the door open

Francois didn't utter the sentence 'the color of that dress is Maria's favorite color'. Orel didn't utter 'he pushed the door open' (or even '*I* pushed the door open'). Their utterances had semantic content different to the semantic contents of those sentences, but the relation expressed by 'said that'—an ordinary purposes *samesaying relation*—counts them as the same such that (32) and (34) are true.

Thus, the gap between the content an attributee is related to by a true attitude-ascription and the content she *entertains* is not the only one of its kind. There is a similar gap between the semantic contents of utterances and the contents to which agents are related by indirect speech reports reporting them.

Furthermore, imagine taking a 'tracking assumption' for indirect speech reports as a constraint on a semantic theory. If '*s* said that P' were true given *s*'s utterance of a sentence

S, we would be committed to assigning *S* with the semantic value, P. This would mean our semantics said that 'chartreuse' and 'the color of that dress' are synonymous, which clearly violates considerations dictating we distinguish the meanings of these expressions [Cappelan & Lepore 1997]. What I'm urging against is the presumption we can legitimately make this move when it comes to our theory of contentful mental-states and our everyday use of attitude ascriptions.

4.4 What Attitude-ascriptions Express

I've argued we should reject the tracking-assumption, for two reasons. It yields an unstable theory of singular thought, and the truth of ordinary attitude-ascriptions is governed, not just by the contents entertained in the mental-states they ascribe, but by factors like the speaker's beliefs, and her beliefs about her audience's beliefs.

This raises questions about the semantics of attitude-ascriptions. The tracking-assumption states that an attitude-ascription which states that *s* ***Φ***'s that *P* is true iff *s* has an attitude, of ***Φ***-ing, which is an *entertaining* of the content *P*. Denying this may seem to entail giving up the traditional Russellian view that attitude-ascriptions state relations between agents and contents. It does not. Instead, I propose we give up certain ideas about the relations (*believing, wondering, thinking* etc.) designated by attitude verbs. It is traditionally unreflectively assumed that *s* standing in the *belief* relation to the content *P* entails that *P* is the content we would specify if we were giving a precise account of the representational properties of *s*'s mental state. Our discussion illustrates this is false. Rather, *in some contexts* (more on this below) '*s* believes that *P*' is true, but *s* stands in a relation to *P* that does not entail *entertaining P*. In these contexts, 'believes' designates a more permissive relation.

I'll elaborate with an example from the paper, and thereby clarify the view:

18) Lucy believes Obama is from Hawaii

(18) states that Lucy believes Obama is from Hawaii. It does this by relating Lucy to the content expressed by '*Obama* is from Hawaii'. This much is entailed by the view, which I wish to preserve, that belief ascriptions state relations between agents and contents. But, what does it take for Lucy to be truly 'belief-related' to this singular content? This clearly depends on what relation is designated by 'believes'. This paper has focused on establishing that there are contexts in which Lucy having a belief-state that is an *entertaining* of the *general content* expressed by 'the president is from Hawaii' suffices for (18) to be true—for her to be truly related by 'believes' to the singular content expressed by '*Obama* is from Hawaii'. In such contexts, Lucy is truly related to a singular content without this entailing that her mental-state is singular. This is explained by two related factors. First, the singular/general thought distinction is a theoretical distinction between different ways a mental-state can be about a particular object, and our ordinary-purposes in making attributions are not always concerned to track it. Secondly, given features of a context, there may be a need to state Lucy's belief in a way that in fact tracks the particular way a speaker, her audience or both think about the object of Lucy's belief. Both these factors often introduce a gap between the content Lucy *entertains* (in my sense) and the content she is truly said to *believe*. In short, *believing* that P is not always *entertaining* that P.

This rules out, for some contexts, the necessary condition envisioned by the tracking assumption for Lucy believing that P. But, I allow the necessary conditions for believing that P are different in different contexts. None of what I have argued dictates there are no contexts in which an attitude ascription is *only* licensed if it relates its attribute to the content

she *entertains* in believing whatever she does. Although there is no space here to argue for this, it seems highly plausible that there are such contexts. For example, in theoretical contexts, our purposes in making attributions may be such that we are required to track contents *entertained* by attributees. In such contexts, it might only be possible to truly relate Lucy to a content if that content individuates the specific representational mechanisms involved in her belief-state. If it doesn't, the ascription will be false. For this reason, I claim that attitude verbs like 'believes', 'thinks', etc. state different relations in different contexts. They are context sensitive, expressing tighter or looser relations depending on context.

Others have rejected assumptions similar to the tracking assumption. Most notably, Kent Bach's [1987, 1997, 2010] insightful work on attitude-ascriptions argues that 'that-clauses' do not fully specify the contents of attitudes ascribed. Bach [2010: 51-2] denies *the specification assumption*: that "A believes that p' is true only if the proposition p is among the things A believes'. He claims that 'belief reports do not relate believers to things believed'. I prefer not to talk this way. My view is that the following can never be true: "*s* believes that P' is true (and states a relation) but *s* does not believe the proposition, P', because it violates an entailment. Allowing this, the question is what believing that P *comes to*, or what *the relation designated by 'believes' is like*. Thus, my claim is that we should give up the assumptions encoded by the tracking assumption about the relations stated by 'believes', 'thinks', and other attitude verbs.[47]

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[47] Given this difference, Bach and I will have to go different ways in our analysis of, e.g., Paderewski cases, and so the difference is not merely terminological. But this is an issue to be discussed another time.

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