Descartes on Language: How Signification Leads to Direct Reference[1]

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1. Introduction

Many would find it trivially true to say that the *nature of ideas*, as Descartes conceives it, determines the kind of theory of intentionality he is committed to. However, to claim that the same is true of Descartes' *theory of reference* would almost surely not elicit such immediate concurrence.[2] Yet upon closer examination, both statements turn out to be just as trivially true. A reconstruction of Descartes' theory of intentionality answers the question of how ideas come to be about things so as to exhibit extra-mental things to the thinker—a topic of continued scholarly debate. Similarly, as far as his philosophical system goes, a reconstruction of Descartes' theory of reference explains how certain linguistic expressions, like names, connect to objects relevant for the truth-value of the sentences in which those expressions are used. In fact, Descartes' theory of intentionality—his view on the objective re-

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[2] "Theory of reference" is used here in the sense discussed, for example, in Raatikainen 2020, i.e., as a theory about language and (some important aspects of) linguistic representation. *Theory of intentionality*, on the other hand, is a view about the nature of the mind and mental representation. Therefore, and for the sake of clarity, in this paper "refer" is used only with regard to linguistic expressions, so that ideas or mental states don't refer but merely *have objects* (i.e., are *about*, or *of*, or *represent*, objects).

ality of ideas[3]—*is* what defines his views concerning linguistic reference.

In this paper, I will argue that Descartes is committed to a theory of *direct reference*.[4] According to this view, what a *singular term* brings to the "semantic value" of a sentence in which it is used is simply the object referred to.[5] *Reference*, in this sense, pertains to the relation between a linguistic item and the object that is relevant for determining the truth-value

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[3] See CSM2 7, AT7 8; CSM2 29, AT7 41–42; CSM2 75, AT7 102. The abbreviation "CSM" refers to English translation of Descartes' works by Cottingham, Stootoff, and Murdoch (Descartes 1985; Descartes 1984) and is followed by the volume and page numbers, respectively. The third volume (Descartes 1991) includes Kenny as translator, and is abbreviated "CSMK" followed by page numbers. All English quotations are from CSM. Abbreviation "AT" refers to Adam and Tannery's edition of Descartes' works (Descartes 1904) and is followed by the volume and page numbers, respectively. For historical overviews of the doctrine of objective reality, see Read 1977; Nuchelmans 1983, chaps. 1–2; Normore 1986; Tachau 1988; and Ayers 1998. For a helpful comparison of objective reality in certain scholastics, as well as in Descartes, see Brown (2007, 139–43). In that volume, see also Clemenson 2007, King 2007, and Tweedale 2007.

[4] For exposition of varieties of direct reference, see Almog (2014, chap. 2). In general, the term "direct reference" is intended to be synonymous with "non-denotational reference," i.e., reference as a relation between a linguistic expression and an object unmediated by "modes of presentation." However, beyond this negative definition things are complicated (for instance, Recanati 1993, xii, points out that the negative thesis does not mean that no "modes of presentation" are involved, only that they cannot be what determine reference.)

For different takes on direct reference, see Soames 1987, 50, and Kaplan 1989, 493. Kaplan makes use of Russellian propositions (it is this view which is mostly discussed below in relation to his views), most visible in his work on *de re* belief; see Kaplan 2013; see also 1989, 493–97; 2012. The nature of *de re* belief (see, e.g., Eaker 2004; Stalnaker 2009; Burge 2012; Kaplan 2013) is very important for the discussion in this paper, but I will not employ the terminology of *de re—de dicto*.

[5] Names, indexicals, and variables are paradigmatic directly referential terms. In this paper, I will mostly ignore variables. *Singular terms* refer to, denote, or designate particular things, while *general terms* apply to many things. At the end of the paper, I briefly discuss what direct reference amounts to.

of a sentence in which that linguistic item is used.[6] My discussion proceeds by dissecting the more fundamental relations that, according to Descartes, ground this semantic relation. My claim that Descartes is a direct referentialist might seem odd at first sight, for Descartes is also committed to the *theory of signification*. According to this age-old, and often disparaged, view, words receive their meaning by signifying *ideas* in the mind of the speaker. Critics from Mill onwards have understood any such mentalistic theory as either amounting to an assertion that ideas, instead of worldly objects, are the referents of names of objects, or viewed the view as leading to hopeless subjectivism in other ways.[7] However, a theory of signification is not a theory of reference, but rather amounts to the claim that "intentionality takes place at the level of ideas, not words."[8] Also, the threat of subjectivism clearly depends on how the nature of ideas is conceived by the accompanying account of thought. Importantly for my purposes, though a theory of signification is not a theory of reference, it will indeed produce one when combined with a theory of ideas. Interestingly, both the emerging theory of reference as well as the nature of signification relation will vary from philosopher to philosopher, possibly even drastically, depending on how they view the relation between thought and its objects.

My argument for viewing Descartes as a direct referentialist is as follows: For Descartes, ideas gain their in-

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[6] It is important to note that Descartes occasionally uses "to refer" (*referrer*) with regards to ideas, in a sense very close to our contemporary one, in relation to what he calls *material falsity of ideas*: "For it often happens in the case of obscure and confused ideas—and the ideas of heat and cold fall into this category— that an idea is referred to something other than that of which it is in fact the idea" (CSM2 163; AT7 233). It is not immediately clear whether cases in which an idea is successfully "connected to" an object also count as cases of "referring," for the evidence is insufficient to properly assess Descartes' views about referring in the sense he uses it. Almog argues that Descartes' use of *referrer* signifies a mode of "going back" to the thing that has already penetrated into the mind (in private communication; see also Almog 2014, 23). His view is at least compatible with the one I present in this paper.

[7] Mill 2011, 15; Frege 1956; and Wittgenstein 2009, §§244–271.

[8] Ott 2008, 294.

tentionality from the *objective reality* contained in the ideas—objective reality being another mode of existence for the extra-mental objects themselves.[9] The conjunction of Descartes' theories of ideas and signification thus results in a view much like that once held by Bertrand Russell, a view according to which singular propositions are complexes that can contain worldly objects, like Mont Blanc, as their constituent parts.[10] Combined with signification, Descartes' view entails direct reference (unlike the Russellian conception of propositions, which only supports direct reference).

However, Descartes' view avoids certain problems that haunt Russellian direct reference, and can explain, for example, how co-referential names can have different "cognitive values" despite there being only one object involved. This is indeed possible, for as Margaret Wilson (1978, 90) has observed, there is a difference between the objective reality of an idea and its *representational character*.[11] While the objective reality is just the worldly object that is the content of the idea, its representational character functions like a Fregean "sense" in that it is a *mode of presentation* of its object. However, contrary to (some standard readings of)[12] Frege, this representa-

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[9] See footnote 3 above.

[10] Russell held this view only briefly, prior to 1905. He expressed commitment to the view in his *Principles of Mathematics* (1903) and in a letter to Frege written in 1904, but by the time he wrote "On Denoting" (1905) he had already rejected the view. Kaplan (2012) elaborates on the neo-Russellian framework of singular propositions. For more on the nature of Russellian propositions, see also Wettstein 1986, 1990; and Almog 2012.

[11] This difference amounts to a distinction between the "level of objective content" and the "level of representation," which Kaplan (2012, 140) views as the touchstone of a direct referentialist theory. Almog (see esp. 2005) rejects this and argues that the postulation of any kind of "content" to explain this distinction is incompatible with direct reference. Bianchi (2007), in turn, argues that representations can be treated as "vehicles" as opposed to objective contents, thus creating a centrist position. The view I attribute to Descartes in this paper resembles that of Bianchi's.

[12] Dummett 1973, and famously also Kripke 1980, view Fregean senses (*Sinne*) as that which determines the reference of names. For a contrasting view, see Korte 2022. When referring to Frege's views in this paper, I mean only the received Dummett-Kripke reading of those views, at the peril of ignoring views that reflect more accurately those of Frege's actual views.

tional character does nothing to determine the object of the idea, for an idea's having a representational character already presupposes it objectively containing a thing.[13] Consequently, when the idea is signified, this mode of presentation does nothing to determine the referents of one's words.[14]

Because of its slightly programmatic nature, my paper probably should be supplied with more caveats than I can sensibly add here. Defending my reading of Descartes as a historically accurate interpretation requires a separate paper, or even several papers. In this paper I am content to point how my discussion here relates to some issues of general scholarly interest, such as *true and immutable natures* and *clear and distinct perception*, but I will not be able to elaborate on the matter due to space limitations. Similarly, my examination how the theory of reference I develop for Descartes properly relates to discussions in contemporary philosophy of language marks only a beginning.[15] For example, I will only begin to sketch how the puzzles about *empty names* or *informative identities* can be successfully solved in the view I propound. In the footnotes, I will present some additional connections between my discussion and these other debates. Before examining objective reality and representational char-

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[13] The Fregean view of reference determination has been criticized extensively by Almog (see, e.g., 1985; 2005; 2008b; 2012; 2014). For a critique of Almog's criticism, see Bianchi 2007. Many, including Almog, see any kind of commitment to representations as squarely incompatible with the idea of direct reference (see also Capuano 2015). Thus, though Almog (2008a) has argued for a view about Descartes' ideas similar to that which I defend, he certainly would not be comfortable with my relaxed use of the notion of "representational character." However, as Kaplan (e.g., 2013, 29) has pointed out, the same problems that talk of representations plausibly raise would be raised by any other mediators, including Kripkean causal chains. Therefore, whether they are representations or not, the direct referentialist must accept the fact that reference nevertheless requires some kind of "vehicle." For discussion of such "vehicles," see Bianchi 2007.

[14] Thus, Descartes' view offers an alternative way to understand Kaplan's famous thesis "No mentation without representation!" (Kaplan 2012, 153; see also Almog 2005; Eaker 2004).

[15] I have, however, elaborated my view concerning the role of causation in grounding referential relation of names already in my earlier work (see Sinokki 2022).

acter of ideas, in sections 3 and 4 respectively, I will proceed by discussing Descartes' general views about language and thought, and the nature of signification, in the section 2 below.

2. Language and thought

Descartes writes directly about language very little. He never engages in anything resembling a theory of language or philosophical semantics. In fact, Descartes is surprisingly quiet about language when compared to some of his scholastic predecessors, his Cartesian followers at Port Royal, his commentator and critic Thomas Hobbes, or the paradigmatic signification theorist, John Locke.[16] Most of what Descartes says about language is in the context of skepticism about animal thought and is not, at first glance, very useful in understanding Descartes' general views about language. Nevertheless, it is a useful place for me to start my examination. It will quickly become evident that Descartes' views about linguistic meaning depend on his views about the nature of thought.

Descartes believes that non-human animals cannot think.[17] For Descartes, this is evinced beyond any doubt by the fact that even the most sophisticated animals can only mimic sounds at best, but cannot engage in genuinely meaningful speech or the meaningful use of signs.[18] In a letter to Marquess of Newcastle on 23 November 1646, Descartes famously argues that "the reason why animals do not speak as we do is not that they lack the organs but that they have no

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[16] See Ott 2003, chap. 1. I rely heavily on Ott's discussion on signification. For my views on Locke's philosophy of language, see Sinokki 2011 (in Finnish).

[17] Notoriously, according to Descartes this entails that non-human animals also lack moral worth, though some commentators argue against this (esp. Cottingham 1978). See also Harrison 1992.

[18] Descartes also thought that meaningful conversation was the surest sign of the presence of intelligence, of a mind, be it in an animal or machine. His view is thus not too distinct from that of Turing's famous proposal (see Turing 1950; see González 2020; see also Cottingham 1997). However, questions about *detecting* a mind should not be confused with question about *having* (or being) a mind.

thoughts."[19] The connection between *genuine* language-use and thought is very important. As Descartes makes clear in the letter, non-human animals readily use various signs just as skillfully as humans to signify passions like hunger, fear, and joy. The point is that animals cannot speak due to their inability to attach the right kind of *semantic content* to their signs, and this is essential for genuine language use: "there has never been known an animal so perfect as to use a sign to make other animals understand something which bore no relation to its passions."[20] As genuine language-use is impossible for animals despite their ability to signify their passions with sounds, it is evident that the latter is not sufficient for the former.

Some commentators emphasize how features of human speech, like its unlimited productivity, ground Descartes' conclusion that language-use requires the presence of an immaterial mind.[21] This is true enough, for Descartes considers genuine language-use to be productive and "the only certain sign of thought hidden in a body."[22] However, it is important to underline that this is *not* because Descartes thinks that language is the only empirically observable manifestation of the otherwise hidden private and subjective realm of thought (as some later philosophers would have it). Almost the opposite is true in fact. Features of speech can act as guides to thinking precisely because Descartes thinks human language-use owes *all* its semantical features to thought. The nature of human language is also, in an important sense, *public*—but so is the nature of thought as well (this publicity of language and thought is a recurring topic in this paper).[23]

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[19] CSMK 302–304; AT4 569–576.

[20] CSMK 303; AT4 575. Contrary to a common misconception, Descartes never denied that animals are capable of sensibility or communication: "all animals easily communicate to us, by voice or bodily movement, their natural impulses of anger, fear, hunger, and so on" (CSMK 366, AT5 278; see also Cottingham 1978; Harrison 1992).

[21] E.g., Cottingham 1997; Chomsky 1991.

[22] CSMK 366; AT5 278.

[23] This, of course, is in line with Descartes' widely documented general tendency towards reductivism and naturalism about meaning; see, e.g., Nolan 1997b; Alanen 2008.

Descartes seems committed to a view about the nature of language and the way words gain their semantic properties known as *theory of signification*: "whenever I express something in words, and understand what I am saying, this very fact makes it certain that I have an idea of what is signified by the words in question."[24] However, he never develops specific views about signification. Without a doubt he was very familiar with the theory, as it was regularly discussed in scholastic logic books.[25] In general, the view that words signify ideas or concepts originates from Aristotle, and that view was widely discussed by the late thirteenth century. (For Aristotelians, spoken words were signs of "concepts" in the mind.[26]) As other signification theorists, Descartes is not systematic about his use of the term "signification"; sometimes it is also the things represented by ideas that are signified instead of ideas.

In a theory of signification, the main (or maybe only) semantic relation words have is the *signification relation*. Words are considered as *signs* of ideas or conceptions in the minds of speakers, and occasionally also as signs of the public ordinary objects they are usually used to name or talk about.[27] As the nature of such signification is anything but clear, the theory has received much criticism. For example, J. S. Mill thought the theory amounts to holding that words *name* or refer to ideas (as opposed to ordinary things), which leads to some absurdities. In correcting what he perceived as mistakes of Thomas Hobbes, Mill writes: "When I say, 'the sun is the cause of day,' I do not mean that my idea of the sun causes or excites in me the idea of day."[28] Mill thinks that in Hobbes' use signification amounts to referring (as defined in the introduction above), so that, for Hobbes, words refer to ideas as opposed to ordinary objects. That Mill so thinks seems evident on the basis of his discussion. While arguing that there are good reasons for calling "the word *sun* the name of the

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[24] CSM2 113; AT7 160.

[25] Descartes received a Jesuit education, and it was especially Jesuit philosophers who discussed and developed the theory of signification in their logic books; see Ashworth 1981.

[26] Ashworth 2012, 300.

[27] At least this is so for Descartes, Hobbes, Port-Royalians, and Locke.

[28] Mill 1974, 25; I.ii.1.

sun, and not the name of our idea of the sun," Mill also cites as evidence the fact that "names are not intended only to make the hearer conceive what we conceive, but also to inform him *what we believe*."[29] Though this formulation leaves enough room for debating, it seems natural to read Mill as pointing to a crucial difference between merely entertaining a conception in one's mind, on the one hand, and holding that conception to be true (or false), on the other. If this is what he means, then Mill must think that it is crucial that words name objects, not ideas, *because* it is objects, not ideas, that are relevant for the truth or falsity of our conceptions. And the name for such truth-relation between linguistic expressions and their truth-makers is *reference*.

The problem with Mill's criticism is that though Hobbes is less than clear how names signify our conceptions, he is quite clear that signification is not referring.[30] In *De Corpore* Hobbes first says that names "are signs of our conceptions" and "not signs of the things themselves."[31] But right after this he also states that some words like "a man, a tree, a stone," though not all of them, "are the names of the things themselves."[32] This is not the place to argue for an interpretation of Hobbes' views, but at least it seems clear that Hobbes was not guilty of the mistake Mill accused him of. Signifying and naming are distinct for Hobbes, though they sometimes can coincide. For Hobbes all names signify conceptions in the mind of the speaker, but at least some of them name ordinary things in addition.[33] One motivation for this view is the existence of empty names, that is, names that lack referents (an issue I discuss later in both sections 3 and 4). Empty names behave in the same ways in linguistic constructions as non-empty ones, and they can be used meaningfully despite their lacking referents in actuality. This is especially problematic for theories of direct reference, which seem to lack any plausible means to explain how empty names can be meaningful yet lack reference. As I mentioned in the introduction, my thesis

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[29] Mill 1974, 24; I.ii.1; emphasis added.
[30] For an overview, see Duncan 2016.
[31] Hobbes, *De Corpore* 1839, I.ii.5.
[32] Hobbes, *De Corpore* 1839, I.ii.6.
[33] Hobbes, *De Corpore* 1839, I.ii.7.

that Descartes is a direct referentialist *and* also committed to the theory of signification might seem inconsistent because of this. No doubt many would find it more natural to think that the conceptions or ideas are signified precisely because they are like Fregean senses that mediate reference (in case there is an object to be referred to). I hope to show that the incompatibility between theories of signification and direct reference is only apparent, and not real.

I believe that Descartes would accept roughly the same view about signification relation as a mode of *signaling* (or indicating) that is articulated by Hobbes (and as analyzed later by Ott and Lowe).[34] Hobbes points out that "those things we call SIGNS are the antecedents of their consequents, and the consequents of their antecedents, as often as we observe them to go before or follow after in the same manner."[35] The example given by Hobbes elucidates the point nicely: "a thick cloud is a sign of rain to follow, and rain a sign that a cloud has gone before." Even if words are not natural but merely conventional signs, they are signs in this same sense. Words both signal the speaker's ideas for the hearer and the ideas signal which words the speaker must choose to convey her ideas. Signification—or linguistic signaling—is a matter of interplay between thoughts and public linguistic conventions. In this view, words are mere *tags* for ideas.

Once signification is understood in this way, the main thesis of the theory of signification becomes the following: "intentionality takes place at the level of ideas, not words."[36] Words are merely physical entities with nothing but physical properties, be they sounds, inscriptions, hand-signals, or flashes of light. They lack intrinsic meaning-related properties but can acquire conventional meanings by being associated with ideas. If we accept that—as Descartes and his followers at Port Royal did—"we can have no knowledge of what is outside us except by means of the ideas in us," then understanding language turns out to be mostly a matter of

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[34] Ott 2003, chap. 1; Lowe 1995, chap. 7.
[35] Hobbes, *De Corpore* 1839, I.ii.2. See Ott 2003, chap. 1.
[36] Ott 2008, 294; see also 2003.

understanding how our thinking and its objects are connected.[37]

From the viewpoint of direct reference, however, this view of words being mere tags for *ideas* seems problematic, to say the least. Direct reference is often viewed as the view that names are tags for ordinary things, and that words lack other kinds of semantic content altogether.[38] This is how Mill, who is often considered as an early direct referentialist, seems to have viewed the opposition between the views. Precisely because names are like tags, they can be tags only for ordinary objects *or* their ideas, but not both. Combined with the view that our only access to extra-mental reality is by way of ideas, as the Cartesians have it, the tagging conception of names entails that tagging the ordinary objects is not a possibility—which is precisely the inconsistency of which Mill accuses Hobbes.

My argument in the coming sections is built around the attempt to show how Descartes' view of ideas and their features—objective contents and representationality—can escape the seeming inconsistency. In the remainder of this section, however, I want to say something about *subjectivism* concerning meaning.

One option that we can rule out in case of Descartes is his happily accepting subjectivism about meaning as a natural consequence of his views. There is plenty of evidence to the contrary. For instance, in replying to Hobbes's objections to *Meditations*, Descartes points out: "Who doubts that a Frenchman and a German can reason about the same things, despite the fact that the words that they think of are completely different?"[39] Regardless of any interpretational issues about signification, there is evidence that Descartes is at the least a firm believer in the publicity of meanings.

Of course, that Descartes is not committed to subjectivism as such does not mean his commitments would not entail it. Frege much later considered ideas as ill-suited to be bearers of public meanings precisely because he considered them

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[37] Arnauld and Nicole 1996, 25.
[38] See, e.g., Marcus 1961, 310.
[39] CSM2 126, AT7 178–179.

necessarily subjective or "private."[40] This follows seemingly directly from his definition of "idea," which seems to be quite close to Descartes' view. Frege defines ideas as imperceptible by ordinary senses and as something "had" as contents of one's consciousness (i.e., sensations are not sensed themselves but had). More to the point, ideas depend on their subject and can belong only to one subject: "no two men have the same idea."[41]

Superficially, at least, Descartes seems committed to Frege's views about ideas. For Descartes, ideas are immaterial modes of the thinking substance (i.e., a mind), and modes are *states* or *ways* in which the substance exists at a moment.[42] Thus, two substances sharing the same mode is impossible.[43] From this substance-mode ontological viewpoint it seems that Descartes' theory of signification unavoidably leads to subjectivism about meaning, as Frege would argue. If ideas could be shared in the way public meanings must be, it would have to be possible for an idea to exist independently of a particular thinking subject. But because an idea is a state of a particular subject, dependent for its existence on that subject, ideas cannot be shared, and therefore, they cannot be what constitute or carry public meanings. Thus, Descartes' view that a German and a Frenchman or any other two speaker-thinkers could share meanings seems unwarranted by his own views.

I, however, think the above reasoning is flawed. I will next show how the conclusion that ideas cannot be shared does not follow from the view that ideas are states of a subject (and ontologically dependent on that subject).

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[40] Frege 1956, 301–302.

[41] Frege 1956, 299–300.

[42] CSM1 201–212; AT8A 25–27.

[43] Though it has been argued (e.g., Hoffman 1990; see also Schmaltz 1992) that in certain cases (sensations and physical surfaces are cases in point) Descartes allows that two substances can share a mode. However, this issue has no bearing on the point I discuss in the text.

3. Objective reality

In certain writings at least, Bertrand Russell was no friend of subjectivism.[44] He suggested that propositions (related to the intersubjective meanings) can be considered in a way that I would like to offer as a model for understanding what ideas are for Descartes. In a famous letter to Frege, Russell writes the following:

> 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 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.[45]

What Russell here labels "the thought" is what Frege called "an idea" (and what Russell calls "propositions" is what Frege calls "thoughts"). Both agree that such mental states are subjective, and thus cannot constitute meanings. However, Russell's point is that the threat of subjectivity is not the only problem we must worry about, for it cannot be the case Mont Blanc is irrelevant for the assertions naming it — the mountain itself must be involved in propositions concerning it *in propria persona*, so to say.[46]

If we construe propositions as distinct from their objects (as Russell thought Frege did), then there is nothing that could explain how those abstract meaning-entities are *about* the ordinary objects. This is the problem of intentionality — how do propositions come to have, or to be about, objects? Russell's point (one of many) here is that even if the problem of subjectivity of meaning is averted by postulating propositions as the intersubjective contents of thought, postulating them can involve a jump out of the frying pan into the fire. Without an intelligible connection to the propositions, the

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[44] That is, in the relevant writings that are prior to his Russell 1918.
[45] *Russell to Frege 12.12.1904,* in Frege 1980, 169.
[46] The vague but expressive notion comes from Lovejoy (1923, 454) and is quoted by Hoffman (2002, 169).

ordinary objects named in the sentences expressing a proposition seem just irrelevant for the proposition. Therefore, to avoid both subjectivism of meaning and irrelevancy of propositions, Russell goes on to affirm a view that Frege found just as problematic as subjective meanings.[47] According it, propositions have parts that are not conceptual, but the physical worldly objects themselves that are named.[48] I will not discuss ontology of propositions further here, but I will later examine the competing conceptualist view held by Descartes that does away with such abstract objects altogether. For now, I wish to focus on how Descartes' view escapes both subjectivism about meaning and irrelevancy of objects by what he calls "*objective reality* of ideas" or "the *objective being*" (of the objects of ideas).[49]

  According to Descartes, our ideas come to have objects, to *represent* or *intend* a thing outside the mind, by way of containing the *reality* (lat. *realitas*) or simply *the being* of that object.[50] Elsewhere, I defend an ontologically realist reading of the doctrine. There I argue that Descartes' claim, according to

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[47] The example Russell takes up is in fact originally Frege's: "Truth is not a component part of a thought, just as Mont Blanc with its snowfields is not itself a component part of the thought that Mont Blanc is more than 4000 metres high" (Frege to Russell 13.11.1904, in Frege 1980, 163).

[48] In addition to the letter from 1904 quoted in the text, Russell expressed commitment to the view in his *Principles of Mathematics* (1903). But by the time of "On Denoting" (1905) he had already rejected it. Kaplan (2012) elaborates on the neo-Russellian framework of singular propositions. On the nature of Russellian propositions and direct reference, see also Wettstein 1986, 1990; and Almog 2012.

[49] The nature of Descartes' variety of objective being view is controversial. It is, for instance, the root of the debate about Descartes' commitment to direct or indirect realism, acting as the ground for totally opposite views. For important discussions on the direct realist side, see, e.g., O'Neil 1974; Yolton 1984; Normore 1986; Nadler 1989; Almog 2002, 2008a; Alanen 2003; and Brown 2007; on the indirect / representationalist side, see, e.g., Kenny 1968; Wilson 1978; Kaufman 2000; and esp. Hoffman 2002.

[50] Descartes' terminology makes it clear that the relation between an idea and the objective reality is one of containment (*continere*) or possession (*habere*). Objects are said to transfer or "'pour" (*transfundere*) their own reality into the ideas causally. (E.g., AT7 40–42; CSM2 28–29.) Ideas also exhibit the objective reality they contain, and this "objective mode of being belongs to ideas by their very nature" (CSM2 29; AT7 42).

which the objective reality is contained quite literally in the ideas yet identical with the objects, is contrary to some accusations, philosophically coherent.[51] We need not get into that discussion, for it suffices to note how Descartes' views about objective reality change depending on whether we are reading it as entailing direct reference or *direct perception*.[52] I argue here only that it entails the first (which is much less demanding a position than the latter, which seems to require that the object of thought is present in the mind by way of an idea *in propria persona*).

Descartes claims that the object itself is contained in the idea.[53] He writes:

> 'Objective being in the intellect' [- -] will signify the object's being in the intellect in the way in which its objects are normally there. By this I mean that the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect—not of course formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e. in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect.[54]

In my view, Descartes is trying to make sense of the idea that although ideas considered as modifications depend ontologically on the thinking substance they modify, they are nevertheless ontologically dependent also on the objects that cause the mind to be modified in that way. The connection between an idea of the sun and the (formally, i.e., actually existing) sun is an existential one, the former not being possible without the latter being related to the intellect in the right way. This two-way ontological dependence of ideas on both the subject as well as the object can be used to overcome the problem of subjectivism brought about by the fact that ideas are nevertheless modifications belonging only to one thinking

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[51] Sinokki (forthcoming). For example, Yolton (1984) thinks that the objective containment is merely metaphorical and has no metaphysical import, and Kaufman (2000, 390) thinks the view makes 'no philosophical sense'. See also Hoffman 2002.

[52] See footnote 49 above.

[53] CSM2 75; AT7 102–103. *Pace* (e.g.,) Yolton 1984 and Kaufman 2000. For a careful analysis, see Hoffman 2002. I do not agree with Hoffman's conclusion that Descartes is an indirect realist, though.

[54] CSM2 75; AT7 102–103.

substance. Obviously, many minds can have modifications that are caused by the one and the same object.

This issue is very relevant for Descartes' view of perception, yet it has proven difficult to get the details straight. Though Descartes insists that it is the sun itself that exists in the intellect, the sun nevertheless has two distinct modes (ways) of being. Descartes thus seems to be committed to the view that in perception we are aware of the sun *only* in the objective sense, and that this objective sun *represents* the sun in its actual mode of being in the sky — which, if true, would be enough to view him as a representationalist.[55] Luckily for us, this problem about two modes of the sun doesn't really pertain to the current question about language and signification and we need not resolve it here. For our purposes it suffices to see that the connection between an idea and its object is a necessary one.

For Descartes, ideas come to have the objects they have because of their causal origination.[56] In fact, the only reason Descartes ventures into metaphysics of causation in the *Meditations* is to articulate how the objective reality of our ideas obeys the laws of ordinary causation. An idea of the sun is any idea that is caused by the sun. This amounts to the view that an idea of the sun involves *essentially* (necessarily) the sun itself; otherwise, it is not an idea of the sun at all but of something else.[57]

To elucidate, let's use the idea of the sun to consider the case of two distinct ideas, called I_1 and I_2, in two different scenarios. Let's stipulate that I_1 and I_2 are completely indistinguishable for the subject S (whose ideas are in question in both scenarios). In the scenario involving I_1, the idea originates in the sun in the way ideas ordinarily do. As a result of this origin, we can say that in this scenario it is the sun that objectively exists in S's mind when S entertains I_1. According to Descartes' view about necessity of causal origin of an idea, then, I_1 is an idea of the sun, and not of something else (i.e., I_1 is the sun itself existing in the intellect). Now, in the other

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[55] This is essentially how Hoffman (2002) presents the case.
[56] CSM2 28, AT7 40–41.
[57] Kripke's (1980, 3rd Lecture) arguments for essentiality of causal origins thus apply to ideas as Descartes conceives them.

scenario, involving I_2, S is in the same position as the previous scenario. However, in this case I_2 originates not in the sun, but in the activity of an omnipotent deceiver (like the one introduced by Descartes in *the First Meditation*). So, in this scenario there is in fact no sky, no earth, and—it is worth emphasizing—no sun, *nor has there ever been*. There are only demon-caused hallucinatory experiences in the mind of S. In this latter case, when I_2 is in S's mind, that which exists objectively in S's mind has nothing to do whatsoever with the sun. Therefore, in line with Descartes' view about necessity of causal origin of an idea, I_2 is not an idea of the sun at all, despite being indistinguishable from one.

What I take to be the important point in Descartes' theory of objective being or reality is this: In the above example, at best, I_2 is a *fake* idea of the sun. Just like a fake gun cannot be used to shoot bullets, a fake idea cannot be used to think of the sun. The connection between an idea and its object is essential (necessary) for the idea in question precisely because in order to think of the sun, you need an idea that objectively contains the sun. An idea not containing the sun does not allow thinking of the sun, but only something else that, at best, has the appearance of the sun.

As for Frege's concern about ideas leading to subjectivism, Descartes' view seems to defuse it quite thoroughly. Though it is impossible for two subjects to share an idea in the sense of sharing a modification belonging to a particular mind, two minds can nevertheless be modified by the same object. This amounts to two subjects having the same idea in their minds (*pace* Frege), and in a sense that is metaphysically just as important as the substance-mode ontological sense—both the subject whose modification is in question as well as the object that is the causal origin of that modification are just as essential for the idea.

Importantly to our discussion, because names tag ideas, and ideas necessarily objectively contain their originating objects, there really cannot be any alteration in references of names either: when a name signifies an idea containing objective reality of an object, O_1, it thereby refers to O_1. This seems to take care of Russell's worry about irrelevance of ordinary objects. What is more, standard externalist considerations

presented by Kripke and Putnam seem to apply here.[58] A person speaking English refers to sun every time they utter the expression "the sun," for the conventions of that linguistic community dictate that the expression always signifies an idea that contains objectively the sun. Of course, it is possible to signify idiosyncratically some other ideas by the expression "the sun" but such signification amounts to making a linguistic mistake—it is a case of using a name that does not name the object to which one tries to apply the name. Furthermore, that kind of Humpty Dumpty use of words does not amount to genuine language use in the sense Descartes understands it, for one can communicate one's ideas successfully only if the linguistic conventions of the public language in question are observed sufficiently. Finally, in the case imagined above where S's perceptions consist of hallucinatory experiences produced by an omnipotent deceiver, S would not even speak English, for none of her ideas contain objectively the things words of English signify.[59]

When his view about objective reality is understood as I have presented it, Descartes' view of signification combined to his theory of ideas amounts to a theory of direct reference (about ordinary, singular objects, that is). As for what kind of direct reference this view precisely amount to, that can be answered only after examining the other aspect of ideas—their representational character.

Before moving on, however, I would like to address an objection that my interpretation might elicit.[60] If it is true that all our thoughts and knowledge of things proceeds by way of ideas, and names are mere tags for those ideas, then it is plausible to ask how do we know that "the sun" is a tag of the same idea for you and me? If the only answer we can provide is (as my appeal to causal origination of ideas seems to imply) that we know it in the same way as we know that the expression refers to the sun, then the ideas seem to do no work in explaining the workings of language.

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[58] Kripke 1980; Putnam 1975. See also Raatikainen 2020 and Haukioja 2017.

[59] This demon-case seems in many ways analogous to Putnam's (1975) Twin Earth case.

[60] I am grateful for Tapio Korte for drawing my attention to this issue.

There are several related points that can be used to counter the objection. First, notice the problem of empty names. Names like "Vulcan" that lack referents are problematic for direct reference. Those names behave linguistically just like ordinary names that have referents and can be used to convey meaningful thoughts, yet they do not refer to anything. One benefit of seeing ideas as an ingredient in semantics lies in explaining the behavior of such empty names—this is in fact one of the main reasons also Hobbes cites for thinking that all names signify conceptions in the minds.[61] In the reconstructed signification theory I attribute here to Descartes, empty and non-empty names do not differ linguistically. What precisely is empty is the idea, not the name—there can be no such objective reality as the reality of planet Vulcan, for such a planet does not exist and cannot cause any ideas in us. However, there still is an idea signified by the name "Vulcan," but it is a fake idea of planet Vulcan in the sense discussed above. It appears like an idea of a planet, but it cannot be used to think about an actual planet.

In my view, though I will not argue further for this here, Descartes' famous example of the intricate machine shows that Descartes sees invented ideas as having composite objective realities.[62] Invented ideas do not contain the objective reality of any one particular thing, for their objective reality is a patchwork of pieces from diverse sources. Such ideas nevertheless have ordinary representational characters (see shortly below), which explains why cognitively those ideas can also appear like ordinary ideas (e.g., compare the astronomers' idea of the sun Descartes discusses, quoted above, to the empty idea of Vulcan; both are products of similar astronomical reasonings).

Another aspect of why words must signify ideas is related to communication. As stated above, for Descartes, language is a system which enables speakers to encode their thoughts into *physical representations* (noises, patterns, sign marks…) that can be decoded at the receiving end by the audience. The exchange of such physical signs is characterized by Descartes occasionally as the "passing of an idea" from one thinker to

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[61] Hobbes, *De Corpore* 1839a, I.ii.6.
[62] CSM2 75, AT7 104. See also Sinokki 2016, ch.3.

another.[63] As arguably even a group of parrots (for details, see reference in the footnote) could pass on such physical marks from parrot to parrot while still not passing on any semantic information or meanings (ideas) whatsoever, we need to add into the picture something carrying the meanings that is transmitted in cases of genuine language-use.[64] We saw Russell claiming that what carries such meaning is a proposition; for Descartes it is an idea containing an objective reality. It could be even argued that at least *prima facie* sharing of thoughts or ideas by transmitting physical marks (produced by our tongues and received by our ears) is significantly *less* problematic than the claim that in addition to this, certain things called propositions (that cannot be touched or be seen) are involved in the business.

Be that as it may, propositions were important for Russell among other things because of their *structuredness*.[65] In contrast to their individual constituent parts (e.g., concepts like "white" and objects like Mont Blanc), he considered propositions as structured unities that bear meanings. A proposition is, in this sense, something more than a mere collection or list of things. It is a "complex" that (conceptually or logically) organizes things into relations and represents things (or states of affairs) as being in this or that way. This unity and logical structure are what make the analysis of such things possible. Next, I will argue that ideas considered from the cognitive aspect of ideas that I call *representational character* can perform this conceptual role Russell (and Frege) thought requires postulating propositions.

4. Representational character

As Margaret Wilson expresses in frustration, Descartes' view of ideas "entails that the objective reality of an idea is not *something the idea wears on its face*."[66] As we saw, ideas I_1 and I_2

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[63] CSM2 11, AT7 14–15.

[64] For a sustained elaboration of this thought-experiment in context of Kripke's causal theory of reference, see Sinokki 2022.

[65] A caveat must be stated; when discussing Russell, I mean to make statements only about contents of the specific works already cited, so I do not intend to generalize.

[66] Wilson 1978, 98.

can contain totally unrelated objective realities yet still be subjectively indistinguishable to the thinker. To understand how this is possible we must take into account that Descartes characterizes ideas as thoughts that are "as it were the images of things."[67] To capture what it properly is that ideas wear on their face, like images, Wilson coins the notion of *representational character* of an idea.[68] Wilson ultimately finds this divorce between the objective reality of an idea and its representational character "an embarrassment, not an asset."[69] I strongly disagree with this assessment, for, on the contrary, I see this divorce as the major strength of Descartes' view. I believe (though I won't argue for it here) that the reason for Wilson's disappointment is that she, like many other commentators, gets the relation between the two backwards. In her view, the representational character must determine the object of the idea, and once she sees, quite correctly, that for Descartes it is instead the objective reality that determines the object of the idea, she finds the view incoherent.

As we noted at the end of last section, for Russell a proposition was a structured unity that presents things or states of affairs as being in this or that way; importantly, proposition is not a mere collection or a list of things but a precisely a *structured unity*. Just like images (ignoring abstract art for the moment), propositions also present a single view of what they present. Moreover, images and propositions do this in virtue of the arrangements of their constituent parts. How their parts are related to each other matters for how things are represented as being. In my view, the kind of representational character we can attribute to Descartes amounts to the way in which the objective contents are arranged in, or presented by, the idea. In my view, it is precisely in this structural, conceptual sense that ideas are *as if images* for Descartes.[70]

In *the Second replies*, Descartes defines ideas as "the form of any given thought, immediate perception of which makes me

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[67] CSM2 25, AT7 37.

[68] Wilson 1978, 90.

[69] Wilson 1978, 98.

[70] Cf. Wilson 1978, 89ff., who discusses representational character especially in relation to sensations and connects it to phenomenality rather that concepts.

aware of the thought."[71] As Cottingham points out, in part because of their formal features "Cartesian ideas are in some respects much more like publicly accessible concepts than private psychological items."[72] The form of thought is the "structure" of the idea which presents things as falling under concepts. These forms are something that can be instantiated in several minds and in several ideas. It is this form or the representational character of the ideas that is indistinguishable in ideas I_1 and I_2 above. Due to space limitations, I will here restrict my attention to the representational character as something conceptual and ignore altogether "qualitative" aspects of it (e.g., phenomenality) for the irrelevance of the latter for the purposes of this paper.

In my view, the representational character is a *mode of presentation* of the objective reality contained in the idea. However, it is not at all like a Fregean "sense" in being a mode of presentation which determines an object. As we saw in the previous section, the idea as a modification of a thinking substance is also a product of the object. That the objective reality comes to mind is a matter of causation. Now, that this objective reality is presented in this or that way similarly flows from the causal connection to the object and does so in accordance with the vagaries of the relation we happen bear to the object. (The way distance affects the visual and auditory appearances of things is an example of such vagaries.)

All this talk of conceptual structure of ideas makes more sense when we consider the fact that Descartes is a *conceptualist* about universals and abstracta, such as mathematical objects.[73] That is, for Descartes there is nothing general or universal outside *any* mind, but plenty that is so within all

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[71] CSM2 113; AT7 160. According to Descartes, "thought" is used to refer to "everything that is within us in such a way that we are immediately aware of it" (CSM2 113; AT7 160).

[72] Cottingham 1997, 39. For Cottingham, these formal features of thought are naturally connected to what Descartes in the Fifth Meditation calls "true and immutable natures," which I will not discuss here due to space constraints.

[73] With ample textual evidence, there is a good case to be made in favor of attributing thoroughgoing conceptualism to Descartes. This view has been elaborated and defended most notably by Lawrence Nolan in a series of papers; see Nolan 1997a; 1997b; 1998; 2011; 2015; 2017.

minds. According to Descartes, all "eternal truths" reside "within our mind" and "[n]umber and all universals are simply modes of thinking."[74] Such universal ideas are formed by cognitive processing, by abstraction and exclusion, for instance.[75] In general, Descartes thinks that these ideas are innate to the mind in the sense of not requiring extra-mental causes like singular ideas, discussed above, require.

This gives us a clue as to how objective reality and representational character relate to one another. While objective reality is something coming into the mind from the outside causally (and can be informationally rich or meager depending on the vagaries of the occasion), universals are conceptual forms by which the mind reacts to that incoming thing with the result that the thing is presented to the mind as being in this or that way. For instance, the sun can come to exist in my mind through its causal action on my senses. It is thereby presented as round and light-emitting, properties which appear as forms which I can abstract from that idea. Evidently for Descartes, such representational characters of ideas are often not quite static but can change in response to our reasoning processes and if they are considered in conjunction with other ideas. Without entering this complex topic, those generic or abstract representational characters that, in contrast, do not change at all Descartes calls "*true and immutable natures*."[76]

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[74] CSM1 208–209, AT8A 22–23; CSM1 212; AT8A 27. Clearly, Frege's insistence that a "third realm must be recognized" (1956, 302) cuts no ice inside an ontology like this, for it mustn't.

[75] CSMK 236, AT4 120; Murdoch 1993; Nolan 1997a. Descartes conceives abstraction in terms of selective attention to a particular aspect of an idea, while exclusion is the active denial of an aspect of an idea; see Nolan 1997a, 133.

[76] In my view true and immutable natures are conceptual entities, existing only in the mind, as Nolan (1997b) argues. Along with Nolan, I believe that true and immutable natures are realities that can exist only in the mind, from which it follows that for abstract ideas, they are also the objective realities contained in those ideas. It is important to notice that for Descartes the fact that true and immutable natures "do not depend" on one's mind does not mean that their existence would not depend on the existence of thought more generally. In my view invented ideas, like ideas of chimera, have composite objective realities, gotten from diverse

In *the Third Meditation*, Descartes asks us to consider two ideas he has of the sun. One idea originates in the sense-perception of the sun, while the other is based on astronomical reasoning. The visual idea, he writes, "makes the sun appear very small," while the reasoning-based, intellectually constructed idea "shows the sun to be several times larger than the earth."[77] Descartes points out: "Obviously both these ideas cannot resemble the sun which exists outside me; and reason persuades me that the idea which seems to have emanated most directly from the sun itself has in fact no resemblance to it at all."[78] As representations, the ideas are very different. That they are ideas of the same thing (the sun) is determined by the fact that they both contain the *objective reality* of the sun. But their difference makes it very clear that the objective reality of an idea is not something the idea "wears on its face"; the objective reality is simply that which can be represented in different ways. And finally, though representational character is obviously a mode of presentation here for the sun, it cannot be what determines the object of the idea. If it were, the visual idea that emanated most directly from the sun would not have the sun as its object, but at best some much smaller yellow disc (which is precisely what Descartes denies being the case here).

Now, how does representational character fit together with signification? Consider first the case of names of mathematical objects. As according to Descartes, such things exist only in the mind—not as modifications of a particular mind, but as features of thought in general—the relations of signifying and reference will coincide in this case just as they did in the case of ideas containing things objectively (see the previous section). Descartes' example of an idea of a *chiliagon* offers a nice illustration. According to Descartes, a mentally visualized image representing a chiliagon is confused and obscure, and it cannot be distinguished from mental images of other similar figures with very many sides. Still, our understanding of

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sources, while nevertheless conceptually the chimera (i.e., the representational character of an idea of chimera) can have a true and immutable nature.

[77] CSM2 27; AT7 39.

[78] CSM2 27; AT7 39.

the chiliagon is clear and distinct, for we can demonstrate mathematically many things of the figure.[79] Here we can say that though the representational character of the idea of a chiliagon constructed in the imagination is confused, the chiliagon that is contained objectively in that idea, and is grasped by the understanding, is what is properly signified by the name.[80] In case of ideas of universals that apply to several things, Descartes says that "we apply one and the same term to all the things which are represented by the idea in question, and this is the universal term."[81] In both cases the object referred to (a mathematical object or a universal) exists only as a form of thought. That object is what is contained in the idea signified by the name as well. Therefore, even here signification and reference coincide.[82]

Invented ideas (discussed already briefly in connection to objective reality above) are akin to ideas of mathematical objects and universals. However, it is important to notice, as Nolan has argued, that the distinction between the two is crucial for Descartes.[83] Invented ideas, like those of chimeras, originate in the mental activity of the thinker who combines ideas into new complex arrangements.[84] This is why those ideas lack a singular objective reality and are patchworks of

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[79] CSM2 50, AT7 72; CSM2 264, AT7 384–385.

[80] Nolan (1997b) argues that the universals, having existence only in thought, are also thus the objective realities contained by those ideas. Though I agree with Nolan's argument in principle, I somewhat hesitate to accept the conclusion. Objective reality is for Descartes clearly something obeying ordinary causation, and I am not sure that the formal–conceptual entities, such as universals must be, are apt to obey causation in the required sense. This problem must be addressed properly on another occasion.

[81] CSM1 212; AT8A 27. This issue relates to Descartes' conceptualism, as discussed below.

[82] Notice that the ontology required by this view is not, *prima facie¸* any more problematic than the seemingly Platonic abstract entities somewhere outside the mind, to the existence of which Frege and Russell are committed.

[83] Nolan 1997b.

[84] Of course, that idea is not created *de novo* every time someone thinks of it, but rather "passed on" from the inventor onwards. The similarities of Kripke's causal transmission of names and Descartes' causal "passing on" of ideas are evident, and a topic for another paper.

several distinct realities. Ideas of mathematical objects and universals are not like this, for their objects have—or are—forms that are independent of any individual thinkers (despite existing only in thought). Yet both kinds of ideas have representational characters. As I pointed out in the last section in relation to empty names, ideas of chimeras and the like lack referents, for they do not contain singular objective realities. Insofar as we can consider mathematical objects and universals as singular beings (though existing only in thought), we can say they are the referents of the names that signify the corresponding ideas. In this, names of mathematical objects and universals are more like names of ordinary singular objects, and unlike empty names lacking such singular actual referents. However, discussing this complicated issue further is not possible in this connection.

In my view, it is precisely the interplay between objective reality and representational character that solves many traditional puzzles that create problems for direct reference theories. In Descartes' view, a thinker might have two ideas with the same objective reality, but with so different representational characters that she is not able to realize that those ideas are but two different representations of one and the same thing. Seeing Venus in the morning sky and then again in the evening sky would be a case in which, due to the vagaries of the situation, an (ancient) astronomer could have had two ideas of one single object without realizing that there is only one thing (just as he didn't realize that what he sees is not a star but a planet). Signifying those ideas with different names like "the Morning star" and "the Evening star'" could eventually result in a significant discovery of the fact that what we thought of as two distinct stars was in fact only one. But for Descartes, this discovery is not about the names any more than finding out that the thing is not a star but a planet. It's a realization about our conceptions or ideas, and how what we know relates to things our ideas are about. As regards reference, it has all along been direct. Despite several names, only one thing, Venus, has been involved all the time. The distinct names were tags for ideas containing one and the same objective reality all along. Yet due to the vagaries of the situation, *qua* representations of the second rock from the sun, the ideas were so confused and obscure that the realization that they

were ideas of the same object required highly sophisticated astronomical reasoning.

One further point about representational character and how it is determined by what I have vaguely referred to as "vagaries" of the situation in which an objective reality is gotten into the mind. That an idea always has a representational character also allows for cases of radical misidentification, like the cases envisaged by Keith Donnellan.[85] Donnellan presents a case in which *S* thinks she sees the history professor, but in fact the thing *S* sees is just a rock in the shadows. In this case, the idea is of a rock. Yet due to the perceptual situation, the representational character of the idea triggers a judgment that it is the history professor there. Consider now *S*'s following soliloquy. Seeing something in the shadows, *S* utters: "What is *that*?" After an inconclusive peer into the darkness, *S* replies to herself: "That's got to be *the history professor*!" It is easy to see that the italicized expressions in these quotes do not refer to the same thing nor do they signify the same idea. In both sentences, "that" refers to the stone and signifies the confused perceptual idea of it. In the latter sentence, "the history professor" refers to the history professor, and signifies an idea of that person, who is mistakenly identified with the stone.[86] Though I cannot go into the details fur-

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[85] Donnellan 1966, 295ff.

[86] As I see it, according to Descartes' view, the mistaken judgment expressed by sentence "That's got to be *the history professor*!" is not an identity judgment (i.e., a judgment of the form "*a* = the *F*"), but rather an attempt to predicate the property of "being the history professor" of the subject that happens to be the stone. Similarly for the question Russell attributes to George IV: It is queried of Scott, by signifying with his name an idea containing his objective reality, whether the property of "being the author of *Waverley*" can be truly attributed to him. Here "the author of *Waverley*" is a description connected to the representational character of an idea, a mode of presentation for a person. As only one person at best can be *the* author of *Waverley*, that representational character can truly go together only with ideas that objectively contain the person who actually wrote *Waverley*. The truth of the judgment or statement then depends on whether the objective realities contained in the ideas with different representational characters (i.e., of a person whose name is "Scott" and of the person who wrote *Waverley*) are the same or not; or in other words, whether the one idea can be truly affirmed of the other or not.

ther, I believe investigating this intriguing interplay between objective reality and representational character can be of help in understanding how language, thinking, and the world beyond these two properly all interlock together, as they obviously do.

5. Conclusion

I have argued that Descartes' views of ideas and signification together entail a picture of language that is directly referential. Words *signify* ideas, and though reference and signification must not be conflated, in many cases they coincide for Descartes. But seeing that this is so depends on a proper understanding of his metaphysics. Important is the causal relation between an object and its idea, requiring an essential (necessary) connection between an idea and the object causally originating it, and the conceptualist ontology that explicates the contents for ideas of universals and abstracta. Once the metaphysics is understood properly, the representational characters of ideas turn out to be mostly conceptual in their nature, and to function as modes of presentations of objects. Because the ideas have both objective and conceptual contents that are very much intersubjective—they are ordinary objects and conceptual universal forms, respectively—the meanings of language in Descartes' view are hardly at the risk of turning out to be "private."

The reason why the ideas are needed in explaining the workings of language *despite* direct referentiality of names is that just as ideas do not wear their objective realities on their faces, names do not wear their referents on their sleeves. It is the representational character of ideas, signified by words, that explains why empty names appear just like referring ones, or why some identity statements are not at all trivial, and so on. This makes a plenty of room for mistakes even in case of ideas that do contain actual singular objects objectively.

In closing, I would like to emphasize how direct reference is, in general, completely silent about the possibility of there being other kinds of semantic or informational contents besides the reference determining modes of presentation which

it forbids.[87] For instance, in astronomy variable stars (i.e., stars whose brightness varies) are named in accordance with a variation of Bayer designation format, a convention of naming that reveals the constellation to which the star belongs and the rank of the star in the order of their discovery. For instance, "UY Scuti" names the 38th variable star discovered in the constellation of Scutum. Thus, besides referring to the extreme red hyper-giant once considered being the biggest star discovered, the name also carries other kinds of highly meaningful information as well. Such information hardly amounts to a Fregean sense in determining the reference, for the name follows from vagaries of the astronomical research and the convention about naming variable stars. Before 1860 when Astronomers at Bonn discovered the star, the name did not determine this specific star, so it could have named which ever star would have been found next.[88] Still, the additional information carried by the name deserves the name *meaning* (it's even expressible as a definite description that is coreferential with the name!). So, direct reference must be considered a thesis about reference only, not a denial of other

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[87] Recanati (1993) defends this claim in length. Of course, many proper names are also common names and can connote, say, biblical figures, and so on. But some authors, like Kaplan, would treat all such cases strictly as mere homoforms, as semantically distinct words which happen to have the same spelling, so such examples would not serve my goal. The example of Bayer designation format, however, is suited to my purposes, because it makes the additional information an essential part of the relevant naming convention (which, then, also affects the modal properties of the names).

[88] I think this example reveals nicely the mistake some, like Wiggins (2001, 132) and Noonan (2014, 144), make in criticizing Kripke's claim about the necessity of origin (1980, 112–13). They claim that the necessity of origin is shown problematic by examples about coreferential names and descriptions, such as Wiggins' claim that while intuitively Julius Caesar might not have a different father, quite intuitively the man whom Brutus murdered in 44 BC could have had a different farther. However, just as the name "UY Scuti" could have named another star, the description "the man whom Brutus murdered in 44 BC" could have picked up a man distinct from the one it *actually* picks up. That is, the objection is not about modal properties of things (contrary to Kripke's original point), but only about modal properties of the expressions used to designate those things. Therefore, the objection misses the point.

kinds of semantic relations or contents beyond reference. Thus, the representational character of ideas, too, can be considered as additional meaning-contents insofar as we are clear that this content has nothing to do with how the reference of name originally was determined.[89]

To my mind, the combination of direct referentiality and modes of presentations that do nothing to fix the reference but are highly useful in many other ways is not yet appreciated enough among philosophers of language and mind. Consider how direct referentialist David Kaplan, for example, is known for his thesis "No mentation without representation!"[90] Though Kaplan himself is ambivalent whether this means that a representation determines (always, sometimes, ever) the object of 'mentation', his critics often base their criticisms on the assumption that he thinks it so determines.[91] The view I am attributing to Descartes offers an interesting way of concurring with Kaplan's thesis without falling prey to its criticisms: it shows how a direct referentialist can be robustly realist about representational mental contents without there-

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[89] I have not discussed here the possibility of fixing the reference of a name by using a description. I, however, have argued elsewhere that such fixing is in fact impossible (see Sinokki 2022).

[90] Kaplan 2012, 153. See also Almog 2005; Eaker 2004.

[91] For example, Eaker 2004, 381; Almog 2005, 520; 2014, 45; Stalnaker 2009, 233. In opposition, Bianchi (2007) points out that for Kaplan, representation can be taken as a vehicle of cognition, which does not determine the object.

Especially in his later works, Kaplan's remarks reveal that his view, in fact, is closer to Descartes' view than to that which Kaplan's critics attribute to him. True, Kaplan thinks that a "representation determines the referent," but only in the sense that it "leads to" (Kaplan's term) the referent; not in virtue of satisfaction conditions, but "by way of its origin, by way of a particular descending path through a network of *tellings about*, a path that ideally is ultimately grounded in an event involving a more fundamental epistemological relation" (Kaplan 2012, 153; see also 167, endnote 22). This seems to amount to similar causal connection I see as obtaining between the extramental object, its idea, and the word used to name the object (contained objectively by the idea that is signified). "Determination" in the sense Kaplan seems to have in mind, is not a satisfaction relation, but a two-way 'pointing' relation, much like the signification relation (see section 2 above).

by yielding neither to Fregean descriptivism nor the Platonism often associated with such Fregean view.

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