



DE SE THINKING AND MODES OF PRESENTATION¹

Abstract: *De se* thoughts have traditionally been seen to be exceptional in mandating a departure from orthodox theories of attitudes. Against this, skeptics about the *de se* have argued that the *de se* phenomena demand no more of our theories of attitudes than traditional Frege cases. In this camp one view is that the *de se* can be accounted for by MOPs in the same way that MOPs can account for how it can be rational to believe, for instance, "Hesperus is shining" while also believing "Phosphorus is shining." This paper formulates some minimal conditions that *de se* MOPs must have in order to explain the relevant *de se* phenomena. Some potential replies are answered. I conclude that *de se* MOPs are not exceptional.

Keywords: *de se*, modes of presentation, attitudes, indexicals.

1. Introduction

A highly influential view in philosophy holds that there is a special category of *de se* thoughts, also known as *indexical*, *egocentric*, or *first-person* thoughts. Such thoughts are said to be about oneself in a particular sense that makes them substantially different from thoughts one might have about other things, and indeed different from other thoughts one might have about oneself.²

To echo Kaplan's (1989) well-known example, imagine that you see someone reflected in a shop window, and you realize that they are about to be hit by snow falling from the roof. You think, "They're about to be hit!" But what you did not realize was that it was yourself you saw. Had you realized this, you would have thought, "I'm about to be hit!" And even though, in a familiar sense, both thoughts are about you, only the latter is a *de se* thought,

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2 Proponents of this view, or close relatives of it, include Castañeda (1966), (1975), Lewis (1979), Perry (1993 [1979]), Evans (1982), McGinn (1983), Kapitan (1995), Velleman (1996), Burge (2004), Ninan (2010), (2013), (2016), Owens (2011), Recanati (2012), Weber (2014).

that is, a thought about you *as yourself*. Moreover, only the latter, *de se* thought will make you move out of the way or cover your head.

Examples of this kind have motivated two claims about *de se* thoughts, which I label as follows:

Essentialism

De se thoughts are necessary for intentional action.

Exceptionalism

De se thoughts mandate a departure from orthodox accounts of attitudes.

Both of these views have been challenged by philosophers who are skeptical about the *de se* as a special category of thoughts.³ This paper concerns Exceptionalism, and I will not have anything to say about Essentialism.⁴

Anti-Exceptionalists, such as Cappelen and Dever (2013) and Magidor (2015), have suggested that the phenomena that motivated Perry (1993 [1979]), Lewis (1979), and others, to endorse versions of Exceptionalism can be explained by the resources that we already need to explain ordinary Frege cases. Since any theory of attitudes must explain (away) Frege cases, Anti-Exceptionalists of this stripe conclude that the *de se* is not exceptional.

Frege cases are standardly handled in terms of so-called *modes of presentation* (MOPs). Accordingly, Anti-Exceptionalists have suggested that the *de se* can be handled by MOPs in the same manner. Roughly, David can rationally believe that he is about to be hit under the MOP "They're about to be hit" while disbelieving that he is about to be hit under "I'm about to be hit." Yet these arguments have been mainly negative. Little or no attention have been given to showing how *de se* phenomena can be accounted for within orthodox views of attitudes.

My aim in this paper is to spell out how first-person or *de se* MOPs need to be understood in order to explain the relevant phenomena. One can see this as a way of delineating an Anti-Exceptionalist position. But more generally, asking what the *de se* demands of a traditional view of attitudes in terms of MOPs is a way of asking what precisely is demonstrated by the *de se* cases that have been appealed to.

Section 2 reviews the opposition between Exceptionalism and Anti-Exceptionalism and introduces the main idea of accounting for the *de se* phenomena in terms of MOPs. In Section 3 I describe three features that *de se* MOPs must have in order to do the work the Anti-Exceptionalist claims they can do. Section 4 considers some potential Exceptionalist replies.

3 De se skeptics include Stalnaker (1999 [1981]), Millikan (1990), Devitt (2013), Douven (2013), Cappelen and Dever (2013), Magidor (2015).

4 For some recent defenses of (different versions of) Essentialism, see e.g. Prosser (2015), Babb (2016), Bermudez (2017), Morgan (2019), Stokke (in press-b).

2. Exceptionalism and Anti-Exceptionalism

2.1. *The Doctrine of Propositions*

Both Perry (1993 [1979]) and Lewis (1979) explicitly took the *de se* phenomena they identified to motivate Exceptionalism. That is, they both thought that *de se* thinking requires an explanation that goes beyond orthodox theories of attitudes. Of course, this claim begs the question of what counts as orthodox theories of attitudes.

Perry held that "the essential indexical is a problem for the doctrine of propositions." (Perry, 1993 [1979], 37) Following Ninan (2016), we can spell out what Perry meant by "the doctrine of propositions" as the conjunction of three claims:⁵

The Doctrine of Propositions

Two-Place

Attitudes are two-place relations between subjects and contents.

Frege's Constraint

If a subject can rationally have a belief she could express by "S" without having a belief she could express by "S'", the two beliefs have different contents.

Absoluteness

Contents vary in truth value only with worlds.

The Doctrine of Propositions is consistent with different theories of attitudes.

One view that obeys The Doctrine of Propositions takes a content to be a pair of an absolute proposition and a MOP, or what Salmon (1986) called a "guise," and takes attitudes to be two-place relations between subjects and such pairs. Further, MOPs are seen as truth-conditionally inert.⁶ I label this view *Minimal Propositionalism*:

Minimal Propositionalism

- (i) A content is a pair $\langle p, *m^* \rangle$ of an absolute proposition p and a MOP $*m^*$.
- (ii) Attitudes are two-place relations between subjects and such pairs.
- (iii) MOPs are truth-conditionally inert.

For example, suppose Sue believes "Hesperus is a planet" but does not believe "Phosphorus is a planet".⁷ An adherent of Minimal Propositionalism analyzes this situation as in (1a-c) (where v is Venus).

5 This arguably deviates slightly from Perry (1993 [1979], 36), yet I take this to be a clearer and more useful way of spelling out the traditional view that Perry was targeting than the one Perry originally gave himself.

6 Needless to say, MOPs do play a role in the truth conditions of attitude ascriptions. Yet the truth conditions of the attitudes themselves are not affected by MOPs, on this view.

7 "I use "..." to indicate how a subject would express a particular belief, or what she would assent to, or how the thought might appear in her inner speech. It is important to

- (1) a. Sue believes $\langle v$ is a planet, *Hesperus is a planet* \rangle .
 b. Sue does not believe $\langle v$ is a planet, *Phosphorus is a planet* \rangle .
 c. For any w , $\langle v$ is a planet, *Hesperus is a planet* \rangle is true at w iff $\langle v$ is a planet, *Phosphorus is a planet* \rangle is true at w .

This represents the general idea that while the belief "Hesperus is a planet" is about Venus, in the sense that it is true if and only if Venus is a planet, it essentially involves a way of thinking about Venus, roughly understood as the role Venus plays in one's cognitive life. As such, the belief "Phosphorus is a planet" is equally about Venus, and has the same truth conditions, but involves a different way of thinking about Venus.

Minimal Propositionalism satisfies The Doctrine of Propositions. But moreover, it is consistent with The Doctrine of Propositions to hold different theories of the propositional component of the pairs that are identified as the contents of attitudes. One version takes the proposition $\langle v$ is a planet \rangle to be a structured entity that includes Venus, the planet itself. Following Recanati (1993), (2012) this view might be called "Neo-Russellianism."⁸ Yet one can also accept The Doctrine of Propositions and hold that $\langle v$ is a planet \rangle is a set of worlds.⁹

Another kind of view that satisfies Perry's doctrine of proposition instead holds that thinking "Hesperus is a planet" involves a different proposition than thinking "Phosphorus is a planet," even though these propositions have the same truth-conditions across worlds. Recanati (1993), (2012) calls such views "Neo-Fregean." So the Neo-Fregean analyzes Sue's situation as in (2a–c).

- (2) a. Sue believes *Hesperus is a planet*.
 b. Sue does not believe *Phosphorus is a planet*.
 c. For any w , *Hesperus is a planet* is true at w iff *Phosphorus is a planet* is true at w .

This view also satisfies The Doctrine of Propositions.

Evaluating to what extent these views are substantially different, or their respective merits, will not concern us here.¹⁰ In what follows I will focus on Minimal Propositionalism.

distinguish beliefs in this sense from MOPs, since, for instance, one can rationally believe "Paderewski, the pianist, has musical talent but Paderewski, the statesman, doesn't," if one does not realize that the pianist and the statesman are one and the same. In such a case one associates with the name two distinct MOPs, such as *Paderewski₁* and *Paderewski₂*.

8 Cappelen and Dever (2013, 70) call this view "Naïve Russellianism."

9 Cappelen and Dever (2013, esp. ch. 5) seem to have this view of propositional contents in mind.

10 See Recanati (1993), (2012) for thorough discussion. And see also Cappelen and Dever (2013, §4.4).

2.2. Frege Cases and Perry Cases

Exceptionalism has traditionally been motivated by cases. Here is one of Perry's classic examples:

Messy Shopper

I once followed a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, pushing my cart down the aisle on one side of a tall counter and back the aisle on the other, seeking the shopper with the torn sack to tell him he was making a mess. With each trip around the counter, the trail became thicker. But I seemed unable to catch up. Finally it dawned on me. I was the shopper I was trying to catch. [...] I believed at the outset that the shopper with a torn sack was making a mess. And I was right. But I didn't believe that I was making a mess. (Perry, 1993 [1979], 3)

In order to argue that "there is nothing deeply central about indexicals here" Cappelen and Dever compare the Messy Shopper case with the following story:

Messy Superman

Pushing my cart down the aisle I was looking for CK to tell him he was making a mess. I kept passing by Superman, but couldn't find CK. Finally, I realized, Superman was CK. I believed at the outset that CK was making a mess. And I was right. But I didn't believe that Superman was making a mess. (Cappelen and Dever, 2013, 33)

Messy Superman is a Frege case. The subject believes "Clark Kent is making a mess" but does not believe "Superman is making a mess" without irrationality, even though "Clark Kent" and "Superman" co-refer. In turn, as I shall say, Messy Shopper is a *Perry case*. That is, a case in which a subject believes "... I..." but disbelieves "... n...", where *n* is a referential term, without irrationality, even though "I" and "n" co-refer, given the context.

Commenting on Messy Superman, Cappelen and Dever write,

the ease with which Frege counterparts [of the de se examples] can be generated makes at least a prima facie case that the Perry/Lewis/Prior-style cases simply are familiar substitution puzzles and that nothing new is brought out that distinguishes indexicals from other referring expressions with respect to opacity. (Cappelen and Dever, 2013, 68)

Correspondingly, Magidor (2015) writes,

One could plausibly argue that any account of ordinary propositional attitudes would need to involve modes of presentation (or similar devices), due to Frege's puzzle. One could then concede that there is one (or one kind of) mode that is first-personal, and that this mode is particularly important for attitudes that play a role in intentional

action. However, this in itself does not require any revision of our standard account of attitudes or attitude ascriptions. (Magidor, 2015, 258)

In other words, the Anti-Exceptionalist claims that Frege cases and Perry cases are on a par with respect to what they demand of theories of attitudes. More particularly, I take Anti-Exceptionalism to be the view that Minimal Propositionalism suffices for explaining Perry Cases.

2.3. Frege's Constraint and Modes of Presentation

The kind of opacity demonstrated by Frege cases traditionally motivated Frege's Constraint, and MOPs are a standard way of reacting while preserving Two-Place and Absoluteness. Accordingly, the Anti-Exceptionalist will analyze Messy Superman as in (3).

- (3) a. a believes $\langle s$ is making a mess, \ast Clark Kent is making a mess \ast \rangle
 b. a does not believe $\langle s$ is making a mess, \ast Superman is making a mess \ast \rangle
 c. For any w , $\langle s$ is making a mess, \ast Clark Kent is making a mess \ast \rangle is true at w iff $\langle s$ is making a mess, \ast Superman is making a mess \ast \rangle is true at w .

So if the Anti-Exceptionalist is right that Messy Shopper does not demand more of our theories of attitudes, we should be able to give a parallel analysis, as in (4).

- (4) a. j believes $\langle j$ is making a mess, \ast The shopper with the torn sack is making a mess \ast \rangle
 b. j does not believe $\langle j$ is making a mess, \ast I'm making a mess \ast \rangle
 c. For any w , $\langle j$ is making a mess, \ast The shopper with the torn sack is making a mess \ast \rangle is true at w iff $\langle j$ is making a mess, \ast I'm making a mess \ast \rangle is true at w .

Similarly, take Lewis's example of the two gods:

Two Gods

Consider the case of the two gods. They inhabit a certain possible world, and they know exactly which world it is. Therefore they know every proposition that is true at their world. Insofar as knowledge is a propositional attitude, they are omniscient. Still I can imagine them to suffer ignorance: neither one knows which of the two he is. They are not exactly alike. One lives on top of the tallest mountain and throws down manna; the other lives on top of the coldest mountain and throws down thunderbolts. Neither one knows whether he lives on the tallest mountain or on the coldest mountain; nor whether he throws manna or thunderbolts. (Lewis, 1979, 139)

Lewis saw this case as motivating rejecting Absoluteness in favor of his theory of attitudes as having centered-worlds contents, that is, contents that vary in truth value not only with worlds but also with individuals. His argument was that since each god knows all absolute propositions, in order to explain why they still do not know which of the two they are, we need to appeal to non-absolute propositions.

Again Cappelen and Dever argue that this case is on a par with Frege cases:¹¹

what Lewis is trying to explain is how Zeus can know that *Zeus* is the god on the tallest mountain, but not know that *he* is the god on the tallest mountain. But this, of course, is just a special case of traditional Frege puzzles. (Cappelen and Dever, 2013, 99)

As for Messy Shopper, we might give the following Anti-Exceptionalist analysis of

Two Gods:

- (4) a. z believes $\langle z$ is on the tallest mountain, \ast Zeus is on the tallest mountain \ast \rangle
 b. z does not believe $\langle z$ is on the tallest mountain, \ast I'm on the tallest mountain \ast \rangle
 c. For any w , $\langle z$ is on the tallest mountain, \ast Zeus is on the tallest mountain \ast \rangle is true at w iff $\langle z$ is on the tallest mountain, \ast I'm on the tallest mountain \ast \rangle is true at w .

So this Anti-Exceptionalist claims that one can meet Frege's Constraint with respect to Perry cases by postulating a MOP, $\ast I \ast$, to differentiate thoughts like "Zeus lives on the tallest mountain" and "I live on the tallest mountain" when the thinker of both thoughts is Zeus.

One may of course be dissatisfied with this approach to Perry cases if one independently has misgivings about MOPs or absolute propositions or the idea that contents of attitudes are pairs of such things. Yet such misgivings are irrelevant to the topic under discussion here. The issue here concerns the claim that Perry cases demand nothing more of theories of attitudes than Frege cases. To complain that MOPs are theoretically unsatisfactory is not a way of vindicating the opposing Exceptionalist position. Correspondingly, the exercise of asking whether the theoretical demands of Perry cases go beyond those of Frege cases is a way of asking what exactly Perry cases show.

Moreover, I am not concerned to argue here that *any* way of handling Frege cases can also handle Perry cases. There may be approaches to the former that are well-motivated and maybe even preferable, given certain other theoretical commitments, for which Perry cases do present a distinct

¹¹ Ninan (2016: 206) agrees.

problem. Rather, if what I argue here is on the right track, then at least some ways of dealing with Frege cases also apply to Perry cases. Still, even if Perry cases do not oblige one to abandon the Doctrine of Propositions, one might want to do so for other reasons.

To evaluate the Anti-Exceptionalist suggestion that since Perry cases can be handled in terms of first-person MOPs, they do not mandate a departure from the Doctrine of Propositions, we need to ask what is required of first-person MOPs to explain the relevant *de se* cases. I turn to this question in the next section.

3. Self-Reference and Non-Descriptiveness

In this section I point out two features that first-person MOPs arguably must have in order to explain Perry cases along with some other characteristics of first-person thoughts.

3.1. Self-Reference

The first feature of first-person MOPs to note is that such MOPs guarantee reference to oneself. Let us state this as follows:

Self-Reference

For all x and y , if x thinks of y under $*I*$, then $x = y$.

The reason $*I*$ must obey Self-Reference is that if it does not, the truth conditions of first-person thoughts will come out wrong.

Take Perry's (1993 [1977]) example of Heimson who has gone mad and thinks he is David Hume, also discussed by Lewis (1979).¹² He thinks to himself, "I wrote the *Treatise*." Heimson is wrong. What he thought is false. Heimson did not write the *Treatise*, Hume did. This means that, for the Anti-Exceptionalist, the propositional component of Heimson's thought involves Heimson, not Hume.

In other words, the Anti-Exceptionalist should analyze Heimson's thought as in (6) (where e is Heimson).

(6) $\langle e \text{ wrote the } \textit{Treatise}, *I \text{ wrote the } \textit{Treatise}* \rangle$

Moreover, many will agree that, even though there may be a sense in which Heimson thought about Hume (I return to this in 4.2), Heimson cannot think

(7) (where u is Hume).

(7) $\langle u \text{ wrote the } \textit{Treatise}, *I \text{ wrote the } \textit{Treatise}* \rangle$

Heimson cannot have a thought that is true if and only if Hume wrote the *Treatise* by thinking "I wrote the *Treatise*." Self-Reference secures this result.

¹² See also Ninan (2016, 88–89). For a related problem, see Barwise and Perry (1983, 148), and Stokke (in press-a) for relevant discussion.

Correspondingly, consider the following story:

Messy Heimson

Heimson is pushing his cart around the supermarket. Hume is in the same store, also shopping. Heimson notices that someone is making a mess. A clerk is heard announcing over the store's PA system, "Hume is not the one making a mess." The clerk is right. Hume is not making a mess. Heimson thinks, "Oh, good, I'm not the one making a mess." But for good measure he checks his cart. Everything is in order. Heimson feels relieved.

Clearly, in this case, what Heimson thought was true. Yet it was not true because Hume was not making a mess, but because Heimson himself was not making a mess. If the clerk had been wrong, and it really was Hume who was making a mess, Heimson's belief would still have been true.

Whatever one wants to say about *I*, the MOP involved in thinking things like "I'm making a mess" or "I wrote the *Treatise*," it must obey Self-Reference.

3.2. *Non-Descriptiveness*

Further, one way of stating the insight demonstrated by Perry cases is that, as Recanati (2012) puts it,

for any indexical α and non-indexical description 'the F ', it is always possible for the subject to doubt, or to wonder, whether α is the F [...].
(Recanati, 2012, 32)

I take it that by "it is always possible" here Recanati has in mind what we might formulate as "there are cases in which it is rational." That is, Perry cases show that, for instance, it can be rational to think "Now is not the time of the meeting," "This is not the road to Rome," "I'm not the person lost in the Stanford Library," and so on.

The point is not just the obvious one that it can be rational to think such things in situations where they are true and one has good reasons to believe them. Rather, Perry cases demonstrate that it can be rational to think such things even if they are false. That is, even if, for instance, "Now is the time of the meeting" is true or "I'm the person lost in the Stanford Library" is true, and so on.

Accordingly, for the first-person, Perry cases can be seen to illustrate that *I* is non-descriptive in the following broad sense:

Non-Descriptiveness

For any x and non-indexical F , x can rationally think $\langle x$ is not the F ,
*I'm not the F * \rangle

Moreover, it is a consequence of Self-Reference that when one thinks such things one is thinking about oneself. In other words, Non-Descriptiveness

implies that one can think about oneself as "I" even if one does not think that one is the *F*, for any non-indexical *F*.¹³

As suggested, this should be restricted to non-indexical descriptions. It is not clear that there are situations in which one can rationally think "I'm not the thinker of this thought," "I'm not here now," or the like, as long as the indexicals are read in the relevant way. However, it can be argued that, even so, nothing is gained by equating *I* with an indexical description.

For instance, consider the proposal that *I* should be understood as *the thinker of this thought*. That is, to have a thought τ of oneself as *I* is to think of oneself as the thinker of τ . Recanati rejects this interpretation of MOPs like *I*:

this move cannot support a descriptivist approach to indexical modes of presentation. What is needed to support such an approach is an objective, *non-indexical* description that provides the sense of the indexical. (Recanati, 2012, 33)

Yet he does not provide an argument for this rejection. I assume the motivation is the following. To suggest that when *x* thinks, for instance, "I'm French," she is thinking $\langle x$ is French, *The thinker of this thought is French* \rangle assumes that the demonstrative figuring in the MOP refers to $\langle x$ is French, *The thinker of this thought is French* \rangle itself. Clearly, though, thinking "the thinker of this thought is *F*" does not itself guarantee that "this thought" refers to one's own thought. You might think to yourself, "Someone thinks that Sue is making a mess. But the thinker of this thought is actually the one making a mess."

So, on this view, there must be a special demonstrative, call it "this+" that figures in first-person MOPs. For instance, one might postulate that *The thinker of this+ thought* always picks out the thinker herself. Indeed, this new MOP must obey Self-Reference in order to get the truth conditions of thoughts like "I wrote the Treatise" right. Yet, so understood, *The thinker of this+ thought* is not substantially different from *I*. There is no significant theoretical difference between the two proposals. For this reason, I will ignore indexical descriptions in what follows.

Given Self-Reference, Non-Descriptiveness means that *I* is a way that *x* thinks of herself that is not facilitated by any descriptive information she might associate with herself. A common way of putting this is to say that everyone is *acquainted* with themselves in a non-descriptive way.¹⁴ Acquaintance, in this sense, is the kind of relation that is standardly invoked to account for the way in which, for instance, perception can facilitate non-descriptive ways of thinking about things. As Recanati writes,

13 Since we are assuming that *x* is rational, it is safe to assume that if *x* thinks she is not the *F*, she does not think she is the *F*.

14 On this, see especially Recanati (1993, 72–73), (2012, 34–38).

in some cases, we are simply unable to properly describe the object that is given to us in experience: we don't know what it is, yet that does not prevent us from referring to it directly (without conceptual mediation) and e.g. wondering what it can be [...]. (Recanati, 2012, 29)

In such cases the subject thinks of an object under a non-descriptive MOP that is supported by an acquaintance relation.

Thoughts supported by acquaintance are typically known as *de re* (or *singular*) thoughts.¹⁵ Thinking *de re* about something does not exclude that one associates descriptive information with the relevant object. The kind of example Recanati describes in the quoted passage above is a limit case. For instance, if Ralph has seen a man in a brown hat sneaking around, he can think *de re* of that man in virtue of acquaintance. But still, he might associate descriptive information with him such as "wears a brown hat." Yet in this case, such information does not determine or constrain reference. If the hat is actually purple, Ralph's thought is still about that man. Rather, Ralph's thought refers to the man *de re* because that is the man he has been acquainted with through perception.

Correspondingly, it is natural to take *I* to be supported by an acquaintance relation. (I return to this in 4.3.) Yet we can note that all that is required is that the reference of *I* be determined relationally rather than satisfactorily, regardless of whether one thinks that this is underwritten by acquaintance or not. In particular, when *x* thinks of herself under *I*, her thought refers to *x* independently of any information she might associate with herself. For concreteness, I continue to talk of this kind of relationally in terms of acquaintance in what follows.

4. Three Exceptionalist Replies

In the last section I argued that to explain Perry cases, first-person MOPs need to be self-referential and non-descriptive, or relational. In this section I consider four potential Exceptionalist replies to understanding *de se* thoughts in terms of such MOPs.

4.1. De Se vs. De Re

Self-Reference and Non-Descriptiveness entail that when the messy shopper, *j*, comes to think "I'm making a mess," *j* is thinking about *j* in a non-descriptive, relational way. The first potential objection I want to comment on argues that this merely captures the *de re* sense in which *j* is thinking about *j* but does not explain the sense in which *j* is thinking *de se* about *himself*.

Perry (1993 [1979]) explicitly argued that *de se* beliefs cannot be analyzed as *de re* beliefs. However, Perry did not discuss the kind of view we

15 See Jeshion (2010) for a useful overview.

have outlined above according to which when *j* believes "I'm making a mess," he believes a proposition that is true if and only if *j* is making a mess under the MOP *I'm making a mess*. As I explain below, Perry's misgivings about understanding the *de se* as *de re* do not apply to this view.

In order to argue that the *de se* cannot be reduced to the *de re*, Perry focuses on a particular way of understanding *de re* beliefs, which Perry describes as a view on which the *de re* is understood in terms of *de dicto* beliefs. We can state this view as follows:¹⁶

De Re as De Dicto

x believes *de re* of *y* that *y* is *F* iff there is a concept α such that α fits *y* and *x* believes that α is *F*.

Here is Perry's objection to this view qua proposal for understanding the *de se*:

if this is our analysis of *de re* belief, the problem of the essential indexical is still with us. For we are faced with the same problem we had before. I can believe that I am making a mess, even if there is no concept α such that I alone fit α and I believe that α is making a mess. (Perry, 1993 [1979], 40–41)

I take this to be the same observation that we noted earlier when motivating Non-Descriptiveness. That is, I take it that by a "concept" here, we are to understand some descriptive information associated with the relevant object.

The most natural way of reading Perry's comment above is as the claim that I can believe "I'm making a mess" while disbelieving things like "The shopper with the torn sack is making a mess," even if I am the shopper with the torn sack. As such, *I*, as we have characterized this MOP, is not open to this objection. Indeed, when *j* thinks of *j* under *I* he is thinking directly of *j* without this being mediated by descriptive information, analogously to the standard way of understanding the relation between an ordinary proper name and its referent.

Having dismissed this construal of *de re* beliefs, Perry (1993 [1979], 42) considers a more intuitive view on which "I believed of John Perry that he was making a mess." Unsurprisingly, Perry dismisses this proposal, too:

Saying that I believed of John Perry that he was making a mess leaves out the crucial change, that I came to think of the messy shopper not merely as the shopper with the torn sack, or the man in the mirror, but as *me*. (Perry, 1993 [1979], 42)

Yet this is not the view we have outlined above, either. While it is true to say that, on that view, *j* believes of *j* that he is making a mess, he does so while thinking of *j* as "I." The latter feature of *j*'s state of mind is what we analyze by saying that *j* thinks of *j* under the MOP *I*.

¹⁶ Cf. Perry (1993 [1979], 40). With some caveats, this is a version of the view of *de re* beliefs pioneered by Kaplan (1969).

4.2. Transparency

The second Exceptionalist response I want to consider argues that the Anti-Exceptionalist who understands *de se* thoughts in terms of first-person MOPs has problems accounting for a particular kind of *transparency* that is characteristic of *de se* thoughts.

There is an intuitive sense in which one can think things like "Hume is making a mess" or "The shopper with the torn sack is making a mess" without being able to identify the referent. For instance, thinking, or even knowing, "The shopper with the torn sack is making a mess" does not guarantee that one is able to pick out the messy shopper or demonstrate them if one was presented with them. As we might say, one can think "The shopper with the torn sack is making a mess" without knowing who the shopper with the torn sack is. The same holds for "Hume is making a mess."

This intuition might be made concrete by claiming that MOPs like *The shopper with the torn sack* and *Hume* are non-transparent in the following sense:

Non-Transparency

A MOP $*m*$ is non-transparent iff for any x and y , x can think $\langle y$ is F , $*m$ is F^* \rangle without being in a position to identify y .

On the other hand, *I* is arguably transparent. If you think "I'm making a mess," there is no sense in which you might not be in a position to identify yourself, or know who you are.

This idea is reminiscent of one way of understanding the phenomenon known as *immunity to error through misidentification*. For instance, Coliva (2003) writes,

Consider, for instance, the case of a person who uses 'me' to refer to someone, different from herself, she sees reflected in the mirror. If there is a sense in which she can take that person to be herself, then there is a sense in which her use of 'I' can refer to that person. I think there is such a sense. (Coliva, 2003, 426)

Coliva concludes that "I" obeys what she calls "The Real Guarantee:"

The Real Guarantee (at the level of language): the comprehending use of 'I' guarantees that the speaker knows which person is its *semantic* referent. (Coliva, 2003, 428)

Take a version of the case Coliva mentions. Lisa sees someone reflected in a shop window. She thinks it is herself. Noticing that the person has a white stain on her shirt, Lisa thinks, "I have a white stain on my shirt." However, it was not herself but Anna she saw reflected. One might argue that there is a sense in which Lisa intended to refer to Anna in this case, since Anna is the person she saw reflected. Yet clearly what Lisa said is false, since Lisa does not have a white stain on her shirt.

So one can take Anna to be the speaker referent of Lisa's use of "I," while Lisa is the semantic referent. This accords with Self-Reference, as we have understood this notion above. We said that when Heimson thinks "I wrote the *Treatise*" he cannot be thinking that Hume wrote the *Treatise*, even though he thinks he is Hume. If one likes, one can insist that Heimson speaker-refers to Hume with this thought, but there is no sense in which what Heimson thought was true. That is, the truth conditions of his thought undeniably involve Heimson (the semantic referent), not Hume.

In other words, the suggestion is that when x thinks of x under $*I^*$, she is in a position to identify herself as the (semantic) referent of her thought. $*I^*$ is transparent, as opposed to MOPs like $*That\ guy^*$, $*Hume^*$, $*The\ shopper\ with\ the\ torn\ sack^*$ and many others. The challenge concerns how the Anti-Exceptionalist can account for this feature of *de se* thoughts.

A first pass is to acknowledge that $*I^*$ is transparent in the following way:

Transparency

For any x , if x thinks $\langle x$ is F , $*I$ am F^* \rangle , x is in a position to identify x .

But what can the Anti-Exceptionalist mean by " x is in a position to identify x "? First, consider Non-Transparency. The observation is that you can think, for instance, "The shopper with the torn sack is making a mess" without being in a position to identify the shopper. To identify the shopper, intuitively, is to think something like, "The shopper with the torn sack is so-and-so," that is, to have a thought like $\langle j = j$, $*The\ shopper\ with\ the\ torn\ sack\ is\ John\ Perry^*$ \rangle , or the like. In other words, a natural way of understanding what it means to identify someone is be able to think of them as one side of an informative identity. Given the apparatus of MOPs, this means to be able to think of them under two different MOPs, as in $*m_1$ is m_2^* .

If this is right, then Transparency must be understood as the claim that when one thinks "I am F ," one is able to think of oneself as one side of an informative identity of the form "I am so-and-so." Hence, Transparency can be re-stated as

Self-Identification

For any x , if x thinks $\langle x$ is F , $*I$ am F^* \rangle , there is an MOP $*m^*$ such that x is in a position to think $\langle x = x$, $*I$ am m^* \rangle

The question is what m in Self-Identification could be.

We already know that m cannot be an MOP like $*The\ shopper\ with\ the\ torn\ sack^*$, $*John\ Perry^*$, or $*That\ guy^*$. For instance, you can think "I'm hungry" without thinking "I'm the shopper with the torn sack," even if you are the shopper with the torn sack, or you can think "I'm about to be hit by snow" without thinking "I'm that guy," even if you are unwittingly demonstrating yourself.

Indeed, it seems that the only candidate for m in Self-Identification is $*I*$ itself. So, according to this argument, the only way the Anti-Exceptionalist can account for Transparency is by noting that whenever x thinks "I am F " she is able to think $\langle x = x, *I \text{ am } I^* \rangle$. Yet, so this objection goes, this is trivial, and does not explain the sense in which "I" is special in that when one thinks "I am F ," one knows who one is thinking about, or alternatively, one is in a position to identify oneself as the (semantic) referent, in contrast with thinking things like "Hume is F ." Indeed, the identity $*I \text{ am } I^*$ is not informative, since the same MOP appears on each side.

The Anti-Exceptionalist can respond to this challenge by demanding a more substantial sense of what is meant by the claim that one is always in a position to identify oneself as "I." Indeed, she can insist that there is only a trivial sense in which this is right. Namely, when you think "I am F " the referent of your thought is your-self, as per Self-Reference. In other words, you are guaranteed to know who the referent of "I" is because you are identical with that person. Yet the Exceptionalist should exhibit some phenomenon or data point about *de se* thinking that is not accounted for by understanding the *de se* in terms of first-person MOPs.

4.3. Pyrrhic Anti-Exceptionalism?

Another way of reacting to the view we have outlined here is to accept that it is a way of preserving Two-Place and Absoluteness by postulating first-person MOPs as an implementation of Frege's Constraint in the face of the *de se* phenomena. Yet even if one agrees that it has been shown that Perry cases are on a par with Frege cases in that they do not demand more than the Doctrine of Propositions allows, one might argue that what Perry cases demand of $*I*$ still corroborates the claim that *de se* thoughts form a substantially distinct category of thoughts.

If this is right, the Anti-Exceptionalist may be said to have won a merely pyrrhic victory. Below, I consider Self-Reference and Descriptiveness in turn. As I explain, none of these characteristics of first-person MOPs are exceptional enough to render the Anti-Exceptionalist an Exceptionalist in disguise.

First, consider Self-Reference. This feature of $*I*$ means that first-person MOPs are guaranteed to refer, and moreover are guaranteed to refer to the subject of the relevant thought. The former feature is not different from many other MOPs. For instance, you might believe both "8 is smaller than 9" and "the square root of 64 is larger than 9" if you do not realize that 8 is the square root of 64. Yet $*\text{the square root of } 64^*$ is guaranteed to refer. The fact that $*I^*$ is guaranteed to refer to x is arguably not an exceptional feature either. After all x is an entity to which one can refer, and in particular, an entity to which x can refer.

Second, as we saw (in 3.2), Non-Descriptiveness is likewise a feature of many other MOPs. Demonstrative, perception-based MOPs like *that man over there* and so on, are ways of thinking directly about things. In particular, as we noted, non-demonstrative MOPs are characterized by their reference being determined relationally, rather than satisfactionally.

Acquaintance is a general way of understanding relational MOPs of this kind. If one can think non-descriptively about other people, it is not surprising that one can think non-descriptively about oneself. Moreover, as we said, any acquaintance relation that you can bear to something not identical to yourself is open to Perry cases. In other words, *I* must be supported by a relation that you can only bear to yourself.

What relation could this be? One suggestion is: identity. Indeed, Perry (2002) has suggested that thinking about oneself is facilitated by a mental file supported by the relation of self-identity.¹⁷ So, the claim would be that if one accepts that the reference of some MOPs is determined relationally, for instance, when thinking about something perceived visually, there is nothing exceptional in the suggestion that identity is a relation that can facilitate thinking in this way about someone, namely oneself.

In particular, one can follow Lewis (1999 [1983]), Recanati (2012), and others in broadening the notion of acquaintance to relations that are, to use Recanati's term, "epistemically rewarding." That is, one can accept that there are many kinds of relations that can facilitate the kind of direct, non-descriptive way of thinking about something that is captured by relational MOPs. Lewis writes,

There are the relations that someone bears to me when I get a letter from him, or I watch the swerving of a car he is driving, or I read his biography, or I hear him mentioned by name, or I investigate the clues he has left at the scene of his crime. In each case, there are causal chains from him to me of a sort which would permit a flow of information. Perhaps I do get accurate information; perhaps I get misinformation, but still the channel is there. I shall call such relations as these *relations of acquaintance*. (Lewis, 1999 [1983], 380–381)

As described by Lewis here, the relevant relations involve "causal chains." Yet one might wonder to what extent self-identity could be a relation such that there may be causal chains from one relatum to the other, that is, from oneself to oneself.

Recanati writes,

In virtue of being a certain individual, I am in a position to gain information concerning that individual in all sorts of ways in which I can gain information about no one else, e.g. through proprioception and kinaesthesia. (Recanati, 2012, 36)

¹⁷ See also Recanati (2012, 36–37).

One way of understanding this picture is that self-identity enables a privat acquaintance relation of the Lewisian kind, which allows for causal flow of information, in the sense that proprioception (or kinaesthesia) is facilitated causally by neurons interacting with the central nervous system.

Along these lines, one might argue that Self-Reference and Non-Descriptiveness are simply features of this kind of acquaintance relation based on self-identity, and moreover, not features that make *I* substantially different from a host of other MOPs based on acquaintance relations.

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