

A New Source of Data About Singular Thought

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Abstract

Philosophers have justified extant theories of singular thought in at least three ways: they have invoked wide-ranging theories motivated by data from other philosophical areas, they have elicited direct intuitions about which thoughts are singular, and they have subjected propositional attitude reports to tests such as Russellian substitution and Quinean exportation. In these ways, however, we haven't yet been able to tell what it takes to have singular thoughts, nor have we been able to tell which of our thoughts they are. I propose, therefore, a methodological contribution, a new source of data about singular thought. We can tell whether a thought is singular if we ask what we can coherently deny at the same time at which we agree with the thought. When we agree with a thought that is general, we cannot coherently deny about the thoughts subject a certain description, the one that occurs in the thoughts subject position. To show how to use this new

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data source, I develop a linguistic method for testing whether a speaker expresses a singular or a general thought.

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1 Introduction

A thought is singular when it contains a specific object; when it contains no specific object, the thought is general. For instance, this thought is singular: that London is in the UK. This, on the other hand, is general: that no matter what city is the capital, the capital of the UK is in the UK. During the last few decades, philosophers of mind and language have pursued two twin concerns of Bertrand Russell: we want to know what it takes to have singular thoughts, and we want to know which of our thoughts they are.

Although philosophers have proposed numerous answers to these questions, let us look not at the answers themselves, but rather at a few ways that philosophers have defended them.

First, philosophers have often derived views about singular thought from theories they held in other philosophical areas: Russell, for instance, from epistemology (1910), David Kaplan from the philosophy of language (1989). When philosophers do so, they are informed primarily not by data about singular thought itself,

but rather by data about the subject matter of the areas they derive their views from.

Second, philosophers have often invoked a certain kind of data about singular thought itself: direct intuitions of singularity. For instance, many philosophers hesitate to admit that we can have singular thoughts about Ortcutt, the shortest spy. For another example, take Robin Jeshion's recent cases, in which she aims to elicit the intuition that we can have singular thoughts without acquaintance (2010:116–17).

Although we can plausibly make good use of philosophical intuitions in this matter, it would nevertheless be disturbing if we used *only one* kind of intuition. Just as a single point will ill serve to determine a straight line, a single kind of data is a poor pointer into the space of theories. Let us therefore consider whether philosophers have used sources of data about singular thought other than direct intuitions of singularity.

At first, it may seem that Saul Kripke has tapped into such a source when he showed us the power of reasoning about counterfactual truth conditions (1980). But Kripke only intended this kind of reasoning to show rigidity, not singularity. And indeed, that is all it can show, because we get the same counterfactual truth conditions regardless whether we employ devices of direct reference or definite descriptions that happen to be rigid *de facto*.

Nevertheless, philosophers have indeed been using a data source about singular thought other than direct intuition: propositional attitude reports. Inspired by Russell (1905) and by W. v. O. Quine (1956), philosophers such as Ernest Sosa

(1970), Keith Donnellan (1977), or Nathan Salmon (2004) have abstracted these principles:

(Russellian Substitution) If a subject s has the singular thought about o that it is P , then for any expression E that directly refers to o , we can correctly report, $\lceil s$ attitude-verbs that E is P . \rceil

(Quinean Exportation) If a subject s has the singular thought about an o that it is P , then we may conclude that $\lceil \exists x (s$ attitude-verbs that x is P). \rceil

It seems at first rather compelling that we should use propositional attitude reports as a source of data about propositional attitudes and about their contents. Nevertheless, this is not as straightforward as it may seem. For consider the phenomenon that Kaplan has called the ‘pseudo de re’ (1989:555). Take, for instance, this case due to Ernest Sosa:

... suppose a sergeant, after consulting with higher authority, returns to his platoon and says to the shortest man: “Shorty, they want you to go first.” Actually the desire expressed by the highest authority was that the shortest man go first; i. e., it desires \lceil the shortest man is to go first \rceil . And yet, in the context, and given a shortest man, that suffices for *exportation* (Sosa, 1970:890)

Sosa concludes that higher authority has a singular thought about Shorty. Yet this is paradoxical, and we don’t know whether to embrace the paradox or rather to

treat attitude reports with skepticism. Moreover, Sosa himself suggests a plausible reason why we might choose skepticism:¹ when we report propositional attitudes, we often report them in any way we can achieve our practical purposes. “[W]hat is of interest to the sergeant is carrying out the orders, doing what the higher authority wants done” (Sosa, 1970:892). It seems, therefore, that we might find propositional attitude reports acceptable whenever they achieve the purposes at hand, even when they are not, in fact, true. And since it can be tricky to disentangle our intuitions about truth from our intuitions about acceptability, we should be wary of relying too much on attitude reports as a source of data about singular thought.

Hitherto we have seen three ways in which philosophers have justified their theories of singular thought: they have invoked theories from other areas, they have elicited direct intuitions of singularity, and they have examined propositional attitude reports. We have found the last of these sources somewhat shaky; and even with the three together, we haven’t yet been able to settle the issue of singular thought. We should therefore try to add a new source of data to our methodological inventory. This is not to say that if we add a new data source then we can expect to settle the issue forever; nevertheless, we can at the very least hope to make some progress.

Let us identify this new data source in *statements of agreement*. Consider this case due to Jeshion:

You are running along the edge of the Pacific Ocean and see a trail of footprints in the sand. You think to yourself, “Man, he has big feet.”

(Jeshion, 2010:115–16)

Consider, now, this dialogue:

- (1) (a) Anna: He has big feet.
(b) Billy: I agree with you, but he didn't leave these footprints.

Since language and thought can come apart, let us focus *not* on Anna's and Billy's language and on its linguistic meaning, but rather on their thoughts and on their psychosemantic contents. Let us agree to say that the thought *expressed* by Anna is the one that psychosemantically contains Anna's *speaker meaning*. The thought expressed by Anna is what Billy agrees with, and Billy coherently agrees with the thought iff the thought does *not* contain what Billy denies: that he—the one said to have big feet—left the footprints. Let us generalize this observation. Suppose that Billy can coherently deny that he—the one said to have big feet—satisfies *any description* (other than 'has big feet.'). On a first approximation, if Billy can do so, then Anna has expressed a singular thought.

This is not to suggest either that Billy does or that he does not coherently agree with Anna. We cannot judge this from an isolated conversation snippet such as 1 a–1 b; to judge whether Billy agrees coherently we need to access the context of the conversation. We shall see in Section 2 that, depending on the context, we can judge either that Billy agrees coherently or that he does not. Furthermore, Billy agrees coherently if and only if Anna expresses, in the respective contexts, singular thoughts. Hence in as far as we are good judges, we can find in our judgments of coherent agreement what we are searching for: a

new source of data about singular thought.

2 The New Data Source: Coherent Agreement

We are searching for a source of data—other than direct intuitions of singularity—about which thoughts are singular. To this end, let us look at what we may coherently deny when we agree with a thought: on a first approximation, a thought is singular iff we may agree with it yet coherently deny about its subject any description other than its predicate.

Let us examine for illustration three cases. Before we do so, however, recall that we are *not* assuming that thought is mirrored in language; i. e., we are *not* assuming that our characters—Anna and Billy—express singular thoughts iff they use sentences that semantically encode singular propositions. As we know from Donnellan (1966) and Kripke (1977), speakers can plausibly express singular thoughts through sentences that semantically encode general propositions. With this in mind, here is our first illustration:

- (2) (a) Billy: Whose footprints are these?
- (b) Anna: I don't know but he has big feet.
- (c) Billy: I agree with you, but he didn't leave these footprints.

In this first case, Billy agrees incoherently and Anna's thought is general. Look now at the second illustration:

- (3) (a) Billy: These footprints remind me that Dave is camping nearby.

(b) Anna: Is he? He has big feet.

(c) Billy: I agree with you, but he didn't leave these footprints; they only reminded me of him because they're so large.

Unlike in the previous case, this time Billy agrees coherently and Anna's thought is singular.

Finally, let us look at the third illustration—Jeshion's original case:

You have no interest whatsoever in discovering whom the big-footed runner is, and no standing general interests in foot sizes. As you run along, you give no further thought to the footprint (Jeshion, 2010:116).

If Billy uttered 2 c in this context, he would agree incoherently; Anna's thought, therefore, appears to be general, which corroborates Jeshion's intuition.²

We have seen how to use coherent agreement to test for singular thought. Before we go ahead, a clarification is apposite. According to our test, a thought is singular iff we may agree with it yet coherently deny about its subject *any* description (with a few exceptions; see Section 3). In some cases we may be tempted to forget this; in these cases, there is a specific description that we tend to consider the *only* one relevant. Yet if we did so then we would get the wrong result from our test. Here is an illustration. A speaker can express a general thought using a linguistic description that is not quite what the speaker means but nevertheless close enough (Donnellan, 1968:209). Suppose, as in Donnellan's example, that Smith was attacked by a murderer, survived the attack, yet died

shortly thereafter of some other cause. Sherlock and Watson understand how Smith died yet do not know who attacked him:

- (4) (a) Sherlock: Smith's murderer is insane.
(b) Watson: I agree with you, but he didn't murder Smith.

Since Sherlock uses the linguistic description 'Smith's murderer,' we might be tempted to consider this the only description relevant to our test. Yet if this were so then our test would yield the wrong result. To see this, notice that although Sherlock expresses a general thought, Watson replies coherently. Now if 'Smith's murderer' were the only description relevant to our test, then our test would say—falsely—that Sherlock expresses a singular thought.³ But 'Smith's murderer' is not the only relevant description: recall that our test will only yield the result 'singular' if Watson can coherently deny *every* description (with the exceptions in Section 3). Here now is one description that Watson cannot coherently deny in this context:

- (5) (a) Sherlock: Smith's murderer is insane.
(b) Watson: I agree with you, but he didn't try to kill Smith shortly before he died.

As we see, Watson cannot coherently deny *every* description. Hence the test yields the correct result: general.

Let us now ask to what extent coherent agreement is independent, as a data source, from an older one—from our direct intuitions of singularity. We can interpret this question in three ways. First, we can ask whether the new data source

is new *in kind*. This is fairly hard to answer, because it could be that we unconsciously infer our judgments of coherent agreement from equally unconscious intuitions of singularity. Since we cannot settle this issue here, let us leave it open. Nevertheless, we can answer the question of independence affirmatively if we interpret it in two other ways: The new data source is new in quantity and in quality. In quantity, because we can easily obtain judgments of coherent agreement from anybody who knows a language, whereas we can only obtain intuitions of singularity easily from philosophers, linguists, or other trained individuals. And in quality, because judgments of coherent agreement are sharper and clearer than intuitions of singularity, which can be fuzzy even when we do have the requisite training. Therefore, even if coherent agreement turned out to be but a new way of looking at intuitions of singularity, it would just as well improve our ability to evaluate theories of singular thought.

Hitherto we have engaged in thought experiments; let us now consider how we can apply our methodology to real-life research. In real life, Billy would not talk in the incoherent manner we have imagined; he would not do so *precisely* because it would be incoherent. This means that we cannot simply observe incoherent agreement in real-life conversation. Rather, we need to capture real-life conversation and bring it back to the lab. When we examine conversation in its natural context, we shouldn't wait for speakers *actually* to deny one description or another, but rather ask whether it *would* be incoherent for them to do so. How we answer this hypothetical question determines whether the thought under examination is singular.

Before we look at a formal statement of our test for singular thought, let us examine one final issue. In addition to a test for singular thought, we need one for *general* thought. This may seem puzzling, but consider that speakers may sometimes express more than one thought in the same utterance. If we take this possibility seriously, then even when we know that a speaker has expressed a singular thought, we cannot conclude that the speaker has not *also* expressed a general one. Hence we need independent tests for singular and for general thought. Moreover, hitherto we have been talking about coherent and incoherent *replies*; yet if Anna expresses multiple thoughts, then we can read Billy's reply as either coherent or incoherent, depending on which thought we read it as a reply to. Thus instead of replies we should be talking about their readings.

Here, now, are the preliminary formulations of our two tests. These formulations deliberately leave out two important issues: essential presuppositions and mental predicates. This is for expository clarity; presuppositions and predicates will be addressed in Section 3.

Consider, first, the general form of the kind of dialogue under discussion:

Speaker: \lceil *Subject-phrase* is *predicate-phrase*. \rceil

Respondent: \lceil I agree with you, but *pronoun* is not *descriptive-phrase*. \rceil

Here, then, is how to test for singular and for general thought:

Testing for singular thought (preliminary): The speaker has expressed a singular thought iff for any description *D*, if we substitute *D* for *descriptive-*

phrase then there is a reading of the respondent's reply on which the respondent replies coherently.

Testing for general thought (preliminary): The speaker has expressed a general thought iff there is a description D such that, if we substitute D for *descriptive-phrase*, there is a reading of the respondent's reply on which the respondent does *not* reply coherently.

3 Refining the Test: Predicated and Presupposed Descriptions

In the previous section, we have seen the preliminary formulations of the tests for singular and for general thought. These formulations left out two important issues: predicated and essentially presupposed descriptions. When we agree with a thought we cannot coherently deny these descriptions; nevertheless, they do not occur in the thought's subject position and therefore they do not render the thought general. To prevent these descriptions from causing false results, we must except them from our tests, which we shall do in the present section: in subsection 3.1 we shall deal with predicated, in subsection 3.2 with essentially presupposed descriptions.

3.1 Excepting Predicated Descriptions

When we think a thought about an entity—say, Marie Curie—there is something that we think *about* Marie Curie: the thought’s mental predicate. If we agree with the thought then we must agree that its predicate holds of Marie Curie; hence *even if the thought is singular* there is still a description—one that expresses the predicate—such that if we agree with the thought we cannot deny this description coherently. This is trouble: when we input into our tests a description that expresses the thought’s predicate, the description triggers a false negative result from the test for singular thought (and the corresponding false positive from the test for general thought). Hence we must except mental predicates from our tests; and to except them, we must find a way to detect them.

At first this may seem easy: it may seem that thoughts always have the same predicates as the utterances that express them. Yet we may *not* assume this; a thought can go apart from its utterance, speaker’s meaning apart from sentence meaning (Grice, 1968). Just as we don’t take the linguistic subjects of utterances as inerrant guides to their mental counterparts, we shouldn’t do so for predicates either.

We must, therefore, find a way to detect mental predicates. But not just any way will do. We ultimately aim to prevent false results from our tests for singular and for general thought. Hence, on pain of circularity, we need to except mental predicates from our tests by detecting them in a way that doesn’t assume that we already know which thoughts are singular.

Hitherto we have been looking at coherent agreement; however, to detect

mental predicates in a non-circular way, let us look at coherent *disagreement*.

Here are examples of coherent and incoherent disagreement:

Coherent disagreement:

- (6) (a) Anna: The leaves are green.
(b) Billy: I disagree with you, they aren't green!

Incoherent disagreement:

- (7) (a) Anna: The leaves are green.
(b) Billy: I disagree with you, they aren't leaves!

Here, then, is how to detect mental predicates. Take this general dialogue form:

Speaker: \lceil *Subject-phrase* is *predicate-phrase*. \rceil

Respondent: \lceil I disagree with you, *pronoun* is not *descriptive-phrase*. \rceil

Detecting mental predicates: We can detect the predicate of (one of) the thought(s) expressed by the speaker if we find a description D such that, if we substitute D for *descriptive-phrase*, there is a reading of the respondent's reply on which the reply is coherent.

This way of detecting mental predicates is non-circular, i. e., it doesn't assume that we already know which thoughts are singular. To see this, notice that we can judge whether Billy and Carol disagree coherently with Anna, regardless of whether Anna expresses a singular thought and regardless of whether we think she does:

Disagreement with a singular thought:

- (8) (a) Anna (about Dave, whom she takes to have left the footprints): He has big feet.
- (b) Billy: I disagree with you, he doesn't have big feet. (coherent)
- (c) Carol: I disagree with you, he didn't leave these footprints. (incoherent)

Disagreement with a general thought:

- (9) (a) Anna (about whoever left the footprints): He has big feet.
- (b) Billy: I disagree with you, he doesn't have big feet. (coherent)
- (c) Carol: I disagree with you, he didn't leave these footprints. (incoherent)

Now that we have a way to detect mental predicates, notice that we must except from the test not only the predicates themselves, but everything they entail. If a thought's predicate P entails P' , then P' too will trigger a false result; hence we want to except all the descriptions that P entails. Furthermore, recall that we want to allow speakers to express multiple thoughts in one utterance; hence we should except from the test the descriptions entailed by the predicates of *all* the thoughts that the speaker expresses. Let us call these the *predicated* descriptions.

If we except predicated descriptions, we will be able to deal with all cases except perhaps a few marginal exceptions. While it is hard to come up with such exceptions, they are conceptually possible: Suppose that a speaker expressed in

the same utterance two thoughts—one singular, the other general. Suppose, furthermore, that the speaker somehow contrived to make the singular thought's predicate identical to the general thought's subject-position descriptive content. This would interfere with our tests. Nevertheless, we are not developing an analysis but an epistemic criterion, a source of data. And since we shouldn't expect every epistemic criterion to be entirely infallible, we need not be concerned in real life about these hypothetical exceptions.

3.2 Excepting Essentially Presupposed Descriptions

In the previous subsection we addressed the issue of mental predicates; in this one, we shall address the issue of essential presuppositions. As with mental predicates, we can get false positives from our preliminary test for general thought when we encounter certain presuppositions. This is why we must except from our test not only predicated, but also essentially presupposed descriptions.

For illustration, let us look at demonstratives and the many presuppositions that accompany them:

- (10) (a) Elaine (looking at a wall and pointing at it): That wall is white.
(singular)
- (b) Fred: I agree with you, but you're not looking at it. (incoherent)
- (c) Gala: I agree with you, but you're not pointing at it. (incoherent)
- (d) Humphrey: I agree with you, but you're not referring to it.
(incoherent)

As we see, Fred, Gala, and Humphrey cannot coherently deny about the wall certain descriptions: that Elaine is looking, pointing, or referring to it. But this is not because of the thought expressed by Elaine; rather, this is because of Elaine's presuppositions. Elaine (or her utterance, or her sentence) presupposes that she is looking, pointing, and referring to the wall; and if we deny these presuppositions, then we cannot agree with Elaine coherently. This seems to force us to conclude—falsely—that Elaine has expressed a general thought.

Notice, now, that we don't get this problem with *all* presuppositions; rather, we only get it with those presuppositions that are *essential* to Elaine's speech act. That is, we only get the problem when the presupposition denied must be true for Elaine to succeed in her speech act. To see the distinction, let us look at a case where the presupposition denied is *not* essential. Suppose that Elaine and Fred have been searching for a white wall to use as a background for a picture. They are therefore presupposing, in this context, that they need a white wall. But this presupposition is *inessential*, in that Elaine can succeed in her speech act even if the presupposition fails. And indeed, Fred can coherently deny the presupposition:

(11) (a) Elaine: That wall is white.

(b) Fred: I agree with you, but we don't need a white wall any more.

We're going to use the sea as a background instead.

Let us generalize. Suppose that in a certain context we presuppose that x satisfies *presupposed-description*. Suppose also that the speaker uses *subject-phrase*

to refer to x and thus expresses a singular thought. Finally, suppose that our presupposition is essential to the speaker's utterance:

Speaker: 「*Subject-phrase* is *predicate-phrase*.」 (singular)

Respondent: 「I agree with you, but *pronoun* is not *presupposed-description*.」
(incoherent)

Since the presupposition is essential, the respondent cannot coherently deny *presupposed-description* about x . Hence, according to our preliminary test from Section 2, it would seem that the speaker expresses a general thought. Yet the speaker expresses a singular one. We must prevent this kind of situation by excepting essentially presupposed descriptions from the test's final formulation.

Unlike in the case of mental predicates, let us not investigate ways to detect essential presuppositions: on this topic there is already a vast literature on projection criteria for presupposition, including the negation test, the question test, and the modal operator test (see Beaver and Geurts, 2011). Rather, let us directly amend the formulations of our tests:

Speaker: 「*Subject-phrase* is *predicate-phrase*.」

Respondent: 「I agree, but *pronoun* is not *descriptive-phrase*.」

Testing for singular thought (final): The speaker has expressed a singular thought iff for any non-predicated, not essentially presupposed description D , if we substitute D for *descriptive-phrase* then there is a reading of the respondent's reply on which the respondent replies coherently.

Testing for general thought (final): The speaker has expressed a general thought iff there is a non-predicated, not essentially presupposed description *D*, such that if we substitute *D* for *descriptive-phrase* then there is a reading of the respondent's reply on which the respondent does *not* reply coherently.

4 A Limitation: Semantic Instrumentalism and Similar Theories

Here now is an acknowledged limitation of our tests: We cannot use the tests to evaluate the view that Jeshion has called semantic instrumentalism (2009:387–88; 2010:105–106). On this view, speakers can think singular thoughts about arbitrary objects by simply using definite descriptions to fix the reference of singular terms. Kripke, for instance, appears to have held this view, for a while, about the name 'Neptune' as used by Leverrier (1980:96). In this brief section we shall see why we ought to treat instrumentalism and similar theories as a limitation of our test.

Here is how a semantic instrumentalist can challenge our test:

(12) (a) Leverrier: Neptune is a planet.

(b) Martha: I agree, but it is not causing the perturbations.

According to semantic instrumentalism, Leverrier expresses in this dialogue a singular thought yet Martha agrees incoherently. This is because Martha is giving voice to contradictory beliefs. On one hand, when she accepts Leverrier's use

of ‘Neptune,’ she implicitly accepts the essential presupposition that Neptune is causing the perturbations. But on the other hand, she explicitly denies that very same presupposition. This shows that if semantic instrumentalism is right, then we can no longer argue that Leverrier’s thought is singular iff Martha agrees coherently.

Fortunately, semantic instrumentalism is an unattractive view held nowadays by few philosophers. We may therefore proceed on the plausible assumption that instrumentalism is false.

Yet even though we may assume that instrumentalism is false, notice that we can come upon similar difficulties whenever we meet what we may call a K-dilemma. Imagine that we are confronted with two groups of philosophers, G-theorists and S-theorists. G-theorists and S-theorists disagree about whether speakers express singular thoughts when they make utterances of a certain kind—K-utterances. G-theorists maintain that utterers of K-utterances express general thoughts. Moreover, G-theorists identify the subject-position descriptions of these allegedly general thoughts with a certain kind of descriptions—K-descriptions. On the other hand, S-theorists maintain that utterers of K-utterances express *singular* thoughts. As for K-descriptions, S-theorists deny that they occur in subject position; instead, S-theorists maintain that K-descriptions are *essentially presupposed*.—We have dismissed instrumentalism on the grounds that it is no longer considered plausible. We cannot, however, issue a similar generic solution to all the potential K-dilemmas. Hence we must proceed with this limitation in mind.

5 A Sample Application: Uses of Complex Demonstratives

Although this paper aims to contribute only to our methodology and not to our body of doctrine, here is an illustration, on the case of uses of complex demonstratives, of how to apply our tests for singular and for general thought.

First, note that the aim here is *not* to intervene in the debate surrounding the semantics of complex demonstratives. That is a matter of natural language semantics, not of psychosemantics. Instead, the aim is to answer a rather independent question, the question whether speakers who use complex demonstratives express singular or general *thoughts*.

Let us look at two dialogues inspired by Jeffrey King (1999:156). First, suppose that Benjamin has told Ada yesterday that a student has scored 100% on his test. Today, after seeing the unusually difficult test questions, Ada says:

(13) Ada: That student who scored 100% is a genius.

In the meanwhile, Benjamin has reviewed his grading and found that, because of an academically irrelevant technicality, the student only scored 99%.

(14) Benjamin: I agree with you, but he or she did not score 100%.

In this context, it seems that Benjamin replies coherently, and therefore that Ada has expressed a singular thought.

Consider, now, this very different context: Benjamin always grades such as to ensure that exactly one student scores 100%. This year Benjamin has an ex-

tremely talented class, so he can only award the top score to a very strong student. Ada is familiar with Benjamin's grading procedure, but she has never discussed the scores with him:

(15) Ada: *That* student who scored 100% is a genius.

(16) Benjamin: I agree with you, but he or she did not score 100%.

This time it seems that Bill replies incoherently, and therefore that Ada has expressed a general thought.

Let us therefore conclude that speakers can use complex demonstratives to express either singular or general thoughts. This is unsurprising, and reminds of the uses of definite descriptions.

6 Conclusion

We have seen in this paper how to use coherent agreement as a new source of data about singular thought. To find whether a thought is singular, we can examine dialogues in which a) a speaker expresses the thought, and b) a respondent agrees with the speaker yet denies about the thought's subject a certain description. If we can substitute for this description any arbitrary piece of information, then the thought is singular; otherwise, it is general. We have found two exceptions to this principle: descriptions that express the thought's predicate, and descriptions that the speaker is presupposing essentially.

As a welcome side effect, we can use this method not only to determine

the psychosemantic features of thought, but also to investigate the pragmatics (though not the semantics) of natural language. We can see this at work in our sample application in Section 5; there, we used our method to find that speakers can express either singular or general thoughts when using complex demonstratives.

Save for this sample application, this paper has aimed solely to improve our methodology, rather than to use the new data source to support particular theories or substantive conclusions about singular thought and about what it takes to have it. This, however, is the next thing we should do.

Notes

¹Note, though, that Sosa does not himself regard this as a reason for skepticism.

²On a historical note, Keith Donnellan has discussed dialogues involving coherent *disagreement* similar to our coherent agreement (1978:54–55); see also Kripke, 1977:270). Donnellan, however, was not using his dialogues to diagnose singular thought; rather, he was examining cases where everyone agrees that the thought is singular, and he was arguing that in these cases speaker reference determines semantic reference.

³Notice that we are *not* here using our test to tell whether Sherlock expresses a singular thought. Rather, we are testing the test itself. It seems safe to assume that we already know which thoughts are singular in easy cases such as Smith's murderer. And if so, then we can use these easy cases to fine-tune the test so we can tell what is going on in harder cases such as Jeshion's Bearprint or Dessert Sensations (2010:117).

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