

*De Re Thought, Object Identity, and Knowing-Wh*¹*

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On one possible, Russellian-inspired view of *de re* thought a thought is *de re*, that is, is about the very thing rather than a mere characterization of it², if and only if (1) it is constitutively tied, if not to the existence, at least to the *identity* of its object (2) the thinker knows which/who the object of her thought is (call this the *knowing-wh* requirement*)³. (1) combines two claims:

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2 I take this minimal characterization of *de re* thought to be uncontroversial. What *is* controversial, though, is what it takes for a thought to be about the *res*. In what follows, I shall take for granted that for a thought to be about the *res*, it has *at the very least* to be expressed by a sentence containing a directly referential singular term causally grounded in its referent. I agree, thus, with Boër; Lycan (1986, p. 131) when they claim that *de-re-ness* is to be identified with aboutness of grade 4 (*i.e.* direct reference-plus-causal grounding) or higher. This paper, however, gives prominence to metaphysical and epistemological rather than semantic issues.

3 To my knowledge, nobody has explicitly endorsed this view in its entirety. While it seems natural to endorse (1) on kripkean lines (see WOODFIELD, 1982, p. v; GARCÍA-CARPINTERO, 2008, p. 79), a kripkean would not endorse (2) either as necessary, or a sufficient condition for *de re* thought. Perhaps the philosopher who came the closest to endorse the view in its entirety is Evans (1982), for he takes *de re* (in his terminology, ‘information-based’) thoughts to be Russellian in character and explicitly adheres to Russell’s Principle (the principle that one does not think or judge about something unless one knows which object the thought or the judgment is about) as a necessary requirement on (singular as well as) *de re* thoughts. It is worth noting that Evans’s claim is stronger than (1) since Russellian thoughts are, on his view, ontologically dependent for their content on the *existence* of their object while (1) merely claims that they are (object-) *identity* dependent. Evans’s

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the claim that (a) a thought *de re* is typically the kind of thought that is individuated by the identity of its object (call this the *individuation principle*) in the sense that if the object is actually or possibly different, the thought itself is, with the claim that (b) it is individuated by the identity of its object in a way that makes its relatedness to that object an essential property of it (call this *de-re-thought essentialism*⁴).

The trouble with this view is that it seems to be at odds with far from uncommon cases wherein the subject undoubtedly has a thought *de* a particular object while, unbeknownst to her, it is not the one she takes to be *F* either because she is confused, or because she is being intentionally tricked. Suppose I entertain a thought about the cup I am seeing – I may think, for instance, *of* that cup that it is made out of plastic – while, unbeknownst to me, it has just been replaced with a qualitatively indistinguishable, yet numerically distinct cup. If (1a) is true, the thought I am entertaining now cannot be the same as the thought I was entertaining about the cup before the trick. By the individuation principle, being about two numerically distinct cups, the thoughts themselves must be different. Now there is a sense in which it might be claimed that they are just the same thought, for arguably nothing in the qualitative character of the (visual) experience that justify them and on which they are based seems to differ from one thought to the other. This presumably explains why the thinker is so easily confused or tricked here. She is tricked or confused because she cannot tell on the sole basis of her (visual) experience the difference between the two objects. She has no good reason to believe that they are different, even though they are⁵. Cases of this type might motivate the rejection of the individuation principle applied to *de re* thoughts and, consequently, the claim that such thoughts are not individuated by the identity of their object. It might motivate the further claim that (1b) too is false for, it

claim may be and has been construed (see BACH, 1994, p. 41-42; MARTIN, 2002, p. 180), nevertheless, as a weaker claim liable to accommodate our modal intuitions concerning the strong (transworld) connection between the identity of the thought and that of its object.

4 Essentialism in general is the doctrine that (at least) some objects have (at least some) essential properties. *De-re-thought* essentialism is more specific. It is the claim that some of our thoughts are *de re* just in case they have (at least) one essential property, the property of being related to that which is contextually determined as their particular object.

5 This is not meant as an argument against the truth of (1a) as its truth or falsehood depends on metaphysical (rather than epistemological) arguments that are still to be given. See below section II.

might be asserted, 'there is nothing internal to a *de re* thought about an object that makes the thought about *that* object'⁶ – call this *de-re-thought anti-essentialism*. Finally, it may raise suspicion that (2) is just as false, for in the above example the subject is having a thought about the very cup she is seeing (to the effect that it is made out of plastic), although she cannot tell if the object (the cup she is seeing) is distinct from the one (the qualitatively indistinguishable cup it replaces) thought about a few seconds earlier.

All this suggests that the view spelled out has, to say the least, strong objections to face and that its correctness, if ever, cannot be taken for granted. In this paper I shall argue that cases of mistaken identity do not force on us the conclusion that the view at stake is false. All they show is that it needs better support. I analyze the motivations for the view as well as some of the objections voiced against it. Finally, I show that mistaken-identity cases can be accommodated so that the restrictions set on its truth by the advocates of the two-component picture (of *de re* thoughts) and the *de-re-thought* anti-essentialists can be lifted and the view itself, defended on better grounds.

I. Identity-Dependent Thoughts

Let us assume for the time being that the view is true, that it expresses, that is, legitimate requirements on *de re* thought. If so, assuming that the left-hand side of the biconditional is true, (1a,b) and (2) must also be true. On what grounds shall one take them to be true? More importantly, what notion of thought *de re* is involved in such claims? How are we to understand the *de-re-ness* of such thoughts?

A way to answer these questions is to trace the very notion of a thought *de re* back to its Russellian roots⁷. Russell is often pinpointed (I take it, rightly) in the literature as the source of

6 Bach (1994, p. 13 fn 5).

7 Of course, it is somehow anachronistic to use this terminology in connection with Russell. The '*de re/de dicto*' terminology applied to *beliefs* or *thoughts* was introduced afterwards, notably by Burge (1979), in the context of a reflection over the logical form of belief reports made in relational ('believes-of') rather than notional ('believes-that') style and the conditions for the correct ascription of the corresponding beliefs. To my knowledge, Russell only spoke of the object (referred to by the singular term and thought about in a judgment) being or not being itself a *constituent* of the judgment or *entering* or not entering into the statement. See in particular

the theoretical contrast between singular thoughts, on the one hand, and descriptive or general thoughts, on the other hand⁸. He is also considered (again, rightly) one of the strongest advocates of singularism. Singularism is the view that (at least) *some* of our thoughts about the world are truly and directly about particulars – in addition to being about properties predicated of them. It is doubtful that Russell eventually managed to defend this view cogently. Because of the strong constraints he had placed on having singular thoughts – that is, thoughts that have as contents singular propositions, he ended up shrinking down the field to instances (thoughts about one's own experiences and, presumably, about oneself) that are paradoxically not about ordinary particulars. As we shall see, Russell's constraints are precisely the ones expressed by (1a,b) and (2). Nothing compels us, however, to endorse Russell's strictures on the semantic values of the words 'singular term' and 'singular thought' as a result of granting the truth of (1a,b) and (2).

Russell's most important contribution to the on-going debate is often thought to lie in his contrast between two natural semantic kinds (referential vs. quantificational expressions) and the parallel contrast between two natural cognitive kinds: singular vs. general (or descriptive) thoughts. The key-notions here are, respectively, that of a linguistic expression's object-dependent, as opposed to object-independent, meaningfulness and that of a thought being about its object in a strong, as opposed to a weak, sense of 'about'⁹. A linguistic expression is said to be object-dependent for its meaningfulness if it is not meaningful, that is, does not generate true or false claims when combined with predicates unless there is an object designated by it. For Russell, only a limited range of singular terms instantiate this semantic property: demonstratives such as 'this' or 'that' and possibly the indexical 'I'¹⁰. All other terms, namely ordinary proper names and definite or indefinite descriptions are object-independent for their meaningfulness to the extent that they generate true or false claims even though there is no object satisfying

Russell (1917, p. 216; 1920, p. 168). The 'singular-thought/-proposition' terminology is, as it seems, best suited to Russell's insights into the nature and structure of some of our thoughts about the world. However, although he had next to nothing to say about the *causal* connection between the thought and its object, which I take to be a crucial feature of the contemporary notion of a thought *de re*, Russell's insights, as we shall see, fit perfectly the idea of thoughts based on information (causally) derived from the object *itself*.

8 See Jeshion (2010, p. 2-3); Bach (2010, p. 39-44); Recanati (2009, p. 8-17; 2010, p. 141-149).

9 See, respectively, Hawthorne; Manley (2012, p. 4-10) and Dennett (1982, p. 67-68).

10 Russell (1917, p. 216-219; 2010, p. 28-30).

the descriptive condition associated with them. The parallel cognitive contrast is that between 'aboutness' in a strong and a weak sense applied to thoughts. Suppose I think the winner of the next presidential election is (will be) a lucky man/woman. In a sense my thought is not *about* anyone, for I may have no specific person in mind at the time the thought was expressed. The thought expressed before the elections is general for it has as content a property, the property of being the winner of the next presidential election and, as a result, that of being a lucky man/woman. Still, it may be said to be in another, weak sense *about* the person whoever it is that is to satisfy both predicates. Suppose the winner happens to be Dilma. My thought expressed before the elections (using typically a definite description in subject position) is not about Dilma in the strong sense of 'about' although it is *about* her in a weak or loose sense, which is precisely the one involved in the relation of denotation¹¹.

Emphasis is usually placed in the literature on singular terms and thoughts on object-dependency and strong aboutness of the existential kind. This is easily understandable, for it is precisely in the empty case (when there is no object to refer to or to be thought about) that the object-dependent meaningfulness of some linguistic expressions and the strong aboutness of some thoughts become conspicuous. So-called 'Russellian (singular) terms' are, by definition, terms the meaningfulness of which is ontologically dependent on the existence of the object purportedly referred to and Russellian (singular) thoughts, thoughts whose relatedness to their object is such that if there is no object, no thought is entertained, for in this case no content is available as content of the thought¹². The empty case is indeed critical. No wonder, then, it has given rise to an intense discussion about the reality of psychological states like hallucinatory ones that are *about* nothing and the possibility of entertaining singular thoughts about non-existent objects¹³. However, in my view it is only the surface manifestation of a deeper phenomenon, which is the hallmark of singular and/or *de re* thoughts: their object-*identity* dependency. As I understand Russell, his main contribution to the on-going debate is to have pinpointed this

11 It is *about* Dilma in virtue of the fact that Dilma happens to satisfy (assuming, of course, she does) the conditions *being the winner of the presidential election* and *being a woman*.

12 See Evans (1982, p. 12; p. 46-47; esp. p. 70-73; p. 173 for the view that demonstrative thoughts are Russellian in the previously defined sense); McDowell (1998, p. 204).

13 As to the former, see Carruthers (1987) and Noonan (1993); for the latter, see Martin (2002) and Crane (2011). For a discussion of the semantics of sentences containing empty singular terms, see Azzouni (2010).

phenomenon as key to any theory of singular thoughts that grant their existence. To flesh this out, I shall use some suggestions made by Blackburn¹⁴. This will help us understand the grounds on which (1a,b) and (2) are often considered true.

Consider the following couple of utterances:

(3) A dog is barking.

(4) That dog [the subject pointing to a salient object in her vicinity] is barking.

Now make the following general assumptions about declarative sentences:

(i) They are often used to convey all sorts of information concerning the things we think and talk about.

(ii) Part of the information conveyed is semantically expressed (encoded) by their utterances.

Given (i) and (ii), there is, intuitively, a difference between (3) and (4) with respect to the nature of the information expressed and conveyed and the kind of thought required to grasp their truth-conditions. (4) is identity-dependent because both the information it expresses and the kind of thought required to understand it (i.e. to grasp its truth-conditions) are strongly dependent on the identity of the object they are about¹⁵. There are two related ways to understand this point. Semantically, the truth or falsehood of the information content semantically encoded by an utterance of (4) depends on whether the particular object referred to by the complex demonstrative 'that dog' has the property of being a dog and, in addition, that expressed by the predicate 'ξ is barking'. The particular dog referred to being part of the truth-conditions of (4) when uttered by someone, its information content would be different if the dog were not the dog actually pointed at, but some other twin or qualitatively indistinguishable dog. Epistemically speaking, the kind of thought required (on the part of the hearer) to understand an utterance of (4), that is, to grasp its singular truth-conditions¹⁶, is itself identity-dependent. The hearer does not understand a given utterance of (4) unless he knows which thing is a dog and is meant

14 Blackburn (1984, ch. 9).

15 On the notion of an identity-dependent utterance, see Blackburn (1984, p. 303).

16 The notion is Recanati's. See Recanati (1993, p. 26-44).

to be barking. And to know which thing is barking is to know the identity of the thing to which the predicates (correctly or incorrectly) apply, that is, to be able to tell whether the thing actually pointed at is or is not the same as another qualitatively indistinguishable thing qua object of thought. By contrast, (3) is identity-independent both semantically and epistemically. Semantically, because the truth or falsehood of the information content of an utterance of (3) does not depend on any specific dog's having or not the property expressed by the predicate 'ξ is barking'. All that is required for an utterance of (3) to be true is that some dog be barking. If one analyzes an utterance of (3) as asserting the existence of at least one object of the domain (say, the animals in the neighborhood) having the property of being a dog and that of barking, the sentence itself can be understood as reporting the quantity of instances on which the predicates are satisfied. It is enough that the predicates be satisfied on at least one instance no matter what/which it is for an utterance of (3) to be true. Epistemically, this means that it is perfectly possible for the hearer to understand the information semantically expressed and conveyed by an utterance of (3) without having the first idea which things of the domain, if any, satisfy the predicates¹⁷.

One can easily understand now why the emphasis is usually placed in the literature on object-dependency and strong aboutness on the empty case. It is precisely in this case that the identity-independent nature both of the information expressed by some (quantifier-involving) sentences and of the thought required to understand them comes to the fore. Take a sentence wherein a definite description occurs such as one of Russell's favorite examples:

5) The present King of France is bald.

On Russell's view¹⁸, the proposition it expresses has a truth-value (it is *false*) and is perfectly understandable even though *no* object uniquely satisfies the conditions expressed by the definite description ('The present King of France') and the predicate 'ξ is bald', as it happens when uttered in 2013. But this is only a dramatic way of emphasizing the identity-independent nature of sentences containing definite descriptions. Just like sentences containing indefinites such as (3) they are identity-independent, for the information expressed by an utterance of (5)

17 The quote is from Blackburn (1984, p. 305).

18 Russell (1905).

can be reconstructed in a sequence of operations to be performed on the predicate expressions so as to yield its truth when uttered on a certain occasion – take the predicate ‘ ξ currently is King of France’ around the domain and check whether it is satisfied by exactly one object of the domain, then take the predicate ‘ ξ is bald’ and check whether the object satisfying uniquely the former predicate also satisfies the latter – without having to specify which object satisfies both predicates. The fact that (5) uttered in 2013 is perfectly understandable while it is false shows that the identity of the satisfier does not matter. Epistemically, this means that the hearer can understand an utterance of (5) without *knowing who* satisfies the identifying condition expressed by the definite description. The kind of knowledge required for such understanding is coined by Russell ‘knowledge by description’ and is contrasted with knowledge by acquaintance, the latter but not the former involving a special kind of knowledge described by Russell as ‘knowing *who*’ the person denoted by the definite description is¹⁹. If one can understand an utterance of (5) when nothing (no one) satisfies the definite description, this means that in the non-empty cases the identity of the object satisfying it is normally irrelevant to the kind of thought required to understand an utterance of (5). By contrast, the identity of the object referred to by ‘that dog’ in an utterance of (4) matters just as much to its truth-conditions as to the kind of thought required to understand it.

It might be objected that the (object-) identity-dependency of some of our thoughts emphasized by Russell captures their singularity *via* the singularity of their content, not their *de-re*-ness. On some more contemporary views, *de-re*-ness not only requires that the object itself be part of the semantic content (*i.e.* of the proposition) expressed by statements such as (4); it also requires that the semantic content be informational in the sense of informing the subject more or less directly about the presence of some objects and/or properties in her surrounding. The kind of connection, involved in contents of this type, with world objects and/or properties is typically thought of as *causal*. For a thought to be *de re* it is not enough that it be about its object in a strong sense of ‘about’ (characteristic of truly referential expressions), it must also be ‘of’ its object in the sense in which a photograph is ‘of’ the objects and properties it represents

19 Russell does not rule out the possibility of being acquainted (in the technically relevant sense) with the object of which one knows it exists and uniquely satisfies a certain property. Still, this does not count as knowing *who* the person is unless one knows an *identity proposition* of the form: ‘A is the such-and-such’ where A is the name of the person satisfying uniquely the definition description. See Russell (1917, p. 215).

more or less accurately, namely in a strictly *causal* sense of 'of'²⁰. Russell does not explicitly mention the causal connection of the subject with the object as a necessary requirement on what he would certainly consider instances of the more contemporary notion of thought *de re* (namely, thoughts about oneself and thoughts about sense-data-as-well-as-universals). However, it is hard to find any room in Russell for a distinction between an *epistemic* relation of acquaintance and a *causal* relation of 'ofness' (something like a distinction between causal and epistemic acquaintance) as there is nothing beyond that which is epistemically accessible to the subject with which the subject would have to be (more or less directly) 'in touch' for her to think about in a strong sense of 'about'. As a result, the requirements placed by Russell on singular thoughts *just are* requirements on *de re* thoughts in the contemporary sense of the locution '*de re*'. They are fuelled by just the same view that fuels his requirements for singularity.

To see this, imagine a scenario in which a thought is entertained and expressed on the basis of an informational state the content of which is 'of' (in the causal relevant sense) the object and properties thought about²¹. Let us imagine, for instance, that on hearing the beautiful sound of a violin, the subject of the experience expresses the thought: '*that* instrument sounds beautifully' with the intention to refer to the very instrument the sound of which is impinging on her. Now suppose that just the same beautiful sound is being heard by the (same) the subject while it is caused by another (numerically distinct) violin and that, on the basis of that experience, the subject entertains and expresses the thought: '*that* instrument sounds beautifully' with the intention to refer to the causal source of her experience. To make the thought-experiment even more telling, one can go modal and imagine two distinct counterfactual situations in addition to the actual one – in which Stradivarius 1 is heard and referred to: one in which the same beautiful sound is caused by a numerically distinct instrument (call it 'Stradivarius 2') and one in which it is caused by no instrument, but simulated by a powerful computer. The question arises as to whether the thoughts expressed in each of these thought-experiments are the same or different. Note that the thoughts entertained and expressed here are *de re* in the above-explained, contemporary sense. On Russell's view, the thoughts are (would be) different as they are individuated by their truth-conditions and their truth-conditions vary from one to another actual situation or

20 See Kaplan (1975, p. 225-227); Evans (1982, p. 124-125).

21 See Blackburn (1984, p. 311-313). Here I am adapting one of Blackburn's examples.

from an actual to a possible situation. The statement ‘that instrument sounds beautifully’ is true in the actual world if and only if Stradivarius 1 sounds beautifully in the actual world. The same statement is true in the substitute possible world if and only if Stradivarius 2 sounds beautifully. It is truth-valueless in the ‘empty world’ if made with the intention to refer to a particular instrument. This shows that the identity of the thought expressed is strongly dependent on the identity of the object referred to by the deictic, for it is not only actually, but counterfactually tied to it in a way that makes its relatedness to the object an essential property of it. Would the referent of ‘that’ not be what it is in the actual world, the thought itself would be different – it would not be the very thought it is. The empty case is but a dramatic way to make this plain.

How about the epistemic relation to the object of thought? As is well known, Russell requires that the subject be *acquainted* with the object referred to (by the deictic) for her to understand the statement and the thought expressed by it to be about the *res*. Being the *converse* of the relation of presentation of the object to the subject, the relation of acquaintance does not require that the object be actually present to the subject’s mind. It is enough that it had once been present. Now acquaintance comes with two epistemic guarantees: the guarantee that the object with which one is acquainted exists (in the sense that it makes no sense to doubt of the existence of an object one is acquainted with) and the guarantee of the discriminability of co-reference (one cannot refer to the same object using two co-referential terms without knowing that they co-refer and, conversely, one cannot refer to two distinct objects using the same singular term without knowing that they are distinct)²². The latter in particular is key for it means that thoughts *de re* are, for Russell, the kind of thoughts that are related to their objects in a way that allow for no actual or possible substitutes that the subject is or would not be able to discriminate as such. In our example, the subject’s thought cannot be about Stradivarius 2 in a possible world where Stradivarius 2 is the referent of ‘that’ without the subject being aware of the fact that Stradivarius 2 is not Stradivarius 1, and consequently, of the fact that the thought she entertains about Stradivarius 2 is not the same as the one entertained about Stradivarius 1.

We are now in a position to understand the grounds on which the view spelled out at the outset is often considered true. If *de re* thoughts are the kind of thoughts required for the understanding of a specific class of utterances, namely identity-dependent ones, and identity-

22 On this, see Michael (2010, 296-297); Hawthorne; Manley (2012, p. 5-7).

dependent thoughts, thoughts that allow for no actual or possible substitute for their object, at least no substitute that the subject would not be able to tell from it, no wonder requirements as strong as those expressed by (1a,b) and (2) be placed on having such thoughts, for it is only by satisfying these requirements that some of our thoughts about world particulars may qualify as *de re*, as opposed to descriptive or universal thoughts²³.

But is the view *ever* true?

II. Narrow vs. Wide Contents, Qualified *de re* thought-essentialism, and Cognitive Liberalism

Cases of mistaken identity of the kind set out at the beginning of this paper are a challenge to the view under scrutiny for the latter rules out the possibility that the thinker be mistaken or confused as to the identity of the object if her thought is to be about it in a strong, identity-dependent sense of 'about'. On this view, a thinker cannot entertain a *de re* thought about an object *x* on the basis of information acquired from *x* through perception, memory, or the testimony of other people if the object she takes to be *F* (namely, *x*) is as a matter of fact or possibly another object (say, *y*), qualitatively indistinguishable from *x*, that also happens to be *F*.

Suppose the Bryan brothers make the decision to play from now on only the men's singles and that you once saw one of them (say, Bob) playing the singles²⁴. Suppose you do not know Bob has a twin brother, Mike, who differs from him only by being right-handed²⁵. One day you turn up at a tournament and see what you take to be Bob playing right-handed. On the basis both of what you see and remember from your first encounter with Bob, you may entertain and express the thought that *he* (referring to what you take to be Bob) is playing very well today, although you

23 This is why I made a point of emphasizing at the outset that (1a,b) and (2) express *requirements* on, and not defining features of, *de re* thoughts. Otherwise, (1a,b) and (2) would be trivially true and it would be pointless to discuss the correctness of the view.

24 Here I am adapting a thought-experiment from Bach (1994, p. 29-31).

25 As a matter of fact, Bob and Mike Bryan are professional tennis players (currently ATP doubles players number one) who have the particularity of being 'mirror twins', one being right-handed and the other left-handed.

are surprised that he be able to play right-handed. Unbeknownst to you, of course, it is Mike who is playing, not Bob. Now, according to the view under discussion, *no* thought *de re* was entertained, nor expressed at the time of your amazement, for you were (would have been) unable at that time to tell Bob from Mike and, consequently, your Bob-thought from a Mike-thought²⁶.

This view seems, to say the least, strongly counterintuitive. A much more natural way to describe the situation, for certainly more faithful to our intuitions as to the conditions for correct ascription of thoughts *de re*, would be to say that you *did* have and express a thought *de re* at the time of your amazement; moreover you did have and expressed one about Mike, although you mistook Mike for Bob. More accurately, you did have and expressed one single thought *de re* – the thought that *he* is playing well today, ‘he’ referring here to Mike – based on two sets of information, one derived through memory from Bob and the other through perception from Mike, merged into one. At any rate, if no thought *de re* were entertained about Mike at the time of your amazement, you would not be able to correct it – thinking that what you took to be Bob actually is Mike – once you are given the information that Bob Bryan has a twin brother called ‘Mike’ and that they can be told apart only because Bob is left-handed while Mike is right-handed. There is a gap between having a *mistaken* thought *de re* and having *no* thought *de re* at all about an object *y* that one took to be *x*. The gap seems completely overlooked by the holders of the Russellian-inspired view on their treatment of mistaken-identity or closely related cases²⁷.

26 Evans (1982) seems to argue along these lines. Although his example of a thought (in his opinion) seemingly entertained by a subject about just one of two rotating indistinguishable steel balls she remembers in the absence of any discriminative knowledge is somehow different, for it involves no identity mistake on the part of the subject, the conclusion seems to be that, despite appearances, *no* thought was had by her about one of the balls. See Evans (1982, p. 90; esp. p. 115 for a clearer statement that no singular/*de re* thought was really had in this case).

27 For a similar criticism targeted at Evans, see Rozemond (1993, p. 284-287). Even if one concedes to Evans that, on being informed that there was a second ball of which she has no memory – just like you were informed that Bob had a twin-brother, the subject would deny that she ever had a thought about one of the balls, it is doubtful whether Russell’s principle – i.e. (2) – should play any role here. A better explanation would be that she would deny this because she is worried that something may have gone wrong in the underlying (causal) process of acquiring information from the two steel balls. Be it as it may, it seems more plausible to ascribe to her a thought about one of the balls in the first place (the one with which she is connected through memory), even though she may have doubts about this afterwards – on being informed that there actually were two steel balls.

But how is one to appraise the view? At this point, two options seem to be available: either one considers it false throughout – its counterintuitiveness being a symptom of its falsehood, or one takes some at least of its claims to be true, yet not without qualification²⁸.

Take (1a). Confronted with the fact that the object may be numerically different while the thought, based on how the subject is appeared to, is the same, it may be considered just *false*. If one takes a thought to be individuated not by its referent, nor its truth-conditions, but by ways one is appeared to no matter which thing is presented or whether there is anything at all to be presented, one naturally ends up with the view that (1a) is false, for ways of appearing or, to use a Fregean terminology, modes of presentation are typically thought features that remain constant across possible worlds²⁹. If two distinct objects can appear to the subject just the same way (under the same mode of presentation) from one world to another, it seems better to give up the claim that the individuation principle applied to thought is true. But giving up this claim, the worry is, may lead one to ask whether such thoughts still deserve to be called '*de re*'. Being individuated by universal features, a better option, as it seems, would be to classify them as general or universal. If so, the left-hand side of the biconditional turns into a false statement. If false, (1a) on the whole is true. But to what extent or on what condition is it? There is but one possibility left. Assuming now that the left-hand side of the biconditional is true, one has to find a way to turn the right-hand side, that is, the individuation principle equally true. Fortunately, this can be done, namely by taking (1a) as a claim about the relation between thought *tokens* and their objects, as opposed to thought *types*. Bach (1982; 1994) takes this line, notably³⁰.

On Bach's view, for a thought to be *de re* its object has to be determined in an altogether different way from the way the object of a descriptive thought is determined. The object of a de-

28 In both cases, one ends up with a false view (*i.e.* a view that has as truth-value the false). If we express it in the form of a biconditional (as we did at the outset), assuming that its left-hand side is true, the right-hand side too must be true for the biconditional to be true. So, it is enough that one of the conjuncts of the right-hand be false for the biconditional (*i.e.* the view on the whole) to be false. However, it is important to leave open the possibility that some of the conjuncts be somehow true, for if one ever manages to show that the remaining false conjunct can also be made true and to lift the restrictions on the truth of the other true conjuncts, the prospects for defending the view might still be good.

29 See Blackburn (1984, p. 313).

30 See also Recanati (1993, I.3 & I.5) for a similar view.

scriptive thought, e.g. a thought expressed by an utterance of (5), is determined satisfactorily; that is, whatever is the object of that thought, it has to be such that it satisfies or fulfills uniquely a context-independent set of conditions – in the present case, the conditions: *being actual King of France, being the only person who is so, and being bald*. If all our thoughts, the problem is, had their object determined this way, it would follow that we have but qualitative or general thoughts about the world. We would not even get close to entertain a thought about its very particulars. In order to secure the truth of singularism, one has to admit that for some at least of our thoughts about the world, their object is determined in some other, context-dependent manner. Bach (1994; 2010) takes it that for a thought to be singular or *de re*, its object has to be determined *relationally*, that is, by actually standing in a certain kind of relation to the subject's thought, namely that of being the cause of the subject's percepts on which the thought is based. In our example the thought entertained by the subject about the cup (to the effect that it is made out of plastic) on the basis of her perception is about the very cup, on Bach's view, not because the latter would satisfy some descriptive condition represented by her, but in virtue of the object seen actually standing to her in the relation of causing her to be appeared_k to *f*-ly – where 'k' ranges over kinds of percepts relative to sense modalities and 'f' over sensory qualities taken in a broad sense of 'sensory'³¹. Now only thought *tokens* can enter into causal relations with physical particulars, for they are concrete entities individuated by their occurrences in space-time. Thought *types* cannot enter into such relations, for they are abstract entities. As a result, (1a), if true, can only be true of thought tokens, not of thought types.

As far as thought types are concerned, it is simply wrong to claim that their identity depends on the identity of their object since two thoughts of the same type (that is, two thoughts involving the same way of thinking both of the object and of the property ascribed to it) can have different objects, depending on the contextual causal relation the object bears to the subject's thought token.

This qualified way to secure the truth of (1a) relies on a couple of strong assumptions: the assumption that (i) the context-dependent, truth-conditional content or, to put it differently, the *semantic* content of the thought is not the only content available to the subject; together with the assumption that (ii) what makes the thought specifically *de re* is not its psychological

31 See Bach (1982, p. 144-145; 1994, p. 20-22).

content (*i.e.* the other content available), but its semantic content; more precisely it is the fact that the semantic content of the thought, contrary to its psychological content, is sensitive to the contextual causal relations that the object bears to the subject's thought token.

As to (i), one way to understand its underlying motivations is to point out that no single notion of content is liable to accommodate all our intuitions concerning sameness and difference of thought(s). While it is crucial to a proper defense of singularism to grant that the subject's thought about the cup is individuated by its semantic, truth-conditional content, that is, by the singular proposition expressed by an utterance in a certain context *c* of 'this cup is made out of plastic', it would be somehow arbitrary to assume that this is the only way for thought *types* to be individuated. As suggested above, while there is an obvious sense in which the thoughts entertained before and after the trick can be said to be different, there is just as intuitive a sense in which one can say that they are just the same thought. The argument is a familiar one. It stems from Descartes's epistemologically motivated methodological solipsism', as rightly pointed out by Bach (1982, p. 143). Suppose that what I take to be a veridical experience, namely my seeing a physical cup in front of me, is but a realistic hallucination. No cup is, as a matter of fact, facing me, but I have no way to tell on the basis of the (visual) experience alone the perception from the hallucination. The need is felt here of another notion of content that would enable one to describe this highest factor common to the perception and the hallucination. This is the notion of *narrow* mental (or psychological) content. A thought based on my visual experience of the cup would certainly be no different, with respect to its narrow mental content, would the mental state be a real perception or a realistic hallucination. The same could be said of two thoughts based on two identical percepts (*i.e.* ways for the subject to be appeared to): if nothing in the percepts enables one to tell one from the other, the thoughts based on them just are the same.

According to this other way of individuating thought types, (1a) is *false*, for the (physical) object referred to being *no* constituent of the mental narrow content of the thought, the thought is no different while the object *ex hipotesi* is. In that respect, the same thought can have different objects, depending on the contextual causal relations they bear to the thought tokens. On the other hand, (1a) is true if suitably qualified, that is, provided it applies to the relation between thought tokens and physical objects. The truth of (1a) is captured using the notion of the *wide* semantic, as opposed to the narrow psychological, content of the *de re* thought.

How about (1b)? Recall that the view under scrutiny requires that the thought be individuated in a way that makes its relatedness to its object an essential property of it. A property is essential just in case it is unconceivable that the thing of which it is a property lacks it or, in metaphysically laden terms, just in case the thing has the property in all possible worlds, or else, just in case there is no possible world in which the thing lacks the property³². To say that the view (among other things) requires that the thought be essentially related to its (particular) object is to say that it requires that there be no possible world in which it fails to be related to it. So, it is enough that it lacks this relational property in *some* possible world, be it the actual world or some other possible world, for (1b) to be false or, at least, not unconditionally true. Mistaken-identity cases suggest that (1b) may be false applied *de re* thought *types*. Being individuated by ways of thinking of the object (and of the property predicated of it) rather than by the object itself (their 'referent'), thought types are only *accidentally* about objects. This is plain when the subject is having a thought based on hallucinations. In this case, there is at least one possible world in which the *de re* thought type lacks the property of being related to any object at all, namely the actual world in which the hallucination takes place. But it is also plain when the object of the thought is replaced, unbeknownst to the subject, with a numerically distinct, albeit qualitatively indistinguishable object. In this case, it hardly makes sense to speak of *the* object of *the* thought, if what is meant by 'thought' is thought *type*. It makes sense, though, to speak of the object of *that* thought, if what is meant by 'thought' is a thought *token*. The object itself entering into the wide content of the thought token, the latter is *essentially* about its object, for there is no possible world in which the thought token lacks the relational property. Once it is fixed *which* the object of the thought is, there is no possible world in which the thought token lacks the property of being related to *it* unless it is replaced in the actual or in any close possible world with a numerically distinct, though indistinguishable, object. In the latter case, however, the thought token *itself* is different. There still is room for (1b) to be true when suitably qualified³³.

32 In our three formulations, the key-notions are the modal notions of *necessity* and *possibility*. I do not deny that there are other, possibly more satisfying, ways to draw the distinction between essential and accidental properties, but I do not need such refinements here. For an overview of the various possible characterizations of the distinction, see Robertson (2008).

33 For a defense of qualified-*de-re*-thought essentialism along these lines, see Bach (1994, p. 15). Bach is not as specific as to which characterization of essential properties is required by the view.

Assuming that the left-hand side of the biconditional or, if one prefers³⁴, the antecedent of the conditional is true, the prospects for saying that (2) is true might seem to be fairly bleak. Two sets of arguments can be set forth here.

First, to claim that the subject is having a thought about the very cup just in case she is able to discriminate it from the cup it actually replaces or from any possible perfect surrogate is to impose too strong a requirement on having such thoughts. Mistaken-identity cases precisely show that being able to discriminate the cup from any other putative object of the same thought is not a necessary condition for having about the cup a thought that deserves to be called '*de re*'. In our example, it is beyond doubt that the subject's thought is 'of' the cup to the extent that her thought can motivate or serve to explain a wide range of attitudes she might adopt towards the cup itself – for instance, throwing *it* away, drinking some coffee from *it*, etc. If she is able to do all that without being able to tell if the objects (the two cups) are identical or distinct, it means that (2) may be false while the first conjunct is true. If so, the view itself is false³⁵.

Second, it might be argued that there is a deeper problem of relevance here. What does, it may be asked, the knowing-wh* requirement ever have to do with the capacity to adopt psychologically motivated attitudes towards the object itself? Here the point is not that one can adopt a wide range of *de re* attitudes without having the first idea which thing/who it is. The point is that the issues seem to be largely independent of each other³⁶. According to a semantic-based approach, the issue of *de re* thought is that of explaining the truth-conditions either of freestanding statements wherein referential terms occur (e.g. 'this cup is made out of plastic') or of belief reports by means of which a thought is ascribed to someone about a specific object (person)³⁷. The issue

34 It is appropriate to use (as I did) the biconditional to represent the view's logical form if one considers (1a), (1b), and (2) necessary *and* sufficient conditions for *de re* thoughts; otherwise (*i.e.* if one takes them to be but necessary conditions), the conditional is enough.

35 Cognitive liberalism is the view that singular or *de re* thoughts are not in general constrained by acquaintance or any other epistemic requirement (cf. HAWTHORNE; MANLEY, 2012, part I). Its correct logical representation would be that of a conjunction with one of its conjuncts (*i.e.* the claim that the subject has a discriminative knowledge of the object of thought) false and the other (*i.e.* the claim that she is having a *de re* thought about the object) true. If so, the view under scrutiny is false.

36 See Boër; Lycan (1986, p.132-133); Michael (2010, p. 302-303).

37 It is in order here to distinguish two cases. If the that-clause contains a referential term (as in 'A belie-

of knowing-which/-who is in principle a separate issue. According to the same semantic-based approach, it is the issue of how to explain the correctness of some of our claims to knowledge or knowledge ascriptions using 'knows-which' or 'knows-who' locutions³⁸. The fact that some authors³⁹ deemed it necessary to connect the latter with the former by adding to the truth-conditions of *de re* thought-ascription reports a distinctively epistemic condition of discriminability or vividness is no evidence against their mutual independency. It rather presupposes it.

One important difference between the two is that the truth or acceptability of *de re* thought-and-attitude ascription reports seems to be less dependent on the interest of the ascriber than the truth of knowledge ascriptions using 'knows-wh*' locutions⁴⁰.

Suppose my French friend D is, for some reason, angry at M – who also happens to be a friend of mine. He might have felt offended, say, by one of M's recurring sarcastic remarks about French people. Suppose, further, I ascribe D the thought that M is an unpleasant person. Intuitively, my ascription report ('D thinks M is an unpleasant person') is true just in case D thinks *de M* that he is an unpleasant person. D displays, as a matter of fact, the range of behaviors characteristic of whoever has thoughts *de M*. He might display, say, some reluctance to having lunch with M, thinking *of* the latter that he is disrespectful. For those who take (2) to express on the whole a legitimate requirement on having *de re* thoughts (in our example, M-thoughts), D cannot think *de M* that he is mean or disrespectful and display all the behaviors characteristic of

ves that Orcutt is the shortest spy') and the report on the whole is true, the thought ascribed is presumably about the referent itself. If it contains a non-referential term (e.g. an indefinite description such as 'a spy'), the thought ascribed can still be *de re* if the (existential) quantifier – into which it may be analyzed – can be legitimately exported so that it falls outside the scope of the epistemic verb, as in 'there is a spy such that A believes he/she is the shortest spy'. As to the latter cases, see Quine (1956) and Kaplan (1975).

38 See Boër and Lycan (1986, p. 3).

39 E.g. Russell (1917); Kaplan (1968); Evans (1982); and more recently Recanati (2010); Dickie (2010).

40 It matters not to conflate here interest-relativity with context-dependency. Interest-relativity has to do with the variability of a teleological parameter (i.e. with our *purposes* or *plans* at the time of the ascription); context-dependency with the fact that the same locution or expression can have different *senses* on different occasions of use. The former is a purely pragmatic while the latter is a pragmatico-semantic notion. For a clear-cut distinction and a cogent defense of the view that knows-w* ascriptions are interest-relative rather than semantically ambiguous, see Boër; Lycan (1986, p. 5-6).

an attitude targeted *at* M as a consequence of having M-thoughts unless he knows who M is. D may be said to know who M is at least for some purposes; in the present case that of accepting or refusing a lunch with M. This involves on the part of the ascriber the exercise of a number of cognitive abilities such as the ability to perceptually identify M, to track M in space and time, to recognize him on different occasions, etc. On the other hand, D might be said not to know who M is for other purposes. Suppose D has just met M, has never heard of him and I forgot to introduce M to D. As a result, D would be unable to cite any important fact or predicate with respect to M (not even M's name) grounding the correct ascription of knowing-who to D. For the purpose of, say, writing a biography of M (assuming that, unbeknownst to D, M is an important intellectual figure that is worth being written about), ascribing D the kind of knowledge normally ascribed using 'knowing-who' locutions would be intuitively incorrect. Notwithstanding, D is having a *de re* thought-and-attitude and my thought report is intuitively true just in case D thinks *de* M that he is an unpleasant person.

This suggests that the correct ascription of *de re* thoughts is interest-relative to a lesser extent than the correct ascription of knowledge using 'knowing-who' locutions; which in turn suggests that, despite the widespread tendency to connect the issues, thought or belief *de re* 'has little if anything to do with "knowing-who"'⁴¹. The same could be said of thought *de re* in relation to knowing-which ascriptions. If this is true, the prospects for preserving the truth of (2) are, indeed, far bleaker than the ones for preserving the truth of (1a) and (1b). But is there any way to do so?

III. World-Involving Mental States, Object-Involving Experience, and Knowing-Which

I take it there is. After all, the lesson to draw from the previous section is not that mistaken-identity cases force on us the conclusion that the view under scrutiny is false, but that it is not unqualifiedly true, at least when it comes to (1a) and (1b). The truth of (2) is much more controversial and takes some additional work to preserve. Now, if one ever manages to maintain the truth of (1a), (1b), and possibly (2) on other grounds than the ones usually invoked to qualify it or even to dismiss it – as far as (2) is concerned, the prospects for supporting the view

41 Bøer; Lycan (1986, p. 132).

while accommodating the mistaken-identity cases might still be good. Moreover, one might end up being in a position to lift the restrictions set on it by the holders of the two-component picture⁴² and the *de-re*-thought anti-essentialists. This is basically the strategy I shall adopt and follow hereafter.

Recall that, assuming that the left-hand side of the biconditional (*i.e.* the claim that the thought had by the subject is *de re*) is true, a way to turn its right-hand side (*i.e.* the individuation principle) equally true would be to consider (1a) as a claim about the relation between thought tokens and their objects, as opposed to thought types. But is this the only way to do so, as the holders of the two-component picture seem to imply? Or is there a way to turn it true without restricting its truth to thought tokens?

One possible argument in support of the view that *de re* thought types, and not only thought tokens, are widely individuated by the object referred to by the referring term in the linguistic expression of the thought and, consequently, that (1a) is true *simpliciter* takes the form of a *modus tollens*⁴³. It is this: if one qualifies the truth of (1a) so as to restrict it to thought tokens in relation to their contextually determined object(s), one may lose the means to draw an important distinction among the mental states between the ones that give rise to *de re* thoughts and those that give rise to thoughts that are not *de re* or else that are, yet only derivatively. The latter distinction is not one one would be ready to give up. Therefore, (1a) is unqualifiedly true, that is, it is true just as much of thought types as of thought tokens.

It is time now to introduce a bit of terminology. Let us call mental states of the sort that give rise to *de re* thoughts *world-involving* and those that give rise to thoughts that are not *de re* or thoughts are only derivatively so *not world-involving*⁴⁴. At the heart of the distinction lie precisely the mistaken-identity cases that were a challenge to the Russellian-inspired view.

42 The two-component picture is the view that *de re*, paradigmatically indexical, thoughts can be decomposed into two ingredients: one being subjective and internal (the so-called 'narrow content' of the thought *qua* type) and the other objective and external (the so-called 'wide content' of the thought *qua* token). See Recanati (1993, p. 98-103; p. 193-197). As seen earlier, Bach (1994) is one of its advocates.

43 For further arguments of the type put forward notably by McDowell and Evans against the two-component picture and possible responses to them, see Recanati (1993, p. 197-207).

44 I borrow the terminology from Recanati (2007, p. 198-202).

Now it is possible to recast the view to accommodate such cases. On the modified version, a thought *de re* would be *typically* a thought based on mental states that allow for the possibility for the subject to be mistaken or confused as to the identity of the object of thought. The relevant contrast here would not be that between thought types and tokens, but between, say, thoughts entertained on the basis of perceptual states or memories, on the one hand, and on the basis of imaginings, on the other hand. What makes them differ *qua* types or sorts from each other is the fact that in the former case the thinker may be mistaken or confused as to the identity of the object of thought precisely because its identity as type is determined by external causal factors the thinker may be unaware of. This possibility is simply not allowed for by thoughts based on imaginings, for the identity of the object being determined in this case by the subject's 'imaginative project'⁴⁵ as opposed to world factors, it makes no sense to claim that its identity may have changed while the subject is unaware of it. Or if it does, it is only because the *de-re*-ness of the thought based on imaginings is inherited from its connection to previous perceptual states or memories⁴⁶. Suppose I have just met a woman and entertained about *that very* woman the thought that *she* is gorgeous. Suppose I keep on thinking about *her* fancying myself travelling around with *her*. This clearly is a case of *de re* thought based on imaginings. However, this fancying is intuitively type-different from a fancying unanchored in a previous visual encounter with the woman, for its aboutness and that of the thought based on it is not completely up to me, but partly determined by external causal factors – *i.e.* my encounter with the particular woman thought about. So it makes perfectly good sense to envision in this case the possibility that I be mistaken as to the identity of the object of my thought precisely because its identity is not fully up to me. The *de-re*-ness of the thought based on imaginings is inherited here from the world-involvingness of the perceptual state to which it is anaphorically linked. So, far from blurring the type-difference between such states and the corresponding thoughts, the possibility of *de re* imaginings anchored in previously occurring perceptual states sharpens it. (1a) is not only true of *de re* thought tokens, it is true of *de re* thought types too. On this view, *de re* thought types are but groupings or classes of *de re* thought tokens whose identity is dependent on the identity of their contextually determined object(s). The empty case is, again, but a dramatic way to turn it conspicuous.

45 The phrase is Williams' (1973, p. 30ff).

46 On this, see Recanati (2007, p. 196-198).

Is there an analogous way to lift the restrictions set on the truth of (1b) by the *de-re*-thought anti-essentialists? The case seems to be much harder to make, for the mere fact that an experience, say, of the visual kind can be non-veridical while no object is being perceived seems to speak in favor of the view that the *de re* thought based on it can fail *qua* type to be related to its (purported) object; that it is not, that is, essentially, but accidentally about it. The correctness of the view, however, depends on strong assumptions one need not make: the assumption that (i) *de re* thought types are narrowly individuated by ways of thinking that are involved as much in the 'good case' (veridical perception) as in the 'bad case' (realistic hallucination); (ii) the qualitative character of the experience on which the *de-re*-thought episodes are based exhausts its phenomenal content.

As to (i), it might be objected that the mental states involved in the 'good case' and the 'bad case' are not of the same kind and, consequently, that the *de re* thoughts based on them are not the same as types⁴⁷. One crucial difference between a veridical perception and a realistic hallucination, it might be claimed, is that in the former case, assuming that it is as of mind-independent objects and properties, the visual experience involved in it has those very objects and properties as constituents whereas in the latter the visual experience involved in it does not. If true, the *de re* thought based on a veridical perception is, *qua* type, essentially and not accidentally about its object, for the object itself is a constituent of the conscious experience involved in the mental state the thought is based upon. So, if the object does not exist as it happens in cases of hallucination, the *de re* thought based on the corresponding mental state cannot be said to be the same *qua type* as the thought based on a case of veridical perception, except that it lacks the (accidentally) property of having the right connection to the world. This would be the position endorsed by the holders of the highest common factor view. A disjunctivist and naïve realist would claim instead, I take it, reasonably that the *de re* thought based on the hallucinatory state is not the same *qua* type as the one based on a case of veridical perception, for the hallucinatory state lacks the essential property of being related to mind-independent objects and properties.

One possible argument in support of this view is phenomenological and bears directly on (ii). A good way to set it out is to emphasize the arbitrariness of (ii). Why, it might be asked, should the phenomenal content of the experience (the *de re* thought is based upon) be restric-

⁴⁷ The objection stems naturally from a disjunctivist theory of perception.

ted to way(s) the subject is appeared to in such experiences? On this restricted view, identity or difference in phenomenal content simply is a matter of identity or difference of *qualia*, that is, of ways the subject is appeared to relative to a specific sense modality. So, if two numerically distinct objects visually appear to the subject just the same way, the phenomenal content of the visual experience is the same, although there are arguably, in our recurring example, two experiencings as of two numerically distinct objects. This talk of identity of character is certainly a useful way to classify experiences, but it clearly abstracts away from further features of them that should be just as relevant to their phenomenology: the fact that two experiential episodes instead of one are involved here and that in each episode the subject is presented with a particular subject matter. On a broader notion of phenomenal content⁴⁸, the latter is not only a matter of how the subject is appeared to, but of what (*i.e.* which particular objects and qualities) is (are) presented to her in each of those experiencings.

If one embraces the broader notion, one loses, as it seems, all reason to qualify the truth of (1b) by restricting it to *de re* thought tokens since *de re* thought types, more specifically the ones based on genuinely perceptual states, are essentially about their object(s) too.

How about (2)? As said earlier, it is not an easy task to preserve the integrity of the knowing-wh* requirement in view of obvious counterexamples and, more fundamentally, of the relevance objection voiced in the previous section. But why, it might be asked, should it be preserved at all? Perhaps a good reason to preserve it is that it has just as much intuitive appeal as its negation (*i.e.* the claim that one can have thoughts *de re* without knowing which the thing/who the person is). Consider again our tennis example, which is just a variation on mistaken-identity cases of the type set out at the beginning of this paper. What you took to be Bob actually was his twin brother, Mike Bryan, playing the men singles. Surely, you were unable at the time of the occurrence of the thought to tell Bob from Mike, nor to know who Bob was, except that he was a professional tennis player and for the fairly limited purpose of pinning on him tennis-related thoughts (such as the thought that he is a good player, that he might win the game, etc.) that *could* have led you to behave toward him such and such a way (*e.g.* to shake his hand after the match to congratulate him, etc.). Now it is true that, intuitively, nothing prevents you from being ascribed a thought *de* Mike in spite of your having mistaken Mike for Bob (that

48 The notion is to be found in Martin (2002, esp. p. 185-186.) Here I am strongly indebted to him.

is, of being unable to discriminate Bob from Mike) and your intending to refer to Bob (and not to Mike) on expressing what you took at that time to be a Bob-thought using demonstratives such as 'this' ('this is a terrific player') or 'he' ('he will win the tournament'). But there is a counterintuition. Following Evans, I take it that it is just as intuitively correct not to ascribe to you a thought *de* Mike if one is to be faithful to that which the ascriber him/herself (in the present case, you) would be prone to ascribe to him/herself⁴⁹. On being informed that Bob has a twin brother named 'Mike' and that you had mistaken Mike for Bob, *you* might be reluctant to ascribe to yourself either a Bob-thought or a Mike-thought precisely because it turns out that you had no (sufficiently) discriminating knowledge of the referent of 'this' or 'he' on uttering 'this is a terrific player' or 'he will win the tournament'. But is it the case? Is it true that you had no discriminating knowledge or, at least, no knowledge that was sufficiently so at the time of the utterance to be ascribed a thought *de* Bob and *a fortiori de* Mike, according to that which you would be prone, retrospectively, to ascribe to yourself⁵⁰?

The answer is affirmative and the fact that it is suggests that there must be some way to preserve the integrity of the knowing-wh* requirement, at least as far as the conditions for the correct *ascription* of *de re* thoughts are concerned. To see this, there is an important distinction to be drawn here between the incapacity of the subject to distinguish Bob from Mike and the (qualitative) indiscriminability of the objects *themselves* (namely, Bob and Mike) *qua* objects of thought. Surely, you were unable to tell Bob from Mike or from any perfectly similar-looking person at the time of the utterance as witnessed by your inclination to believe that Bob was, to your amazement, able to play both hands rather than believe that you were watching another,

49 This is how I understand the italicization of 'he' in '(...) this subject will certainly behave as though *he* subscribed to Russell's Principle, interpreted as requiring discriminating knowledge (...)'. (EVANS, 1982, p. 90). Again, Evans's example is not a case of mistaken identity, but a case wherein the subject is not able to tell one of the steel balls from the other. In this respect, it is perfectly relevant to mine.

50 It might be replied here that the knowing-wh* requirement has nothing to do with *having* a Bob- or a Mike-thought and that the thought (semantically) expressed by 'this is a terrific player' or 'he will win the tournament' uncontroversially is a Mike-thought (for 'this' or 'he' here refer to Mike, not Bob). One thing is the thought, its ascription another. On this view, the knowing-wh* requirement would only matter to the conditions for the correct *ascription* of *de re* thoughts, not to whether such thoughts are ever *had*. This reply undoubtedly calls for a more careful treatment of cases of the type under scrutiny. Although there is, I take it, a possible response to it, I will leave it as it is for addressing it would lead me far beyond the scope of this paper.

perfectly similar-looking person playing right-handed. But this does not mean that Bob was indistinguishable from Mike; on the contrary, he *was* discriminable from him by being left-handed. It only means that you were in no position at the time of the utterance to *know* it for in order to know it, that is, to exclude the relevant alternatives, more discriminating information was needed about Bob than the one you already had in your possession; precisely the relevant pieces of information you are given afterwards and prompt your reluctance to ascribe to yourself a Bob-thought and *a fortiori* a Mike-thought.

Of course, there still is a concern as to how one is to adjudicate the conflicting intuitions. Evans suggests that trying to rest our appraisal of the knowing-which requirement on either of them is hopeless unless one has a theoretical argument that allow one to do so; and, clearly, his own theoretical argument leads him to adjudicate them in favor of the knowing-which requirement (*i.e.* Russell's principle)⁵¹. Here I agree with Burge that the way Evans construes the requirement itself leads him to over- or even hyper-intellectualize the cognitive capacities required to have, or perhaps more accurately, to be ascribed *de re* (singular) thoughts and to place highly restrictive conditions on the representational capacities involved in having (or being ascribed) such thoughts⁵². In a nutshell, on Evans's view, one cannot count as having the thought *de a* that it is *F* unless one knows what it is for the proposition *a is F* to be true; which in turn requires that one have a general conception both of what it is for any object to be an *F* and of what it is for it to be an object *a* – in Evans's technical terminology, the subject must have 'Ideas' both of the particular referred to by the singular term '*a*' and of the property symbolized by the predicate letter '*F*'⁵³. With respect to the former requirement, he takes it that having an 'Idea' of the object *a* constitutes 'distinguishing knowledge' (1982, p. 107) of that object if the subject has a general conception either of what differentiates fundamentally that object from other objects of the same kind (if she has, that is, a 'fundamental Idea' of the object) or, should the conception employed *not* be (metaphysically) grounded in fundamental ways for objects of the same kind to differentiate themselves from each other, knowledge of the truth of an identity proposition relating *a* – of which the subject has a non-fundamental 'Idea' – with an arbitrary object *b* of

51 See Evans (1982, p. 89-92).

52 See Burge (2010, p. 181-208; esp. p. 191-199).

53 See Evans (1982, p. 106).

which she has a fundamental Idea. All in all, Evans's construal of the knowing-which requirement amounts to claiming that the subject does not know *which* thing is thought about unless she knows (*i.e.* has an internal representation of) 'the fundamental general conditions under which objects (...) of the relevant kind are the same or different'⁵⁴, that is, the big individuation principles relative to each kind that ground metaphysically our conceptual representations of particular objects as members of those kinds. This strikes as too strong a requirement for, as Burge rightly points out, animals, children, and even some human adults lack such a knowledge and even so are, as it seems, perfectly able to entertain *de re* (singular) beliefs, notably of the perceptual kind, about the physical world⁵⁵. So, if the conflicting intuitions are to be adjudicated, this cannot be done on the basis of Evans's construal of (2). Otherwise, it would seem more reasonable to adjudicate them in favor of the causalist view criticized by him⁵⁶.

Still, there is a possibility left, that of giving (2) a less restrictive construal to preserve its truth as a necessary requirement for the correct ascription of *de re* thoughts. One thing that is worth noting in the cases (thought experiments) usually invoked in support of (2) is that the subject already has *ex hypothesi* the means to discriminate the purported object of her thought by standing in the right causal connection to just one object. In Evans's modified scenario of the rotating indistinguishable steel balls, for instance, the subject is causally connected to just one of the balls (the one she saw on a later day) through her perceptual memory as she has *ex hypothesi* no memory of the similar-looking ball she had seen a few days earlier⁵⁷. So, one might be tempted to say that since she does have the ability to discriminate the object of her thought by remembering *it* (where 'it' refers to just one particular), it seems natural to ascribe to her a thought *de re* on the sole basis of her being causally connected through an informational state to the object and discard as unnecessary any '*further* discriminating abilities' of the kind

54 Burge (2010, p. 196).

55 Idem.

56 The causalist view is the view that standing in the right causal connection to the object-source of the information (on which the thought is based) is a sufficient condition for the subject to have (be ascribed) a thought *de re*. It follows that 'it is possible [on this view] to think about an entity *despite substantial confusion or ignorance about its nature or identity*.' (ROZEMOND, 1993, p. 275. Our emphasis) This is certainly no small payoff, although I do not think one should get rid that easily of epistemic conditions on *de re* thoughts.

57 See 1982, p. 90.

required by Evans⁵⁸. Still, there is a worry as to whether this would count as discriminating (or distinguishing) *knowledge*. It is doubtful that standing in the right causal connection through perceptual memory to just one object (*the* object of thought) is a sufficient condition for knowing *which* object it is, if by 'knowing' one means justified true (propositional) belief. This is presumably what prompted Evans to impose further restrictions on knowing-which by requiring from the subject the possession (and exercise) of further, high-level discriminating abilities of the kind described above.

Although I agree with Burge (and Rozemond) that these further requirements are too strong, I do not think that it would be satisfying to recoil (or stick) to the causalist view precisely because what is required here is discriminating *knowledge*, not only the ability to discriminate or single out objects⁵⁹.

Here it might be useful to get back to our tennis example. We saw that although Bob *was* discriminable from Mike, the subject was reluctant to ascribe to herself a thought *de* Bob (and *a fortiori de* Mike) because she was in no position to *know* which, or perhaps more accurately here, who the object of her thought was. Note that one could turn the scenario more similar to Evans's and allow that the subject have no memory of Bob and entertain a thought about what he takes to be Bob on the basis of her perception of the sole Mike. Still, it would not suffice to invoke the discriminating abilities involved in the perception of Mike to ascribe to the subject knowledge of who Mike is (or even of which object it is) and, on that basis, a Mike-thought. Something more is required that would put the subject in a position to answer questions of the type: 'is that the person/object you had in mind?' and exclude the relevant actual or possible alternatives ('this object/person, but not that one'). What may be considered a satisfying answer to these questions, except one relying upon the facts the subject is informed of afterwards, which happen to be the very facts that prompt his reluctance to ascribe to herself whatever thought is a thought *de*?

58 This is, as I understand it, Burge's position. See 2010, p. 193. The phrase '*further* discriminating abilities' is Burge's.

59 This is meant as a criticism of Burge's assimilation of one notion of knowing-which (the one he takes to express a sound requirement) with that of a capacity 'to single out [a particular] in some way or other' (2010, p. 176).

If this is true, there is a way to preserve the truth of (2) and, thereby, the integrity of the knowing-wh* requirement. Instead of requiring a kind of discriminating knowledge that is presumably absent from higher animals and conceptually non-fully mature human beings, it seems more reasonable to require from the subject the knowledge of some important, interest-relative facts of varying levels of generality that allow her to identify the object of her thought for her to be ascribed a thought of the *de re* kind. What are those facts and what determines their importance, as well as their level of generality, with respect to the relevant teleological parameter is another story to tell.

I hope to have offered here a fairly cogent defense of the view spelled out at the beginning of this paper — a view drawing on Russell's account of *de re* (or singular) thoughts as object-identity dependent thoughts. While it seems that the requirements it expresses are undermined by cases of mistaken identity or substantial confusion of the part of the subject, I argued that such cases can be easily accommodated and the view on the whole preserved provided it is granted (as I think it should be) that: (i) the individuation principle is true not only of *de re* thought tokens, but also of *de re* thought types. Otherwise, there would be no distinction available between thoughts (perceptual ones and, more generally, based on world-involving mental states) whose identity is causally determined by the identity of their object and thoughts (based on imaginings, and more generally, on mental states that are not world-involving) whose identity is up to the subject's will (ii) unqualified *de-re*-thought essentialism is supported by phenomenological considerations of the kind appealed to by the disjunctivists and the naïve realists against the advocates of the highest common factor view (iii) the knowing-wh* requirement, understood as a necessary requirement for the ascription of *de re* thoughts (rather than for having them), can be given a construal on which the subject must know some important, interest-relative facts of varying levels of generality that enable her to singly identify the object perceived, remembered or talked about as *the* object of her thought.

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RESUMO

O presente artigo discute uma concepção dos pensamentos de re que pode ser endossada com certa naturalidade na esteira da teoria de Russell. Nesta concepção, um pensamento é acerca da coisa (res), em vez de uma mera caracterização, se e somente se ele for constitutivamente ligado, se não à existência, ao menos à identidade do objeto e o (a) pensador(a) souber qual/quem é o objeto. Diante do desafio de dar espaço aos casos não raros de identidade equivocada e de confusão substancial da parte do sujeito, eu argumento que a visão considerada pode ser mantida na sua integridade. E ainda, as limitações impostas à sua verdade pelos defensores da imagem do pensamento de re como composto de dois ingredientes e pelos anti-essencialistas podem ser levantadas.

Palavras-chave: *Pensamento de re. Identidade equivocada. (Anti-)essencialismo. Saber qu*. Conteúdos estreitos e amplos. Estados mentais envolvendo o mundo.*

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss a view of de re thoughts that can be naturally endorsed in the wake of Russell's account. This is the view that a thought is about the very thing (res) rather than a mere characterization of it if and only if it is constitutively tied, if not to the existence, at least to the identity of its object and the thinker knows which/who the object of his/her thought is. Faced with the challenge of accommodating far from uncommon cases of mistaken identity or substantial confusion on the part of the subject, I argue that the integrity of the view can be preserved and that the restrictions set on its truth by the advocates of the two-component picture and the anti-essentialists can be lifted.

Keywords: *De re thought. Mistaken identity. (Anti-)essentialism. Knowing-wh*. Narrow and wide contents. World-involving mental states.*