*Liberal thinking**

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Abstract: When you think about a particular object, what makes your thought about *that* object? Roderick Chisholm, Ernest Sosa and Michael McKinsey have defended 'latitudinarian', 'descriptivist' or what I call 'liberal' answers to that question. In this paper I carefully consider the motivation for these liberal views and show how it extends in unanticipated ways to motivate views that are considerably more liberal.

Keywords: intentionality, reference, anaphora, Roderick Chisholm, Michael McKinsey, Ernest Sosa

1. Introduction

When you think about a particular object, what makes your thought about *that* object?[1]

The question might not seem so puzzling when the object of thought is yourself or something you currently perceive. After all,

[1] Supposing that utterance is to the outer as thought is to the inner, our question amounts to much the same as Wittgenstein's, 'What makes my utterance into an utterance about *him*?' [1973, p. 177].

you're directly aware of yourself, and the act of perception puts the object in mind. But not all your thoughts about particular objects are like this. Many of them are about objects that you're not currently perceiving, remembering or otherwise directly aware of. Call such thoughts *distant thoughts*. We can thus put our question more pointedly: *what makes distant thoughts about the particular objects that they are about*?

In important recent work, Michael McKinsey [2009] revisits this unresolved fundamental question. His discussion updates and defends a view he has developed in a series of substantial but underappreciated papers over several decades. McKinsey's basic view — what he calls a 'description theory of mental reference' — is that

> in situations in which a person is neither directly nor perceptually aware of an object, the person's thought is about that object, at least typically, and perhaps always, because the object uniquely satisfies the description or descriptions on which the thinker's mental act of reference is based. [McKinsey 2009: 84]

This paper builds on the work of McKinsey and some of his opponents, the Fregean Liberals, especially Roderick Chisholm and Ernest Sosa. I propose nine new sufficient conditions in all. I motivate each of my proposals by a careful examination of the basis for the proposals put forward by McKinsey, Chisholm and Sosa. In this respect, my contribution presupposes that either McKinsey or the Fregean Liberals are at least on the right track. With that assumption in mind, my main conclusion will be that distant thought can

be achieved in more ways than standard liberal theories have anticipated. In other words, and making absolutely clear my working assumption: *if* McKinsey, Chisholm or Sosa have correctly identified a sufficient condition for distant thought, *then* we can identify other, more liberal sufficient conditions too.

A corollary of my working assumption is that, contrary to what some have thought [e.g. Kaplan 1969, Devitt 1974], there is no necessary causal condition on distant thought. (There may still be *sufficient* causal conditions, of course.) This corollary has been defended repeatedly and at length elsewhere [McKinsey 2009: 88–90, Sosa 1970: 888–889, Sosa 1995: 93 ff., Unger 1983]. I won't reiterate or enhance that defense here.

I acknowledge that the guiding intuitions behind the original liberal theories aren't universally shared. But they are widely shared, and they shouldn't be simply dismissed. I invite those who share them to explore further with me where they might lead. Those who don't share them can still learn something from the present discussion: they can better understand the consequences of liberal theories based on those intuitions. They can even treat my extensions of liberalism as a reductio of liberalism, if they want.

Here is the plan for the paper. Section 2 presents the basic Fregean Liberal view and the standard critique of it, which motivates McKinsey's alternative proposal, what I call Anaphoric Liberalism. Section 3 presents Anaphoric Liberalism and the semantic phenomenon it's modeled after. Section 4 presents four proposals for extending Anaphoric Liberalism, along with a fifth corollary. Sec-

tion 5 revisits Fregean Liberalism, considers more carefully the intuitive motivation for it, and presents four proposals that build on it. Section 6 sums up.

2. *Fregean Liberalism*

Fregean Liberalism accepts this principle of distant thought:

> (**FL**) Necessarily, for any person S, object y, and property G, *if* there is a property F such that (i) y = the F, (ii) S thinks that the F is G, and (iii) the proposition that F is G entails that F exists, *then S* thinks of or about y that y is G.[2]

For our purposes it won't hurt to simplify FL as follows.

> If y is the F and you think that the F is G, then you think of y that y is G. [Compare Chisholm 199: 159]

FL purports to state a *sufficient* condition for distant thought, not a necessary condition.[3]

The view is called 'Fregean' because its contemporary proponents draw inspiration from Gottlob Frege's pioneering work on thought and reference [Frege 1892/1952]. But it's worth noting that earlier philosophers accepted FL too, such as Thomas Reid. Reid does so in the context of explaining what he calls 'simple apprehension,' supposedly the most basic form of aboutness, consisting of

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[2] Substituting 'S' for McKinsey's [2009: 85] original use of 'x' as a variable ranging over persons, and 'thinks' for 'believes'. McKinsey calls this principle 'The Liberal Theory of Aboutness.' In the literature such a view is often called 'latitudinarian,' but 'liberal' has clear advantages as a label.

[3] Some have aspired to sufficient *and necessary* conditions [e.g. Sosa 1970].

nothing more than having an object in mind, so that we may form further thoughts about it. Reid writes,

> An individual is expressed in language either by a proper name, or by a general word joined to such circumstances as distinguish that individual from all others; if it is unknown, it may, when an object of sense, and within reach, be pointed out to the senses; when beyond the reach of the senses, it may be ascertained by a description, which, though very imperfect, may be true, and sufficient to distinguish it from every other individual . . . . Thus, Westminster Bridge is an individual object; though I had never seen or heard of it before, if I am only made to conceive that it is a bridge from Westminster over the Thames, this conception, however imperfect, is true, and is sufficient to make me distinguish it, when it is mentioned, from every other object that exists. [Reid 1785: 223–4]

As is perhaps fitting, the liberal Fregean account of mental reference had its heyday in the 1960s and 70s. But just like every Democratic U.S. President in the postwar era, it was also accused of being *too liberal*. Critics charged that the view faces troubling counterexamples, such as the following. Rod is at a party. He believes that the imposing woman he is looking at is taller than seven feet. He also mistakenly believes that the imposing woman is the only one at the party drinking a martini. Unsurprisingly Rod concludes that the only one at the party drinking a martini is taller than seven feet. As it turns out, the only one at the party drinking a mar-

tini is the diminutive Pygmy in the corner of the room, unseen by Rod. FL entails that Rod believes of the Pygmy that the Pygmy is taller than seven feet. But this can easily seem like the wrong verdict, which in turn reflects poorly on the Fregean view.

McKinsey believes that Fregean Liberalism fails and offers an explanation for why, harkening back to Russell's [1905] theory of descriptions. Sentences such as 'the only one at the party drinking a martini is taller than seven feet' — and more generally sentences of the form ⌜The F is G⌝ — express *general* claims rather than claims about particular things. In order for a thought to be about a particular thing, McKinsey contends, the thought must take as its content a singular proposition, which has the thing itself as a constituent. One hallmark of a singular proposition is that it is expressible by a sentence whose subject is designated by what Russell called a 'logically proper name,' what Mill [1882: 34] called a 'non-connotative term,' and what McKinsey calls a 'genuine term.' A genuine term's referent is its sole semantic contribution to propositions expressed by sentences containing the term. The definite description 'the F' is not a genuine term.

3. *Anaphoric Liberalism*

Unlike Democratic presidents faced with the charge of being too liberal, Fregeans don't have the convenient option of deflecting by waging war, cutting taxes, slashing social programs, or getting 'tough on crime.' How to respond, then? If FL doesn't give a sufficient con-

dition for distant thought, what might we add to it to get a sufficient condition?[4]

McKinsey proposes that we can have distant thoughts that are 'based on' a very specific type of 'descriptive assumption' [2009: 99]. The basic idea is that a descriptive assumption can enable you to have a singular thought via the mechanism of mental anaphoric reference. In order to have a distant thought, in addition to correctly assuming that exactly one object is F, your thought must, as McKinsey puts it, 'involve a *mental act of reference that is based on*' your 'true assumption that there is just one F' [2009: 91].

To help us appreciate McKinsey's view, consider some points about anaphoric reference of pronouns with quantifier antecedents. Pronouns sometimes function like bound variables, as in the sentence,

(1)　　If any person loves music, he appreciates Beethoven.

which is most naturally understood analogously to a universally quantified sentence:

$$(\forall x)(\text{If } x \text{ loves music} \rightarrow x \text{ appreciates Beethoven}).$$

Just as x in x appreciates Beethoven is bound by the quantifier $(\forall x)$, so too is the second occurrence of 'he' in (1) bound by the quantifier 'any person'. Peter Geach [1975] thought that all English pronouns work this way, that is, analogously to bound variables.[5]

But as Gareth Evans [1977] observed in response to Geach, it

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[4]　Sosa [1970, 1995] argues that contrary intuitions about purported counter-examples can be explained away. I return to FL below.

[5]　Exceptions are 'pronouns of laziness,' which Geach treats differently.

isn't plausible that all pronouns function like a bound variable, especially those whose antecedent is an individual's name, as with,

(2)   If Gareth loves music, he appreciates Beethoven.

If we assimilate 'he' to a bound variable in (2), then we are forced to treat the proper name 'Gareth' as smuggling in quantificational and predicative structure that the sentence intuitively doesn't have (contra Russell 1905). But for our purposes this isn't Evans's most interesting objection to Geach.

The most interesting objection is that some pronouns aren't bound by their quantifier antecedents, but instead function as 'singular terms whose denotation is *fixed by a description recoverable from the clause containing the quantifier antecedent*.' Evans calls these 'E-type pronouns.' An E-type pronoun 'denotes those objects which *verify* (or that object which verifies) the sentence containing the quantifier antecedent' [Evans 1977: 498, 499, some emphasis added].[6] Here are two examples.

(3)   Mary danced with many boys and they found her interesting.

(4)   If Jane has a son, she will spoil him.

In (3), 'they' recovers its referent from 'many boys', and in (4) 'him' recovers its referent from 'a son'. But in each case the pronoun falls outside the scope of the quantified expression.

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[6] Evans's view on E-type pronouns is related to Kripke's [1980] view on proper names, according to which a proper name can have its reference fixed by a description, even though the name isn't synonymous with the description (or any description, for that matter).

To make this abundantly visually evident, consider (4), which on at least one natural reading appears to have this logical form:

$$(\exists x)$$

$$(\exists x)(\text{Jane has } x \text{ as a son}) \rightarrow \text{Jane spoils him}_x.$$

The brace over the top redundantly highlights the quantifier's scope. Notice that him_x in the consequent isn't bound by the quantifier $(\exists x)$ in the antecedent. Yet it certainly seems that the referent of him_x, if there is one, is recovered from the quantified antecedent.[7]

Building on this sort of insight into pronominal anaphora, McKinsey [1986] argues that something similar happens in thought, what he calls 'mental anaphora.' The phenomenon is best illustrated by a very simple case.

(**OSCAR**) Oscar is out fishing on a lazy Sunday afternoon. At

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[7] Groenendijk and Stokhof [1991] propose an alternative view that would allow quantifiers to bind pronouns falling outside of their syntactic scope. An anonymous referee helpfully suggests an alternative construal of (4)'s logical form worth considering:

Alt 1: $(\forall x)(x \text{ is a son of Jane's } \rightarrow \text{Jane spoils } x)$.

I think there is a natural reading of (4) that this doesn't capture. Suppose I utter (4), and it turns out that Jane has five sons but spoils only four of them. If Alt 1 were correct, then my utterance would be falsified. But, at least on one natural interpretation, my utterance isn't falsified, because I didn't commit to the following: if Jane has five sons, then she spoils them all. The natural next suggestion is to interpret (4) as having this alternative logical form:

Alt 2: $(\forall x)(x \text{ is Jane's unique son } \rightarrow \text{Jane spoils } x)$.

But this doesn't seem quite right either. Suppose again that I utter (4), and it turns out that Jane has two sons but spoils *neither* of them. If Alt 2 were correct, then my utterance would *not* be falsified. But, intuitively, my utterance would be falsified. None of this necessarily settles the matter, but it helps set the stage for further discussion.

long last, he feels a tug on his line. With high hopes, he reels in the line, only to come up empty-handed.

Based on this simple story, the following seems to be a fair cognitive ascription,

(5)   Oscar wishes he had caught the fish that got away.

On one natural reading of (5), it could be true even if no fish actually got away, because Oscar's line instead got caught on some debris near the bottom of the pond. On this same natural reading of (5), Oscar's wish is perfectly consistent — it's clearly possible for what he wishes to have been true — so we can't understand him to be wishing, for example, that there had been a fish that he caught but did not catch. McKinsey [2009: 93] proposes that this perfectly natural reading of (5) amounts to this,
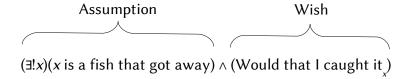
(6)   Oscar assumes that just one fish got away, and Oscar wishes it had been the case that he caught it (that very fish).

In a key passage, McKinsey writes,

Now suppose that just one fish did get away from Oscar at *t* and call it 'Bubbles'. Since the truth of the singular proposition that Oscar catches Bubbles at *t* would make Oscar's wish come true (at some other possible world), and since the words 'he caught it' in (6) express this proposition, this singular proposition would be the content of the wish ascribed by (6). But then, it surely seems that Oscar's wish would really be *about* Bubbles. But this wish would be about

Bubbles merely because Bubbles in fact uniquely satisfies the descriptive assumption on which the mental act involved in Oscar's wish is based. [2009: 93, with numbering adjusted]

To make the analogy with E-type pronouns visually evident, let's represent the logical form of (6) as follows,

$$\underbrace{(\exists!x)(x \text{ is a fish that got away})}_{\text{Assumption}} \wedge \underbrace{(\text{Would that I caught it}_x)}_{\text{Wish}}$$

Taking our cue from the earlier discussion of E-type pronouns, we could put matters this way. It_x appears in the scope of the wish but recovers its referent, if it has one, from the descriptive content of the assumption, which doesn't have scope over the wish. And since Bubbles uniquely satisfies the descriptive assumption, it_x directly refers to Bubbles. It_x functions as a genuine term.[8] All of this makes it seem that Oscar is thinking directly about Bubbles. His wish has as its content a singular proposition about Bubbles.

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[8] An anonymous referee points out that Geach [1967] raised potentially relevant concerns about intentional identity of objects across distinct mental acts, leading to the question: in virtue of what are we entitled to tag 'it' with the subscript 'x'? McKinsey [1986] discusses Geach's views extensively, and motivates his own theory of mental anaphora on the grounds that it helps address Geach's concerns. I am with McKinsey [1986: 169] when he writes, 'I am not certain' that a mental anaphoric reading of Oscar's wish is correct, but I find it attractive, and I've yet to see a 'good reason to think otherwise.' Of course, this doesn't settle the matter. It might be argued that mental acts of reference are individuated in a way that is inconsistent with this solution, and that's worth considering. But now we're encroaching on the fundamental intuitions motivating liberal theories, and since I'm primarily concerned to trace those motivations' implications, I'll gently set aside discussion of such arguments for another occasion.

Nothing in the analysis of OSCAR depends essentially on the thought being a *wish*. We can construct similar cases for other propositional attitudes. For example, it would have made no difference had we instead said 'and Oscar *thinks* it would have been great had he caught it (that very fish)'.

Anaphoric Liberalism accepts this principle of distant thought:

> (**AL**) Necessarily, for any person S, object y, and property G, *if* there is a property F such that (i) y = the F, and (ii) *S* assumes that there is just one F, and *S* thinks that it (that very F) is G, *then* S thinks of or about y that y is G. [McKinsey 2009: 94][9]

We could simplify AL as follows.

> If y is the F, and you assume that there is a unique F, and you think that it$_F$ is G, then you think of y that it$_F$ is G.

McKinsey considers AL to be 'quite liberal,' though not as liberal as the Fregean principle FL. The key difference between the two is that AL requires you to think, via mental anaphoric reference, that *it$_F$ is G*, not merely that *the F is G*. This, McKinsey contends, makes the difference between a singular thought and a purely qualitative general thought. Such a purely qualitative thought can't be a particular object, but it can enable singular thoughts via the mechanism of mental anaphora.

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[9] McKinsey calls this 'The Reference-Fixing Theory of Aboutness' and defines it for cognitive attitudes generally, rather than just *thinks*, as I have done here for the sake of simplicity.

4. *Progressive Anaphoric Liberalism*

Fregean Liberalism and Anaphoric Liberalism do not, strictly speaking, conflict. They each purport to identify a sufficient condition for distant thought, and there might be a multitude of such conditions. But they share at least one interesting feature: they both require you to *truthfully* think that some object *uniquely satisfies* the relevant description. By contrast, I will suggest that this isn't essential for distant thought. If FL and AL are correct, then it is just as plausible that there are sufficient conditions for distant thought that don't require you to truthfully assume unique satisfaction, thus making it even easier in one way to have distant thoughts. Conditions in this mold I call *progressively liberal*, or **progressive** for short. In the remainder of this section, I propose four new progressive sufficient conditions, and in the following section I propose four more. This section focuses on extensions of Anaphoric Liberalism. The next section will focus on extensions of Fregean Liberalism.

4.1. Cumulative Anaphoric Liberalism

Consider this case.

> (FINGAL) Fingal is out fishing one lazy Saturday afternoon. Hours have passed uneventfully. Finally, at 5 p.m. He feels a tug on his line. Then at 6 p.m. He feels a tug on his line again. With high hopes each time, Fingal reels in the line, only to come up empty-handed. He heads home dejected.

Based on this simple story, the following seems to be a fair cognitive

ascription,

> (7) Fingal wishes that he had caught both of the fish that got away.

In line with the earlier treatment of Oscar, I propose this perfectly natural reading of (7),

> (8) Fingal assumes that just two fish got away, and Fingal wishes that it had been the case that he caught them (those very fish).

Now suppose that just two fish did get away, and call them 'Venn' and 'Dorsey'. Since the truth of the proposition that Fingal catches Venn and Dorsey would make Fingal's wish come true, and since the words 'he caught them' in (8) express this plural proposition, this proposition is the content of the wish ascribed in (8). But then it surely seems that Fingal's wish is about Venn and about Dorsey. More generally, it seems implausible that Oscar's wish would be about Bubbles unless Fingal's wish was also about Venn and Dorsey. It would be an odd and unexpected discontinuity indeed if moving from an assumption featuring *one* fish ('it') to an assumption featuring *two* fish ('they') prevented a fisherman from wishing about the fish in question![10]

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[10] McKinsey suggested to me [personal communication] that Fingal's wish is about *the pair* consisting of Venn and Dorsey, {Venn, Dorsey}, but about neither Venn nor Dorsey *per se*; and furthermore that the anaphoric pronoun 'them' in (8) refers to the pair {Venn, Dorsey}, but not to either Venn or Dorsey. But I doubt that anyone convinced by McKinsey's take on Oscar would find this convincing. For, by parity of reasoning, it could be objected in turn that Oscar's wish is about the singleton set {Bubbles}, but not Bubbles; and that the anaphoric pronoun 'it' in (6) refers to the singleton

If McKinsey's treatment of Oscar's wish is right, then what I say here is right about Fingal's wish. And, recall, I am assuming that McKinsey is right about Oscar. So Fingal's wish is about about Venn, even though Venn doesn't uniquely satisfy the descriptive assumption on which the wish is based. And Fingal's wish is about Dorsey, even though Dorsey doesn't uniquely satisfy the descriptive assumption either. (Of course, no one fish could satisfy the description 'the two fish that got away'.) There is no unique fish that got away, and Fingal doesn't assume that there is a unique fish that got away. Indeed, he explicitly assumes otherwise.

FINGAL features two fish. But there is no reason to think that we must limit it to just two. In principle 'them' could refer to an arbitrarily large number of individuals.

Cumulative Anaphoric Liberalism accepts this principle of distant thought:

> (**CAL**) Necessarily, for any person S, objects $x_1, \ldots, x_n$, and property G, *if* there is a property F such that (i) $x_1, \ldots, x_n =$ the Fs, and (ii) S assumes that there are exactly n Fs, and S thinks that they (those very Fs) are each G, *then* S thinks of each $x_i \in \{x_1, \ldots, x_n\}$ that x_i is G.

We can simplify CAL as follows.

> If there are exactly n Fs, and you assume that there are exactly n Fs, and you think that each one of them$_F$ is G, then

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set {Bubbles}, but not to Bubbles. The suggestion is equally implausible in both Fingal's and Oscar's case, in part because neither fisherman wishes that he caught a set-theoretic construction.

you think of each one of them$_F$ that it$_F$ is G.

AL is just a special case of CAL, where $n=1$.

Perhaps there is an upper bound to the number of objects that we could have respective distant thoughts about in this way. Some people report to me that they find the cases plausible when n is in the low to mid single digits, but they become more reluctant when n rises above that, and increasingly so as n becomes larger.[11] If we suppose that this reluctance reveals something important about cumulative distant thought, then CAL could be revised:

(CAL*) Necessarily, for any person S, objects x_1, . . ., x_n, and property G, *if* there is a property F such that (i) x_1, . . ., x_n = the Fs, and (ii) S assumes that there are exactly n Fs, and S thinks that they (those very Fs) are each G, and (iii) $n \leq m$, *then* S thinks of each $x_i \in \{x_1, . . ., x_n\}$ that x_i is G.

where m is the upper bound of accumulation, if there is one.

4.2. Tolerant Anaphoric Liberalism

Consider this case:

(**FLAHERTY**) Flaherty is out fishing on a lazy Friday afternoon. Hours pass uneventfully. At 3 p.m. Flaherty feels a strong tug on his line. Excitedly he reels the line in, but he comes up empty-handed. At 6 p.m. he feels another strong tug and reels the line in, but alas, nothing again. He heads

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[11] One spirited interlocutor presented me with a case involving a stadium full of 110,000 drunken screaming soccer fans.

home disappointed.

Based on this simple story, the following seems to be a fair cognitive ascription.

(9) Flaherty wishes that he had caught both of the fish that got away.

I propose this natural reading of (9),

(10) Flaherty assumes that exactly two fish got away, and he wishes it had been the case that he caught them (those very fish).

Now suppose that exactly one fish got away, and call him 'Flipper'. What Flaherty mistook for another fish tugging was actually an old boot briefly caught on the hook. This makes Flaherty's assumption false. Nevertheless, the truth of the proposition that Flaherty catches Flipper would *partially* fulfill Flaherty's wish. And even though the anaphoric pronoun 'them' fails to refer to two fish, it still does refer to Flipper. But then it surely seems that Flaherty's wish is at least *partly* about Flipper. This is true despite the fact that Flaherty didn't assume that a unique fish got away, and that what he did assume was false.[12]

FLAHERTY features an assumption that exactly two fish exist. There is no reason to think that we must limit it to just two, but it doesn't seem correct that the number could be arbitrarily large, so that it was wildly off the mark. Rather it seems that there is *at least some* tolerance for overestimating the number of fish. Why it

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[12] If the 1:2 ratio is so low as to cause trouble, let's adjust it to, say, 4:5.

should seem this way is an interesting question, but not one I will address presently.

Tolerant Anaphoric Liberalism accepts this principle of distant thought:

> (**TAL**) Necessarily, for any person S, object x, and property G, *if* there is a property F such that (i) x = the F, and (ii) S assumes that there are exactly n Fs, where $n \leq m$, and S thinks that they (those very Fs) are each G, *then* S thinks of x that it is G,

where m is the upper bound of tolerance, if there is one, limiting how much S may overestimate the number of Fs. We could simplify TAL as follows.

> If x = the F, and you assume that there are exactly n Fs, where $n \leq m$, and you think that each one of them$_F$ is G, then you think of x that it$_F$ is G.

If we accept both Tolerant Anaphoric Liberalism and Cumulative Anaphoric Liberalism, we will probably also accept as a corollary the following principle of distant thought:

> (**TCAL**) Necessarily, for any person S, objects $x_1, \ldots, x_n$, and property G, *if* there is a property F such that (i) $x_1, \ldots, x_n$ = the Fs, and (ii) S assumes that there are exactly m Fs, where $m \leq k$, and S thinks that they (those very Fs) are each G, then S thinks of each $x_i \in \{x_1, \ldots, x_n\}$ that it is G,

where k is the upper bound of tolerance on overestimation, if there

is one.[13]

4.3. Probabilistic Anaphoric Liberalism

Consider this case.

> (WILL) Will is out fishing on a lazy Thursday afternoon. Hours have passed uneventfully. Finally, at 5 p.m. Will feels an ambiguous tug on his line. It *might* have been a fish, but it also might have been some seaweed or an old boot. He reels in his line to check, but alas, nothing. At 6 p.m. he feels a similar ambiguous tug on his line. He reels in his line, only to come up empty-handed again. After considering the characteristics of the tugs, he concludes that it is very likely that at least one of them was due to a fish nibbling on the line, but somewhat unlikely that each tug was due to a different fish nibbling on the line. In any event, he heads home disappointed.

Based on this story, the following seems to be a fair cognitive ascription,

> (11) Will wishes that he had caught the fish (or, on the off chance, two) that got away.

I propose this reading of (11),

> (12) Will judges that at least one, and probably just one, fish got away, and he wishes that it had been the case that he

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[13] As with CAL*, we could also add an upper bound on accumulation.

caught it (that very fish).

Now suppose that just one fish did get away, and call him 'Gil'. Since the truth of the proposition that Will catches Gil would make Will's wish come true, and since the words 'he caught it' in (12) express this proposition, this singular proposition is the content of the wish ascribed in (12). But then it surely seems that Will's wish is about Gil. And this is true despite the fact that Will doesn't assume that there is a unique fish that got away. Rather, he assumes only that there *probably* was such a fish.

Probabilistic Anaphoric Liberalism accepts this principle of distant thought:

> (**PAL**) Necessarily, for any person *S*, object *x*, and property G, *if* there is a property F such that (i) *x* = the F, and (ii) *S* judges that there is at least one, and probably just one, F, and *S* thinks that it (that very F) is G, *then* S thinks of *x* that it is G.

We could simplify this as follows.

> If *x* is the F, and you judge that there is probably just one F, and you think that if$_F$ is G, then you think of *x* that it$_F$ is G.

4.4. Conditional Anaphoric Liberalism

Consider this case.

> (**WILDE**) Wilde is out fishing on a lazy Wednesday afternoon. Hours have passed uneventfully. At the end of the day,

Wilde feels an ambiguous tug on his line. It *might* have been a fish, but more likely it was some seaweed or an old boot. He reels in his line to check, but alas, nothing. He heads home disappointed.

Based on this simple story, the following seems to be a fair cognitive ascription.

(13) Wilde wishes that he had caught the fish that might have got away.

I propose this reading of (13),

(14) Wilde assumes that there might have been a fish that got away, and that if any fish got away, then exactly one fish got away; and Wilde wishes that if exactly one fish did get away, then it had been the case that he caught it (that very fish).

Now suppose that just one fish did get away, and call him 'Finley'. This makes Wilde's assumption true: if any fish got away, then exactly one fish did. And it makes the antecedent of his wish true: exactly one fish did get away. So the truth of the proposition that Wilde catches Finley would make Wilde's wish come true. And the words 'he caught it' in (14) express this singular proposition. But then it surely seems that Wilde's wish is about Finley. And this despite the fact that Wilde doesn't assume that there is a unique fish that got away. Rather, he assumes merely that there might have been a fish that got away, and that if any fish got away, then exactly one fish did.

Conditional Anaphoric Liberalism accepts this principle of distant thought:

(**CoAL**) Necessarily, for any person *S*, object *x*, and property G, *if* there is a property F such that (i) *x* = the F, (ii) *S* assumes that there might be an F, and (iii) *S* assumes that if anything is F, then exactly one thing is F, and S thinks that if there is exactly one F, then it is G, *then S* thinks of *x* that it is G.

We could simplify this as follows.

If (a) *x* = the F, (b) you assume that there might be an F, (c) you assume that if anything is F, then exactly one thing is F, and (d) you think that if exactly one thing is F, then it$_F$ is G, *then* you think that it$_F$ is G.

Let me highlight one advantage of accepting CoAL in addition to AL. Suppose for the sake of argument that we accept AL but not CoAL, and we reject that Wilde's wish is about Finley. Now consider a minor extension to WILDE.

(WILDE continued) On his walk home from the fishing hole, Wilde reconsiders the tug he felt on his line. Upon reflection he concludes that it wasn't ambiguous at all. It was due only to momentary carelessness that earlier on the boat he wasn't confident that it was indeed a fish tugging on the line. He revises his opinion and now assumes that it was a fish, not merely that it might have been.

If we reject CoAL but accept AL, then our view implies that upon re-

vising his opinion about the tug, Wilde goes from not having a wish about Finley, to having a wish about Finley. But surely this is an odd discontinuity. Either Wilde's wish is about Finley both before and after the revision, or it is about Finley neither before nor after.

A different example might help illuminate the point. Agnes is agnostic about whether a wise and benevolent creator created the universe. She thinks that there might be such a thing, but the evidence is slight. She also assumes that if such a creator exists, then there is only one such creator. Moreover, she hopes that if there is a unique creator, then it would save her from sorrow and misery. Now suppose that there is a wise and benevolent creator, and it is unique. It seems that Agnes's hope is about this being. That is, she hopes, of the creator, that it will save her. Yet if we accept AL but reject CoAL, then our view implies that Agnes's hope is not about the creator.

There is a further troubling implication. Continue the story so that Agnes becomes convinced that there is a creator, and thus that there is a unique creator. Our view would entail that because she revised her opinion and became more confident that a creator exists, her hope is now about the creator. She goes from not having a hope about the creator, to having a hope about the creator. But this discontinuity is counterintuitive.

5. *Progressive Fregean Liberalism*

Thus far I have proposed four progressive extensions to Anaphoric

Liberalism, along with a fifth corollary. In this section I will propose analogous extensions to Fregean Liberalism. Just as we located additional principles of distant thought in the Anaphoric family, we can also locate additional principles in the Fregean family.

Recall our simplified statement of the Fregean Liberal principle of distant thought, FL:

If y is the F and you think that the F is G, then you think of y that y is G.

5.1. Cumulative Fregean Liberalism

Here is how Chisholm motivates FL:

Suppose I judge that the only person in this room who can play the clarinet is a Senator. I can know directly and immediately that I *am* judging in this way. Suppose further that *you* happen to be the only one in the room who plays the clarinet. It follows from these facts that my judgment is *direct upon* [you]; it is a judgment, *with respect to you*, that you are a Senator. And we can say just what there is about the judgment that *makes* it a judgment that is directed upon you — a judgment *with respect to you*.

In a word, and considerably oversimplified: if a person S judges that the only thing that is so-and-so is such-and-such, and if an object y is the only thing that is so-and-so, then S may be said to judge *with respect to y* that *it* is such-and-such; and S's judgment, therefore, is *directed upon y*. And

that's how my judgment is directed upon you: you are the only one in the room who plays the clarinet; I judge that the only one in the room who plays the clarinet is a Senator; hence I judge *with respect to you* that you are a Senator; and therefore my judgment is *directed upon you*. [Chisholm 1990: 158–159, with minor adjustments for terminological consistency]

No plausibility is lost here if we take this commentary to motivate not merely FL, but **Cumulative Fregean Liberalism**,

(**CFL**) If $y_1, \ldots, y_n$ are the Fs, and you think that the n Fs are G, then you think of each $y_i \in \{y_1, \ldots, y_n\}$ that y_i is G.

Modify Chisholm's example so that he judges that the only two people in the room who can play the clarinet are Senators. It is just as plausible in the modified case that he knows directly and immediately that he is judging this way. Suppose that the only two people in the room who play the clarinet are you and me. It seems just as plausible in the modified case that Chisholm's judgment would be directed upon you and me. You and I are the only ones in the room who play the clarinet, and he judges that the two people in the room who play the clarinet are Senators. Hence he judges with respect to us that we are Senators, and his judgment is directed upon us.

Consider also this argument for Fregean Liberalism, due to Ernest Sosa [1995: 92, with adjustments for terminological consistency].

P1. If there is such a thing as the F, then the proposition that the F is G is about the F and attributes being G to the F.

P2. If you believe the proposition P, and P is about x and attributes being G to x, then your belief is about x and attributes being G to x.

C. Therefore Fregean Liberalism is true.

No plausibility is lost if we run a version of Sosa's argument for CFL.

P1a. If there are such things as the Fs, then the proposition that Fs are G is about the Fs and attributes being G to each of the Fs.

P2a. If you believe the proposition P, and P is about $x_1, \ldots, x_n$ and attributes being G to each $x_i \in \{x_1, \ldots, x_n\}$, then your belief is about each x_i and attributes being G to each x_i.

C. Therefore Cumulative Fregean Liberalism is true.

As with CAL earlier (§4.1), we might want to impose an upper bound of accumulation on cumulative distant thought. If so, then CFL could be rewritten

(**CFL***) If $y_1, \ldots, y_n$ are the Fs, and you think that the n Fs are G, and $n \leq m,$ then you think of each $y_i \in \{y_1, \ldots, y_n\}$ that y_i is G.

where m is the upper bound of accumulation. FL is just a special case of CFL, where $m=1$. And while some might think it implausible that m could be arbitrarily large, thereby motivating a shift to CFL*, it is similarly implausible that m can't be greater than 1.

A point from the epistemology of arithmetic lends support to CFL. Consider this inequality: 642,000,000,246 > 1. No doubt you know that this inequality is true. And it can easily seem that you

have long thought that this inequality is true. But this is the first time you judged that it is true, and it is the first time you con-sciously entertained a sentence containing the constant term '642,000,000,246', or a proposition with 642,000,000,246 as a constituent. So then how could it be that you have long thought that this inequality is true? How could you have long thought *of* 642,000,000,246 that *it* is greater than 1?

Here is one explanation: CFL is true, and when applied to the present case, both clauses of its antecedent are satisfied.

- 2, 3, 4, . . . are the natural numbers other than 1 (i.e. they are the Fs).
- you think that all of the natural numbers other than 1 are greater than 1 (i.e. you think that each of them is G).

CFL thus entails that

- you think of each $y \in \{2, 3, 4, . . .\}$ that y is greater than 1 (i.e. is G).

And since $642,000,000,246 \in \{2, 3, 4, . . .\}$, it follows that you think that the inequality in question is true.

5.2. Tolerant Fregean Liberalism

Consider this variation on Chisholm's case. Chisholm judges that the only two people in this room who can play the clarinet are Sen-ators. But this judgment is false. You and I are both Senators, but *you* are the only one in the room who plays the clarinet. (I play the oboe but not the clarinet.) If in the original case Chisholm judges

with respect to you that you are a Senator, then it seems just as plausible in this case that Chisholm judges with respect to you that you are a Senator.

Here Chisholm overestimates the number of clarinetists in the room by only one. And his thought is clearly still about you. But if he had overestimated by hundreds, then it's not at all clear that his thought would still be about you. So there must be some tolerance for misjudgment, though how much tolerance is difficult to say.

Tolerant Fregean Liberalism accepts this principle of distant thought:

(**TFL**) If y = the F, and you assume that there are exactly n Fs, where $n \leq m$, and you think that each F is G, then you think of y that y is G,

where m is the upper bound of tolerance, limiting how much S may overestimate the number of Fs.

Consider a version of Sosa's argument, this time for TFL.

P1b. If there is such a thing as the F, then the proposition that each of the m Fs is G is (at least partly) about the F and attributes being G to the F.

P2b. If you believe the proposition P, and P is (at least partly) about x and attributes being G to x, then your belief is about x and attributes being G to x.

C. Therefore Tolerant Fregean Liberalism is true.

Again we understand m to be the limit of tolerance for misjudgment consistent with thinking about x. If FL is true, then TFL is guaranteed to be true, even if only in the limiting case where $m = 1$. But in-

tuitively it does seem possible for *m* to be greater than 1.

5.3. Probabilistic Fregean Liberalism

Consider this variation on Chisholm's case. Chisholm is outside the room and is credibly told that someone inside can play Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, which Chisholm knows is an extraordinarily difficult piece. Chisholm judges that there is at least one, but probably just one, person in that room who can play Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, and the person would have to be a concert pianist. Suppose further that you happen to be the only one in the room who can play that concerto. If in the original case Chisholm judges with respect to you that you are a Senator, then it seems just as plausible in this case that Chisholm judges with respect to you that you are a concert pianist.

Probabilistic Fregean Liberalism accepts this principle of distant thought:

> (**PFL**) *If y* is the F, and you judge that there is at least one F, and probably just one F, and you think that the F would be a G, *then* you think of *y* that *y* is G.

I'm not sure that we can run a version of Sosa's argument for PFL. The difficulty is coming up with an analog of P1. It might be something like, 'If there is such a thing as the F, then the proposition that *what is probably the unique F is G* is about the F and attributes being G to the F.' But that is not entirely satisfactory.

5.4. Conditional Fregean Liberalism

Consider this variation on Chisholm's case. Chisholm is milling around outside. Over the din he hears the piano playing in the room. It *might* be someone playing Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3. But he can't tell, and given how extraordinarily difficult the piece is to play, it's more likely that someone is playing some other piece. Nevertheless Chisholm does judge that if it turns out that someone in the room is playing Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, then there is exactly one person in the room playing it, and the person would have to be a concert pianist.[14] Suppose further that you're in the room playing the concerto, and you're the only one in the room playing it. Once again, if in the original case Chisholm's judgment is directed upon you, then it seems equally plausible in this case that his judgment is directed upon you too.

Conditional Fregean Liberalism accepts this principle of distant thought:

> (**CoFL**) *If* (a) *y* = the F, (b) you think that there might be an F, (c) you think that if there is an F, then there is a unique F, and (d) you think that a unique F would be G, *then* you think of *y* that *y* is G.

> Consider a version of Sosa's argument for CoFL.

> P1c. If there is such a thing as the F, then the proposition that *if there is a unique F, then the F is (would be) G* is about the F and attributes being G to the F.

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[14] The judgment's propositional content should not be understood as a mere material conditional with a vacuous truth-condition.

> P2c. If you believe proposition P, and P is about *x* and attrib-
> utes being G to *x*, then your belief is about *x* and attributes
> being G to *x*.
>
> C.   Therefore Conditional Fregean Liberalism is true.

P1c seems true because in a situation where there is a unique F, it uniquely satisfies the antecedent, and its status — whether G or not-G — determines the conditional's truth-value. That seems to make the conditional about the F.

We can motivate the extension from FL to CoFL another way. Consider this case that Sosa uses to motivate his theory.

> A new man, Shorty, has just joined the platoon, but the Lieu-
> tenant is unaware of this fact. The Sergeant, after consulting
> with his Lieutenant, returns to the platoon and says to the
> shortest man: 'Shorty, Lieutenant wants you to go first.' Ac-
> tually the desire expressed by Lieutenant was that the
> shortest man go first — that is, Lieutenant desires ⌜the
> shortest man is to go first⌝. And yet, in the context, and giv-
> en the shortest man, that suffices for *exportation*: it enables
> us to move 'the shortest man' outside the scope of the psy-
> chological modality, and enables us to conclude that it is true
> of the shortest man that Lieutenant desires that he go first.
> [Sosa 1970: 890, with minor adjustments in light of
> Chisholm 1976: 9]

Now consider the same case with a minor adjustment. Instead of having 'the shortest man is to go first' in corner quotes, we have 'if there is a shortest man, then the shortest man is to go first'. Ser-

geant could report, 'Shorty, Lieutenant wants you to go first,' just as felicitously in this slightly modified case as he could in the original. So if in Sosa's original case Lieutenant desires of Shorty that Shorty go first, then the same is true in the slightly modified case.

We can substantiate this with an argument. First, recall Geach's point, 'A thought may have just the same content whether you assent to its truth or not; a proposition may occur in discourse no asserted, no unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition' [1965: 449]. In any given context, at least, 'Q' means the same thing when you think or utter 'Q' as when you think or utter 'If P, then Q'. So when Lieutenant says or thinks, 'the shortest man is to go first,' it means the same thing whether it appears on its own, as in Sosa's original example, or embedded in the consequent of a conditional, as in the modified example. Second, recall Frege's doctrine that sense determines reference. Or, to put the point more cautiously, in any given context, if two expressions have the same sense or meaning, then they refer to, or are about, the same thing. Third, we stipulated that the context is exactly the same in the slightly modified example as in Sosa's original, the only difference being that Lieutenant says, 'if there is a shortest man, the shortest man is to go first,' rather than just, 'the shortest man is to go first.' From these three premises it follows that if Lieutenant's desire ⌜the shortest man is to go first⌝ is about Shorty in the original case, then Lieutenant's desire ⌜if there is a shortest man, the shortest man is to go first⌝ is also about Shorty in the modified case. And if that's correct, then the move from FL to CoFL starts to look irresistible.

6. Conclusion

When you think about a particular object, what makes your thought about *that* object? That is the question we are ultimately trying to answer. We began by reviewing one popular answer, Fregean Liberalism, and McKinsey's critique of it. Then we considered McKinsey's positive proposal based on mental anaphora, Anaphoric Liberalism, and how it is motivated by the reference-fixing model of anaphoric pronouns. Next, building on McKinsey's work, I offered a series of progressively liberal proposals that are motivated on much the same ground as Anaphoric Liberalism, thus extending the family of liberal anaphoric principles of distant thought. Finally, returning to the intuitive case that Chisholm and Sosa made for Fregean Liberalism, I applied similar reasoning to motivate another series of progressive proposals, which extend the family of liberal Fregean principles of distant thought. I conclude that if Liberal thought is possible, then Progressively Liberal thought is possible too.[15]

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