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Book Symposium  
on François Recanati's *Mental Files*

Edited by Fiora Salis

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# Introduction

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Singular thought, mental reference, reference determination, co-reference, informative identities, propositional attitudes, attitude ascriptions, *de se* thought, indexical thought, perceptual concepts, identification, recognition and misrecognition. These notions and phenomena, so central to philosophical inquiry in mind and language, have been often articulated and explained by deploying the increasingly popular idea of a mental file. A mental file is a structure for the storage of information that a subject takes to be, internally, about one and the same external object. Its notion is deeply rooted in our folk psychology and it is akin to the idea of a concept, a cognitive particular or a mental representation standing for an individual object. A mental file is a philosopher's construct originally introduced by Grice (1969: 141-2) under the label 'dossier' in his discussion of vacuous names and referentially used descriptions. Strawson (1974: 54-6) uses a similar idea in his discussion of identity statements. Evans (1973: 199, ff.) talks of a speaker's 'body of information associated with a name' within his information-based account of reference determination and borrows Grice's notion of a dossier of information within his (1982: Chapter 8, spec. 276-7) account of recognition-based identification. Perry (1980) introduces the label 'mental file' for the first time to account for the phenomenon of continued belief. He (2001: 128-46) appeals to the same notion to account for the phenomenon of co-reference and in his (2002) introduces the Self file to provide the sense of the indexical 'I'. Bach (1987: Chapter 3, spec. 34-9, 44) deploys mental files in his discussion of *de re* thought. Devitt (1989: 227-8, 231) does it in his account of informative identity statements. Forbes (1989; 1990: 538-45) uses the notion of a dossier associated to a name to specify the content of belief ascriptions. Jeshion (2010: 129, ff.) presents a new theory of singular

thought as thought from mental files. Friend (2011: spec. 194, 198, 200; forthcoming) appeals to mental files to explain the phenomenon of intersubjective identification of fictional characters within an ontologically irrealist framework. More authors have deployed the same metaphor more often than one might initially think.

It is remarkable, however, that while philosophers of mind and language have been very keen on deploying mental files they have never engaged in a serious investigation of their nature. This is until Oxford University Press published two books in 2012 that will establish the agenda for future research in this area. The first is François Recanati's *Mental Files*, which offers a rich and sophisticated theory of singular reference in language and thought focusing on mental files as the constituents of individual thinking. The second is Mark Sainsbury's and Michael Tye's *Seven Puzzles of Thought. And How to Solve Them: An Originalist Theory of Concepts*, which is an elegant, simple and quite natural theory of public and intersubjective concepts (one with which I am very sympathetic). There are three aspects of Recanati's theory that make it the perfect subject for a book symposium though. First, it is innovative in that it puts forward an original Neo-Fregean theory of singular reference in terms of mental files. Second, it is partially controversial, as it will become clear by reading the critical articles of this symposium. And third, as a consequence, it is in urgent need of clarification, which has been provided here by the author.

Recanati is one of the leading figures in contemporary philosophy of language. His contributions span from the theory of meaning, semantic content and truth conditions to the theory of pragmatic processes, from direct reference, empty singular terms and definite descriptions to speech act theory, from the theory of perspectival thought, relativism and contextualism to indirect discourse and quotation. The topic of his new book falls squarely within the philosophy of mind. But Recanati explicitly introduces his theory as a sequel to the one he elaborated in his *Direct Reference. From Language to Thought*, thus contributing to both the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language. According to him, a mental file is like a singular term in the language of thought. It is a cognitive structure for the storage of information (or misinformation) that a subject takes to be about an external object. More specifically, it is a mode of presentation — a



Fregean *Sinn* — associated to a linguistic singular term and it is non-descriptive because its reference is determined relationally rather than satisfactionally. Modes of presentation determine the referent of the singular term to which they are associated, they account for its cognitive significance and for the clustering of information about the referent of the term. Furthermore, Recanati suggests that mental files (types) are individuated not through the information they contain, but through the type of epistemically rewarding relations that originate them. An epistemically rewarding relation is a relation of acquaintance (either past, present or, possibly, future) that a subject entertains with a certain object in a certain context and that allows to gain information from the object.

The book is divided into nine parts. In the first part Recanati argues against several varieties of Descriptivism and in favor of the mental file approach as an original Neo-Fregean version of Singularism — the view according to which we can think about individual objects directly (through some relation of acquaintance) or indirectly (via knowledge of some properties and relations that they might exemplify). The second part is dedicated to the introduction of the notion of mental files as non-descriptive modes of presentation and to the articulation of an account of identity judgments in terms of Perry's notion of linking as an operation on distinct files. Further discussion is dedicated to presumptions of identity, which are explained in terms of operations within a single file. The third part is dedicated to the full articulation of Recanati's original model of mental files as mental indexicals, i.e. cognitive particulars whose reference is determined through a contextually relevant relation of acquaintance and existing only as long as that relation holds. Further attention is dedicated to the introduction of more stable files with a longer life span such as the Self file based on the identity relation to oneself, the recognitional files based on a familiarity relation and the encyclopaedic files based on a purpose-tracking relation. In the fourth part Recanati introduces the notion of co-reference *de jure* — defined as a relation between two singular terms to the effect that anybody who understands a piece of discourse involving the two terms thereby knows that they co-refer — and he addresses several versions of different traditional objections. The fifth part consists in a critical discussion of the controversial aspects of *de jure* co-ref-

erence regarding factivity and epistemic transparency. In the sixth part Recanati claims that the traditional acquaintance constraint on singular thought should be theorized as a normative claim rather than as a factual claim, and this would allow him to countenance acquaintanceless singular thoughts. The seventh part focuses on attitude ascriptions and the meta-representational function of mental files as representations of how other speakers think about objects in the world. In the eighth part Recanati elaborates on the communication of singular thought and in particular on *de se* thoughts, indexical thoughts and cases of referentially used descriptions. The ninth part is dedicated to the articulation of the advantages of the mental files framework against its main competitors, including Perry's token reflexive account and Lewis's centered world framework.

The symposium includes seven critical discussions and Recanati's replies. In the first contribution Annalisa Coliva and Delia Belleri lead an organic discussion of what they see as some obscurities concerning the nature of mental files, the acquaintance constraint on singular thought and the origination of a file with no actual acquaintance to its referent, the notion of epistemic transparency and that of *de se* thought.

In the second contribution Keith Hall focuses on the nature and coherence of Recanati's acquaintance constraint on singular thought interpreted as a normative claim rather than a factual claim. Hall criticizes Recanati's replies to upholders of the idea that we have acquaintanceless singular thought and discusses the consequences of a loophole he individuates in Recanati's thesis according to which we can entertain a singular thought about an object with which we are not yet acquainted by introducing a descriptive name into public language.

In the third contribution Peter Pagin articulates a critical discussion of the connection between semantics and cognitive significance and individuates a few problems with Recanati's account. He recommends that we should distinguish between a linguistic expression and its semantic properties and criticizes Recanati's idea according to which mental files correspond both to the linguistic expression and to the cognitive significance of that expression.

In the fourth contribution Krista Lawlor critically assesses two objections that Recanati makes against Descriptivism, concerning

the communication of singular thought and the internalization of acquaintance relations promoted by certain sophisticated versions such as token reflexive accounts. She expresses the doubt that Recanati's own theory might fall prey to his own criticisms of the alternative descriptivist views.

In the fifth contribution David Papineau focuses on Recanati's indexical model of mental files and defends two theses. The first is that there is less indexicality in the mind than there is in language. The second is that mental files are more like names than like indexicals.

In the sixth contribution Thea Goodsell criticizes the way in which Recanati individuates mental files as typed by epistemically rewarding relations.

In the seventh and last critical contribution Manuel García-Carpintero surveys Perry's and Lewis's contrasting proposals about the interpretation of *de se* thoughts, Stalnaker's argument for an original version of the latter view and Recanati's take on it in *Mental Files*. He further argues that Recanati's (2007, 2009) Lewisian account of *de se* contents is in tension with the mental files approach to content-ingredients he has been developing in his work, including its full articulation in *Mental Files*.

The latter contribution to this symposium consists of Recanati's replies to his critics. In this occasion Recanati not only clarifies and better articulates many of the ideas he presented in the book, but further develops new and more radical hypotheses about the correct interpretation of the acquaintance constraint on singular thought, about the notion of singular reference and singular thought involved in discourse about fictional characters and in the use of descriptive names, about the indexical model of files and more.

I would like to thank the authors who accepted my invitation and elaborated their criticisms in a genuinely deep and rigorous way. And I would like to thank Recanati who immediately expressed his genuine enthusiasm for this symposium and who contributed a long piece containing some important clarification on his present proposal and on its possible future developments.

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# Some Observations on François Recanati's *Mental Files*

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François Recanati's *Mental Files* provides a new and thought-provoking account of the nature and structure of singular thought. According to Recanati, mental files are non-descriptive modes of presentation and are used to tackle a variety of philosophical issues. In this contribution, we will provide a brief overview of Recanati's work and a critical assessment of some of its main theses.

## 1 Background and overview

Descriptivism is 'the view that our mental relation to individual objects goes through properties of those objects' (3)<sup>1</sup>, that is, we think about singular objects only insofar as we ascribe properties to them. The view draws from Frege the distinction between reference and sense or *mode of presentation*. The components of our thoughts are senses, which are modes of presentation conceived of as *descriptive*, i.e. as characterising an object as the only bearer of a certain property: for example 'the morning star' or 'the evening star'.

In contrast, Singularism says that 'our thought is about individual objects as much as it is about properties. Objects are given to us directly, in experience' (4). One of the main problems of Singularism comes with cases of misidentification: suppose Charles believes that Mont Blanc is 4,000 metres high; one day, he sees a mountain

<sup>1</sup> If not otherwise specified, all references are to Recanati 2012.

and forms the belief that it is less than 4,000 meters. Unbeknownst to him, that mountain is Mont Blanc. Since Mont Blanc occurs directly in both of Charles' thoughts, he counts as irrational for he has contradictory beliefs about the same object. Singularism has to invoke something like modes of presentation in order to be able to say that Charles' thoughts are not inconsistent, for Mont Blanc is really 'presented differently' in each thought. But is it possible to combine Singularism with modes of presentation without falling prey to Descriptivism?

Recanati's book aims at providing a positive answer to this question, thus arguing for the following combination of elements: (a) a Singularist conception of thought about individual objects; (b) the sense/reference distinction; (c) a non-Descriptivist notion of sense or mode of presentation. To achieve this result, he introduces the notion of *mental files*: these are modes of presentation for individual objects which, however, are not based on descriptions but rather on *acquaintance relations*. A relation is of acquaintance just in case it is *epistemically rewarding*, i.e. it enables one to acquire information from an object. *Perception* is a paradigm here, for it allows information to flow directly from the object to the mind. However, other kinds of 'mediated' acquaintance, through communication or contextual relations, are also possible (35-36).

Mental files thus conceived are, for one thing, repositories of information — which may or may not be veridical — about a certain object. For another, they are analogous to singular terms in that they refer to the object itself. So, for instance, Charles' being perceptually acquainted with Mont Blanc triggers the creation of a mental file, which (a) can store a certain amount of information — or *misinformation* (e.g. 'the mountain I see', 'the world's tallest mountain') in the form of a list of predicates and (b) refers to Mont Blanc itself. Note that, according to Recanati, the file's reference is not determined by the information contained in it. What mental files refer to

'is not determined by properties which the subject takes the referent to have (i.e. by information — or misinformation — in the file), but through the relations on which the files are based. The reference is the entity we are acquainted with (in the appropriate way), not the entity which best 'fits' information in the file.' (35)

The mechanism of reference of mental files is modelled upon Kaplan's conception of indexicality in formal semantics. Mental file types are said to have a 'character', i.e. a rule setting the conditions at which the file itself should be tokened in one's mind, which requires different *epistemically rewarding relations* to be instantiated (59-60). In the case of 'I', for instance, the file should be tokened only when the relation of (the referent's) being identical with the producer of the token obtains, or is presumed to obtain (61). Note that the subject need *not* think about the obtaining of such relation while she creates a token of the file in her mind (248, note 4, 251). If the file refers, then it has a 'content', i.e. it contributes an individual to the truth-conditions of the thought — as in the case of 'I'. If it does not, the file nevertheless counts as a genuine component of the thought — with 'intentional' features only (63-64, 246-7).

## 2 Critical assessment

Mental files, as Recanati conceives them, appear as multifarious and versatile objects. They can be used to approach in an original and challenging way many philosophical puzzles, ranging from informative identities to the communication of perspectival contents. Yet their nature and workings remain relatively unclear at least at places.

For instance, there seem to be several ambiguities in the way mental files are presented. On the one hand, we are told that they are singular Fregean senses, that determine the referents they stand for. On the other, we are told that they are similar to Fodor's terms in the language of thought. However, Fodor's concepts are only syntactically different and do not contain any semantically relevant material apart from their referent, nor is the latter determined by sense. Furthermore, we are told that mental files are singular senses but then they are used to store any kind of information. This would be fine as long as the latter didn't serve any semantic purpose, but, as the discussion of the mental file SELF in connection with the problem of its communication will presently make apparent, it is unclear whether this is so.

Another aspect of Recanati's proposal that is not entirely clear is its precise scope. For we are told that mental files are mental indexicals which depend, for their existence, on there being an epistemi-

cally rewarding relation, in the form of acquaintance, between a subject and the object the file is a file of. On the face of it, however, this would entail that mental files are quite limited, for we do not seem to be acquainted with a lot of entities that we are nevertheless able to think about. We are not acquainted with non-existing and fictional entities; nor are we acquainted with past or future entities, let alone with abstract ones, like numbers or logical entities. Recanati, however, stresses that in the first case — the one of non-existing or fictional entities (but notice the partly confusing treatment of SUPERMAN and CLARK KENT at 197-ff) — we essay a singular thought, but we would have none (160). Rather, we would have a descriptive and therefore general thought (161). However, he also seems to say that we can report someone else's attitudes about these entities in such a way that their possession of the corresponding mental files, or at least, pseudo-singular files, would be presupposed (177, 204-5). Pseudo-singular files, however, do not seem to be equivalent to some general or descriptive thought-content. For, granted that they do not license singular thoughts, they still are to be regarded as singular in some relevant sense. In order to capture this nuance, Recanati describes subjects who entertain such files as thinking singular *vehicles* and not singular contents. To entertain a singular vehicle, he says, is to token a mental file which is not created on the basis of an acquaintance relation (either one that actually obtains, or one which is expected to actually obtain) (166-169). Singular vehicles however, are merely *taken* to provide singular reference by those who entertain them (if, e.g., they are mistaken about the existence of their referent — think of a child who believes in Santa Claus); at best, they are *treated* as providing singular reference (we may imagine a cautious scientist, who is not sure about the existence of the entity she is naming). In each case, theirs is only an *appearance* of singularity and it is not clear how one could go from an appearance of singular thought to singular thought proper, in any interesting semantic sense. So if entertaining a singular vehicle comes down to entertaining a *seemingly singular thought* (which is really not a singular thought, in any interesting semantic sense), we do not see how this notion could be of help. In the second case, i.e. the one of past or future entities, things are complex. As to past entities, we may be in relation to them through language, because someone was acquainted with them and a



communicative chain was set up so as to preserve reference to these entities. In the case of future or still unknown entities, in contrast, we are tentatively told that we can already have singular thoughts about them, as long as their referents will come into existence (e.g. Newman 1) or will be discovered (e.g. Neptune for early astronomers), even though we will not be acquainted with them (164-5, 169, 171). But this seems weird. For the causal chains, or, at any rate, the epistemically rewarding relations based on acquaintance, which will eventually be set up should have backward effects. To spell this out: in order for one to have a singular thought about an entity one will be acquainted with in the future (say, Newman 1) one must be linked with that entity in some relevant way. Following Recanati, such a link is to be regarded as an epistemically rewarding relation with a physical object (acquaintance) (20); yet if the entity in question exists only in the future, the link between the entity and the speaker must work backwards so as to ensure that singular thought is attained in the present. The problem here is that it does not seem that an epistemically rewarding relation such as acquaintance can afford this kind of connection. We may have the impression that it does, because we are able to place ourselves in an a-temporal perspective from which we can neutrally assess this relation, as it were, from a purely conceptual point of view. Yet this does not entail that, when one speaks about e.g. Newman 1 in the present, one is really related, *in any epistemically rewarding way*, with a physically existing individual. Finally, nothing is said about the case of abstract entities and this is partly unsatisfactory because it leaves in the dark an area of our thought that is extremely important as it accounts for some of our fundamental cognitive abilities, some of which would seem to produce singular thinking about their objects, e.g. '3', 'the positive square root of 16' (taken as referring *de re* to number 4), etc.

One further feature of the theory which is not entirely clear is the extent to which one's singular thoughts are transparent. Recanati disagrees with both Boghossian's and Burge's different takes on the issue of the compatibility between externalism and self-knowledge. He claims that in the following kind of inference, taking place after a slow switch between worldly mental files and their counterparts on twin Earth,

- (1) Jo once loved playing in the water.
- (2) Jo does not like playing in the water now.
- (3) Jo has changed.

it is not the case, *contra* Boghossian, that ‘water’ in (1) and (2) respectively refers to water and twater; nor is it the case, *contra* Burge, that the reference of ‘water’ in (2) is water, like in (1), because the reasoning initiated in (1) requires the reference of ‘water’ to remain stable. Rather, the reference of ‘water’ is confused in both cases, so it is neither water nor twater and therefore (1) and (2) are neither true nor false. Yet, according to Recanati, his account preserves transparency. For transparency has it that *if* there is a singular thought, then the subject would know what his thought is about. But since the premises in the inference do not satisfy the antecedent of the conditional, they cannot be taken to be a counterexample to it. Now, the intuition that no specific thought about water (or twater) is being thought is not very solid and, at any rate, it is not clear what evidence there is for thinking so. With respect to (2), where supposedly the subject is aware of Jo’s behavior in the presence of some stuff resembling water, it really seems that he would be thinking a singular thought about *that* stuff. As it happens, it is twater, so the subject would really seem to be thinking about twater. In the case of (1) things might be a little bit more complicated, for memory is involved. But Recanati himself thinks that memory is a way of storing information about previously encountered objects, even though it also affects a transformation of the original files, since they are no longer based on perception of their referents. At any rate, it would seem that on Recanati’s preferred account of the role of memory, ‘water’ in (1) should refer to water. If so, then transparency would not be preserved, after all. However, even if one grants Recanati the idea of confused reference in (1) and (2), this would actually entail that while the subject may be thinking of thinking a (t)water-thought in each of the premises, he would not. So, it remains unclear how the proposed solution would actually allow to compatibilize externalism and the transparency of senses, for the content of one’s thoughts would still be unknown to the subject.

One further aspect of the framework presented by Recanati that deserves consideration, in our opinion, is his account of the SELF

file and its communication. In this and other work of his, Recanati insists on the relevance, to the possession of the SELF file, of a number of epistemically rewarding relations, such as somatic proprioception, self-locating perception, memory and immediate knowledge of one's own mental states. These relations are epistemically rewarding insofar as the subject is identical to the person he receives somatic proprioceptive and self-locating perceptual information from, or to the person whose memories he is storing and whose mental states he is immediately aware of. Recanati seems to go as far as saying that these sources of information are intrinsically self-specifying (cf. 88, note 10). But, as a matter of fact, although, as a norm, one is identical to the person one is receiving the relevant kind of information from, or whose past is responsible for the memory impressions one is having, it need not always be so, when at least somatic proprioception, self-locating perception and memory are at stake. One might then deny that, when things go wrong, there is real proprioception, self-locating perception and memory. But this is not a very promising strategy as it would rule out possible counterexamples simply by definition. So, one more promising way to go would be to say that, despite the fact that these very sources of information are at work and despite the fact that they feed a subject with information which seems, at least *prima facie*, about himself, responsibly to exploit that information as in fact being about oneself may, at least on occasion, depend on entertaining the relevant identification components (or being prepared to do so), which might be wrong. So the identity between oneself and the person whose body is responsible for the proprioceptive/self-locating information one is receiving, or between oneself and the person whose memories one is storing, is only contingent. But if our SELF file should guarantee knowledge of its referent in all possible circumstances, for otherwise it would no longer be a SELF file,<sup>2</sup> it cannot be based on those epistemically rewarding relations. For, in some circumstances, they would not deliver information about oneself and, if one were to entertain the relevant identification components, one would have to have a SELF file already, which allows the subject knowingly to refer to himself. Hence, we need a relation which secures the knowledgeable identity

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Anscombe 1975, Coliva 2003.

of the subject to himself *in all possible circumstances*. That relation, we take it, would rather be the one between the subject and the thinker of a given occurrent thought. What this shows is that not all singular modes of presentation of a given entity, in this case the subject himself, are on a par with respect to a given file. Some would seem to be constitutive of it, like ‘the thinker of this occurrent thought’ for SELF. Indeed it appears as though the identity ‘I = the thinker of this occurrent thought’ — conceived as a type, not as a token — holds as a conceptual necessity and that we have a priori knowledge of it. So arguably, this kind of information will bear an especially close relation to the SELF file, such that if one were to remove it, one would lose an extremely fundamental way of identifying oneself as a subject. By contrast, the information stored in the file, which may depend on other epistemically rewarding relations or be descriptive, does not appear as constitutive of the file at issue, for the reasons just explained. These considerations seem to be worthy of thought, and perhaps Recanati’s own account could benefit from them.

Moving to files and linguistic communication, recall that Recanati stresses in more than one passage that the information stored in a file should not be expected to play a semantically significant role. For instance, it should not be expected to fix the reference of the file itself — this role being fulfilled by the epistemically rewarding relation (35). But, when it comes to the problem of communicating I-thoughts, it is not entirely clear that Recanati remains faithful to this pronouncement. For he puts forward the view that in communication speaker and hearer understand each other because they share the public sense of ‘I’, i.e. roughly, ‘the person who utters this token of ‘I’’, which is part of their respective files SELF and HE, and correspondingly leads each subject to the SELF and HE file. In this case, some descriptive information contained in the file (‘the person who utters this token of ‘I’’) is allowed to play a semantically significant role, by being what gets conveyed in communication and by being what allows subjects to latch onto the referent, via the relevant mental files. Although we appreciate the fact that, in Recanati’s reconstruction of the underlying cognitive mechanism, the information does not strictly speaking fix the reference of a file — because it merely allows the subject to go to his SELF file and the hearer to go to his HE file (set up through a more direct acquaintance relation,

such as perceptual discrimination, etc.), it is not clear to us that this mechanism completely avoids this worry. After all, the descriptive information 'the person who utters this token of 'I'' would be what gets conveyed in communication and what would lead each party to latch onto the appropriate file. Be that as it may, it is far from clear that this complex cognitive process is what is going on when we communicate through the use of 'I'.

Finally, in the last chapter of the book Recanati argues against a recently developed framework for the semantics of *de se* (and *de re*) thought, known as *multi-centred worlds framework*.<sup>3</sup> According to this framework, the content of a *de re* belief like 'That man is holding a gun' — concerning, say, a threatening figure one sees in front of oneself — is a (multi) centred proposition, whose evaluation is to be effected relative to a 'base world', which comprises a possible world  $w$ , a time  $t$ , and a sequence of individuals  $\langle s_1, s_2, \dots, s_n \rangle$ ; in the example at issue, the proposition is to be evaluated at  $\langle w, t \rangle$  relative to individuals  $\langle s_1, s_2 \rangle$  (viz. the subject of the thought and the person the subject sees before himself). Recanati's main problem with the idea of construing centred worlds in terms of sequences of individuals is the following: one may believe to be acquainted with an individual  $r$  and form a belief about  $r$ , where no such individual exists in the base world. In this case, there is nothing in the base world that can act as the referent of the acquaintance-based (albeit illusory) thought (258). The semantics would therefore fail to account for what is intuitively a fully-fledged *de re*, singular thought. In order to obviate this inconvenient, Recanati suggests the following solution: *de re* thoughts are to be cashed out as centred propositions, to be evaluated at a base world construed as a triple  $\langle w, i, t \rangle$  consisting of a world, an individual and a time, which also includes a *sequence of mental files*,  $f = \langle f_1 \dots f_n \rangle$  (258-9). Sequences of individuals are thus expunged from centred worlds, and only mental files are kept (256, 258). If this is so, then the files seem to acquire a strange status. On the one hand, they are mental, 'internal' objects, which act as vehicles of thought or 'mental singular terms' (viii, 35, 182, 244-5); on the other hand, they are the 'anchors' of our *de re* thoughts (253). These two features, however, seem difficult to reconcile: for one would think that

<sup>3</sup> See Ninan 2010 and Torre 2010.

the objects of our *de re* thoughts are external to the mind, and that they do not coincide with the vehicles we use to refer to things in the world. Recanati could reply that the proper objects of our *de re* thoughts are really the referents of the mental files at issue — not the files themselves. This, however, just suggests that mental files alone are not enough in order to capture *de re* thought: individuals matter as well, and they should find their place in a suitable semantics for this kind of phenomenon. Moreover, this solution appears to us quite drastic, compared with the rather marginal problem it aims to deal with. For dismissing individuals, while retaining mental files only, causes a change in structure for *all de re* thoughts, even those which *do* have a referent. The following strategy could be adopted by the centred-worlds theorist as a way of dealing with the difficulty waived by Recanati: in the case of *de re* thoughts which concern no acquainted individual (due perhaps to misperception or hallucination), one could grant that the subject has no *de re* thought, as there is no referent, even though it seems to him to be directly and non-descriptively presented with the object. Of course this would pose a limitation to the transparency of thought, but, as we saw before, it is not clear that Recanati's own account would manage to preserve it.

### 3 Conclusion

Despite these marginal points of possible disagreement we would like to close by registering our unconditional appreciation of Recanati's attempt to reconcile Singularism with a non-descriptivist notion of mode of presentation, therefore tracing a distinction, with respect to mental files, between their reference, their relationally determined, indexical-like functional role and the information they store. We confide that this original position will play a decisive role in future debates on singular thought for many years to come.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Though this contribution has been discussed and conceived together, Annalisa Coliva is the author of Section 2 (save for the last paragraph), Delia Belleri of everything else. We would also like to thank Manuel García-Carpintero for very useful feed-back on a previous version of this discussion note.

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# Acquaintance and Mental Files

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In recent years there has been an ongoing debate about whether singular thought requires acquaintance. Although few nowadays accept Russell's view that we are only ever acquainted with sense data, many philosophers continue to maintain that in order to have a singular thought about an object, a subject must have some intimate epistemic or causal connection with it. On the other hand, those in the anti-acquaintance camp have challenged the motivations for imposing acquaintance constraints on singular thought, and have argued that there are serious difficulties confronting such views.<sup>1</sup> In *Mental Files*, Recanati's answer to the anti-acquaintance theorists is to grant that there is no *de facto* acquaintance constraint on singular thought, but to insist that there is still a *de jure* one. On his view, in order to think a singular thought about an object, a subject must possess a mental file that refers to it. Moreover, in order for a subject to possess a mental file, she must be acquainted with its referent. But this does not entail that there are no acquaintanceless singular thoughts. 'Must' may be factive on some readings and merely normative on others. Recanati's interesting idea is that the acquaintance condition on mental files is an instance of the latter. If Recanati is right, then acquaintance is involved in the very concept of a mental file, and by extension, singular thought. In this paper, I will evaluate Recanati's answer to the anti-acquaintance theorists. I begin with a brief discussion of Recanati's account of mental files.

<sup>1</sup> On the acquaintance side are Bach 1987, Boer and Lycan 1986, Donnellan 1979, Evans 1982, Kaplan 1989, McDowell 1984, Recanati 1993, Reimer 2004, Salmon 1987, and Soames 2003. Jeshion 2002, 2004, (forthcoming), Manley and Hawthorne 2012, and Sainsbury 2005 reject the acquaintance constraint.



## 1 Mental files as non-descriptive modes of presentation

Mental files are cognitive structures that bind together information that a subject takes to be about the same external object. Like Fregean senses, they serve to individuate our cognitive perspectives on objects of thought. On Recanati's view, mental files are non-descriptive modes of presentation — ways that objects are 'given to us' directly, rather than by description (34). The idea behind this metaphor is that whereas the referent of a descriptive mode of presentation is determined satisfactorially (i.e. by virtue of the referent satisfying some set of descriptive conditions), the referent of a non-descriptive mode of presentation is determined relationally.<sup>2</sup> In particular, mental files function to store information about the objects that subjects bear acquaintance relations to, where acquaintance is construed as a relation through which a subject may receive information from an object (Recanati calls these 'epistemically rewarding' or 'ER' relations). Drawing on the standard type-token distinction, files are typed by their corresponding acquaintance relations. Each file-type  $M$  is associated with an acquaintance relation  $R_M$  such that the referent of a file-token  $m$  of type  $M$  is the unique object  $o$  to which the subject stands in the  $R_M$  relation.<sup>3</sup> In a word, the referent of a mental file is the dominant source of, rather than the object that best satisfies, the (mis)information contained in the file.

In this way, Recanati's mental files have a non-descriptive semantics and so they are the mental analogues of referring terms. Since singular contents are contents expressed by sentences containing referring terms, as one might expect the contents of thoughts that involve mental files are also singular. But here Recanati draws on the distinction that is often made between thoughts with singular content and thoughts with singular *form*. Singular contents are often characterized as object-dependent in the sense that they are neces-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bach 1987 on the satisfactorially-relational distinction.

<sup>3</sup> Recanati qualifies this view (70, note 1): the referent of a file  $m$  of type  $M$  tokened by a subject  $S$  is the unique object  $o$  such that  $m$  stands in the token-reflexive relation  $R^*$  to  $o$ , where  $R^*$  holds between a file  $m$  and object  $o$  if and only if  $m$  serves to store information gained by  $S$  in virtue of  $S$ 's standing in the associated relation  $R_M$  to  $o$ . Since this qualified semantics doesn't matter for the purposes of this paper, I stick with the simpler presentation.

sarily about the object or objects that they are actually about.<sup>4</sup> If we assume that thoughts can only be about objects that exist, this characterization implies that one's thought has a singular content only if there exists an object one's thought is about. But just as one might think that ordinary referring expressions ('Aristotle', 'Venus') and empty names ('Vulcan', 'Santa Claus') form a single semantic category of referring expressions<sup>5</sup>, some philosophers have thought that there is a single cognitive or psychological category — singular thoughts — that encompasses both thoughts with singular content and thoughts for which there exists no object that one's thought is about. To be a singular thought in this sense, a thought-episode need only *purport* to have a singular content; there needn't be any object that it is a representation of.<sup>6</sup> For Recanati, the singular form or referential purport of a thought episode is accounted for by the non-descriptive semantics of the cognitive 'vehicles' that subjects deploy in such episodes. So mental files are the 'vehicles' of singular thoughts.

By drawing the distinction between singular thought 'vehicles' and singular content, Recanati splits the question of acquaintance constraints on singular thought in two: first, is acquaintance required for a subject to entertain a singular content? And second, is acquaintance required for a subject to deploy a mental file? Recanati's answers to these questions have much to be said for them. However, on my view, neither is ultimately correct. In the next section, I argue that the loophole Recanati provides in the acquaintance constraint on entertaining singular contents is insufficiently motivated and generates unsatisfactory conclusions when combined with the other theoretical commitments of his framework. Finally, in the last section I argue that there are a number of problems confronting Recanati's *de jure* acquaintance constraint on mental files that should make us skeptical that the primary function of files is characterizable

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Evans 1982 and McDowell 1984. For Recanati, on one way of disambiguating the term 'content', the contents of thoughts are Russellian propositions. Since Russellian singular propositions are object-dependent, Recanati endorses an object-dependent conception of singular contents.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Sainsbury 2005.

<sup>6</sup> As Ken Taylor puts it 2009, thoughts can be 'referentially fit' without being 'referentially successful'.

in terms of acquaintance.

## 2 Acquaintance and singular content

Although the function of Recanati's files is to store information obtained through a corresponding acquaintance relation, there can be malfunctions: files can be tokened even when there is no object that the subject uniquely stands in the relevant acquaintance relation to. Since mental files can fail to refer in this way, opening a file is not sufficient for a subject to have a thought with singular content. In order for a subject to have a thought with a singular content about an object *o*, she must possess a file that refers to it (155). Since the referent of a file is determined by its associated acquaintance relation, one would expect Recanati's view to be that actual acquaintance is a necessary condition on entertaining singular contents. However, Recanati provides a loophole for cases involving descriptively introduced names — that is, names whose referents are fixed by a definite description, used attributively. Descriptively-introduced names are problematic for the acquaintance theorist because they arguably function in language and thought just as paradigmatic proper names do, but neither introducing these names into the language nor using and understanding them seems to require that agents be acquainted with their referents.<sup>7</sup> Since sentences containing descriptive names arguably express singular contents, by introducing such names into the language speakers and thinkers can entertain the singular contents those sentences express, and thereby come to have singular thoughts about the names' referents, whether acquainted or not.

Taking up this issue, Recanati considers what he calls the Strong Acquaintance View (159), according to which speakers that introduce such names *sans* acquaintance are unable to grasp any singular content about the object *o* denoted by the reference-fixing description. The problem with this view, Recanati claims, is that when a speaker introduces a descriptive name into the language prior to her

<sup>7</sup> These claims are by no means uncontroversial (cf. Jeshion 2004, Reimer 2004). In addition to the famous examples ('Neptune', 'Jack-the-Ripper', Evans' 'Julius', and Kaplan's 'Newman1'), we should also include here Kaplanian dthat terms and deferred demonstratives and pronouns.

acquaintance with  $o$ , it is determined *in advance* that  $o$  is to be the referent of that file whenever the speaker eventually becomes acquainted with it. Therefore,

‘assuming the subject is right in his anticipation that [the acquaintance relation] is going to come about, then what reason is there to deny that, through the singular vehicle and its (delayed) connection to [ $o$ ], the subject is able to think a singular thought about [ $o$ ]?’<sup>8</sup> (162).

According to the ‘semi-liberal’ view he adopts, it is possible for a subject to entertain a singular content about  $o$  by tokening a descriptive name, but only if (i) she expects to be acquainted with  $o$  and (ii) her expectation is actually fulfilled in the future.

This is puzzling. In adopting this semi-liberal view, Recanati appears to be committed to the following theses:

**File Semantics.** For any mental file  $m$  of type  $M$  tokened by a subject  $S$ , there is a corresponding acquaintance relation  $R_M$  such that the referent of  $m$  is the unique object  $o$  such that  $S$  bears  $R_M$  to  $o$ .

**Singular Content.** A subject  $S$  entertains a singular content about  $o$  only if  $S$  has a mental file whose referent is  $o$ .

**Loophole.** If a subject  $S$  introduces a name ‘ $N$ ’ into the language by means of a reference-fixing description ‘the  $D$ ’ that denotes an object  $o$ , and thereby tokens a corresponding mental file  $m$  of type  $M$ , and if  $S$  does not bear any acquaintance relation to  $o$ , then  $S$  can still entertain a singular content about  $o$ , but only if  $S$  correctly anticipates that the acquaintance relation  $R_M$  will come about.<sup>9</sup>

As will become clear in what follows, these theses cannot be jointly maintained. However, it is not clear whether in adopting **Loophole** Recanati intends to abandon **File Semantics** or **Singular Content**. Neither option is without serious difficulties.

<sup>8</sup> Here ‘singular thought’ is understood to mean singular content.

<sup>9</sup> It’s not at all clear what it means for a speaker to anticipate acquaintance (see Section 3). But as I read him, Recanati does not intend anticipation to be understood as itself an attitude with singular content.

If Recanati gives up **Singular Content**, then **Loophole** would allow a speaker *S* in a Loophole case to entertain a singular content about an object *o* with which *S* is unacquainted, but **File Semantics** would prevent *S* from mentally referring to *o* via any file she possesses. Notice that it doesn't help here to point out that *S* will be acquainted with *o* or that *o* will be the referent of one of *S*'s files should she ever become acquainted with it. What we want to know is whether *S* can mentally refer to *o* *now*, prior to acquaintance. Here Recanati can go one of two routes. On the one hand, if the only way *S* can mentally refer to *o* is via some file, then we get the absurd conclusion that speakers can entertain singular contents about objects that they cannot mentally refer to. On the other hand, if *S* can mentally refer to *o* despite having no file that refers to it, then one would want to know how this is possible. Presumably one way *S* might mentally refer in a Loophole case is by tokening a mental analogue of the relevant descriptive name. But on Recanati's picture, to token a mental name is to token a mental file.<sup>10</sup> This route then leads Recanati to the awkward conclusion that in tokening a mental name/file, *S* can mentally refer to *o* and thereby entertain a singular content about it, even though the mental name/file *S* tokens does *not* itself refer to *o*. This strikes me as an extremely unattractive conclusion. But to make matters worse, one wonders whether **Loophole** will also allow speakers to communicate the singular contents they entertain in Loophole cases. If so, how is such communication possible if not by uttering a sentence containing the relevant descriptive name? On Recanati's view, however, files serve as the senses of occurrences of proper names and determine their referents. This entails that without acquaintance, files associated with descriptive names would fail to refer, and so would the corresponding name-occurrences. It is utterly mysterious how a subject could communicate a singular content about an object if she cannot refer to it.<sup>11</sup>

Another option is for Recanati to emend **File Semantics** (presumably he would not want to abandon it wholesale) to read: the referent of a file *m* with associated acquaintance relation  $R_M$  is the

<sup>10</sup> As I understand him, a mental name is just the 'address' or 'label' of a mental file (37).

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to Fiora Salis for pushing me to clarify these two points.

unique object  $o$  such that either  $S$  bears  $R_M$  to  $o$  (now) or  $S$  is correct in anticipating that she *will bear*  $R_M$  to  $o$  in the future.<sup>12</sup> If acquaintance is not actually forthcoming, the file fails to refer and the subject fails to think a thought with singular content. Setting aside the rather large problem about what it means for a subject to ‘anticipate’ acquaintance<sup>13</sup>, one worry for this move is how correctly anticipating future acquaintance could affect the content of one’s thought. How can the content of my thought now be determined or affected by what happens in the future? Anticipating this objection, Recanati says that the ultimate source of this objection might simply be the intuitive but mistaken pull of Cartesian internalism (163).

But I don’t think that’s right; the force of this objection is something that even card-carrying externalists could accept. Externalists about mental content believe that two subjects can be in phenomenologically indistinguishable mental states which nevertheless differ in content. What does *not* follow from this is that two subjects could be in phenomenologically indistinguishable mental states which nevertheless have contents of a fundamentally different *kind*: one having a singular content, the other having a descriptive or general thought.<sup>14</sup> The trouble for Recanati here is not only explaining how correctly anticipating future acquaintance could affect what *kind* of thought one is presently thinking, but also why one needs to (i) anticipate future acquaintance at all, and (ii) be correct in so anticipating. Recanati’s stated reason for **Loophole** is that in initiating a file alongside a descriptively-introduced name, it is determined in advance that the referent of the file/name will be the object denoted by the reference-fixing description. But then why should it matter whether a subject will ever *actually* be acquainted with that object? And why should it matter whether a subject anticipates acquaintance? Even if I never become acquainted with the object denoted by the description used to introduce a descriptive name, or if I never anticipate being

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps Recanati intends to give a *de jure* reading of File Semantics along the same lines as his *de jure* reading of the acquaintance constraint on file tokening. Even so, telling us what a file *must* refer to does not tell us what it actually refers to. So Recanati would still owe us an account of the *de facto* semantics for files.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Section 3 for objections to this metaphor.

<sup>14</sup> Jeshion makes this same argument in her (forthcoming).

acquainted with it, surely it is still determined in advance that that object is to be the referent of the name/file were I ever to become so acquainted. Recanati's argument for **Loophole** therefore gives us no reason to suppose that subjects need to *anticipate* forthcoming acquaintance, nor that they need to be correct in so anticipating. But if Recanati were to give up these two constraints in **Loophole**, then any act of descriptive reference-fixing would allow subjects to entertain singular contents without acquaintance. Although that conclusion would be welcome to me, this is precisely the sort of liberal view Recanati wishes to avoid. For this reason, I do not think that Recanati's semi-liberal position here is sustainable. If Recanati is loathe to give up all acquaintance constraints on singular content, he'd do better to give up **Loophole**.

### 3 *De jure* acquaintance

Serious difficulties also confront Recanati's acquaintance constraint on singular thought vehicles, i.e., mental files. Since files don't always refer, there is no *de facto* acquaintance constraint on tokening files. However, there is still a *de jure* acquaintance constraint. Presumably this means that one should open or token a file only if its function is or will be fulfilled — i.e. only if one does or will bear the relevant acquaintance relation to some unique object.<sup>15</sup> In this way, Recanati stakes out middle ground between the acquaintance and anti-acquaintance camps. With the anti-acquaintance theorists, he grants that there is no *de facto* acquaintance constraint on singular thought (qua singular vehicles). With the acquaintance theorists, he maintains that singular thought requires acquaintance, but only if understood as a normative requirement.

There are three main problems with this position. The first concerns conclusions Recanati draws from the *de jure* acquaintance constraint. Because files function to store information that comes through a relevant acquaintance relation, Recanati claims that in tokening a file, subjects presuppose that its function is or will be fulfilled — that there is a unique object to which they bear the relevant acquaintance relation (61). Taken literally, this strikes me as

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Recanati (2012: 63).

deeply implausible. 'Acquaintance' is a philosophical term of art; it is absurd to suppose that it is something that subjects think about, let alone anticipate or presuppose. Similarly, whatever mental file initiation is, it is not something that is transparently within subjects' cognitive power to perform. Recanati owes us an account of how to understand these metaphors in a way that does not attribute to subjects some implausible transparent access to their own cognitive architecture.

Unfortunately, Recanati often talks about anticipating acquaintance on the model of anticipating meeting someone. For example, he claims that in certain exceptional cases, thinkers token files without presupposing that the *de jure* acquaintance constraint will be met. An adopted child might initiate a mental file for his biological mother, knowing perfectly well that he will never be acquainted with her. Or I can initiate a file for the average American male, give him a name, and predicate various things of him, despite the fact that I know that there is no such person with whom I can be acquainted (168). By presenting these and other cases as examples where subjects do not presuppose that there is a unique object to which they (will) bear the relevant acquaintance relation, Recanati invites us to understand his notions of presupposed or anticipated acquaintance on the model of anticipating meeting someone. But it is difficult to see how these notions so understood could be extended to other objects of singular thought. For example, if as many philosophers believe we can have singular thoughts about abstract objects, what would it mean to anticipate or presuppose acquaintance with such objects?

A related second difficulty for *de jure* acquaintance concerns whether Recanati's notion of acquaintance as epistemically rewarding (ER) relations is too restrictive. Recanati characterizes ER relations as causal chains that permit the flow of information.<sup>16</sup> But it is not at all clear that we can only have singular thoughts about objects that causally impinge on us or the files we token. In their recent

<sup>16</sup> Recanati cites Lewis (1999: 380-1): 'There are relations that someone bears to me when I get a letter from him, or I watch the swerving of a car he is driving, or I read his biography, or I hear him mentioned by name, or I investigate the clues he has left at the scene of his crime. In each case there are causal chains from him to me of a sort which would permit a flow of information...I call such relations as these *relations of acquaintance*'.



book (2012: Chapter 1), Manley and Hawthorne provide a battery of cases that create problems for the causal acquaintance theorist. To mention just a few, on a Kaplanian account of indexicals, a speaker who utters the word ‘tomorrow’ in a context refers to a time in the speaker’s future, and so cannot bear an ER relation to it on any standard conceptions of causation. But it does not seem that speakers have any problem in mentally referring to future times, or other future existents. Or suppose a mechanic gestures at a car, saying ‘Let me see that engine’ (we are to imagine that the engine is hidden from view). There seems to be no barrier to the mechanic’s ability to refer in thought and talk to the relevant engine, although there may be no relevant causal relation that he bears to it. Or suppose there is a linguistic convention that assigns each newborn a unique numeral as its name which is the output of some algorithm taking as its input the newborn’s time and place of birth. Presumably a speaker can refer to a newborn via its assigned numeral, yet there needn’t be any causal connection between the speaker’s use of the numeral and the baby it names.

Here Recanati might respond that these examples involve files that have derived functions. Anticipating cases like those mentioned above, Recanati accepts that there may be files which do not require acquaintance in accordance with the *de jure* acquaintance constraint (168). But rather than taking such cases as counterexamples to his view, Recanati instead treats them as exceptions that prove the rule. The *primary* function of mental files is still characterizable in terms of ER relations; these problem cases involve files that have ‘derived’ functions whose fulfillment does not require acquaintance. These derived functions are parasitic on files’ acquaintance-based function, and there is presumably some evolutionary story that would explain how our ability to token files with derived functions evolved from more basic abilities involving acquaintance-based files (like the ability to recognize, track, and store information about objects moving across one’s visual field).

This leads us to a final difficulty for *de jure* acquaintance: what are the motivations for thinking that the primary function of files has anything to do with acquaintance in the first place? This is one of the central claims of Recanati’s book, but as far as I can tell he provides no arguments for it other than by demonstrating how it can

solve certain problems in the philosophy of language and mind. This methodological approach to mental files is deeply problematic. In theorizing about cognitive architecture, we are making philosophical claims, but ones that can have real empirical consequences. One such consequence concerns the psycho-functional and evolutionary relationship between philosophers' files and the cognitive structures studied by cognitive psychologists. There is a phenomenon widely studied in cognitive psychology called chunking whereby individuals performing memory tasks have been found to group information together in discrete chunks in order to aid free recall of the information.<sup>17</sup> Chunks are superficially similar to philosophers' files, but since the information in them are not necessarily grouped together according to any semantic relationships, chunks do not have an acquaintance-based function. As a methodological point, it would be inappropriate to divorce armchair speculation about the function of mental files from empirical research, on pain of prejudging the functional and evolutionary relationship between philosophers' files and the cognitive structures posited by psychologists.

From my perspective, instances of mental files (and other superficially similar structures like chunks) whose function is ostensibly not characterizable in terms of acquaintance are neither exotic nor rare: on the contrary, they pervade our cognitive lives.<sup>18</sup> At the very least, the proliferation of such problem-cases should make us question the motivation for taking the acquaintance-based function of files to be primary. According to an opposing paradigm, the primary function of files is simply to group information together in cognition. A special case of this occurs when that information is taken to concern the same external object, but in general the information stored in files needn't even be grouped together by subject matter. If Recanati is to maintain that the acquaintance-based function of his mental files is somehow primary, he needs to offer more by way of argument for that claim, especially if he thinks it has certain empirical con-

<sup>17</sup> Cf. George Miller's 1956 classic paper 'The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two'.

<sup>18</sup> Recanati's treatment of files with 'derived' functions is not unlike how descriptive names get treated in the philosophy of language: as semantic oddities. Cf. Jeshion 2004, who argues against this view.

sequences for the evolutionary relationship between acquaintance-based files and files with derived functions.<sup>19</sup>

Another reason to be skeptical of the claim that the primary function of files has to do with acquaintance is that this claim leads to false predictions even in Recanati's favored cases involving acquaintance-based files. As I understand Recanati, since files' primary function is to store information obtained through a corresponding ER relation, all information stored in a given file comes through the file's characteristic ER relation. If that were right, however, one would expect that when a file is tokened without acquaintance, the subject will not be able to store any information in the file and so the file will be empty. This is implausible. Even if Leverrier was never to become acquainted with Neptune after having introduced the name into the language, that surely would not prevent him from being able to track and store information about Neptune in his NEPTUNE file. But since Leverrier bears no acquaintance relation to Neptune, there is no epistemic channel through which information concerning Neptune can be received.<sup>20</sup> So either Leverrier is unable to retain any information that he takes to be about Neptune or that information fails to be stored in his NEPTUNE file. This can't be right.

As a result, it is not at all obvious that the empirical phenomena that Recanati's files are posited to model and explain (such as our ability to track, store, and make inferences with information that we take to be about the same external object) do not also frequently occur with thoughts that are not about objects known by acquaintance. Again, this should make us skeptical that the primary function of mental files is to store information obtained through acquaintance relations, and that the cognitive phenomena really warrant taking

<sup>19</sup> I should also like to note in passing that even if the acquaintance-based function of files is somehow evolutionarily basic, I see no compelling reason to think that the (primary) functions of files should not have evolved from their original acquaintance-based function.

<sup>20</sup> Some might deny that Leverrier lacks acquaintance with Neptune. If so, pick your favorite case. To borrow one from Manley and Hawthorne 2012, Mendeleev correctly anticipated in 1870 the existence of an element he called 'eka-aluminum' (now known as Gallium). At the time, no known samples had been discovered, yet it seems implausible to suppose that he could not have stored information in his EKA-ALUMINUM mental file.

mental files to be non-descriptive modes of presentation — the mental analogues of referring expressions. Indeed, why would it be a mistake to think that there can be mental files which serve as the vehicles of paradigmatically *descriptive* thoughts? Or which are the mental analogues of singular terms more generally, rather than just *referring* terms? Shedding Recanati's acquaintance-based semantics for files would, I think, open more doors, allowing us to explore the possibility that files have a much larger role to play in our cognitive lives.<sup>21</sup>

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# The Cognitive Significance of Mental Files

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As one of the major figures in the philosophy of language and mind during a quarter of a century, François Recanati has contributed to speech act theory, the theory of meaning and truth conditions, the theory of primary pragmatic processes, to direct reference theory, and to the accounts of indirect discourse, quotation, definite descriptions, perspectival thought, and more. The topic of the new book, *Mental Files*, falls squarely within the philosophy of mind, but the main interest is as always semantic. Recanati is concerned with the semantics of mental representation and its relation to cognitive significance. This theme connects back to his concerns in *Direct Reference. From Language to Thought*, to which there are many references. Like the earlier contributions, the new book is a joy to read; clearly written, well structured, subtle in its distinctions, and forcefully argued.

In this review, I shall focus on the connection between semantics and cognitive significance, as it is developed in the book. I shall raise — what I take to be — a few problems with the account.

## 1 What are mental files supposed to do?

A central claim of *Mental Files* is that ‘we refer through mental files, which play the role of so-called ‘modes of presentation’’ (8). Mental files are the *vehicles* of singular thoughts (57), and singular thoughts, in turn, are ‘thoughts that are directly about individual objects, and whose content is a singular proposition — a proposition involving individual objects as well as properties’ (5).

Classically, the appeal to singular propositions as thought contents incurred a problem of cognitive significance. Romain Gary is (was) identical with Émile Ajar. He published novels under both names (used in the preceding sentence) — in fact received the Goncourt prize under each — and their coreference did not become publicly known until after his death. Pierre, who likes to read novels, entertained singular thoughts about Gary/Ajar. But he had different beliefs associated with the two names. At one point, he assented to both (1) and (2):

- (1) Gary is dead.
- (2) Ajar is not dead.

Apparently, Pierre has the singular *belief* that Gary is dead, as well as the singular belief that Ajar is not dead. Intuitively, Pierre does *not* believe that Ajar is dead. However, if the singular proposition that is the content of Pierre's belief *that Gary is dead* involves Gary himself, then it appears to be the *same* content as the content of a singular belief *that Ajar is dead*. So it seems that Pierre must believe that Ajar is dead, after all.

In order to block this conclusion, we must first recognise, with Frege, that the two names have different *cognitive significance* for Pierre, and then model that difference to have an effect on belief content. Achieving this is one of the tasks that Recanati assigns to mental files.<sup>1</sup>

A related task concerns *empty names*, or the capacity to think object-directed but objectless thoughts. An example often used in the literature is that of the astronomer Leverrier, who correctly inferred the existence of Neptune, as the cause of the perturbations of the orbit of Uranus, and incorrectly inferred that there was a planet, to be named 'Vulcan', causing the shifts of the perihelion of Mercury. No such planet exists, and so 'Vulcan' is an empty name. Still, Leverrier had Vulcan thoughts, similar in many respects to his Neptune thoughts before the actual discovery, such as

- (3) Vulcan causes shifts of the perihelion of Mercury.

<sup>1</sup> See section 3 for an alternative approach to the relation between cognition and content.

Since singular thoughts seem to require referents for their very existence, it appears impossible to account within a singular thought framework for how Leverrier could have thoughts 'about' Vulcan. But Leverrier's epistemic situation was pretty much the same as with respect to Neptune, and some singular thought theorists, including Recanati, would want to accept that Leverrier did have singular thoughts about Neptune before any direct observations of it. Explaining this is another task that Recanati sets for mental files.

For Frege, both the problem of cognitive significance and the problem of empty names was solved by means of his notion of *sense*, which is, or contains, a *mode of presentation* of an object. Frege is usually interpreted as taking the mode of presentation to be descriptive, i.e. to embody a descriptive condition, such as being *the cause of the shift of the perihelion of Mercury*, and this is consistent with his examples. This solves both problems. For the first, two distinct senses can present the same object, and senses are parts of thought contents. So, with 'Gary' and 'Ajar' being associated with different senses, we have an explanation, or the beginning of an explanation, of why the belief that Gary is dead can have a different content than the belief that Ajar is dead. With different contents, Pierre can believe the former but not the latter. For the second, we can accept, as Frege did, the possibility that no object at all satisfies the descriptive condition contained in the sense of e.g. 'Vulcan'. The content is well-defined and believable whether a referent exists or not.

Now, you can combine central ideas of Frege with an idea of singular thoughts by requiring that the content of a singular thought is individuated not only by the descriptive condition, but *also* by being about the very referent that satisfies that condition. Then no thought *not* about the same object could have the same content. This is the main line of the neo-Fregean idea of so-called object-dependent senses, developed by Gareth Evans 1982 and John McDowell 1977.

Recanati, however, rejects descriptivism. Mental files are to provide cognitive significance in virtue of being modes of presentation of individuals, but they are to be *non-descriptive modes*. In the following, we shall see how these tasks are discharged.



## 2 What are mental files?

Mental files are the vehicles of singular thoughts. They belong to the system of mental representations. They are the mental counterparts to singular terms, and they *refer*, or are *supposed to refer* (35). More precisely, they are the counterparts to indexicals, since they possess the essential features of indexicals (57). At the same time, they are modes of presentation, which is to say ‘senses’ (257), and *individual concepts*, i.e. thought constituents (64). For someone used to thinking about language, this is puzzling. (Since it is connected to what I see as the main problems with the account, I’ll pause the presentation here for a brief digression.)

We must distinguish between a linguistic expression and its semantic properties, whether it is reference or some non-extensional property, since linguistic expressions don’t have their semantic properties essentially. One linguistic expression can have different meanings in different languages, different meanings at different times in the same language, and even more than one meaning in the same language at the same time.<sup>2</sup> How can something mental both correspond to the linguistic expression *and* to the *sense* of that expression?

I have not learned to appreciate this combination. One can use the term ‘concept’ in accordance with the psychological tradition, to stand for *mental* entities rather than the *contents* of these entities (cf. 35, note 6), but Recanati clearly distinguishes the semantic content — the reference, or acquaintance relation — from the file itself. One might also say that what we think *with* are contents, and what we think *with* are mental representations, and hence they must be the same. But this argument may, and I think does, trade on an ambiguity of ‘think with’.

In one sense we communicate ‘with’ sentences, and in one sense we communicate ‘with’ propositions, but clearly, those senses are not the same. Moreover, in some passages Recanati himself stresses the distinction between a singular thought in the sense of *thought vehicle* and a singular thought in the sense of *thought content* (160, 163). There, the mental counterpart of an indexical or a name — i.e. a

<sup>2</sup> Even if we make the distinction between homonymy and polysemy, the latter amounts to several (related) meanings of the same expression.

mental file — is part of the *thought vehicle* only, not of the *thought content*. It is not easy to see how this squares with speaking of files as *being* senses/modes of presentation in other passages. Still, as we shall see, a file may in the end play a semantic role in virtue of its ‘syntax’ alone. (End of digression.)

As I have understood it, the content-involving properties of mental files are:

- 1) having a referent,
- 2) having an information channel (acquaintance relation),
- 3) serving a referent-intending function,
- 4) containing information (or misinformation) about the referent.

The most important function of a mental file is to refer to an individual, and that is exactly, according to Recanati, what almost all mental files do. Moreover, they do so in virtue of standing in a particular *relation* to the referent. This is the so-called *indexical model*, according to which the referent of a mental file is determined by means of standing in a suitable *acquaintance* relation to the file, not by satisfying a descriptive condition associated with it. There is a mode of presentation, but it is relational in nature, not descriptive. Recanati speaks of acquaintance relations as *epistemically rewarding* relations (20), or *ER*-relations. Acquaintance relations are epistemically rewarding in allowing the subject to gain *information* from the object (37). That is, there is an information channel from the object to the file, in virtue of the ER-relation.

Recanati also speaks of senses as *reference-determining* (118-121), but possibly this does not amount to saying more than that if two files have different referents, they also have different senses (cf. 120), in which case there is no *determination-process*. With certain exceptions (to which I shall return below), when a mental file exists, it stands in an acquaintance relation to an object, and so the object is *ipso facto* determined.

I shall discuss the third feature in Section 4. As for the fourth feature, the very term ‘mental file’ is connected with the idea that a mental file is a kind of repository of information, or misinformation, about the referent. This [mis-] information consists in the properties

the subject takes the referent to have, i.e. the subject's beliefs about the referent (35). It can be thought of as a list of *predicates* the subject takes the referent to satisfy (37). Since predicates can be relational, and therefore involve other mental files, we cannot think of a mental file syntactically as constructed out of the predicates (on pain of a regress, if two files appear in each other's lists of predicates). Rather, the properties must be associated with the file in a non-constituting way. Information can be added to and deleted from the file, while the file itself stays the same.

There are files of different kinds. Demonstrative files are associated with a perceptual mode of presentation (74), memory files (or memory demonstratives) with a memory mode of presentation (62), and recognitional files with a recognition or familiarity mode of presentation (71). These are the varieties of basic mental files, or mental files *simpliciter*.

Over and above these there are non-basic, or derivative kinds. A demonstrative file is *converted* into a memory file when the perceptual relation to the object is lost. While the demonstrative file then goes out of existence, something remains that endures through conversions, and these are the *stable files* or 'piles' (82).

Some derivative files are more like proper names than like demonstratives, in that they abstract from any particular mode of presentation. These are the *higher-order files*, or 'encyclopedia entries', which require some acquaintance relation or other, but no particular kind (74-75).

There are also *proto-files* (64-65), which are distinguished from basic mental files in that they can store *only* information received through their own proper acquaintance relation. The proto-file SELF\* of a subject stores information only through proprioception, while the proper file SELF can add information about the subject coming from other sources as well.

### 3 Cognitive significance

In the theory of meaning, we have the options of *connecting* semantics and cognitive significance and also of separating them. In the semantics of singular terms, Kripkean theories of rigid designation, like Kaplanian theories of direct reference, take the latter alternative. It

is characteristic of such theories that they rely heavily on pragmatics for accounting for the content that is intuitively conveyed by means of simple sentences containing (rigid or directly referring) proper names (e.g. Soames 2002). It is also characteristic that they rely on an appeal to unexpressed senses or modes of presentation for giving the semantics of belief sentences (e.g. Salmon 1986).

Frege took the first alternative. One property, *sense*, both constitutes cognitive significance *and* serves to determine reference. It is semantic not only in the loose sense of being ‘expressed’, but also in the stricter sense of determining (jointly with the world) the truth values of sentences, as truth values are special cases of referents.

If we are not concerned with language, but with providing an account of mental representation, within the framework of mental files, there are still two options, but they look somewhat different. The separation alternative (corresponding to the Kripke/Kaplan alternative for public terms) cannot appeal to pragmatics, since mental files are not tools of communication, and it cannot appeal to separate modes of presentation, since the files themselves were supposed to play exactly that role. The only item that can complement the semantics is the file itself.

The connection alternative (corresponding to Fregean semantics) can be carried over to mental terms, provided the semantics of the mental terms allows it. Such an account should satisfy the following condition:

(DIF) Any difference in cognitive significance between two mental files can be explained by their semantic difference.

The analogous condition for linguistic terms is satisfied by Frege’s theory. A difference of sense between two coreferring terms explains how a person can take the terms to have different referents, and by what has come to be called ‘the cognitive criterion of difference’ (Perry 1977), any difference in cognitive significance between two terms entails that they do have different senses.

As I have interpreted Recanati, he opts for the connection alternative. Files are supposed to serve as modes of presentation and to account for cognitive significance in virtue of that. This allows, for instance, for a difference between mental files also in the case where the subject takes the objects to be the same. According to Recanati,

two files may be *linked* by a belief in the identity of the referents, and this allows information to ‘flow’ between the two files (what is believed of the one referent is also believed of the other; 43), but they have, or correspond to, a difference in mode of presentation nonetheless. Modes of presentation ‘are supposed to account for cognitive significance, for clustering/coordination of information, and for reference determination’ (8, note 3). Difference in cognitive significance, then, is supposed to be reflected in difference of mental files. The fact that the subject X has two mental files, say alpha and beta, constitutes the fact that the modes of presentation, and hence the cognitive significance of the files are different. Since the files are different, and each file has its own information channel, the channels allow different information to ‘cluster’ in the different files (42, 50, 83). The referent is presented by means of the file as the object of information collected/clustered in the file.

This account will work, then, if distinct files always have distinct channels of information, or acquaintance relations. If two files can have *the same* channel of information, then the individuation of channels of information is insufficient to account for difference of cognitive significance. In that case, there must be something else that makes the difference.

It seems to me quite possible that a subject can have two files that do *not* differ in their acquaintance relations. Suppose X takes herself to see two moths flying around in her kitchen. She opens a file for each, alpha and beta, thinking of them as ‘A’ and ‘B’, respectively. She takes herself to see now A, now B. The acquaintance relations are indeed different in case there *are* two moths, one causing the opening of alpha, the other the opening of beta. But in case the subject in fact is mistaken, and there is only *one* moth causing the opening of both files, there does not seem to be any difference between the acquaintance relations of alpha and beta. X opens first demonstrative files, which are converted into memory files, when a moth is taken to go out of sight, and then converted to recognitional files, when a moth is taken to be seen again. There is, we may assume, no particular feature in the external aspects of the causal relations that explains the difference. X takes herself sometimes to see A, sometimes to see B, and most often not to know whether she is seeing A or B.

Such a situation is certainly possible (and so are others, essentially like it). Is there any semantic difference between the files alpha and beta? A description theorist can certainly say that the terms 'A' and 'B' differ in sense: the one can have the sense of the description 'the moth I saw first' and the other the same sense as 'the moth I saw second', even if she coined the terms only after taking herself to have seen both and did not then remember the original sightings. Maybe the term 'B' then lacks a referent (and maybe not, depending on the reading of the description).

But this option is not open to the mental file theorist, since for both files there is an acquaintance relation to an object, in fact the same object, and there does not seem to be any difference between these relations *except* the distinctness of the mental file relata.<sup>3</sup> Since there are two files, there is also a difference in cognitive significance, but in this case, it seems that the *only* difference in cognitive significance between the files, if any, is numerical distinctness of the files.<sup>4</sup>

Since distinctness of files is distinctness of mode of presentation, this is a semantic difference. So the distinctness of mental files is *in itself* a semantic difference. I take it that Recanati accepts this conclusion. If he does not, he faces the challenge of explaining away the possibility. But I also take it that he holds that a mere difference in syntax cannot in itself constitute a semantic difference (linguistic

<sup>3</sup> Could one nonetheless find such a difference? Krista Lawlor has pressed this question. From the description of the case, I have no definitive proof that one cannot, but I also see no way of doing it. Suppose we have a sub-type of the scenario where one perceptual *gestalt* triggers alpha while another *gestalt* triggers beta (and yet others are neutral). The subject incorrectly takes these two *gestalts* to correspond to observational properties not shared between A and B. Would such a difference between alpha and beta be a difference between their acquaintance relations? As far as I can see, the *gestalts* would be pieces of information within the files rather than ingredients in the relations. For instance, the subject could change her belief about the observational properties of the object without changing the identity of the file.

<sup>4</sup> As Kripke (1980: 81) pointed out, a person can associate the same sense of e.g. two historical names, like the names of two physicists, Feynman and Gell-Mann, taking them to have different referents, while yet not knowing anything about the one that she does not also know about the other. But in that case, unlike the present mental files case, the senses are incomplete (or at least taken to be incomplete): not sufficient to determine unique bearers.

quotation contexts aside).

The result seems to be that the (DIF) condition isn't met, and that Recanati ends up with the *separation* alternative rather than with the connection alternative, a result I think he does not want to embrace. The way out I guess Recanati would choose here, is to appeal to his idea of *primary content* (24), distinct from the referential, *secondary* content. That the file itself can make a semantic difference over and above reference, and over and above the acquaintance relation, may be acceptable in light of this further level of content, at least if two files must differ in primary content.

Like Frege's notion of sense in part was meant to account for the possibility of thoughts without referents, so the notion of primary content of mental files is meant to account for the possibility of singular thought without acquaintance. We now turn to that.

#### 4 Required acquaintance and primary content

On 155 Recanati sums up the mental files framework in two principles:

1. The subject cannot entertain a singular thought about an object *a* without possessing, and exercising, a mental file whose referent is *a*.
2. To possess and exercise a mental file whose referent is *a* the subject must stand in some acquaintance relation to *a*.

Surprisingly, Recanati goes on to *deny* that it follows that 'no singular thought can be entertained unless the subject is acquainted with what her thought is about'. This is achieved by interpreting the second principle as a *normative* claim. That is, as I understand it, Principle 2 does not state that acquaintance is a necessary condition on mental files, only that it is a necessary condition on mental files that they are *required* to have an acquaintance relation to an object. Since a file can be required to have such a relation without actually having it, the conclusion is blocked, as desired.

The possibility of singular thought without acquaintance depends on the appeal to its function:

‘But singular thought involves tokening a singular vehicle in thought (a mental file, or a mental name); and a singular vehicle, qua type, is individuated in terms of its function, which is: the storing of information gained through acquaintance. So *singular thought is still defined in terms of acquaintance*, even if there can be singular thought in the absence of (present or even future) acquaintance.’ (163-63, emphasis in the original.)

It is also clear, I think, that the function referred to here is what is in other passages called the *primary content*:

‘The primary content of a thought constituent is taken to be its function or role, which function or role contextually determines its referential or ‘secondary’ content’ (24).

The primary content, then, allows thinking singular thoughts without standing in an acquaintance relation to the object. ‘Singular thought’ here means *singular thought vehicle* (164): without the acquaintance relation no singular *content* is established.<sup>5</sup>

I find the idea of primary content problematic. The concept of a mental file, like the concept of a *gene* in genetics, is in itself functional. Unlike linguistic expressions, we don’t observe mental files or tokenings of them. We cannot demonstrate them. What we know about mental files, we know on the basis of the *theory* of mental files. ‘Mental file’ is a theoretical term in a theory like Recanati’s, and the interpreted theory formulation it occurs in gives us its functional role, which is our concept of a mental file. We can then go on to ask whether there exist mental entities that fill this role, and whether there is a unique collection of entities that do. This is just the customary predicament of theoretical terms in science. Certain observations — in the present case, for instance, certain introspective observations — may confirm or disconfirm the theory through its observational consequence. So far, all is in order.

The problematic step comes when an *additional* functional role or normative requirement is included in the basic functional role itself. This is not to say that a normative requirement cannot be included

<sup>5</sup> Still, Recanati oscillates between this position and a more ‘instrumental’ position where one *does* have a singular thought *about* an object if one opens a file for it, even without acquaintance, provided the circumstances are optimal, like in the case of Leverrier and Neptune, when the subject is *justified* in expecting a future acquaintance (Cf. 167, note 9).



with a function. To take an example, the president of the United States is *required* to ask Congress to approve his budget. The presidency is an office, i.e. a functional role, fulfilled by one person at a time. It is part of serving in that office that one is required to ask Congress for approval. This is fine, but it is fine because there is an *independent* method of identifying the holder of the office. The holder is identified through a national election and the ceremony of being sworn into office. Suppose, by contrast, that there were no such independent method of identifying the president, and that it were wholly a matter of finding out who fulfills the functional role. In trying to find this out, we would then ask, for instance, who the generals take their orders from, but as part of the quest of finding the president, we would also ask persons whether *they are required to ask Congress to approve their budget*. But this does not make sense, since one can be subject to such a requirement only as a *consequence* of serving in the office. The person asked if she is so required can only answer ‘I don’t know. Yes, if I am the president, and No, if I am not’. The president must be identified independently of being subject to the requirements of the office.

In classical functional role theory (e.g. Loar 1986), the functional roles are causal. This means that we can investigate the causal pattern in e.g. processes of the brain, to find out what brain states fulfill certain functional roles. But when the functional role is *normative*, this cannot be done. We cannot, as a means of identifying mental files, get hold of a brain state, or a mental state, and ask whether that state is *required* to have an acquaintance relation to an object. A brain state, or a mental state, can at most be subject to such a requirement once it has been identified as a mental file by an independent criterion. For instance, if mental files were all causally related to external objects by some acquaintance relation, we could use that general fact to identify mental files. But this is not the case, on Recanati’s account. It is only part of their function to be *required* to stand in an acquaintance relation. But that means conflating a consequence of being a mental file with what is needed for identifying them in the first place. That is why I find the idea of the primary content of mental files problematic.

If the idea of primary content is removed from the theory, I guess the idea of singular thought without acquaintance will go by the

board. But then the mental file as a part of a singular theory *vehicle* will be reduced to mere syntax in the system of mental representation. And mere syntax does not account for cognitive significance, at least not on the connection account. So if, as was argued in the preceding section, there are differences in cognitive significance that go beyond differences in acquaintance relations, the mental files framework does not provide a complete account of cognitive significance either.<sup>6</sup>

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# Files, Indexicals and Descriptivism

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Recanati's book contains stimulating discussions of a great many interesting problems and repays careful reading. My comments focus on some questions about indexicals and descriptions.

Recanati defends Singularism against Descriptivism. The Singularist claims (i) the semantic contribution of a referring term to the proposition expressed by an utterance in which it figures is its *referent*; (ii) one needs acquaintance with, or more generally an *epistemically rewarding* (ER) relation to the referent, if one is to think a singular thought about it. On Recanati's view, Singularists can better defend these two theses by including mental files in their account, using files to play the roles usually assigned to modes of presentation.

Descriptivism denies (i), holding that referring terms contribute descriptive content to the proposition expressed, where this content in turn determines reference. Descriptivism runs into trouble, according to Recanati, because it neglects the 'relational character of reference determination' (22). He makes a good point here — this neglect is arguably the root of Descriptivism's vulnerability to the so-called 'modal argument.'<sup>1</sup> But of course Descriptivism can be modified to address the problem by injecting relational properties into the descriptive content associated with a referring term.<sup>2</sup> For example, one sees Mt. Blanc and thinks 'that peak is dramatic.' The amended

<sup>1</sup> Marcus 1961; Kripke 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Searle 1983. Alternatively the Descriptivist might hold that rigidified descriptions 'the actual F', or 'dthat F' are the semantic contribution of names and other referring terms (Kaplan 1970). But here, Recanati argues, because it is possible for 'the actual F' to be used attributively, the hearer or consumer of the sentence might understand it without knowing what the sentence refers to. So rigidified descriptions cannot secure the hearer's grasp of a singular thought about the particular F in question.

Descriptivist view holds that the demonstrative ‘that peak’ contributes a description of a relation between the thought (or thinker) and the referent — for instance, ‘the peak causing this visual experience’ or ‘the peak I see.’

Recanati argues that the resulting ‘sophisticated 2-D Descriptivism’ still fails. He raises two objections, one about the communication of singular thought and one about the fact that Descriptivism internalizes acquaintance relations. Thinking about both objections helps us to see more deeply into Recanati’s own project.

## 1 Descriptivism and the communication of singular thoughts

Recanati’s first objection to sophisticated Descriptivism is that it fails to account for a constraint on the communication of singular thoughts:

‘First, to grasp the singular thought expressed by an utterance such as ‘That peak is less than 4000m high’, it is not sufficient for the hearer merely to understand that the speaker is looking at a (unique) peak and saying of it that it is less than 4000m high: the hearer herself must come to occupy an epistemic position enabling her to entertain a singular thought about the same object. As we have seen, entertaining such a thought involves standing in a suitable ER relation to the object of the thought. (Typically, the hearer will have to look in the same direction as the speaker, in order to see the peak for herself.)<sup>3</sup> This constraint on what counts as understanding in the singular case is left unaccounted for by 2-D Relational Descriptivism.’ (24)

Recanati’s basic claim is that grasping a relational descriptive content does not ensure that the hearer will stand in a suitable ER relation to the object; but standing in such a relation is required for understanding. More fully, his argument is this:

- (i) Entertaining a singular thought requires standing in an ER relation to the referent.
- (ii) If a hearer understands a communicated singular thought, then the hearer must stand in an ER relation to the same referent to which the speaker stands in an ER relation. (Recanati’s ‘constraint’.)

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<sup>3</sup> Recanati here cites Strawson (2004: 78).

- (iii) But a hearer might understand the communicated Descriptivist content perfectly well without standing in an ER relation to the referent.
- (iv) So a hearer might understand the communicated Descriptivist content, and yet not thereby be enabled to think a singular thought with the referent as its object.
- (v) So the Descriptivist content is insufficient as an analysis of the content of the singular thought.

To illustrate, imagine that the speaker's utterance 'That peak is less than 4000m high' is recorded and replayed at some other time and location. Hearers of the recording would understand that *the mountain the speaker is seeing is F*. But they wouldn't thereby grasp a singular thought about Mt. Blanc. Why? There are arguments about what a singular thought is and what it takes to think one. Without entering into these arguments, we might propose a neutral criterion or test for when a speaker has communicated a singular thought. The criterion is that the hearer thereby be in a position to corefer with the speaker, that is, to make anaphoric reference to the object of the speaker's thought. In the recording case, the hearer is not in a position to make an anaphoric reference to Mt. Blanc.<sup>4</sup>

Using this neutral criterion, we can see if the Descriptivist might reply to Recanati's argument. To reply to the argument, the Descriptivist must specify a relational descriptive content that the speaker might convey to the hearer which would permit the hearer to take up the speaker's reference to Mt. Blanc, and to make anaphoric reference to it with her own utterances. For example, if the hearer might grasp the content of the speaker's utterance and go on to appropriately say, 'Yes, and it's covered in snow, too', then it will count as a case of successful communication of singular thought.

<sup>4</sup> We should probably add that the test involves 'non-lazy' anaphora, where one isn't just using an anaphor as a shortcut to duplicate some content expressed by the speaker, but uses the anaphor in an 'essential' way to corefer. Thanks to David Hills for suggesting (though not necessarily advocating) the proposed criterion.

Here's a try on behalf of the Descriptivist. Suppose the hearer is on the phone with the speaker, and when the speaker says, 'that peak is less than 4000m high', the hearer grasps the descriptive relational content *the mountain you are seeing is less than 4000m*. The hearer has descriptive information about the situation of the speaker as the speaker is talking. The hearer thinks of the referent of 'the speaker' (or 'you') under the relational description *the person talking to me now*, and the referent of 'here' (should the speaker use it) under the description *the location of the person talking to me now*. These are thin descriptions, but they give the hearer a handle on the situation of the speaker. And it seems that grasping these descriptive contents gives the hearer a sufficiently tight handle on the speaker's situation so that she can refer to what he refers to anaphorically. In the case we're imagining, it is possible for the hearer to take up the speaker's reference anaphorically. When the speaker reports, 'that peak is less than 4000m high', the hearer may reply, 'Is it less than even 3000m do you think?'

More needs be said to establish that a Descriptivist response along these lines might work. Obviously the Descriptivist owes an *explanation* of why having a relational descriptive take on the situation of the speaker permits the hearer to corefer with the speaker's utterance.<sup>5</sup> My aim here is just to suggest that it seems the Descriptivist may have the resources to respond to Recanati's complaint.

The envisioned Descriptivist response raises further issues about the communication of indexical thought. The communication of indexical thought is a large topic for Recanati because on his view much of our thought about objects is indexical: we entertain non-descriptive thoughts by standing in contextual relations to the objects the thoughts are about. And so the question how we can communicate such thoughts to hearers in different contexts becomes pressing for Recanati (166).

Recanati notes that Frege addresses the question of the communication of indexical thought by distinguishing private ('psychological') modes of presentation and publicly communicable ('linguistic') modes of presentation; we cannot communicate the private mode of presentation, though we can communicate the public one (167 ff).

<sup>5</sup> Again, not just in a 'lazily' anaphoric way.

But as Recanati notes, this only invites the question: how are these modes related?

Recanati ultimately prefers a different answer than Frege's. The idea is that when indexical thought is communicated the speaker and hearer have more in common than a state of affairs they both represent.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, the modes of presentation under which speaker and hearer think about the state of affairs also have some content in common (171).

For example, Sam tells Helen, 'The mountain I see is F' and Helen thereby comes to think *the mountain you see is F*. The indexicals 'I' and 'you' have 'descriptive meanings' (176) such as 'the speaker of utterance *u*', 'the hearer of utterance *u*', which in turn are part of the content of the relevant files or modes of presentation. Suppose both Sam and Helen have a file concerning Sam, and each of their files contains the information that Sam is the utterer of the token. It is this overlapping content that ultimately makes communication possible. The full story from here is somewhat complex. (Briefly, when Sam says, 'the mountain I see is F' he expresses a thought with *his file on himself* as a constituent, because he associates the descriptive meaning 'the speaker of the utterance' with 'I' (176). Helen, the hearer, also associates this descriptive meaning with Sam's utterance of 'I', and in her case, this same descriptive meaning triggers *her file on Sam*, and makes it a constituent of her thought.) Details aside, the crux of Recanati's view is that the descriptive meanings of indexicals provide 'identificatory facts' (172) about their associated referents, and the sharing of these meanings is what makes possible communication involving indexicals.

Recanati's account deserves more discussion than I can give it here. For our purposes, we should note just one thing. As we saw, in order to make sense of how communication with indexicals works, Recanati claims that each indexical has associated descriptive meaning, which provides 'identificatory facts' about the referent of the indexical term. Both speaker and hearer have files on the referent, and these descriptive meanings are part of those files. Now it's a good question for Recanati whether by locating these descriptive

<sup>6</sup> The state of affairs is in turn is represented by a Russellian proposition (or the 'subject matter proposition' in Perry 2001).

meanings in the thinker's file he takes his own view a step toward 'internalizing acquaintance relations.' For recall that Recanati's second main charge against Descriptivism is that it implausibly 'internalizes' acquaintance relations, incorporating them into the content of thought (34). Let's turn to that complaint now.

## 2 Internalizing acquaintance

Recanati's second main complaint against Descriptivist accounts of singular thought is that they make the relation between thinker and object an element in the content of the thought. This over-intellectualizes singular thought.

Does Recanati's own view manage to steer away from internalizing acquaintance as completely as he wishes? There are two places where it seems the files account must allow acquaintance relations to be accessible to thinkers.

(a) The first, as we just saw, is in Recanati's account of indexicals in communication. Recanati's solution requires including the descriptive meaning of 'I' in the file content: it requires that this meaning provide identificatory facts about the referent (the speaker), and it requires that the descriptive meaning is consciously accessible (both to speaker and to hearer).

(b) The second place where internalization is suggested is this. Consider the idea that a file serves as a mode of presentation. When Earl remembers seeing the Louvre, he has a memorial mode of presentation of the Louvre; when he sees the Louvre, he has a visual mode of presentation. The files account says Earl has two files (or in more complex cases, where Earl knows it is one and the same museum in question, there are two files that are linked, or (eventually perhaps) there is but one file based on two ER relations). Now suppose Earl remembers the Louvre. When he thinks 'What a large building that was', he thinks with a memorial mode. That this mode of presentation is different than the visual mode of presentation he once enjoyed is plain to him. If Earl is a normal adult, he is probably able to articulate this fact. Earl probably doesn't express the difference by saying that his



modes of presentation differ, in that one is visual and the other memorial. Nonetheless, as a routine matter *the character (as visual or as memorial) of modes of presentation is accessible to the thinker*. How does this happen? A good question. A natural answer for the file account would seem to be that the thinker has access to the ER relation at the base of the file. So the file itself contains information about the ER relation on which it is based. For example, Earl's file on the Louvre when he first sees it includes a description 'being the  $x$  I see before me'; his file when he remembers the building includes 'being the  $x$  I once saw' or some such. Recanati could resist this idea and hold instead that only reflective thinkers have such access to ER relations, and perhaps claim that access comes in the form of a higher-order thought about the sources of one's information. I suspect this wouldn't get it right about lots of ordinary cases of unreflective people who reason in ways that are sensitive to the mode by which they acquire information. To handle the unreflective cases, some internalizing of the ER relation seems needed to account for the phenomena.

Given these two points (a) and (b), perhaps the files theorist might relent and allow *some* internalized contents concerning acquaintance. Perhaps one could do so without thereby going all the way to full Descriptivism, on which these grasped descriptive contents *suffice* to determine reference. But, equally, if we allow the internalization of some content *relevant* to reference determination, then some Descriptivist views may be in the clear. For instance, consider David Lewis's descriptivism.<sup>7</sup> Lewis can argue that a causal relation is part of what does the reference fixing; and while a description grasped by the speaker doesn't fix reference all by itself, it does fix the character of our terms. This character, in combination with facts about the occasion of utterance and facts about causes, determines reference. These further facts are not represented in the content of the thought. Some of the reference fixing relation gets into the head, and some stays outside it, if you will. That doesn't seem implausible. Whatever we might think of the view, it seems that Recanati's view and a modified Descriptivism like Lewis's aren't so far apart on the issue

<sup>7</sup> Holton 2003.

of internalized acquaintance relations.

### 3 Files vs. competing accounts

There are many other competing theories of reference and cognitive significance phenomena. For instance, on the Descriptivist side, there is Two-Dimensional Semantics, which develops a new account of sense or intension.<sup>8</sup> And on the Singularist side there are Direct Reference theorists who want to handle many of the phenomena Recanati handles by invoking new kinds of truth-conditional content, instead of files or modes of presentation.<sup>9</sup>

How does the files account compare to these competing theories? The question is too large for full discussion here, but a couple of questions can frame further inquiry.

First, as we have seen, Recanati would set all Descriptivist theories aside:

‘...what I objected to ...was not two-dimensionalism per se, but the descriptivist construal: the idea that the acquaintance relations which determine what a given thought is about are represented in the content of the thought...’ (194).

Recanati notes that Jackson and Chalmers’ Two-Dimensional Semantics does not suppose that epistemic intensions are represented in the content of thoughts (note 171), and in consequence, he seems to have no complaint against this Descriptivist view. But in that case, it seems we do not need a file framework to dispense with the relevant Descriptivist commitment. So what recommends a files-based approach?

This question becomes pressing when Recanati considers other accounts that dispense with senses or modes of presentation, and attempt to capture ‘mental indexicality’ (195) without the use of files. Among these, Recanati considers Lewis’s centered worlds approach, and John Perry’s token-reflexive approach. Recanati says the main problem is that each re-introduce the ‘descriptivist commitment’ (195) i.e. making reference fixing relations internal to the thought. I have discussed above whether Recanati himself can completely avoid

<sup>8</sup> Chalmers and Jackson 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Stalnaker 2010; Lewis 1983; Perry 2001; Kaplan 1989; Fine 2007.

such a commitment, so I won't say more about this. But Recanati voices a different and more serious worry about the token-reflexive approach that I do want to discuss.

Briefly, the token-reflexive account holds that relations of speakers to token utterances help to determine a kind of *reflexive content*, over and above the *subject matter content* of the utterance. The hope is that we can appeal to the former in order to address various problems for direct reference theory.

Recanati raises an objection to the whole approach:

'If I say or think 'I am tired', and this is analysed as 'the utterer/thinker of *u* is tired at the time of *u* in the world of *u*', then I have referred to myself under the descriptive-relational mode of presentation 'the utterer/thinker of *u*'. In the token-reflexive framework, every object of thought is referred to under such a descriptive-relational mode of presentation which exploits the object's relation to *u*. But what about *u* itself? Under which mode of presentation is it referred to?' (198)

Recanati considers possible ways for the token-reflexive theorist to articulate a suitable mode of presentation for *u* ('this occurrence', or what have you), and argues that none work. He concludes that

'if one goes for reflexive modes of presentation, they must be treated as nondescriptive. At this point, clearly, we need a theory of nondescriptive modes of presentation — the sort of theory I have tried to provide — and the token-reflexive framework is of no help in this endeavour. So the reflexivist is in a rather bad situation: her account does not stand on its own feet and needs support from the account it is supposed to be an alternative to.' (198)

This is a serious charge. How might the token-reflexive theorist respond? Start here: Perry's actual answer to the question 'Under which mode of presentation is the utterance *u* itself referred to?' is 'None.'<sup>10</sup> Rather, the utterance *u* figures as a constituent of the proposition that expresses the reflexive content of the utterance. There is no description of *u*, or sense or mode of presentation under which the subject thinks of *u* itself. (According to Perry, reflexive propositions are 'lumpy general propositions' in which the utterance is itself a constituent.<sup>11</sup>)

<sup>10</sup> Perry (2001: 77).

<sup>11</sup> Perry (2001: 29, 77).

If we avoid Recanati's conclusion that the token-reflexive theory is up the creek without a paddle, then it seems the question of why choose the files approach is still open.<sup>12</sup>

On this point I close with an observation. Often, Recanati's approach is to argue for the necessity of the files framework in light of the abject failure of other approaches. And there may in fact be places where one can insist that we are forced to invoke cognitive particulars (files or something else) in our explanations. For instance, one might argue that cognitive particulars are necessary in explaining what it is for one to think of something as being the same thing, or to engage in 'coreferential thinking.'<sup>13</sup> But it is also possible that one does not need to argue for the absolute untenability of other approaches in order to advocate in favor of the files framework. One could instead seek to articulate the distinctive advantages of the file model over other models.

<sup>12</sup> I'm not certain whether Recanati acknowledges this answer. He goes on to consider an alternative reply for the token-reflexivist, but I'm not certain it captures the account just sketched. Recanati writes:

'Instead of appealing to reflexive modes of presentation, he or she may appeal to super-direct reference, the sort of thing that Russell was after. In super-direct reference, there is no mode of presentation: the referent itself serves as its own vehicle, as it were. No mental file is needed to stand for the object in such a case, because the object itself is directly recruited as a thought constituent. This of course cannot be done with many objects, but with mental occurrences arguably it can' (198).

I'm not certain if Recanati is here talking about the answer Perry gives (that utterances are themselves constituents of reflexive propositions). But what is Recanati's concern about this approach? He writes:

'Although I have no knock down argument against this approach, I find it insufficiently [sic] motivated and too much in the grip of a rather extreme Cartesian picture. Why not appeal instead to multiple anchors, corresponding to all the acquaintance relations in which we stand to objects of thought?'

I'm not sure how to understand the concern about Cartesianism, though the claim that we can go with the files account if we want to instead of going token-reflexivist is of course true.

<sup>13</sup> The story here is a long one, and the fact that we have cognitive particulars is clearly not the whole of it. There are content-based competitors here too, we should note. For instance, Kit Fine 2007 thinks we can use content-based explanation for sameness of thinking as well. I'm not convinced one can do so, on pain of circularity worries, but that is a topic for another day.

A *prima facie* advantage of the file model is that it holds out the possibility of using the same model to handle a bunch of problems and questions. For instance, we would like an account that explains what it is for one to think of something as being the same thing — coreferential thinking. We would also like an account that identifies a stable public content for certain explanatory purposes (direct reference theory does a good job with this), and also handles coreference phenomena or Frege cases, empty names, and confused reference (direct reference theory runs into trouble with these). Some theorists favor mixed approaches. John Perry is a good example. He uses cognitive particulars (files) for some jobs, and reflexive content for other jobs: he uses files to explain what it takes to think coreferentially, but doesn't use them to handle Frege cases, preferring reflexive content for this purpose. If the files account can handle all of these problems, with a single model, that would seem a point in its favor.

All things considered, it would be good to hear more about the comparative advantages of the files account.

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## Comments on François Recanati's *Mental Files*: Doubts about Indexicality

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François Recanati has written a valuable and timely book. The suggestion that thought involves the deployment of 'mental files' has been around for some decades, and is becoming increasingly popular, but until now there has been no sustained examination of the idea. Recanati has developed a detailed theory of mental files, and future treatments will take his book as their starting point.

I am very much in favour of the general lines of Recanati's approach. In particular, I fully support his policy of dealing with Frege cases, not by introducing some extra semantic level additional to referential value, but simply by appealing to the possibility that different *vehicles* of thought can be used to refer to the same entity. Recanati shows convincingly that a multiplication of descriptive senses or extra 'intensions' is quite unnecessary to deal with Frege cases. All we need is the idea that distinct mental files can refer to a single entity.

I also fully support Recanati's decision to focus on the individual rather than the community. Recanati's mental files are possessed by individuals, and he offers no general account of when different individuals might be said to 'grasp the same concept'. In this respect his book contrasts with Mark Sainsbury and Michael Tye's recent *Seven Puzzles of Thought* (Oxford University Press 2012), which is in many respects consistent with Recanati's approach, but which seeks primarily to articulate a notion of a public concept rather than that of an individual's mental file. I myself am very doubtful that any one notion can do justice both to the public and individual dimensions of thought; indeed I remain to be convinced that there is any real work for the idea of a public concept, once we have a good account of individual mental files and the use of words to communicate them. So

I think that Recanati does well to focus on the individual rather than the social level.

However, as is only to be expected, there are aspects of Recanati's book with which I disagree. In particular, I think that his adoption of an 'indexical model' for mental files leads him astray in various ways. In these comments I shall focus on his use of this model. In the first two sections below I shall point out some ways in which this model can be misleading. After that I shall argue that, when it comes to 'demonstrative files', the model is not only misleading but positively erroneous.

## 1 The indexical model

Recanati models the workings of mental files on the way that indexical *words* function in language.

Linguistic indexicality is familiar enough. Indexical word types — such as 'here', 'now', 'I', 'you' — do not have referents to call their own. There is no particular time referred to by the word type 'now', nor any particular person referred to by the word type 'you'. In this respect, indexical word types contrast with proper names types — 'Timbuktu' — or natural kind term types — 'gold' — which have standing referents, so to speak.<sup>1</sup>

It is only *tokens* (specific dated uses) of indexical words types that have referents. The way this works is familiar. The indexical word types have a 'character' that specifies how the context of utterance of any *token* of that type will determine a referent for that token. Thus the character of the type 'now' specifies that any token use of this word type will refer to the time at which the relevant utterance is being made; similarly the character of the type 'you' specifies that any token use of this word type will refer to the person to whom the relevant utterance is being addressed; and so on.

Recanati's thought is that mental files work like indexical words. Token mental files fall into types, depending on the kind of 'epis-

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps proper names are not so non-indexical as they initially appear. More than one person is called 'David Papineau'. One account of how such proper names manage to refer is that 'David Papineau' is a type the tokens of which get attached indexically to specific people on occasion of use (Pelczar 2001).



temically rewarding relation' that the token bears towards its referent. For example, tokens of the perceptually demonstrative mental file type *that man* will bear a potentially fruitful epistemic relation to the man to whom the relevant thinker is currently attending. This species of 'epistemically rewarding relation', in conjunction with the relevant thinker's context, then determines a referent for any token of *that man*, analogously to the way that the character of an indexical word type plus a context determines a referent for any indexical word token. Similarly, tokens of the mental file type *here* will refer to the place where the thinker is currently located; and tokens of the mental file type *I* will refer to the person who is using that token in thought.

Recanati applies this indexical model to mental files in general. He argues that even his 'encyclopaedic' files conform to the model. Encyclopaedic files are distinguished by the fact their existence does not depend on any specific epistemic relation to their referent. My *Barack Obama* file can survive the loss of any specific epistemic rewarding relationship to him (I might forget his name, or alternatively forget what he looks like and cease to be able to identify him visually) as long as some (any) such rewarding relationships remain. For Recanati, this is enough to bring encyclopaedic files under the indexical model. The crucial point, as he sees it, is that their referents are still contextually determined. The referent of my *Obama* file is determined as that item in my context to which the file bears some (any) epistemically rewarding relations.

## 2 There is less mental than linguistic indexicality

I have no objection to the idea that the referents of mental files are generally contextually determined, and Recanati is of course free to use the term 'indexicality' to express this idea if he wishes. But there is a danger that this usage will obscure the fact that there is a lot less indexicality in the mental realm, so to speak, than Recanati's analogy between mental and linguistic 'indexicality' might lead one to expect.

Consider first Recanati's '*I*' files. These are mental files which each subject possesses, distinguished by the special epistemic relationship of self-knowledge that each subject bears to itself. I have my

*I* file, you have yours, and so on. In the normal case, each of us uses our *I* file throughout our life as a repository in which to accumulate information about ourselves. These are the tokens of the *I* file type: that type, to be specific, whose tokens acquire their reference in virtue of bearing the self-knowledge relationship to particular thinking subjects.

Now consider the English word 'I'. The character of this word type specifies that any of its tokens will refer to the user of that token. So on many occasions English speakers will use the type word 'I', and on each of those occasions the token so uttered will refer to whomever is speaking. In this case, and by contrast with mental *I* files, the normal understanding is that even the different uses of 'I' by a given individual on different occasions will each comprise different *tokens* of the type. If I use 'I' this evening when talking to my wife on Monday, and then again on Thursday when talking to a student, these are naturally taken to be two different tokens of 'I', each separately assigned me as referent in virtue of the principle that all such uses refer to the speaker.

It is understandable enough that we should so cut things up differently in the mental and linguistic cases. Mental *I* files normally function as repositories for all the information that individuals acquire about themselves in the course of their life. Viewed in this way, it is essential that they persist for as long as their possessors survive. They need to be able to accumulate information over lifetimes.

'I' words, by contrast, have no such corresponding function. There is no obvious sense in which bodies of information get attached to tokens of the 'I' word type, and a fortiori no sense in which an accumulating body of information is attached to all of a given person's 'I' utterances. So there is no reason to lump all of a given person's 'I' utterances into different manifestations of a single 'I' token, in the way that Recanati lumps together all a given person's rehearsals of their mental *I*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this is a bit quick. If I use the type word 'I' repeatedly in the course of a *single* conversation, then shouldn't we count these as different *uses* of the *same* token, on the grounds that in general intra-conversational uses of indexical words are most naturally read, given the conventions of anaphora, as repetitions of the same token term (and so as 'de jure' co-referential)? I am happy to grant this. But my more general point remains. For these considerations provide no argument

The upshot is that mental *I* files display a lot less indexicality than linguistic ‘I’ words. Whereas I must have deployed millions of linguistic tokens of the type word ‘I’ in the course of my life, I have only ever deployed one mental token of the *I* file type.

Now consider encyclopaedic files like my *Obama* file. For Recanati, this is an ‘indexical’ file in virtue of having its referent fixed contextually (as that item to which the file bears some epistemically rewarding relations). Again, I worry that this terminology may be misleading about the structure of encyclopaedic files.

Let us ask how encyclopaedic files are supposed to conform to the type-token structure displayed by other indexical constructions. My personal *Obama* file is presumably a token of the relevant type. This token will persist as long as I remain able to think of Obama, and will serve as a repository for all the information that I accumulate about him in this time. It is this token whose reference is contextually fixed as Obama himself.

But what now is the type of which this personal file is a token? A first thought might be that it is the category which contains all the other token personal encyclopaedic files possessed by people who can think about Obama, whether by recognizing him, or by knowing his name, or any mix of these and other epistemically rewarding relations. But this seems wrong. After all, those tokens all have the *same* referent, namely Barack Obama. And given this there seems nothing to stop us saying that the type itself has this standing referent. But this is in tension with the idea that indexical types have no referent to call their own.

As far as I can see, the only good way to fit the personal encyclopaedic *Obama* files into the standard indexical type-token structure would be to view them as tokens of the type *encyclopaedic file* (or perhaps *encyclopaedic person* file). This type would have no reference of its own, and each of its tokens (such as an *Obama* file, or a *my first teacher* file, or a *that-woman-down-the-road* file...) would then have its referent fixed as that thing (person) in the relevant thinker’s environment to

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for identifying tokens of ‘I’ *across* conversations. If I use ‘I’ on Monday in one conversation, and then on Thursday in another, these are surely *two* tokens each separately assigned a reference in context. So we still have a contrast with mental *I* files, where the *same* token of the *I* type needs to stay with me from Monday to Thursday, and indeed for the rest of life.

which the relevant file bears some epistemically rewarding relation.

This would work all right, but it would be strange, and certainly wouldn't line up with any indexical constructions present in natural languages. We certainly don't have some type *word* the tokens of which refer variously to Obama, my first teacher, that woman down the road, ..., depending on the context in which those tokens are uttered.

This is not yet a substantial criticism of Recanati's account of encyclopaedic files. I have no objection to his central idea that they have their referents fixed contextually. Still, it does seem unhelpful to use the term 'indexical' to express this idea. If such paradigmatically permanent files as my *Obama* file are classed together with 'here' and 'now' files as similarly 'indexical', I cannot help feeling that some important distinctions are being lost.

### 3 *You* thoughts

So far I have argued only that Recanati's 'indexical' model for mental files needs to be treated with care, given the extent to which some of his mental files display rather less indexicality than this terminology might initially lead readers to expect.

However, I worry that there is a more substantial danger in Recanati's emphasis on indexicality: the thought that mental files share the structure of linguistic indexicals can encourage us to multiply mental files beyond necessity. In this section I shall illustrate this danger by considering the possibility of 'you' files. In the next section I shall apply the morals I draw to 'perceptual demonstrative' files. (While Recanati does not himself posit 'you' files, 'perceptual demonstrative' files play a central role in his project.)

Suppose I am thinking that John Colleague gave a good talk yesterday, and that I must tell him this next time I see him. At that moment, lo and behold, he comes into the common room. 'You gave a good talk yesterday', I say to him.

Now, my utterance unquestionably contains an indexical type *word*, 'you', tokens of which are conventionally understood as referring the person to whom the utterance is addressed. But should we think of me as expressing a thought involving a correspondingly indexical *you* file? When John looms into view, do I form a token

thought file of the *you* type, a distinctively 'second-person' file whose reference is fixed via the relation it bears to the addressee of the thinker's current utterance?

This would seem an unattractive move (and indeed Recanati does not make it). I don't need to form any extra *you* file when I am about to address John, beyond any files about him I already have. So there is no reason to suppose that my utterance 'You gave a good talk yesterday' expresses some corresponding indexical *you* thought. Rather it is just the linguistic means that I use to express a pre-existing non-second-person thought.

Recanati agrees, in the course of discussing how thoughts get communicated in speech. His view (222-3) is that when a speaker's utterance *u* contains 'you', the information that the hearer 'is the addressee of *u*' will be in the file that the speaker is using to think about the hearer, and also in the hearer's first-person I file. This information will 'stand for' the relevant files, and 'trigger their activation', but it will not contribute to the content of what is being communicated.

This seems quite right to me. We don't need *you* files to explain the content of what speakers say about their hearers.

Still, perhaps the point bears a bit more examination. Note that *something* inside the speaker needs to figure out that, in the context, 'you' is the appropriate word with which to give public verbal expression to the thought that, say, *John gave a good talk yesterday*.

Presumably, the production of the relevant utterance is informed by the speaker's information that (a) John is the (potential) addressee, and (b) 'you' is the right word to communicate to a current addressee any thought that refers to that same addressee.

But if this is right, then it seems that there must be re-usable mental term *current addressee* in the speaker's mental economy, with which to formulate the information in (a) and (b). And this then argues that we should recognize that in thought there is a *type* of referring mental term (*current addressee*), *tokens* of which are used on particular occasions to mediate inferences about when to use the word 'you' to express some thought.

So it does look as if there is indeed a referring mental type (*current addressee*) which works very like the linguistic type indexical 'you', in that tokens of both will refer to whoever is currently (potentially)

being addressed.

Still, even though we do need to recognize these re-usable mental types, there is no reason to think that they should be dignified as *files*, nor that they play any significant role in *thought*.

As I see it, the mental type in question operates mainly in the sub-personal speech production system. Once this speech-production system ‘knows’ that *John is the current addressee*, it will set itself to express all John-referring thoughts using the word ‘you’. In the normal case, I don’t need to think about how to express my thoughts. My selection of words is generated automatically, courtesy of an automatic and unconscious system that figures out what grammatical string of words will best serve to express my thought in the current context.

True, there will need to be some interaction between the sub-personal speech production system and personal level conceptual thought, in order to derive the crucial interfacing information that, say, *John is the current addressee*. We can’t eliminate conceptual thought in deriving this conclusion, for after all there is no limit to the kind of conceptual information about John that might be relevant (suppose you know that John often goes around in disguise, but can’t resist custard cream biscuits ... and you use this information to figure that the strange bearded man in the common room must be John.)

Still, this doesn’t mean that the term *current addressee* itself needs to function as an information-accumulating file in our person-level cognitive economy. Once a judgement like *John is the current addressee* has been arrived at, it will be handed over to the speech production system, and this token of *current addressee* will cease to play any role in person-level thought.<sup>3</sup> Moreover the speech production system itself certainly won’t treat this token as some file whose function is to gather and preserve any further information about its referent. Its only use for this token is to register that John is the current addressee and thence direct that *John* thoughts should be expressed with ‘you’.

<sup>3</sup> This argues against Recanati’s suggestion that some such item as ‘is the addressee of *u*’ will generally get entered into speakers’ files for the person in question. Since this information is only needed by the unconscious mechanisms that put thoughts into words, there is no obvious reason to keep a record of it. Perhaps this is part of the explanation of why I can often remember conversations in some detail without being able to remember whom I had them with.

So, all in all, even though we need to recognize that there are referring mental terms *current addressee* with an indexical structure like ‘you’, these terms will not function as mental *files*.

#### 4 Demonstrative files and their problems

Let me now turn to demonstrative files. This is where I think that the indexical analogue is genuinely damaging. It encourages the view that there are token mental files corresponding to token linguistic demonstratives, when in truth there is nothing corresponding in our actual cognitive structure.

Recanati has a distinct species of demonstrative files (*that thing, that woman*) which are opened when a thinker is in perceptual rapport with some item, and which survive and accumulate information as long as that rapport is maintained.

An immediate query about these files concerns cases where we think about some previously perceived item even though we have ceased to be in continuous perceptual contact with it. So for example I might recall the woman I saw this morning, along with the information I then acquired about her. Or I might recognize that woman when I see her again this afternoon, again remembering the information I acquired earlier.

A natural first thought is that in such cases we reactivate the demonstrative file that we opened when we first saw the woman this morning. This would explain the current availability of any information we acquired in that earlier encounter. However, Recanati cannot say this. The demonstrative file that I originally formed disappears along with the termination of the epistemically rewarding perceptual contact on which it is based.

Recanati’s response to this query is to multiply files. As well as the original perceptual demonstrative file, I will also have a ‘memory demonstrative file’ (62), and a ‘recognitional file’ (71). Memory demonstrative files exist in virtue of an epistemically rewarding *memory* relation that the thinker bears to the relevant item; as long as one can remember the earlier encounter, one can think of the woman in question as *that woman [whom I saw]*. Recognitional files exist in virtue of an epistemically rewarding relation of *familiarity*; as long as one is capable of recognizing the item in question, one can think of it via a

recognitional file.

So, on Recanati's view, when I later recall the woman that I saw this morning, or later recognize her, I am not reactivating my original perceptual file, but rather activating new and different files, a memory demonstrative file, or a recognitional file.

However, now Recanati faces a different query. When I later think about the woman, either via memory or via recognition, I will presumably have available all the information about her that I acquired from my earlier perceptual encounter this morning. But Recanati cannot take this as given. That earlier-acquired information was originally deposited in my perceptual demonstrative file, a file that is distinct from memory file and recognitional file, and indeed no longer exists. So there is no immediate guarantee that the information it contained will be available elsewhere.

Recanati's response is that the relevant information from the original demonstrative file will be *transferred* to the memory file and recognitional file. These latter files will inherit the information originally deposited in the perceptual demonstrative file, and so will be able to activate it in thought, and augment it via further encounters with the referent.

## 5 A simpler view

Well, all this adds up to a cogent story, but it strikes me as gratuitously complicated. Why have so many files when one would do? Here is an alternative picture. When I first encounter some item perceptually, I open a potentially permanent file in which to accumulate information about that item. That file outlasts the original encounter, and the same file is reactivated when I remember the relevant item or re-encounter it. The information earlier acquired is thus automatically available on those later occasions, and can be added to when new facts are acquired, without any need for any multiplication of files. (See Papineau 2006.)

On this view, the files that we open on first perceptual encounters, and in general on coming into any contact with any new item of thought, are *name-like*. They are designed to be permanent repositories of information about the item in question, and are not dependent on any particular sources of information about that object. In



this respect they are akin to Recanati's 'encyclopaedic' files, whose function is to gather information about some referent from whatever sources offer themselves.

Of course, there will be occasional cases where we open two such files for what is in fact the same referent. I encounter a woman (or a tree, or a chair, ...) and then later on I encounter it again without realizing that it is the same one. Or I already have a well-developed file for *John Perry*, say, and then don't realize that the man I am talking to at the party is him. But nothing in this requires us to multiply *types* of file. In such cases we will simply have two name-like files containing different bodies of information that we don't yet recognize are co-referential. And, if we do later realize that the two files refer to the same thing, then we can merge them, or more cautiously link them, and thereby bring the two bodies of information together.

Many of the name-like files that we open in this way will prove temporary. Not every perceived tree that we have occasion to think about — or chair, or coffee cup, or indeed person — will prove worthy of a lasting entry in our mental filing system (or turn out to be the same as something for which we already have a lasting entry). And in some such cases the files we have opened for these things will no doubt atrophy away and cease to be available for forming thoughts. But again this doesn't require us to multiply *types* of file. There is no need to view the files that get closed down as special demonstrative files which by their nature cease to exist once their defining epistemic relation is lost. From my perspective, there is no constitutive feature of the closed-down files that prevents them persisting indefinitely as repositories of information about their referents. The reason they get closed down is not that they cannot survive the loss of some epistemic relation, but simply that they have faded away from disuse.

## 6 More complications

Recanati's multiplication of files generates even more difficulties than those I have drawn attention to so far. Suppose I remember that *Paul Churchland is tall*. Then I recognize Paul at a conference *and* note that *Paul Churchland has a beard*. I conclude, quite logically, that *someone is tall and has a beard*. However, if my memory demonstrative

file and my recognitional file are different files, as Recanati's story has it, then this inference is invalid, for nothing yet guarantees that *Paul-remembered* is the same person as *Paul-recognized*. We would seem to need an additional premise, to the effect that *Paul-remembered* = *Paul-recognized*. (As Recanati puts it, arguments that use the *same* file throughout are de jure entitled to presumptions of co-reference. But when different files are in play we need extra information to establish co-reference de facto.)

However, as Recanati himself agrees, it is highly implausible that my argument that *someone is tall and has a beard* stands in need of any extra premise that *Paul-remembered* = *Paul-recognized*. When I see Paul at the conference, I surely recognize him *as* the Paul that I can remember, and don't need explicitly to judge that the Paul I am recognizing to have a beard is the same as the one I remember to be tall.

Recanati's response to this extra problem is to introduce a yet further file, a *recognitional-demonstrative* file. This file is activated when you re-encounter someone whom you could previously remember, and is distinguished by the fact it now enjoys *two* epistemically rewarding relationships with its referent, the memory relationship and the current perceptual relationship. As a result, *this* file will acquire both the information that *Paul Churchland is tall* and that *Paul Churchland has a beard*, and since this information is now housed in a single file we will have the desired de jure presumption of co-reference to draw the desired conclusion, without any need of an extra identity premise.

But once more this multiplication of files seems quite unnecessary, forced on us only by Recanati's commitment to the idea that different files are constituted by different epistemically rewarding relations to their referents. If we drop this idea, then there is nothing to stop us supposing that I have always had one name-like encyclopaedic Paul Churchland file that I originally formed when I first read *Scientific Realism and the Plasticity of Mind* in the early 1980s, and into which I have since placed all my Paul Churchland information acquired from whatever sources, including the perceptual sources I came to be able to use once I met him.

## 7 Why not be simple?

I can see no advantages in multiplying files in the way that Recanati does. When Recanati first defends the idea that demonstrative files die off, to be succeeded by memory files and recognitional files, with consequent transfers of information, he appeals, quoting Frege, to the fact that certain *linguistic expressions* need to be replaced in a corresponding way.

‘If someone wants to say today what he expressed yesterday using the word ‘today’, he will replace this word with ‘yesterday.’ (81)

Well, this is of course true. But it does not bear on the point at issue. We can all agree that we often *express* our thoughts using type *words* whose reference depends on the context of utterance, and thus need to shift type words to keep referring to the same entity when the context of utterance changes. But it does not follow that the mental files constituting the thought expressed need to be shifted similarly. (Indeed the rest of the quotation Recanati takes from Frege makes just this point: ‘Although the thought is the same its verbal expression must be different...’)

We often use indexical words when it is clear that there is nothing correspondingly indexical in our thoughts. We have already had the example of ‘you’ expressions of non-second-person thoughts. There are plenty of other similar cases. You don’t know Jane’s name, though I do; I know that you can see her, though I can’t. ‘*That woman* is an eminent barrister’ I tell you, invoking our mutual knowledge that you are looking at her. The expression may be indexical, but the thought I am expressing involves my permanent encyclopaedic file for Jane, not some temporary demonstrative file (remember that I myself can’t see her). There is nothing indexical about my thought. Even though I express my thought using the phrase ‘that woman’, my thought itself involves my permanent file for Jane, which does not shift reference with context in the same way as the phrase ‘that woman’ does.

Examples could be multiplied. There is a surprisingly widespread tendency to infer, from the use of indexical words to express some thought, that the thought expressed must be similarly indexically structured. But it does not take much reflection on cases to show

that this inference is generally invalid.

Is there any other reason to suppose that we have short-lived ‘demonstrative’ mental file tokens of the kind that Recanati posits? A strongly verificationist account of concepts might hold that every distinct criterion of application demands a distinct concept, in order to rule out irresolvable disagreements. But even the logical empiricists rejected this extreme ‘operationalism’ on the grounds that it would require an absurd proliferation of concepts, and were happy to recognize concepts with multiple criteria of application. Similarly, in the present context, there seems no rationale for requiring that every ‘epistemically rewarding relation’ generates its own mental file. Why not simply allow that many such relations can become attached to stable encyclopaedic files?

## 8 Perception and action

A rather different thought would be that we need to recognize demonstrative files, not because they have distinguished epistemic inputs, but because they have special behavioural outputs.

Suppose that I want to grab, or parry, or move away from or towards some specific physical item. To guide my behaviour, won’t I need to think of it as *that thing there* [*that I can see/feel/hear*]?

I think that this is indeed right, and that it does argue in favour of a re-usable type of mental term (*that thing there*), tokens of which are used on particular occasions to guide behaviour. But just as with the *current addressee* terms discussed earlier, there is no reason to view these terms as associated with any *files*, nor to suppose that they play any significant role in *thought*.

I take it that the direct control of fine-tuned motor behaviour is managed by an automatic sub-personal system, analogous to the system that determines which words we use to voice our thoughts. This motor control system will respond to directives like *grab that thing there* [*that I can see/feel/hear*], and to this extent will indeed deploy tokens of a type mental term *that thing there*. But this automatic motor control system is not in the business of storing information about the things it refers to, and so will not have any information-accumulating files associated with its tokens of *that thing there*.

Just as with the speech production system, the motor control system will need to interface with conceptual thought along the way to arriving at instructions like *grab that thing there*. Suppose I want to look up a passage in *Naming and Necessity*. I will need physically to get hold of the book and leaf through it. In order to do this I need to arrive at a judgement that *Naming and Necessity is that thing there*, which I can then put together with my desire to *grab Naming and Necessity* to generate the motor instruction *grab that thing there*.<sup>4</sup>

As before, there is no limit to the kind of conceptual information that might help generate the judgement *Naming and Necessity is that thing there*. In a simple case, I might simply see that *Naming and Necessity* is in its normal place in my bookshelf. But I might also note that a blue hardback is on the common room table, and remember that John Colleague had told me that he hadn't been able to find his copy of *Naming and Necessity* since he'd taken it to the common room to show the new lecturer that he didn't understand Kripke...

Still, once I have generated the information that *Naming and Necessity is that thing there*, by whatever means, and thence generated the instruction *grab that thing there*, I can simply hand matters over to the behaviour-control system. We can think of this system as representing the book as a grabbable item standing in a specific relation to my body, limbs and possible behaviour. To this extent the automatic system will be representing the book in the same way as it would represent any similarly sized and shaped item that is similarly grabbable. That is, it will be using a temporary token of a type representation, a type that may well be re-used on other occasions when a similar object is to be grabbed. But this automatic system won't treat this token as a file in which to accumulate information about its referent. After all, the behaviour-control system doesn't want to know anything about this referent, beyond its egocentric location and grabbability. That is why it is perfectly adequate for its purposes simply to represent it using a temporary token of the type *that thing there*.

<sup>4</sup> It is tempting to view conscious perception as the medium of this interface. It seems plausible that conscious perception simultaneously represents entities *conceptually*, as re-identifiable items about which we have stored information, and *egocentrically*, as items to which we bear such-and-such a current spatial relation.

I have already argued that personal-level conceptual thought has no good use for temporary files corresponding to such temporary tokens of *that thing there*. As I pointed out in section 6 above, at the personal level it makes far more sense to coin non-temporary name-like files for the things that we perceive, files which can outlast our perceptual contact with those items and in which we can preserve any information we glean about them. At the personal level, temporary files which do not outlast perceptual contact would simply generate extra cognitive work to no good advantage.

So, to sum up, reflection on the nature of behavioural guidance does indeed point to the existence of ‘perceptual demonstratives’ that come in types and whose tokens do not survive the loss of perceptual contact. But there is no reason why these terms should function as mental *files* of the kind Recanati is interested in. The function of these terms is to direct the motor control system to perform certain types of behaviour, not to accumulate information about their referents.

## 9 Conclusion

Recanati is greatly to be thanked for developing a detailed theory of mental files. His book will bring shape to the debate on this topic and define the agenda for future discussions. In my view, however, his emphasis on the ‘indexicality’ of mental files is misplaced. At best this emphasis is misleading, and at worst it leads to the postulation of far more mental files than are needed.<sup>5</sup>

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# Mental Files and their Identity Conditions

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It is increasingly common for a thinker's capacity for singular thought to be described in terms of that thinker having 'mental files' on the individuals thought about.<sup>1</sup> A mental file is supposed to have a dual role: to be thinker T's repository of information about an individual *a*, and to be the mode of presentation under which T thinks about *a*.

Mental files seem to offer an appealing account of what modes of presentation are. They allow us to think about modes of presentation by analogy with familiar paper-based or electronic filing systems. And because files are supposed to be psychologically-realised clusters of information, they offer an abstracta-free account of modes of presentation. Moreover, the suggestion that there are files is given 'empirical bite' (Recanati 2012: viii) by talk of 'files' in psychology (e.g. Kahneman et al. 1984, 1992) and linguistics (e.g. Heim 1983, 1988).

Positing mental files appears to require making substantive claims about mental representation. Nonetheless, the suggestion that singular thoughts deploy mental files is usually made in just a paragraph or two.<sup>2</sup> Recanati's *Mental Files* provides a welcome contrast. In it, he develops by some way the fullest account of mental files to date. He defends files from certain objections, and works through in detail how files can be used to resolve certain long-standing puzzles in philosophy of language.

According to Recanati's 'indexical' model, files are typed by the epistemically rewarding (ER) relation they are based on (Chapter 5).

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Strawson 1974; Perry 1980; Forbes 1990; Segal 2001; Dickie 2010; Jeshion 2010.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. Forbes 1990, Segal 2001, Jeshion 2010.



ER relations range from the simple (e.g. currently visually-attending an object), to the composite (e.g. currently visually-attending an object and remembering having visually-attended it in the past), right up to the higher-order relation that holds if a subject stands in any particular epistemic relation to an object.

A primary role for a file is to collect information about an object sourced through the ER relation that the file is based upon. To illustrate, suppose I have a visual-demonstrative file, based on my current visual relation with a bird, collecting information gathered through that relation. That visual-demonstrative file can also host information that is not acquired through my visual relation to the bird, as when a companion tells me something about the bird (77). However, the reference of the file's contents is determined by the context and the ER relation the file is based on, so the reference of the file is the unique source of the visual information in the file.

File types are characterized by their functional role in thought (246). Recanati specifies aspects of these functional roles in considerable detail. For example, Recanati considers what happens to a thinker's files when she comes to form an identity judgement (that is, she judges that  $a=b$ ). Suppose a thinker starts with a file  $F_a$  about  $a$ , and a file  $F_b$  about  $b$ . If she judges that  $a=b$ , then (depending on what kind of ER relations  $F_a$  and  $F_b$  are based on) she will either *merge*  $F_a$  and  $F_b$  to form a single file, or she will *link*  $F_a$  and  $F_b$ . When the thinker *links* files, she retains two distinct files but information can flow between those files (43-53).

However, when Recanati goes into this kind of detail, it is not always clear that he has provided a clear argument for the claims he makes, nor that he has fully explored either the consequences of his position or alternative ways of developing the mental files account of singular thought. And Recanati appears to hold back altogether from finalizing some of the most important details of any account of mental files. These tendencies can be illustrated by considering what Recanati says about an important component of an account of mental files: the identity conditions on mental files.

## 1 The importance of identity conditions

File identity plays an important role in mental file accounts of singular thought. We are interested in mental files because they are supposed to play the ‘mode of presentation’ role. Part of the mode of presentation role is to account for cognitive significance phenomena (viii). For example, we are supposed to be able to explain how John rationally believes both that *Hesperus is a star* and *Phosphorus is a planet* by saying that John has two distinct files on the planet Venus. The Hesperus-file and Phosphorus-file are both internally consistent (so John is rational), but they are mutually inconsistent. This kind of explanation turns on the distinction between a thinker having two mental files on a single object, and one mental file on a single object.

And file identity is particularly important for Recanati because he emphasises distinctions such as that between linking and merging files. To distinguish linking from merging just is to distinguish cases where an identity judgement results in a single file from cases where an identity judgement results in two files with information moving between the two.

However, as I argue in Section 2, Recanati does not offer a satisfactory account of the identity conditions on files. We might think that this isn’t such a problem — after all, we regularly manage to distinguish cases where there is one person in the room from cases where there are two persons in the room without the benefit of an adequate account of the identity conditions on persons. But the cases of *persons* and *files* aren’t analogous: we have an independent grasp on *persons* beyond the philosophical theory of persons. But we have no better grasp on *mental files* than that provided by the philosophical theory of files. The proponent of mental files cannot rely on any independent understanding of what it is to have one file or two distinct files, but must supply this understanding as part of the theory.

To make questions about the identity conditions on mental files clearer, use the idea of ‘*co-filing*’.

Pieces of information *i* and *j* are *co-filed* if and only if there is some file such that *i* and *j* are both members of that file.

My question is: under what conditions are pieces of information  $i$  and  $j$  co-filed at time  $t$ ?<sup>3</sup> As Recanati points out (96), we can ask about co-filing at two levels. At the level of symptoms, we ask: what are the symptoms of  $i$  and  $j$  being co-filed? At the level of explanation, we ask: what does explain those symptoms? That is, what does explain the fact that  $i$  and  $j$  are co-filed?

Files are supposed to be psychologically-realised clusters of information, so it seems likely that significant progress in the question of explanation will be made only with the help of psychology. Therefore, my focus will be on the *symptoms* of co-filing.

## 2 Identity conditions in Recanati's *Mental Files*

Recanati offers an initial account of the identity conditions on files:

‘To say that there are two distinct mental files is to say that information in one file is insulated from information in the other file. Files are a matter of information clustering. Clustering takes place when all the information derives from the same source, through the same ER relation...’ (42)

But this answer is only provisional. It is merely a norm that information in a file derives from a single source (that is, that co-filed information originates in a single object). In practice, co-filed information may derive from multiple objects or from no object at all (63). And linking files overcomes the informational-insulation of the linked files even whilst they retain their distinct identities (43).

Although Recanati's initial account of the identity conditions on files is only provisional, he does not go on to give a clear indication of what his final account is. And as I argue in Sections 3 and 4, if we explore plausible routes Recanati could take, we find no account of identity conditions compatible with all of Recanati's other claims about mental files.

To structure the plausible routes available to Recanati for a final account of cofiling, consider how we interpret his claim that:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> From now on, I'll take the qualification 'at time  $t$ ' as read.

<sup>4</sup> This quotation is from a section outlining a now-abandoned response to circularity objections to file accounts. However, Recanati indicates that the response was abandoned because it gives only a symptom of co-filing without ex-

[T]wo pieces of information occur in the same file just in case *the subject uses them* (or is disposed to use them) in a certain way, namely, in an ‘integrated’ manner. [Footnote – For example, the subject who has the predicates ‘is well-read’ and ‘is bald’ in his Cicero-file is thereby disposed to infer that some bald man is well-read.]’ (96)

I assume that Recanati’s examples indicate that treating information in an integrated manner means being disposed to reason *as if* that information is about the same thing.<sup>5</sup> So two pieces of information occur in the same file just in case the subject is disposed to reason *as if* that information is about the same thing.

However, we should remember that Recanati distinguishes between a weak and strong form of reasoning *as if* the information is about the same thing. It is not clear which one he takes to be a symptom of co-filing.

To understand the weak/strong distinction, we need to understand Recanati’s distinction between (i) judgments of identity and (ii) presumptions of identity. When a thinker comes to *judge* that  $a=b$ , that thinker will be disposed to reason *as if* information about  $a$  is about the same thing as information about  $b$ , *via* the identity premise  $a=b$ . For example, if a thinker has the information *Cicero is well-read* and *Tully is bald*, and judges that  $Cicero=Tully$ , then she is disposed to infer that *some bald man is well-read*, but only in virtue of the identity judgement  $Cicero=Tully$ .

But Recanati rehearses Cambell’s 1998 argument that as well as judgments of identity, there must also be presumptions of identity. Presumptions of identity allow a thinker to ‘trade on identity’, that is to treat information as if it is about the same thing *without* any explicit or implicit identity judgement. To illustrate: a thinker is using a presumption of identity when she has the information *Cicero is well-read* and *Cicero is bald*, and is disposed to infer that *some bald man is well-read* without employing any identity judgement at all.

On the weak form of what it is for information to be used in an ‘integrated manner’, information  $i$  and  $j$  is used in an integrated

plaining it — not because it got the symptoms of co-filing wrong.

<sup>5</sup> At least for information that is at most about one thing. Matters become more complex when we consider reasoning that is about more than one thing. Following Recanati (50), I abstract away from such concerns.

manner when the thinker is disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing, regardless of whether this is a result of a judgement of identity or a presumption of identity. On the strong form, *i* and *j* is used in an ‘integrated manner’ *only* when the thinker is disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing in virtue of a presumption of identity.

These distinct forms correspond to two ways we can interpret Recanati’s suggestion that *i* and *j* occur in the same file just in case the thinker is disposed to use *i* and *j* in an ‘integrated manner’.

The weak reading gives one possible answer to my question about the identity conditions of mental files:

CF-1 *i* and *j* are co-filed if and only if the thinker is disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing (whether in virtue of a presumption or judgement of identity).

But the strong reading gives a different account of identity conditions:

CF-2 *i* and *j* are co-filed if and only if the thinker is disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing in virtue of a presumption of identity.

But neither CF-1 nor CF-2 are obviously compatible with all of Recanati’s other claims about files.

### 3 Difficulties with the weak reading (CF-1)

Given close connections between a thinker’s disposition to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing and her being said to take it to be the case that *i* and *j* are about the same thing, it appears that Recanati had CF-1 or something very like it in mind when he wrote:

‘Two pieces of information go into the same file if they are taken to concern the same object.’ (101)

However, CF-1 sits unhappily with Recanati’s claim that mental files are reference-determining modes of presentation (viii). In outline, there is reason to think that if files are reference-determining modes of presentation, then all information in a single file is coreferential in a particularly strong, ‘*de jure*’ way. But CF-1 implies that not all

information in a file is *de jure* coreferential.

Recanati characterizes *de jure* coreference between linguistic expressions:<sup>6</sup>

‘I characterize *de jure* co-reference in terms of a priori knowledge of (conditional) co-reference: two terms are *de jure* co-referential just in case anyone who understands the utterance in which they occur knows that they co-refer if they refer at all.’ (110)

Recanati also discusses *de jure* coreference in thought, and between pieces of information (e.g. 94, 120), but gives no explicit characterization of this. Extrapolating from his characterization of *de jure* coreference for linguistic terms gives a (very rough) characterization of *de jure* coreference for information:

*i* and *j* *de jure* corefer if and only if the thinker knows *a priori* that if *i* and *j* are about something they are about the same thing.<sup>7</sup>

It is not the case that: if I take *i* and *j* to be about the same thing or reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing, then *i* and *j* are *de jure* coreferential. Suppose I am in the garden. I hear a bird singing and also see a bird singing. I gather *p* from the seen-bird and *q* from the heard-bird. After leaving the garden I judge *that-heard bird* = *that-seen bird*. In virtue of this identity judgement, I take it that *p* and *q* are about the same thing, and I am disposed to reason as such. But I retain my ability to think independently about *that-heard bird* and *that-seen bird*, that is, it remains possible that *p* and *q* are about different birds.<sup>8</sup> Merely judging that *that-heard bird* = *that-seen bird* does not grant me *a priori* knowledge that *p* and *q* are about the same thing (if about anything at all). Hence *p* and *q* are not *de jure* coreferential.

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion of how best to characterize *de jure* coreference, see Pinillos 2011 and Goodsell (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Again, I abstract away from considering information which is about more than one object.

<sup>8</sup> Recanati and I agree that (at least at first) I retain my ability to think independently of *that-seen bird* and *that-heard bird* (45). My own evidence for this position is just the fact that if it turned out that the identity judgement *that-seen bird* = *that-heard bird* were false, I would have a false belief of the seen-bird that it is the same as the heard-bird, and of the heard-bird that it is the same as the seen-bird. Those false beliefs are only available if I retain the ability to think independently of the heard-bird and the seen-bird.

But by CF-1, because my identity judgement *that-heard bird = that-seen bird* disposes me to reason as if *p* and *q* are about the same thing, the identity judgement results in *p* and *q* being stored in the same mental file.<sup>9</sup> None of the considerations I raised to reach this conclusion turn on the irrationality of the thinker, so putting the pieces together, we find that if we adopt CF-1, we must accept that a rational thinker can have co-filed information that is not *de jure* coreferential.

This conclusion corresponds to Recanati's claim that if information-pieces *i* and *j* are in the same file as the result of information flowing between linked-files, *i* and *j* are not *de jure* coreferential, but if *i* and *j* occur in the same file without a prior linking operation, they are *de jure* coreferential (94-95).

However, I will show that there is reason to think that if we understand '*a priori* knowledge' in a way that allows *a priori* knowledge of conditional coreference to be widespread, then so long as files are reference-determining modes of presentation, all information co-filed by a rational thinker must be *de jure* coreferential.

Thinkers rarely think explicitly about their information. This means that if all information which occurs in the same file without the benefit of a prior linking operation is to count as *de jure* coreferential, the *a priori* knowledge required for *de jure* coreference must be highly idealized, relying on the thinker's disposition to use that information rather than her explicit beliefs about the information. A very plausible option is that a thinker counts as *a priori* knowing that *i* and *j* are about the same thing (if they are about anything at all) if (i) *i* and *j* are about the same thing (if they are about anything at all), and (ii) the thinker acts as if (i) holds.

Recanati gives only a brief introduction to modes of presentation, largely relying on his audience's familiarity with the idea.

<sup>9</sup> By CF-1, *p* and *q* must be stored in the same file. On Recanati's picture, I retain two distinct files on the bird (because the bird is still given in two distinct ways, one in auditory memory and one in visual memory). To reconcile these claims, we must suppose *p* and *q* are both stored in two files. That is, the very same pieces of information are simultaneously in two files (rather than simply duplicated in each file). According to CF-1, the only way a thinker can retain two separate files of duplicate information is if she does not reason as if that duplicate information is about the same thing.

‘Modes of presentation are supposed to account for ‘cognitive significance’, for clustering/coordination of information, and for reference determination.’ (viii)

The reference-determining role of modes of presentation means that when *i* and *j* are associated with the same mode of presentation, *i* and *j* are about the same thing (if about anything at all).

‘Cognitive significance’ considerations relate to how a rational thinker might have apparently inconsistent attitudes (for example, when a thinker sincerely assents to ‘Hesperus is bright’ whilst doubting that ‘Phosphorus is bright’). The suggestion is that it is rational to take apparently inconsistent attitudes just so long as those attitudes are associated with different modes of presentation. The idea is that a thinker is rationally licensed to treat those attitudes as potentially about different objects just in case they are associated with different modes of presentation. But then the thinker is only rationally licensed to treat *i* and *j* as potentially being about different objects if they are associated with different modes of presentation.<sup>10</sup> So if a rational thinker associates *i* and *j* with the same mode of presentation, she will not behave as if *i* and *j* are potentially about different objects, but she will behave as if it is the case that *i* and *j* are about the same thing (if about anything at all).

Putting the pieces of the mode of presentation role together, we find that if a rational thinker associates *i* and *j* with the same mode of presentation, then (i) *i* and *j* are about the same thing (if they are about anything at all), and (ii) the thinker acts as if (i) holds. But this is enough to meet the conditions for *a priori* knowledge of conditional coreference. So if *i* and *j* are associated with the same mode of presentation, then *i* and *j* are *de jure* coreferential. And this means that if, as CF-1 implies, not all information in the same mental file is *de jure* coreferential, files cannot play the mode of presentation role.

CF-1 is incompatible with files playing the mode of presentation role. The fact that files fill the mode of presentation role is central to our interest in files, making this a significant difficulty with CF-1. And even rejecting CF-1, there is still a difficulty for Recanati: he

<sup>10</sup> A corollary of this position is that if *i* and *j* start out in the same mental file, to suppose that *i* and *j* are about different things, the thinker must move *i* and *j* to distinct files.



explicitly claims that it is not the case that if  $i$  and  $j$  are in the same mental file, then  $i$  and  $j$  are *de jure* coreferential (94-95). And it is this claim that seems inconsistent with files playing the mode of presentation role.

This line of argument could be resisted by providing a suitable alternative account of the *a priori* knowledge required for *de jure* coreference, or of *de jure* coreference itself. However, although these ideas play an important role in Recanati's *Mental Files*, they are not fully explained, making it difficult to see what the suitable alternative account would be.

#### 4 Difficulties with the weak reading (CF-2)

The weak reading of the claim that  $i$  and  $j$  are co-filed just in case the thinker is disposed to treat them in an 'integrated manner' gave CF-1, which turned out to be incompatible with files playing the mode of presentation role. We might hope for more success with the strong reading (CF-2).

CF-2  $i$  and  $j$  are co-filed if and only if the thinker is disposed to reason as if  $i$  and  $j$  are about the same thing in virtue of a presumption of identity.

In places, Recanati appears to have something like CF-2 in mind. Introducing the distinction between presumptions and judgments of identity, Recanati writes:

'this gives us a criterion for telling apart the cases in which there is a single file and the cases in which there are two. If the subject 'trades upon identity' and proceeds to integrate various pieces of information directly, without appealing to a further identity premise, that means that there is a single mode of presentation.' (83)

How we evaluate CF-2 depends on how we understand 'presumption of identity'. One option (the *information-gathering* option) is that there is a presumption of identity between  $i$  and  $j$  just in case the thinker is disposed to reason as if  $i$  and  $j$  are about the same object without ever having formed an identity judgement implying that  $i$  and  $j$  are about the same object, and has never called into question whether  $i$  and  $j$  are about the same object. The other option (the *current-reasoning* option) is that there is a presumption of identity between  $i$  and  $j$  just

if the thinker is disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same object without using an additional premise implying that *i* and *j* are about the same thing. The disambiguations come apart in at least one direction if it is possible that though *i* and *j* were initially treated as about the same thing in virtue of an identity judgement, that identity judgement can become so embedded in the thinker's reasoning that she is disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing without deploying an additional identity premise in her reasoning.

Recanati's own focus on whether a thinker has ever made an identity judgement suggests the information-gathering understanding. But Campbell's 1988 argument, reiterated by Recanati, treats presumptions of identity as a kind of reasoning, suggesting the current-reasoning understanding.

The disambiguations of 'presumption of identity' give corresponding disambiguations of CF-2:

CF-2<sub>ig</sub> *i* and *j* are co-filed if and only if the thinker is disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing in virtue of an information-gathering presumption of identity between *i* and *j*.

CF-2<sub>cr</sub> *i* and *j* are co-filed if and only if the thinker is disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing in virtue of a current-reasoning presumption of identity between *i* and *j*.

CF-2<sub>ig</sub> runs into trouble with file merging and linking. Judgements of identity result in files being linked or merged. Merging results in originally non-co-filed information being co-filed (46). And linking is supposed to enable information to flow from one file into another.

'Now, when two distinct files are linked... information from one file can flow freely into the other, and be integrated with the information there.' (94)

CF-2<sub>ig</sub> is ruled out as an option for Recanati, and for anyone who allows that files sometimes merge. Information pieces *i* and *j* may end up co-filed even though the thinker is only disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing because of a prior judgement of identity.

Moreover, CF-2<sub>ig</sub> is independently unattractive as an account of the identity conditions on mental files. If mental files are supposed to capture and account for how we reason *now*, their identity condi-

tions should not focus on how information was gathered, but rather on what can be done now with that information.

This leaves CF-2<sub>cr</sub>. CF-2<sub>cr</sub> looks to be the most attractive available account of file-identity. It links identity conditions on files to how we reason *now*. And importantly, there appears to be no reason to think that CF-2<sub>cr</sub> allows for *i* and *j* to be co-filed without being *de jure* coreferential. And more generally there appears to be no argument that CF-2<sub>cr</sub> gives identity conditions on files that are incompatible with files playing the mode of presentation role.

However, although it appears to have been possible to reconstruct an acceptable account of the identity conditions on files, it is not clear that CF-2<sub>cr</sub> is consistent with all of Recanati's other claims.

First, CF-2<sub>cr</sub> appears to conflict with Recanati's claim, quoted above, that merely taking *i* and *j* to be about the same thing is sufficient for their being co-filed (101). Second, CF-2<sub>cr</sub> is incompatible with his suggestion that when *i* and *j* are co-filed due to linking, there is no presumption of identity between *i* and *j* (94-95). According to CF-2<sub>cr</sub>, co-filing requires presumptions of identity. And third, CF-2<sub>cr</sub> appears to conflict with Recanati's claim that when 'two distinct files are linked, information is allowed to flow freely between them' (94). Instead, CF-2<sub>cr</sub> suggests that linking could only result in information moving from one file to another when the identity judgement is so embedded that the thinker starts using current-reasoning presumptions of identity in her reasoning.

However, it is not clear how problematic this is for Recanati's account of files. Recanati does not provide clear arguments for the three claims about mental representation that CF-2<sub>cr</sub> is incompatible with, and as discussed, he does not explore fully all their consequences.<sup>11</sup> As a result, it is not clear to what extent these claims

<sup>11</sup> The closest that there is to an explanation is that to count as concepts, files must satisfy the Generality Constraint (see Evans 1982), that is 'a file should be hospitable to any predicative concept in the subject's possession' (65). We might attempt to meet this constraint by saying that a file can host information acquired through linking as well as through the ER relation the file is based on. But arguably, this does not help the file to meet the generality constraint – if a file can only host information sourced through linking or the ER relation, we still have some limitations on what predicates the file can contain. For example, if I never link my 'moon' file to a file containing '- is a mammal', I will never be able to host the

are important to Recanati's picture, and to what extent they can be abandoned without cost.

## 5 Conclusion

I have argued that it is important for Recanati to have an account of the identity conditions on files, and have shown that Recanati does not have a clear final account of these identity conditions. I have also shown that neither of the plausible routes Recanati could take are fully compatible with his other claims about mental files, though I have pointed out that the fact that Recanati has not argued for all details of his mental file theory means that it is not clear whether this incompatibility is a significant concern.

As Recanati rightly points out:

'We investigate the phenomena by constructing models for them, and we follow the model where it leads to see, precisely, *where* it leads.' (50)

But this does not mean that we should construct just any model. We need some argument for why we construct the model as we do, or at least a comparison of the model with its competitors. Helpfully, Recanati finishes the book with a comparison of his semantic framework with alternative frameworks purporting to explain the same semantic phenomena without mental files. But behind Recanati's semantic framework is what appears to be a substantive and in places detailed theory about mental representation. It would have been helpful for Recanati to include more discussion of the relative strengths of this part of the mental file picture — or a disclaimer that despite appearances his is not a substantive theory of mental representation, and with it an explanation of what can be retained of the semantic framework without taking 'mental files' to be a substantive psychological posit.<sup>12</sup>

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predicate '*is a mammal*' in my 'moon' file. The Generality Constraint is better met just by allowing that a file can host any predicate in virtue of the thinker supposing that the subject of the file satisfies the predicate.

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# The SELF File and Immunity to Error Through Misidentification

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There are two diverging views on singular thoughts: a ‘latitudinarian’ or ‘liberal’ one (Sosa 1970, Hawthorne & Manley 2012) appealing to Fregeans, on which thinking a *de dicto* proposition that predicates some property *f* with respect to some individuating concept *a* of *x* suffices for having a singular thought about *x*; and a narrower one attractive to Millians, on which it requires *acquaintance* — some special relation binding the thinker with the object of reference, a causal psychological relation like perception or memory. In *Mental Files*, François Recanati advances a liberalization of the acquaintance view which, even if I do not find it fully convincing, I will not question here; I will assume that it deals well with Millian concerns from a perspective hospitable to the Fregean.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in the 1960s and 1970s Castañeda, Perry and Lewis argued that thoughts about oneself ‘as oneself’ — *de se* thoughts — raise special issues. In the first section I briefly survey the data, and Perry’s and Lewis’s contrasting proposals: while Lewis aims to account for *de se* thoughts by taking the subject away from such contents, which are thus properties instead of complete traditional proposi-

<sup>1</sup> Recanati allows that one may have a singular thought when one opens a file merely on the basis of descriptive information. Thus, Leverrier had singular thoughts about Neptune when he introduced the name, as I (2008) have argued is correct. However, against what I (2010) think, Recanati does not allow for singular thoughts in cases of merely imagined acquaintance, or in cases in which the acquaintance is expected but never materializes, because there is no object or because the subject never comes to be in the relation with it: ‘The acquaintance relation may be anticipated without undermining the reference relation which is based on it, but if the acquaintance relation never comes about, the reference relation does not either’ (2012a: 164).

tions, Perry offers an account compatible with traditional views. I also discuss Stalnaker's argument for a form of the latter view, and Recanati's take on it in *Mental Files*. In the second section I take up Recanati's (2007, 2009) arguments for a subjectless view of the content of 'implicit' *de se* thought, on the basis that we can thus better explain the phenomenon of *immunity to error through misidentification*. I argue that this is not the case, and I suggest that such a view is in tension with Recanati's mental files approach to *de re* thought in general and the SELF concept in particular. I will thus take advantage of the occasion of this symposium on *Mental Files* to air a perplexity I have been harboring with regard to the compatibility of Recanati's Lewisian account of *de se* contents and the mental files approach to content-ingredients he has been developing in his work, which are fully articulated in *Mental Files*.

### 1 *De se* thoughts

Following Castañeda 1966, Perry 1979 and Lewis 1979 showed that thoughts about oneself 'as oneself' — *de se* thoughts — require special treatment, and advanced rival accounts. Perry introduces the problem with a celebrated example:

'I once followed a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, pushing my cart down the aisle on one side of a tall counter and back the aisle on the other, seeking the shopper with the torn sack to tell him he was making a mess. With each trip around the counter, the trail became thicker. But I seemed unable to catch up. Finally it dawned on me. I was the shopper I was trying to catch.' (Perry 1979: 33)

Before his epiphany, Perry has, according to latitudinarian accounts of *de re* thought, a belief about himself (under the individuating concept *the shopper with the torn sack*) to the effect that he was making a mess; but this is insufficient for him to have the reflexive, self-conscious belief that he would express in accepting 'I am making a mess', the one that leads him to rearrange the torn sack in the cart.

As Perry points out, it will not help to opt for a narrower account of *de re* thought:

'Suppose there were mirrors at either end of the counter so that as I pushed my cart down the aisle in pursuit I saw myself in the mirror. I take what I see to be the reflection of the messy shopper going up the aisle on the other side, not realizing that what I am really seeing is a

reflection of a reflection of myself.' (Perry 1979: 42)

Given that he is perceiving himself in the mirror, the narrower conception allows for Perry to have a *de re* belief about himself, to the effect that he is making a mess; but this still falls short of the reflective, self-conscious belief manifested by acceptance of 'I am making a mess' and the cleaning up behavior. Castañeda's amnesiac cases suggest that rich descriptive concepts are also unnecessary; for they *are* able to think about themselves in a fully self-conscious reflexive way, by using and understanding 'I' and related expressions for first-personal reference while knowing precious little about themselves.

Propositional attitudes and speech acts are individuated by representational contents that are taken to be propositions with absolute truth-values: given a full specification of a possible way for the world to be, propositions thus understood get a definite truth value with respect to it. Alternatively, propositions can be simply identified as classes of possible worlds, those with respect to which they are true. Thus, in believing that snow is white one represents worlds in which snow is white, and places the actual world among them. Lewis and Perry take *de se* thoughts to question this picture.

Lewis proposes to abandon the traditional theory of contents, and to take them to be *properties* instead of propositions: entities which are true or false, given a full characterization of a way for the world to be, only relative in addition to a subject and a time. Alternatively, the contents of propositional attitudes are, or at least select, not just classes or worlds, but rather classes of *centered worlds*: worlds together with a designated subject and a time. In coming to believe what he would express by accepting 'I am making a mess', Perry locates himself among all subjects making a mess at a given time and world.

On the traditional conception of contents the actual world is not part of the believed content, but in believing a proposition one ascribes it to the actual world at which the believing occurs; it is the attitude of believing, or the act of judging, which, as it were, as part of its 'illocutionary' nature, brings the world at which it occurs as the relevant one to evaluate the truth of the belief. A mere *imagining* with the same content would not similarly bring the actual world to bear, because imaginings are not evaluated as true or otherwise relative to whether the actual world where the imagining occurs is



correctly represented by their contents. Similarly and by analogy, on Lewis's view it is the attitude of believing itself, as opposed to its content, which brings to bear the subject and time relevant for the evaluation of its truth or falsity. Subjects who come to believe what they would express in English by uttering 'I am making a mess' believe the same contents, in the way that subjects who believe that snow is white at different worlds believe the same contents. This provides a nice solution to the initial problem of *de se* thought: if no descriptive conception of the subject (including ones allowing for *de re* thought on the narrow conception N) is sufficient for *de se* thought, and none appears to be needed, this is on Lewis's view because the subject is *not represented as part of the content*, but is brought to bear for purposes of evaluation by the act of judging itself, not by its content. These *perspectival contents* that Lewis's account posits have made a strong comeback to the philosophical scene in recent years, in the so-called *relativist* accounts advanced by writers such as Kölbel 2004, Egan 2007, 2010 or McFarlane 2003 for different areas of discourse: judgments of taste, epistemic modals, future-tense claims on the assumption of indeterminism, among others.

On Perry's alternative view, we should distinguish the *content* or object of the belief from the belief *state* through which it is accessed. The content is just a traditional proposition, *de dicto* or *de re*. The state is a specific condition of the subject, by being in which a given content is believed. Contents help to account for the role that propositional attitudes constitutively have in appraising the rationality of the subject, the adequacy of his beliefs to his evidence and of his actions to his beliefs and desires, the desirability of his desires, etc. But only in a coarse-grained way: for a full account of rational action we need not just the content, but also the specific *state* through which the content is accessed. In line with Frege's puzzles, the previous cases involving *de se* thoughts show that traditional contents are not enough to appraise rationality and cognitive significance; ways of accessing them should also be taken into consideration.

Belief states themselves must hence have some kind of meaning or significance, if they are to have a role in appraising the rationality of actions or inferences. In his original account, Perry 1979 appeals to Kaplan's 1989 distinction between *character* and *content* to characterize the significance of states. Utterances of 'he is making a mess' and

'I am making a mess' might have, in their contexts, the same singular content, but they have different characters. Similarly, Perry's belief state when he looks at what is in fact his own reflection in the mirror, and later when he catches up, are different states with the same content; given the differences in rational action to be expected from one and the other, states themselves must have a role in the explanation of action and the cognitive significance of the belief in virtue of their character-like meaning.

Now, Stalnaker (1981: 145-8) objected to accounts such as Lewis's and the original one by Perry just presented on the grounds that they cannot capture an 'informational content' that is an essential feature of utterances including essential indexicals, and advanced an alternative account appealing to the 'diagonal propositions' that he (1978) had introduced earlier. Like Perry, I prefer to think in terms of structured propositions, as opposed to possible-world ones (and in fact take them to be ontologically more fundamental), so I will not present the Perry-Stalnaker debate in terms of diagonal propositions; I will present it instead in terms of what I take to be essentially equivalent token-reflexive structured propositions.<sup>2</sup>

Let us imagine a variation on Perry's supermarket story in which, contemplating the situation and realizing what is going on, a kind shopper warns Perry, which leads to Perry's epiphany. He thereby comes to accept 'I am making a mess' after being told 'you are making a mess'. On Perry's original view the *contents* of the beliefs thereby expressed are the ordinary, coarse-grained *de re* propositions which are conveniently identical for the two utterances. However, as we know, this singular content does not account for what Perry comes to know after the epiphany: he already believed it beforehand. Nevertheless, it seems that whatever explains Perry's distinctive behavior after the epiphany was in this variation of the story communicated to him by the other shopper's utterance.

How could Perry's or Lewis's proposals account for this? The character-like contents corresponding to the shopper's utterance, 'you are making a mess', are very different from those corresponding to the ones by means of which Perry would express his acquired knowledge, 'I am making a mess'. The properties that the shopper

<sup>2</sup> The reader might find further elaboration in my 2006a.

and Perry rationally self-attribute differ (*addressing someone who is making a mess*, *making a mess*, respectively), and the corresponding perspectival contents are similarly different. Alternatively put, it would be absurd for Perry to ascribe to himself the property that the samaritan shopper expresses — to wit, that of *being addressing someone who is making a mess*. For Lewis and Perry to deal with this consistently with their accounts, they should elaborate them so as to explain how it is that, in virtue of the shopper expressing a certain *de se* content, Perry comes to learn a different one.

On the simplest account of successful communication, the episode should be explained by Perry's learning *the very same content* that the samaritan shopper expressed. This is what Stalnaker's account in terms of diagonal propositions or token-reflexive contents purports to offer. We can think of the meaning of indexicals like 'I' or 'you' as token-reflexive rules, which, given a particular token, fix its referent relative to some contextual property: being the speaker who produced it, or its (most salient) addressee. This provides a descriptive (but not purely general) conception of the referent; in the case of the samaritan utterance of 'you are making a mess', we have a token-reflexive conception associated with the particular case of 'you', *the addressee of that token*.<sup>3</sup> Both the samaritan shopper and Perry can share this way of representing him. So we have here an ordinary content, determining a traditional proposition, which is communicated from one to the other: the one we could explicitly articulate with 'the addressee of that token of 'you' is making a mess'.

Perry 1993 accepts that, for the kind of consideration about informational content that Stalnaker pointed out, these token-reflexive contents provide a better representation of the significance of belief-states than the one he had earlier suggested in terms of Kaplanian characters. As Perry 2006 explains, however, this refined version of his account can be taken in the proper way if it is to provide an at least *prima facie* successful account for *de se* thoughts. On this interpretation, the proposal is just a refined way of understanding the significance of belief-states; but an adequate account of *de se* contents (hence of the nature of attitudes and speech acts in general) still re-

<sup>3</sup> I have discussed the role of these contents in detail elsewhere (1998, 2000, 2006a).

quires the distinction between belief-contents and belief-states (ways of accessing the content). The modification of Perry's original proposal lies only in that now the significance of belief-states is characterized in the traditional propositional way that token-reflexive contents afford.

This still leaves us with the task of explaining the nature of states and contents and their interrelation. Perry has an account on which states are mental particulars that may be classified by their 'official contents' (the coarse-grained singular propositions) and also by a plurality of other finer-grained propositional contents, useful for different explanatory purposes. In my view, the appeal to the state/content distinction in the case of *de se* thoughts is just a particular case of the proper way to understand a Fregean view on the attitudes, which I (2000, 2006a) have argued requires ascribing a presuppositional nature to reference-fixing senses. I cannot elaborate on the details of my own view of *de se* senses here.<sup>4</sup>

Recanati (2012a: 211-18) provides an interesting account of the communication of *de se* contents that is compatible with this. On his proposal, the concepts/mental files that the speaker (the samaritan shopper in the variation on Perry's original story above) expresses and the hearer (Perry) comes to entertain as a result differ, as it should be, for Perry's is his own SELF concept, while this is not the one in the thought that his informant gives voice to. However, the latter evokes the former, because they share something: the linguistic sense of the token indexical that the speaker uses, *the addressee of this very token of 'you'*. I will come back to this below when I consider the consistency of Recanati's perspectival content account of *de se* thoughts with his views on the SELF file.

<sup>4</sup> Peacocke (1983: Chapter 5; 2008: Chapter 3; 2012), Higginbotham 2003 and Howell 2006 defend different proposals I am sympathetic to. On all of them, as Peacocke (2012: 145) puts it, it is constitutive of the SELF concept as it occurs in a *de se* attitude-state that it refers to the thinker of the attitude. A simple version of this suggestion assumes a language of thought; the difference between the state individuated by a sentence corresponding to 'I am making a mess' and another individuated by 'the addressee of that token is making a mess' is that only the former includes an expression whose reference rule aims to pick out its subject.

## 2 *De se* thoughts and immunity to error through misidentification

Recanati 2007 argues for a (moderate) relativist account of some contents; in particular, he argues for a perspectival content account of ‘basic’ or ‘implicit’ *de se* thoughts, on which their possible-world-contents must be given by *centered* worlds, along the lines of Lewis’s. Recanati offers a new argument for this sort of account; he defends it on the basis of observations about the phenomenon that Shoemaker characterized as *immunity to error through misidentification* (‘IEM’ henceforth):<sup>5</sup>

‘to say that a statement ‘*a* is *j*’ is subject to error through misidentification relative to the term ‘*a*’ means that the following is possible: the speaker knows some particular thing to be *j*, but makes the mistake of asserting ‘*a* is *j*’ because, and only because, he mistakenly thinks that the thing he knows to be *j* is what *a* refers to.’ (Shoemaker 1968: 557)<sup>6</sup>

I will argue that IEM does not support the perspectivalist view, and suggest that rather the opposite is true. In more recent work, Recanati (2009 and 2012b) acknowledges some of the points that I will make, but he still defends the perspectivalist proposal on the basis of considerations about IEM. I will argue that they are unconvincing.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, I will argue that the Mental Files take on the SELF concept and proto-concept is in tension with the account.

Consider the moment in Perry’s story when he sees what in fact is his image in a mirror with a torn sack. Imagine another variation on the story, in which this is in fact the ground for Perry’s epiphany, because this time he recognizes himself in the mirror; suppose then that he judges on this basis what he would express by ‘I am making

<sup>5</sup> Shoemaker suggests that IEM captures some of Wittgenstein’s points about uses of ‘I’ ‘as subject’ vs. uses of ‘I’ ‘as object’ in the *Blue Book*.

<sup>6</sup> Pryor 1999 offers an alternative propositional characterization, free from concerns that this linguistic characterization — useful as a starting point — might raise. Pryor’s characterization also highlights the relativity to ways of reaching the relevant judgment and to normal circumstances that, as the examples below will make clear, any proper characterization should contemplate: a judgment can be IEM if made on a given epistemic basis in normal circumstances, and not if made on different bases or under abnormal conditions.

<sup>7</sup> Stanley (2011: 91-3) and Morgan 2012 make related objections to Recanati.

a mess'. Made on such epistemic grounds, the claim is exposed to the error that Shoemaker identifies: Perry might have been wrong in identifying himself with the person whose back is reflected in the mirror; he would then be right that someone is pushing a cart with a torn sack and is thus making a mess, but wrong to think that it is he who is making a mess. In the original version of the story, the epiphany comes instead from Perry seeing that he is pushing a cart with a torn sack. Consider Perry's physical self-ascription, 'I am pushing a cart with a torn sack', made on the basis of his visual perception of the scene around him; or his psychological self-ascription, 'I see that I am pushing a cart with a torn sack'. Neither of these claims appears to be open to that sort of error; nor is the thought he expresses by 'I am making a mess', when based on such epistemic grounds.

These examples show that, if there is a connection between *de se* thoughts and IEM, it must be indirect; for the thoughts Perry expresses by accepting 'I am making a mess' in both cases are *de se*. The subtler connection might be this: 'I'-thoughts that are IEM are *fundamentally de se*; those that are not are only *de se derivatively*, in that, in making them by using the first-person concept, the speaker identifies himself as the object of other, *fundamentally de se* thoughts. Recanati's claims based on IEM on behalf of the property account of *de se* thought concern only the *fundamentally de se*. He (2007, 177) thus distinguishes *explicit* from *implicit de se* thoughts. The former are attitudes to traditional, full-fledged propositions, the latter to truncated perspectival propositions.

Various writers including John Campbell, Christopher Peacocke and Crispin Wright have developed an account of IEM suggested by Evans that Wright 2012 calls 'the Simple Account'. On the Simple Account, non-IEM thoughts are (roughly) thoughts the structure of whose epistemic justification depends on an identity claim;<sup>8</sup> thus, for instance, Perry's judgment 'I am making a mess' in the first version of the story in the second paragraph of this section, which was not IEM, depends on Perry's identity judgment, *I am that person reflected*

<sup>8</sup> I say 'roughly' because there are further cases that are also not IEM but whose justification exhibit a more complex inferential structure, including the cases that Pryor 1999 calls 'which-misidentification'; cf. also Recanati 2012 and Wright 2012.

*in the mirror*. This is why he might coherently consider that, although the existential ‘part’ of his claim — that someone is making a mess — is correct, he is mistaken in the identification, and it is not in fact he himself but someone else who is making a mess. On the Simple Account, IEM thoughts are negatively characterized as those that are not thus dependent on an identity claim.

This account crucially relies on the notion of *doxastic* justification, hence on the problematic *basing* relation. There are well-known discrepancies among contemporary epistemologists that have immediate resonance for our present issue. Certainly, that a judgment A is epistemically based on a certain claim B cannot require that the subject phenomenologically experiences his coming to judge A as a result of an inference in part from B; for Perry might well lack such inferential phenomenology in the above example of non-IEM thought. Consider Moore’s (in-)famous inference, (i) here are two hands, (ii) if there are hands, there is an external world, hence (iii) there is an external world. Given its validity, someone who judges (i) is thus rationally committed to (iii); but there are different ways of understanding such commitments. Pryor 2004 distinguishes two epistemological attitudes we may have with respect to them, a *liberal* and a *conservative* one. On the conservative attitude, having *prima facie* justification to believe (i) requires antecedent justification to believe (iii); the liberal denies this, even though he agrees that evidence against (iii) would defeat our justification to believe (i). I would further distinguish two versions of the conservative attitude; on the most straightforward conservative-conservative version, justification for (i) would require a priori or empirical evidence for (iii); on a liberal-conservative one along lines explored by Wright (2004), it is enough if (iii) is a presupposition that one is entitled to make by default.

These views carry over to the status of identity claims that one might discern in the justificatory structure of our singular thoughts. The conservative-conservative attitude is the proper one concerning Perry’s identification with the person whose back he sees in the mirror. Consider, however, the judgments mentioned earlier as examples of IEM: Perry’s physical self-ascription that he is pushing a cart with a torn sack, made on the basis of visual perception, or his psychological self-ascription that he sees that he is pushing a cart

with a torn sack. Shoemaker would consider them as cases of *circumstantial*, not *absolute* IEM; they are *de facto* IEM but under weird circumstances they could be subject to error through misidentification. Imagine, for instance, that the science fiction technologies that films like *Avatar* contemplate could allow to block our own visual impressions and receive instead those coming from another body.<sup>9</sup> Under those circumstances, Perry's judgments might be wrong because of the mistaken identification of himself with the body that is the source of the relevant visual impressions. We can interpret this in terms of the distinction between the liberal-conservative and the conservative-conservative attitudes. Even if the subject reasonably and in fact correctly took for granted in the context the identity premise, so that the judgment did not depend on it, there are contexts in which epistemically the judgment must be taken as made on the basis of the identity premise, for a circumstance in which it fails is a relevant alternative.

On this proposal, the commitment to identifications that ordinary self-ascriptions based on visual perception in fact carry are understood along the lines of the liberal-conservative proposal above, as opposed to the conservative-conservative view that suggests itself as more appropriate for the mirror example: these identities are in normal contexts presuppositions to which we are entitled by default, without the need to have ordinary *a priori* or empirical evidence for them.<sup>10</sup> We do not need to go into these issues any further. Note just that the explanation that the Simple Account affords appeals to the absence of an identity claim in the justificational structure; Recanati's explanation appeals instead to the absence of a conception of the self in the content of the IEM judgments. The Simple Account helps us to distinguish two senses for a thought to have an identification component. In the first sense ('identification<sub>p</sub>'), the epistemic grounds for the thought include an identity-premise. In the second sense ('identification<sub>c</sub>'), the thought includes a concept that identifies what it is about. On the Simple Account, having an identification<sub>c</sub> component is compatible with a thought being IEM; for being

<sup>9</sup> Dennett 1978 imagines such a scenario.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Coliva 2006, 2012 and Wright (2012: Sections 7-8); cf. also Peacocke (1983: 139-151) and Peacocke (2008: 92-103).



IEM is *lacking* an identification<sub>p</sub> component, and thoughts having identification<sub>c</sub> components may well be identification<sub>p</sub> free — they might even be epistemically basic. In contrast, Recanati's account explains IEM by the absence of an identification<sub>c</sub> element.

The Simple Account opens the possibility of thoughts including identification<sub>c</sub> components, which are nonetheless IEM with respect to them. And it seems to be the case that there are such thoughts. Wright 2012 offers as examples 'you are very close' and 'he is a long way off', both based on observation; Peacocke 2008, 'this keyboard is black', again based on observation. Hence, Recanati's 2007 account of IEM will not do. Recanati 2009, 2012b accepts this; he accepts it even for some first-personal IEM thoughts. Thus, a thought expressed by 'my legs are crossed', based on proprioceptive evidence, is IEM on his original account because the content is just the property of having crossed legs, which the subject self-ascribes. However, the thought expressed by 'it is my legs, not my neighbor's, that are crossed' cannot plausibly be considered as not including the concept of the thinker's leg. Nonetheless, it is still (circumstantially) IEM. Recanati suggests (2009: 259; 2012b: Sections 2.2 and 2.3) that this is only so because the 'subject-explicit' thought is derived through a process he calls 'reflection' from a 'subject-implicit' property-ascription, and thus has the same grounds as the latter, lacking an identity-premise:

'a judgment is immune to error through misidentification if it is implicitly *de se*, that is, if the subject is not represented in the content of the judgment but his or her involvement is secured by the mode of the grounding experience; yet an explicit *de se* thought may *also* be IEM if it has the same grounds as an implicit *de se* thought.'

But how could this work for demonstrative thoughts? Recanati (2012b: Section 3) justifies the extension of the proposal to that case, but Wright 2012 raises serious concerns.

It thus seems that the perspectival content account of first-personal thoughts is no better placed vis-à-vis IEM than the token-reflexive proposal outlined in the previous section. On the contrary, the failure of Recanati's attempt to extend his proposal to explain the IEM character of explicit (SELF concept involving) *de se* thoughts to IEM thoughts relative to demonstrative concepts in general suggests that the explanation of the IEM character of a thought (if there

is one) must be compatible with its having a full traditional proposition as content. Such an explanation, I submit, should come from the broadly token-reflexive nature that the alternative to the perspectival content view presented in the previous section advances, i.e., of the relevant identification<sub>c</sub>. Here is the core of a suggestion. Deployment of individual concepts takes for granted reference-fixing information. A thought of the form *A is P* is IEM when the ascribed property *P* is already ascribed to the referent of the concept *A* as part of its background reference-fixing information.<sup>11</sup> On this suggestion, when *being P* is individuating, the identity *A is the P* is not a premise in the justificational structure of the judgment, but is rather (either *de facto*, i.e., merely circumstantially, or *de jure*) taken for granted in deploying concept *A*.

At first sight at least, to me a token-reflexive account of *de se* thoughts incorporating the kernel of an account of IEM just outlined fits Recanati's 2012a views on the SELF concept better than the perspectival content account. Simply put, mental files are individual concepts, and concepts are ingredients of contents. If the account of *de se* thoughts is that they deploy the SELF mental file, then the contents of *de se* thoughts have this concept as an ingredient. Recanati's account of the communication of *de se* contents, outlined in the previous section, appears to assume the same. In the terminology used above, Recanati's account of *de se* thoughts and their communication appears to involve an identification<sub>c</sub> — the SELF file.

Now, this only applies, I guess, to Recanati's 'explicit' *de se* thoughts. He (2012a: 64) does envisage a SELF\* 'proto-file', which, unlike the full SELF file, 'can only host information gained 'from inside', in the first-person way and hence does not obey Evans's 'Generality Constraint'. I suppose the idea is that proto-files are vehicles for nonconceptual contents, and that it is the SELF\* proto-file that figures in basic, 'implicit' *de se* contents. But this does not help. On the best account I know of the conceptual/non-conceptual distinction (cf. García-Carpintero 2006b, Heck 2007) the difference has to do with the nature of the content-vehicles, in particular with their inferential potential — which is consistent with Recanati's appeal to

<sup>11</sup> For the *de se* case, Peacocke (2012: 148-9) provides two suggestive examples that can be understood along these lines.

breakdown of the Generality Constraint to characterize nonconceptual content. On this view, vehicles for nonconceptual contents still make contributions to contents; hence no justification for the perspectival content account of *de se* thoughts can be gleaned from this either. Contentful states involving the SELF\* proto-file still appear to involve an identification<sub>c</sub>.<sup>12</sup>

I have taken advantage of the occasion of this symposium on *Mental Files* to question Recanati's (2007, 2009) grounds for his Lewisian account of *de se* contents, and also its compatibility with the mental files approach to content-ingredients articulated in the book. In the first section, I have contrasted the Lewisian, perspectival content approach with a token-reflexive elaboration on the Perry-Stalnaker traditional alternative. I presented the communication problem raised in favor of the latter, and I have suggested that Recanati's proposal to deal with it in the book appears to fit better the latter view. In this section I have argued that IEM does not give any advantage to the Lewisian view; rather, the opposite appears to be the case.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. also Peacocke's (2012: 154-6) criticism of Perry's 2002 related view.

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# Mental Files: Replies to my Critics

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## 1 The primacy of acquaintance

Coliva and Belleri write:

‘[An] aspect of Recanati’s proposal that is not entirely clear is its precise scope. For we are told that mental files are mental indexicals which depend, for their existence, on there being an epistemically rewarding relation, in the form of acquaintance, between a subject and the object the file is a file of. On the face of it, however, this would entail that mental files are quite limited, for we do not seem to be acquainted with a lot of entities that we are nevertheless able to think about. We are not acquainted with non-existing and fictional entities; nor are we acquainted with past or future entities, let alone with abstract ones, like numbers or logical entities.’ (Coliva and Belleri: 109-10)

Coliva’s and Belleri’s observation raises a dilemma for my view: either its scope is very limited, as they suggest — it only accounts for a small class of mental files based on acquaintance; or — if the account is taken to apply to all mental files, including those that are purely descriptive because there is no way in which we could be acquainted with the object they are about — then it is totally implausible.

Clearly, I offer my theory as a *general* account of singular thought; so its scope should *not* be limited to a small sub-class. This means that I have to embrace the second horn of the dilemma and face the implausibility criticism. As Keith Hall puts it,

‘Instances of mental files (...) whose function is ostensibly not characterizable in terms of acquaintance are neither exotic nor rare: on the contrary, they pervade our cognitive lives. At the very least, the proliferation of such problem-cases should make us question the motivation for taking the acquaintance-based function of files to be primary.’ (Hall: 129)

This worry is especially pressing since there is no shortage of theorists who reject the acquaintance constraint on singular thought. All the mental files ‘whose function is ostensibly not characterizable in terms of acquaintance’ lend *prima facie* support to their approach, as against mine. As a result, ‘If Recanati is to maintain that the acquaintance-based function of his mental files is somehow primary, he needs to offer more by way of argument for that claim’ (Hall: 129).

Let me start by rehearsing what I actually say in the book, in order to make clear what I mean when I talk of the primacy of acquaintance. I say that mental files are governed by an acquaintance norm. Acquaintance is understood liberally, so that testimony counts as (mediated) acquaintance. Tokens of a given file carry the presupposition that the norm governing the file is satisfied: they carry an acquaintance presupposition. The acquaintance presupposition generates what (in a two-dimensionalist framework) we may refer to as the primary content of the file token, distinct both from its referential or secondary content, and also from its informational content (the information in the file).

When the norm/presupposition is violated, the file fails to express a secondary content — it fails to refer — but it still carries its primary content. So I can accept that, in such cases, the subject is still ‘thinking a singular thought’, in one sense of that phrase: a singular vehicle is tokened, which carries the primary content it inherits from the type of which it is a token. This accounts for the cases of *de facto* non-acquaintance, e.g. for the cases in which the subject is thinking about a nonexistent object such as Vulcan.

There is another type of case, in which there is no ‘failure’ properly speaking. There is no failure because the subject is not in the business of thinking about objects s/he is or might be acquainted with. Thinking about fictional characters like Emma Bovary is a case like that; thinking about the average American male, and calling him ‘Bob’, may be another case of the same sort. All such cases are characterized by the following two features: (i) there is no attempt to satisfy the norm, yet (ii) the norm remains operative. The norm remains operative because it is ‘exploited’, to use Grice’s phrase. (According to Grice, the maxims of conversation are exploited when one flouts them blatantly in order to convey an implicature.) What the subject is doing with the file in the relevant cases is not governed

by the norm — so the subject can't be criticized for violating the norm — but doing what he or she does *still presupposes the norm*. The subject could not do what s/he is doing with the file if the norm wasn't in place. I will henceforth use 'exploitation' as a technical term to refer to the cases in which these conditions are satisfied.

The most general exploitation mechanism is *simulation*: one does *as if* one were using the file normally (i.e. according to the norm) to refer to an object of acquaintance. According to a simple and powerful story, this is how fiction works (Lewis 1978, Walton 1990, Kripke 2013): it involves the simulation of (perceptual or testimonial) acquaintance. It is pretty clear that simulation is parasitic on what is simulated, so condition (ii) is satisfied: doing as if one were following the norm presupposes the existence of the norm.

What should we say about the (secondary) content of the file in exploitation cases? Does the Emma Bovary file activated in the reader of *Madame Bovary* refer? The answer ought to be negative: there is simulated reference, but no actual reference. To be sure, there is a clear difference with the Vulcan case. In the Vulcan case the subject (Leverrier) makes a mistake and fails to think something true or false. In the Emma Bovary case, the reader makes no mistake and cannot be criticized. But the reason for that is that his or her thought occurs in a special, fictional mode. It does not matter that the files deployed by the reader of a fictional text fail to refer. As Frege suggested, in fiction the step from sense to reference is not taken. In my framework, that means that the primary content is sufficient — one does not care about the secondary content, so it does not matter if there is no secondary content for the fictional thought. Still, according to Frege, what the subject is thinking is neither true nor false.

What about descriptive names? Here also the thinker (the person who uses or understands the descriptive name) is not acquainted with the object — the object is given only by description; and here also, the thinker cannot be criticized for not being acquainted with the object. This suggests that, perhaps, there is a form of simulation in this type of case as well. That's the sort of story I floated in *Direct Reference*. In using descriptive names, arguably, we do *as if* the object was given (and use a singular vehicle to think about it). Why do we do that? In many cases (those I focussed on in *Direct Reference*) because we anticipate a forthcoming epistemic state in which we will be ac-



quainted with the reference. In other cases, there may be no such anticipation, but using a singular vehicle may yield worthwhile cognitive dividends, by making thinking and reasoning easier (especially when counterfactual thinking/reasoning is involved).

If we opt for a simulationist approach to descriptive names, we can maintain Evans's hard line regarding their secondary or referential content. The strong acquaintance view, as I call Evans's position, says that the singular thought we attempt to think (about the object known by description) is not available for us to think. (This is reminiscent of what Russell says about 'Bismarck'.) The thought fails to have a singular content, though phenomenologically it feels as if it had a singular content. But tokening the thought vehicle in the simulative mode brings cognitive dividends which compensate for the local 'lapse into fiction' induced by descriptive names.

The strong acquaintance view is not the only possible take on descriptive names, even within a simulationist framework. (As I said already, I take the 'anticipated acquaintance' account of descriptive names put forward in *Direct Reference* to be a form of simulationism. To anticipate an acquaintance situation is to do as if it already obtained.) We can also liberalize the acquaintance constraint and say that when we *correctly* anticipate some forthcoming acquaintance relation to the denotation of the description, then we are in a position to think a genuine singular thought about it. This view (which Hall calls 'Loophole') is put forward very tentatively in *Mental Files*. I don't endorse it in the book — I mention it as an intermediate position (worth investigating) between the strong acquaintance view and liberalism. Hall and Coliva & Belleri don't like this intermediate view, which seems to posit a weird kind of backward causation. Moreover, Coliva and Belleri point out that it does not fit my picture very well, because the relation to the future referent is not epistemically rewarding. In any case, I don't really care whether Loophole is true or not. I can live with the strong acquaintance view, as I can live with the liberal view put forward by advocates of semantic instrumentalism.

Radical forms of semantic instrumentalism, such as that put forward by David Kaplan (1989a, 1989b), provide an alternative to simulation approaches. According to radical instrumentalism, using singular vehicles when the referent is known only by description

yields a ‘broadening of the horizon of thought’: a singular thought content which, without language, would *not* be available to the subject (because the acquaintance constraint is not satisfied) *becomes* available when we help ourselves to the linguistic apparatus of direct reference. On this view the thinker actually manages to refer singularly, so what may have started as a form of simulation has led to a form of ‘cognitive restructuring’: the acquaintance constraint is no longer operative and we can think singularly about objects through essentially linguistic means. This is very different from the strong acquaintance view, because the thought is now taken to have a full blown secondary content which is singular. If we follow this route we embrace a strong form of liberalism. We reach the conclusion that ‘any act of descriptive reference-fixing would allow subjects to entertain singular contents without acquaintance’ (Hall: 126).

Hall thinks this liberal position is not open to me:

‘Although that conclusion would be welcome to me, this is precisely the sort of liberal view Recanati wishes to avoid. For this reason, I do not think that Recanati’s semi-liberal position here is sustainable.’ (Hall: 126)

By ‘Recanati’s semi-liberal position’ Hall refers to the view that, although the acquaintance constraint holds, it is satisfied when we correctly anticipate a future acquaintance relation (Loophole). Now, as I said already, I don’t really care about Loophole’s fate. And I have no quarrel with semantic instrumentalism. I *can* accept the liberal view that some files are not governed by an acquaintance constraint. Appearances notwithstanding, the liberal view is compatible with my account for, in addition to mechanisms of exploitation, which presuppose the acquaintance norm, I also make room for *derived functions* for singular vehicles. When a singular vehicle acquires a derived function, the norm corresponding to the initial function no longer holds. So I am open to the instrumentalist suggestion that language ‘broadens the horizons of thought’ and makes it possible to use our mental files to do something other than what it is the primary function of the files to do.

‘Primary’ here must be understood in a new, evolutionary sense. The idea is this. We start with referential devices which are already in place in perception (as well as in infant cognition). These devices are encoded in language, but language makes it possible to do things

with them that we can't do in perception (or that infants can't do). For example, in language referential indices can be bound (through quantifiers which manipulate assignment functions instead of letting the context assign referents to the indices), and they can also be used freely, without external anchoring, as in E-type anaphora. I accept that there are these things in language (and in thought informed by language). So I am open to the idea that there are *purely descriptive files*, as people as diverse as Jeshion, Dickie and Cumming have recently claimed. That's compatible with my framework if one treats such descriptive files as a late achievement made possible by language.

Hall objects to my view that

'even if the acquaintance-based function of files is somehow evolutionarily basic, I see no compelling reason to think that the functions of files should not have evolved from their original acquaintance-based function.' (Hall: 130, note)

But that's exactly what I am saying. The cases which are the most striking counterexamples to the acquaintance view, namely the cases in which there is *not even exploitation of the acquaintance norm* but, rather, a different use of the file altogether, are cases in which the file has evolved derived functions, distinct from the evolutionary basic function of storing information gained through acquaintance. I accept that there are such cases, but I maintain that acquaintance has got some sort of primacy. I am making an empirical hypothesis: that the object tracking system which exists in perception is used throughout cognition — even in high-level cognition, e.g. in thought about abstract objects. The units of the system — the files — acquire new functions when they are recruited in this way to do extra jobs in thought. The hypothesis is that language plays a crucial role in making these new functions available.

To sum up, there are three types of case to consider, and two senses in which the acquaintance function of files is primary. The three types of case are: (i) the prototypical cases in which a file is used to track an object one is acquainted with and to store information gained through acquaintance with it; (ii) the exploitation cases in which e.g. one does *as if* the file was used to track an object of acquaintance and to store information about it (even though it's not); and (iii) the cases in which the acquaintance norm is no longer operative because the files have evolved derived functions. The two

senses of ‘primary’ are: (a) in exploitation cases the acquaintance norm which governs the type is presupposed, even though the thinker is not following the norm but engaging in simulation. Simulation is asymmetrically dependent on what is simulated, and that is what establishes the primacy of the prototypical acquaintance cases over the simulation cases. (b) The derived functions correspond to new jobs assigned to the files, but the referential function of the prototypical files is primary because *the files are what they are in virtue of belonging to the object tracking system* (where they have a referential function), and the new roles correspond to uses of *these files* to do new things thanks to, *inter alia*, the interaction with the linguistic system.

## 2 Vehicles, modes of presentation, and primary content

Some of my critics are puzzled by my oscillation between talk of files as quasi-syntactic vehicles and talk of files as modes of presentation:

‘There seem to be (...) ambiguities in the way mental files are presented. On the one hand, we are told that they are singular Fregean senses, that determine the referents they stand for. On the other, we are told that they are similar to Fodor’s terms in the language of thought. However, Fodor’s concepts are only syntactically different and do not contain any semantically relevant material apart from their referent, nor is the latter determined by sense.’ (Coliva and Belleri: 109)

‘Mental files are the vehicles of singular thoughts. They belong to the system of mental representations. They are the mental counterparts to singular terms, and they *refer*, or are *supposed to refer*. (...) At the same time, they are modes of presentation, which is to say ‘senses’ (257), and *individual concepts*, i.e. thought constituents (64). For someone used to thinking about language, this is puzzling.’ (Pagin: 136)

But there is no puzzle, really. Modes of presentation are whatever plays the mode-of-presentation-role (as defined through what Schiffer refers to as ‘Frege’s Constraint’).<sup>1</sup> Beyond that, it is an open issue what exactly modes of presentation are — what plays the role. My claim in the book is that what plays the mode of presentation role is the vehicle (the file). By this I mean that it is possible for a rational subject to take different attitudes towards (what is in fact) the same object if the subject has two numerically distinct files about that ob-

<sup>1</sup> See Schiffer (1978: 180).

ject. The files don't have to differ semantically: they may be of the same type, have the same referent, and contain the same information (or misinformation).

Pagin describes a Fregean semantics for mental files as based on the following principle:

(DIF) Any difference in cognitive significance between two mental files can be explained by their semantic difference.

Pagin thinks I accept the principle, but I don't. I reject (DIF). Pagin himself, in the paper, shows that a mental file theorist is not in a position to embrace (DIF). He gives the following example:

'Suppose X takes herself to see two moths flying around in her kitchen. She opens a file for each, alpha and beta, thinking of them as 'A' and 'B', respectively. She takes herself to see now A, now B. The acquaintance relations are indeed different in case there *are* two moths, one causing the opening of alpha, the other the opening of beta. But in case the subject in fact is mistaken, and there is only *one* moth causing the opening of both files, there does not seem to be any difference between the acquaintance relations of alpha and beta. (...)

Such a situation is certainly possible (and so are others, essentially like it). Is there any semantic difference between the files alpha and beta? A description theorist can certainly say that the terms 'A' and 'B' differ in sense: the one can have the sense of the description 'the moth I saw first' and the other the same sense as 'the moth I saw second', even if she coined the terms only after taking herself to have seen both and did not then remember the original sightings. (...) But this option is not open to the mental file theorist, since for both files there is an acquaintance relation to an object, in fact the same object, and there does not seem to be any difference between these relations *except* the distinctness of the mental file relata.' (Pagin: 140-1)

In the case described by Pagin, there is no semantic difference between the two files, which are exactly alike. Yet in that situation the subject can contemplate the possibility that alpha is *F* while beta is not *F*. What this suggests is that two files can differ in cognitive significance *solo numero*. So we should reject (DIF). That is what I mean when I say that modes of presentation are vehicles.

This does not mean that *only* the numerical identity of the file *qua* mental particular matters to cognitive significance; that would be absurd. My claim is weaker: nothing less fine-grained than the vehicle, and in particular no semantically defined equivalence class,

will be able to play the mode of presentation role in its entirety. We need mental particulars (as Perry often emphasized). But the vehicles have semantic properties, and among their semantic properties some contribute in a non-negligible way to cognitive significance. In particular, the type of a file carries a presupposition to the effect that a certain type of ER relation is in place. The presuppositions carried by a file in virtue of its type constitute its *primary content*.

Coliva and Belleri complain that, if files are vehicles, the theory fails to account semantically for what is common to singular thoughts when the acquaintance constraint is satisfied and when it isn't. What is common, in my framework, is only a singular vehicle. In the normal case, when the acquaintance constraint is satisfied, the vehicle has a singular content, but when the acquaintance constraint is not satisfied, a singular vehicle is tokened but it does not have a proper singular content. This is unsatisfactory, Coliva and Belleri say:

'Recanati describes subjects who entertain such files as thinking singular *vehicles* and not singular contents. To entertain a singular vehicle, he says, is to token a mental file which is not created on the basis of an acquaintance relation (either one that actually obtains, or one which is expected to actually obtain) (166-169). Singular vehicles however, are merely *taken* to provide singular reference by those who entertain them (if, e.g., they are mistaken about the existence of their referent — think of a child who believes in Santa Claus); at best, they are *treated* as providing singular reference (we may imagine a cautious scientist, who is not sure about the existence of the entity she is naming). In each case, theirs is only an *appearance* of singularity and it is not clear how one could go from an appearance of singular thought to singular thought proper, in any interesting semantic sense. So if entertaining a singular vehicle comes down to entertaining a *seemingly singular thought* (which is really not a singular thought, in any interesting semantic sense), we do not see how this notion could be of help.' (Coliva and Belleri: 110)

To sum up their argument: in a framework which takes the files to be syntactic entities, there will be no notion of singular thought characterizable 'in any interesting semantic sense'.

But I deny that. There is an interesting semantic sense in which to entertain a singular vehicle is to think a singular thought. The singular vehicle has a primary content, which it retains even when there is failure of reference (hence no secondary content). That is sufficient to ease Coliva's and Belleri's worry. The primary content corresponds to the fact that (even if the acquaintance constraint is

not satisfied) the subject entertaining the file is supposed to stand in the right ER relation to the object s/he purports to think about. The primary content has a normative character and survives when, de facto, the norm is not complied with.

Pagin objects to the idea that files have primary content in that sense:

‘The concept of a mental file, like the concept of a *gene* in genetics, is in itself functional. Unlike linguistic expressions, we don’t observe mental files or tokenings of them. We cannot demonstrate them. What we know about mental files, we know on the basis of the *theory* of mental files. ‘Mental file’ is a theoretical term in a theory like Recanati’s, and the interpreted theory formulation it occurs in gives us its functional role, which is our concept of a mental file. We can then go on to ask whether there exist mental entities that fill this role, and whether there is a unique collection of entities that do. (...)’

In classical functional role theory (e.g. Loar 1986), the functional roles are causal. This means that we can investigate the causal pattern in e.g. processes of the brain, to find out what brain states fulfill certain functional roles. But when the functional role is *normative*, this cannot be done. We cannot, as a means of identifying mental files, get hold of a brain state, or a mental state, and ask whether that state is *required* to have an acquaintance relation to an object. A brain state, or a mental state, can at most be subject to such a requirement once it has been identified as a mental file by an independent criterion. For instance, if mental files were all causally related to external objects by some acquaintance relation, we could use that general fact to identify mental files. But this is not the case, on Recanati’s account. It is only part of their function to be *required* to stand in an acquaintance relation. But that means conflating a consequence of being a mental file with what is needed for identifying them in the first place. That is why I find the idea of the primary content of mental files problematic.’ (Pagin: 143-4)

Pagin says the problematic step ‘comes when an *additional* functional role or normative requirement is included in the basic functional role itself’ (143). But if this is the problem, then let’s not include the normative requirement in the basic functional role. Let’s start with the set of basic cases, i.e. the cases in which all goes well (the acquaintance relations are in place, etc.), and characterize the basic functional role of mental files at that level, as Pagin recommends. The assumption is that there are things that play that role, and that we can find out what they are by looking. Suppose we have identified them. Then a further assumption of the theory is that it will be possible to find *other things* with the following three properties:

- (i) They are of *the same type* (nonsemantically characterized) as the basic files.
- (ii) They don't play the basic functional role because the acquaintance relations aren't in place.
- (iii) Still, they have the same cognitive significance (by standard tests) as those involved in the basic cases.

The theory accounts for the putative observation in (iii) by saying that the type has acquired a primary content which derives from the function which the tokens play in the basic cases and is inherited by the tokens in the non-basic cases.

The distinction between primary and secondary content is relevant also to an issue Coliva and Belleri raise about transparency:

'One further feature of the theory which is not entirely clear is the extent to which one's singular thoughts are transparent. Recanati disagrees with both Boghossian's and Burge's different takes on the issue of the compatibility between externalism and self-knowledge. He claims that in the following kind of inference, taking place after a slow switch between worldly mental files and their counterparts on twin Earth,

- (1) Jo once loved playing in the water
- (2) Jo does not like playing in the water now
- (3) Jo has changed

it is not the case, *contra* Boghossian, that 'water' in (1) and (2) respectively refers to water and twater; nor is it the case, *contra* Burge, that the reference of 'water' in (2) is water, like in (1), because the reasoning initiated in (1) requires the reference of 'water' to remain stable. Rather, the reference of 'water' is confused in both cases, so it is neither water nor twater and therefore (1) and (2) are neither true nor false. Yet, according to Recanati, his account preserves transparency. (...)

Even if one grants Recanati the idea of confused reference in (1) and (2), this would actually entail that while the subject may be thinking of thinking a (t)water-thought in each of the premises, he would not. So, it remains unclear how the proposed solution would actually allow to compatibilize externalism and the transparency of senses, for the content of one's thoughts would still be unknown to the subject.' (Coliva and Belleri: 111-2)

But the distinction between levels of content is crucial here. Reference is opaque, so secondary content is opaque as well. The subject does not know whether *s/he* is thinking about water, about twater,



or about nothing at all. What the subject has transparent access to is the mode of presentation, not the reference. Now in (1) and (2) the same mode of presentation — the same mental file ‘water’ — occurs twice, so the subject knows that these two occurrences co-refer if they refer at all. There are three options compatible with what the speaker knows in virtue of the transparency of modes of presentation: (a) the two occurrences both refer to water; (b) they both refer to *twater*; (c) they both fail to refer because the file’s presupposition is violated in the slow-switch situation. Burge goes for option (a) (or option (b) if we reverse the order of the premises). I raise difficulties for his account, and advocate option (c), also compatible with the transparency of modes of presentation. This ensures (contra Boghossian) that a minimal degree of self-knowledge is compatible with externalism, but it has never been my intention to claim that externalism was compatible with a stronger, Cartesian form of self-knowledge corresponding to the transparency of secondary content.

### 3 Are mental files indexical?

There was a time when people took indexicality to be a property of language, and of language exclusively. Thought itself, they believed, *could not* be indexical (any more than it could be ambiguous).<sup>2</sup> Then came the discovery of ‘the essential indexical’. Castañeda, Prior, Geach, Perry, Lewis and others put forward examples in which removing the indexicals from a sentence changes the nature of the thought that is expressed. This seems to establish that the thought expressed by uttering an indexical sentence is itself indexical, in some cases at least. Since then, the study of indexical thought has flourished. The nature of indexical thought has become a major topic in the philosophy of language and mind.

Has the pendulum swung too far in the other direction? In his contribution to this symposium, Papineau suggests that it has:

‘There is a surprisingly widespread tendency to infer, from the use of indexical words to express some thought, that the thought expressed

<sup>2</sup> The reasoning behind that conclusion was fallacious — it begged the question against theories of thought that take the vehicle of representation to be constitutive of thought (syntactic theories, as we might call them).

must be similarly indexically structured. But it does not take much reflection on cases to show that this inference is generally invalid.’ (Papineau: 171-2)

Papineau actually makes two claims against the ‘mental indexicality’ trend. One is that language and thought work differently — there is less indexicality in thought than language. The other claim is that the referential units in thought are *mental files coarsely individuated*. Such mental files are more like names than like indexicals. Papineau rejects my appeal to fine-grained mental files based on specific contextual relations to objects, on the grounds that ‘personal-level conceptual thought has no good use for [them]’ (9). As we shall see, he thinks that as soon as we encounter an object we open a *potentially lasting* mental file for it, abstracting away from our current ER relations to it. Now there is a type of file with the required characteristics in my system: ‘encyclopedia entries’ (as I call them) are lasting files, and they abstract from particular ER relations. Papineau likes them, but he does not think we need (in addition) the fine-grained files based on particular relations, such as demonstrative files.

Papineau makes a couple of sub-points pertaining to his first claim. First, he says that encyclopedia entries (which I treat as abstractly indexical because they rest on contextual relations to objects without specifying/requiring any particular ER-relation) are not indexical in the sense in which in language some words are indexical. He writes:

‘The only good way to fit the personal encyclopaedic *Obama* files into the standard indexical type-token structure would be to view them as tokens of the type *encyclopaedic file* (or perhaps *encyclopaedic person file*). This type would have no reference of its own, and each of its tokens (such as an *Obama* file, or a *my first teacher* file, or a *that-woman-down-the-road* file ...) would then have its referent fixed as that thing (person) in the relevant thinker’s environment to which the relevant file bears some epistemically rewarding relation.

This would work all right, but it would be strange, and certainly wouldn’t line up with any indexical constructions present in natural languages. We certainly don’t have some type *word* the tokens of which refer variously to Obama, my first teacher, that woman down the road, ... , depending on the context in which those tokens are uttered.’ (Papineau: 163-4)

I admit that encyclopedic files are not indexical in the same sense in which demonstratives or the standard indexicals are. Whether or not we want to call them indexical is not a substantive issue (as Papineau notes). I call them indexical because the mode of reference determination is relational and corresponds to a feature of the type. The difference with standard indexical files in the narrow sense is that the relation is only specified abstractly.

Is Papineau right that this abstract form of indexicality does not line up with any indexical construction present in natural language? I think that depends upon one's semantic theory. I myself have put forward a semantic analysis of proper names which treats them as indexical. (This is like Pelczar's analysis, which Papineau mentions in a footnote.) As Fiengo and May 2006 rightly stressed, a proper name *type* — what Kaplan 1990 calls a generic name — does not refer, but has (typically multiple) bearers, in virtue of various naming-conventions involving the name. What refers is a use of the name in a sentence. What a use of the name refers to is some object  $x$ , assigned in context (in virtue of speaker's intentions and related factors), *provided* the object in question satisfies the linguistic presupposition carried by the use of the name. What is presupposed is that  $x$ , the referent, is a bearer of the name.<sup>3</sup>

Papineau, as you recall, objects that

'We certainly don't have some type *word* the tokens of which refer variously to Obama, my first teacher, that woman down the road, ..., depending on the context in which those tokens are uttered.' (Papineau: 164)

But proper names arguably *are* such words. To use a well-worn example, the name 'Aristotle' is a type uses of which refer variously to the philosopher or to the shipping magnate. If proper names can be analysed as indexicals (and, in the footnote about Pelczar, Papineau acknowledges that they can), there is no reason why encyclopedia entries could not be.

In *Direct Reference*, I emphasized one potential consequence of the indexical view of names:

<sup>3</sup> If the presupposition fails, there may still be speaker's reference but there is no semantic reference.

‘An ordinary indexical is associated with a particular relation R by the semantic conventions of the language. For every expression-type belonging to the category of ordinary indexicals, there is a specific relation R, such that the reference of a token of the expression is the object (or an object) which stands in that relation to the token. Different indexicals are thus paired with different relations by the semantic rules of the language. But it seems that all proper names are associated with the same relation R by the semantic rules of the language: the reference of a proper name, in all cases, is the entity which bears that name. In other words, while there is a distinct semantic rule for each indexical (the rule that ‘I’ refers to the speaker, ‘you’ to the addressee, ‘this’ to an entity contextually salient, and so forth), there is a single semantic rule for all proper names, namely the rule that a proper name refers to its bearer.’ (Recanati 1993: 142)

Note that this is exactly like the case of encyclopedia entries as described by Papineau. Different encyclopedia entries are tokens of the same abstract type ‘encyclopedia entry’. Similarly, in *Direct Reference*, I toyed with the idea that ‘there is a single abstract indexical, call it PN, corresponding to all proper names, or to the general category of proper names. Every proper name would be an instance of this abstract indexical, which could thus be defined by the following rule: an instance of PN refers to the bearer of that instance’ (Recanati 1993: 142).

Papineau also mentions a couple of cases in which, even though an indexical word is used in expressing a thought, there is no corresponding indexical constituent in the thought. He uses ‘you’ as an example. When I see John and have a thought about him that I want to communicate to him, I say ‘you’. My thought — the thought I express — involves a lasting file about John. As Papineau says,

‘I don’t need to form an extra *you* file when I am about to address John, beyond any files about him I already have. So there is no reason to suppose that my utterance ‘You gave a good talk yesterday’ expresses some corresponding indexical *you* thought. Rather it is just the linguistic means that I use to express a pre-existing non-second-person thought.’ (Papineau: 165)

Of course, the use of the linguistic means in question (the word ‘you’) to express a thought about John presupposes that John is identified as *the current addressee*. But according to Papineau,

‘The mental type in question operates mainly in the sub-personal speech production system. Once this speech-production system ‘knows’ that *John is the current addressee*, it will set itself to express all

John-referring thoughts using the word ‘you’. In the normal case, I don’t need to think about how to express my thoughts. My selection of words is generated automatically, courtesy of an automatic and unconscious system that figures out what grammatical string of words will best serve to express my thought in the current context.’ (Papineau: 166)

This raises a very interesting issue — are there indexical files in *personal-level* thought? — which I am about to consider. For the time being, I simply note that Papineau’s observation about ‘you’ is compatible with my account. The case discussed by Papineau is (in my framework) a case in which the addressee is thought of under a composite file resting on a number of ER relations to John, the person the speaker is addressing. This is not a pure ‘you’ file. (Assuming such files exist, they would be a variety of demonstrative files.)

I now turn to Papineau’s second claim, and his most significant objection to my account. Papineau thinks that as soon as we encounter an object we open a potentially lasting mental file about it, abstracting away from our current ER relations to that object. He does not think we need, in addition to such files (encyclopedia entries), the fine-grained files based on particular ER relations, such as demonstrative files. He claims there are no such files: the demonstrative component in thought corresponds to egocentric features of objects which are important because they guide action but which do not serve to accumulate information about the objects. To accumulate information, we need a potentially lasting file.

For Papineau there is a subpersonal system of action-guidance which, like the subpersonal system of speech production, needs indexical categories; but *thought* is said to rest on a system of (enduring) files which have the distinct function of accumulating information about objects. It is a mistake to confuse the indexical categories at work in the action-guidance system and the referential categories (the files) we use in thought:

‘[The] automatic motor control system is not in the business of storing information about the things it refers to, and so will not have any information-accumulating files associated with its tokens of *that thing there*.’ (Papineau: 172)

Papineau’s theory resembles a view put forward by Perry in various places. Perry describes the mind as having both ‘buffers’ which

register egocentric information about the objects which play certain important epistemic-pragmatic roles in the subject's context (e.g. the role of current addressee), and 'detached files' about the objects in question. The buffers are arguably subpersonal, but this does not mean that we should only admit detached files as thought constituents, as Papineau suggests. In *Direct Reference*, after discussing Perry I offered a three-level picture with an intermediate category of *indexical object-files* between the buffers (bottom level) and the encyclopedia entries (top level).

One merit of having indexical files (in the narrow sense) as well as encyclopedia entries in thought is that this provides a bridge with the domain of perception, where reference goes through object files based on various tracking relations. The mechanism of incremental conversion makes it possible for indexical object-files to evolve into more and more abstract files, up to the encyclopedia entries which are 'detached' (in one sense at least). I think the transition between the two types of representation is an important issue, and that it must be explicitly represented in the theory. My system honours this requirement.

But Papineau is right to emphasize the dynamic unity of files across incremental conversion. In line with that emphasis, I myself introduced the (coarse-grained) 'piles' in addition to the (fine-grained) files in chapter VII of *Mental Files*. A possibly better way of accommodating Papineau's insights within my system would be to pair each file, qua body of information putatively about a single object, with a referential index. The index can play the role of address or label for the file: at any given time  $t$ , the index will give access to the file currently bearing the index. But the innovation I am contemplating to make the system more dynamic is this: *in incremental conversion the index will be transmitted from the source file to the successor file*. The index, thus construed, can do all the work done by the lasting file in Papineau's framework. But the fine-grained files do not disappear, in contrast to what happens in Papineau's framework. The reason why we need them, and cannot do simply with coarse-grained files à la Papineau, is that modes of presentation can be as fine-grained as one wishes.

Take Papineau's example: I have a thought about John which I want to communicate to him, so I say 'you'. As Papineau points out,

my thought involves my *John* file — a lasting, composite file rather than a short-lived, demonstrative file. But if, suddenly, I come to entertain a doubt about the identity of the man in front of me, I may think: ‘Is *that man* really John? What about the moustache?’ And I may ask him: ‘Are you John?’ in such cases I need to deploy fine-grained files based on certain ER-relations and not others. I need a demonstrative file in addition to my preexisting *John* file. (In general, I take it that one can modulate one’s files more or less at will, by giving prominence to certain epistemically rewarding relations and bracketing others. Dennett’s paper ‘Where Am I?’ provides nice examples of such modulation involving the ‘self’-file, in contexts in which the presupposition of unity of various informational channels fails.)

To account for the interrogative thought ‘Is that man really John?’, Papineau will need to appeal to two potentially lasting files: my John file, and the new file created for the man I see, who may or may not be John. The new file is ‘potentially lasting’ (like all files in Papineau’s framework), but it will actually last only if I keep using it; if the man I see turns out to be John I will discard the new file and not use it again, so it will decay and disappear. It will not last.

But I think it is not enough to posit two files to account for the case. We also need to account for the two *types* of mode of presentation at stake, corresponding to the singular terms ‘that man’ and ‘John’ respectively. The first mode of presentation has to do with our current (perceptual) relation to the man, while the other one is based on multiple information sources. I take the first mode of presentation, expressed by ‘that man’, to be a demonstrative file, and the other one, expressed by ‘John’, to be an encyclopedia entry.

As we have seen, Papineau rejects the very idea of a demonstrative file. He acknowledges the existence of indexical modes of presentation in thought (at the interface with the action-guiding system), but thinks such modes of presentation are not in the business of storing information about the referents: the accumulation of information task is incumbent upon the lasting, coarse-grained files. That, I think, is the weak point in Papineau’s argument. In *Mental Files* I argued, contra Papineau, that demonstrative files can themselves be used to accumulate information during the thought episode which is their lifespan (and within the bounds of which they can be re-used).

Insofar as I can tell, there is no reason to restrict the function of storing information to lasting files.

#### 4 Linking, merging, and coreference *de jure*

I take two terms to be coreferential *de jure* when they are associated with the same mental file. In identity judgements the terms flanking the identity sign are typically associated with distinct files. But we also need a notion of coreference *de jure* between pieces of information, to capture the idea that sometimes — when the subject ‘trades upon identity’ (Campbell) — it is presupposed that two pieces of information concern one and the same object. It would be natural to say that two pieces of information are coreferential *de jure* just in case they are ‘co-filed’ (to use Goodsell’s terminology), i.e. belong to the same mental file. Yet that is not possible in my framework. Corresponding to identity judgments, there is the operation on files I call ‘linking’. Linking two files makes the transfer of information possible between them. So, when you discover that A is B, you are licensed to transfer information in the A file into the B file, and vice versa. But that means that the files will now contain information gathered ‘from outside’, i.e., not through the ER-relation on which the file is based but through linking. I thus distinguish the ‘nucleus’ and the ‘periphery’ of the file. Only bits of information in the nucleus will be coreferential *de jure*. (Information in the periphery is only there because of a judgement of identity.) In other words: in my framework co-filing does not require presumptions of identity with presuppositional status. Defeasible identity judgments are sufficient to ground co-filing. It follows that co-filing is a weaker notion than coreference *de jure* between pieces of information: not all pieces of information that are co-filed are coreferential *de jure*.

Goodsell objects that the resulting theory is incoherent:

‘Recanati explicitly claims that it is not the case that if *i* and *j* are in the same mental file, then *i* and *j* are *de jure* coreferential (94-95). This claim... seems inconsistent with files playing the mode of presentation role.’ (Goodsell: 185-6)

Indeed modes of presentation determine reference, and they account for cognitive significance. Because modes of presentation play these two roles, Goodsell argues, it is a priori that two occurrences of the



same mode of presentation will corefer if they refer at all. So if two pieces of information are associated with the same mode of presentation (the same file), it will be presupposed that they concern the same object (if any). Thus it seems impossible to separate co-filing and coreference *de jure*.

I agree with Goodsell that there is a potential problem here. Fortunately, as she points out, another option is available. Moreover, it is an option which I think we need to consider if, following Pryor's interesting suggestions for developing the mental-file account, we opt for a graph-theoretic representation of relations (Pryor, forthcoming).

The idea I am now toying with is that linking should *not* be described as allowing 'information transfer' between files. Suppose we start with two files, A and B, and the identity of their referents is discovered (or is thought to have been discovered). Linking takes place, corresponding to the identity judgement 'A = B'. Linking enables information in one file to 'mix' with information in the other file in reasoning; but no transfer of information between files has to occur, strictly speaking. Linking does no more or no less than an identity judgment does.

Interestingly, Goodsell points out that

'It is possible that though *i* and *j* were initially treated as about the same thing in virtue of an identity judgement, that identity judgement becomes so embedded in the thinker's reasoning that she becomes disposed to reason as if *i* and *j* are about the same thing without deploying an additional identity premise in her reasoning.' (Goodsell: 187)

I think this is correct: an identity may acquire presuppositional status with time. The more we use the files A and B in tandem in reasoning (because of the identity belief which enables information in them to mix), the more we tend to presuppose the identity which grounds the coordinated use of the two files. At some point in the process identity will be presupposed. This point is often represented through the 'merging' idea: instead of two files, we only have one. A slightly different representation is made possible by the idea of referential index I introduced in my response to Papineau. When identity between A and B is presupposed, the two files come to share the same referential index. That means that the two files are now treated as a single, composite file (in virtue of the principle that two distinct files

cannot bear the same referential index at the same time).

Goodsell points out that, before the presupposition stage, when the two files are merely linked,

‘I retain my ability to think independently about that-heard bird and that-seen bird, that is, it remains possible that [they are] different birds.’ (Goodsell: 183)

This is right, but I would go further. Even when the identity is presupposed I may retain that ability. If I discover that the identity is mistaken and that there are actually two birds (one I see and one I hear), I can deconstruct the composite file and restore the initial indices. When, as in this case, the files correspond to distinct information channels (here, distinct modalities), un-merging the files is a relatively simple matter of index-splitting.

This relates to an issue I discussed in my response to Papineau. We can modulate our files in response to incoming information, e.g. we can stop using a composite file and start using two more specific files instead. As Goodsell points out in a footnote, ‘to suppose that *i* and *j* are about different things, the thinker must move *i* and *j* to distinct files’ (Goodsell: 185, note). The distribution of referential indices tracks the current presuppositional state of the thinker, but that state dynamically evolves. Presuppositions come in and go out of existence all the time.

## 5 Mental files vs. competing accounts

In *Mental Files* I discuss alternative frameworks such as two-dimensional neo-Descriptivism, token-reflexivism, and Lewis’s centered-content framework. Lawlor argues that I am too critical of these frameworks, and that both the token-reflexive framework and the descriptivist framework have the resources to address my worries in a potentially satisfactory manner. In a syncretic spirit, she claims that ‘one does not need to argue for the absolute untenability of other approaches in order to advocate in favor of the files framework’ (Lawlor: 156). Likewise, García-Carpintero attempts to defend a view similar to Perry’s (involving a distinction between the singular content of a state and its primary content, understood as a token-reflexive proposition), and suggests that it is compatible with my ap-

proach in terms of files, though not with the Lewisian approach I advocate in *Perspectival Thought* and my papers on IEM. (On the last point, see the next section.)

But I do not think I ever argued for the absolute untenability of the other approaches. On the contrary, I hold that all the main approaches shed some light on the phenomenon, and that each improves as a result of elaboration made necessary by criticism emanating from the other approaches (including, hopefully, criticism presented in *Mental Files*). I believe that, in the end, there is a true convergence, which I tried to highlight in the last chapter of the book.

Lawlor speaks as if my mental files account stood in contrast to Perry's account, but it doesn't; it's an elaboration of it. Perry distinguishes between the content (a singular proposition) and the belief state, and assigns the state a primary content akin to a Kaplanian character. Belief states are vehicles, in my terminology, and Perry himself appeals to files qua mental particulars in analysing them. My theory has exactly the same ingredients as his. Note that, in Perry's work, you find elements from different frameworks: a two-dimensional component, a mental-particular component, a token-reflexive component (not to mention the Lewisian component which surfaces in 'Thought without Representation').

Even though García-Carpintero thinks my mental files account is in tension with the Lewisian approach of *Perspectival Thought*, he acknowledges that elements from different frameworks can be combined. Thus he takes Stalnakerian diagonal propositions, or token-reflexive propositions of the sort he himself advocates, to be less an alternative to Perry's initial theory of indexical belief than an elaboration:

'Perry accepts that, for the kind of consideration about informational content that Stalnaker pointed out, (...) token-reflexive contents provide a better representation of the significance of belief-states than the one he had earlier suggested in terms of Kaplanian characters. (...) On this interpretation, the proposal is just a refined way of understanding the significance of belief-states; but an adequate account of *de se* contents (hence of the nature of attitudes and speech acts in general) still requires the distinction between belief-contents and belief-states (ways of accessing the content). The modification of Perry's original proposal lies only in that now the significance of belief-states is characterized in the traditional propositional way that token-reflexive contents afford.' (García-Carpintero: 196-7)

Similarly, Stalnaker points out, Lewis's centred contents can be used to model the primary content of belief states in Perry's framework (Stalnaker 2003: note 255).

Let me say a bit more about the convergence I talked about. The most important thing is that everybody agrees that we need two levels of content. The distinction can be captured in different ways (character/content; diagonal/horizontal; reflexive content/subject matter content, etc.), but it is unescapable. The only (apparent) exception is Lewis: he seems to have a single level of content — centred contents. But this is an illusion (Recanati 2012b: 249). Lewis's centred contents are relativized propositions, and relativized propositions can only be evaluated against an appropriate index. If you pair the index and the centred content, you get an Austinian proposition with classical truth-conditions. Suppose the indexical content of a belief state is a property  $P$  which the believer self-ascribes. Then the belief is true iff *the believer has P*. The right-hand side of the biconditional gives us the secondary content of the belief, while the property  $P$  itself corresponds to its primary content. So, as I emphasized in *Perspectival Thought*, there are two levels of content in the centred content framework.

The main problem with Relational Descriptivism (i.e. the version of Descriptivism which takes on board causal/relational factors and rephrases the descriptive contents in terms of them) is that it puts the acquaintance relations into the content of the belief even though they clearly don't belong to its subject matter. But if we add to Relational Descriptivism a distinction between two levels of content — as 2-D Relational Descriptivism does — the objection no longer arises. The acquaintance relations are now represented as part of *primary* content, not as part of secondary or subject-matter content.

In *Mental Files*, I objected to all 'internalization' of acquaintance relations, on grounds of intellectualism. Acquaintance relations are determinative of content, but they are not themselves represented. This must be qualified, to take account of the distinction between primary and secondary content. Acquaintance relations are not (explicitly) represented as part of secondary content, but that is compatible with their being, perhaps, *implicitly* represented as part of primary content. As Lawlor points out, 'unreflective people reason in ways that are sensitive to the mode by which they acquire in-

formation' (153); that sensitivity is not the same thing as having 'a higher-order thought about the sources of one's information' (*id.*). I agree. I also agree that distinguishing between unreflective sensitivity to ER-relations and explicit representation of them makes it possible for 2-D Relational Descriptivism to evade the charge of intellectualism, while still somehow incorporating the ER relations into primary content. But that means that, just as there are two levels of content in that framework, there are two distinct 'grasping' relations corresponding to them. The secondary content is what the thinker (explicitly) represents, but the primary content is not represented in the same way. The thinker stands in a different relation to primary content than the relation he or she stands in to secondary content. Modulo this distinction between two grasping relations, 2-D Relational Descriptivism can be saved.

But if that is so, then, Lawlor argues, 'it seems we do not need a file framework to dispense with the relevant Descriptivist commitment. So what recommends a files-based approach?' (154) As I pointed out already, the mental-file account I offer seeks to integrate as much as possible of the insights underlying the other accounts; but, of course, it adds something to them. Why add something? Because it's not enough to posit two levels of content, even if you add a corresponding distinction between two grasping relations, one appropriate to secondary content and the other one to primary content. You must say something about *what the relation is* in the case of primary content.

Perry, one of the few authors who've touched upon this issue, calls that relation 'attunement'. He describes it as follows:

'Attunement to the relation that our self-notions have to ourselves, or our perceptions have to the object they are of, does not require belief or thought about the relation; it requires know-how, not knowledge that.' (Perry 2012: 99)

This is very much the Lawlor point about unreflective sensitivity vs explicit representation, but Perry more specifically talks of 'know how'. What that means, according to the gloss I offer in *Mental Files*, is that primary contents (which Perry initially modeled as Kaplanian characters)

'have a *procedural* nature. They correspond to certain functions which words or mental vehicles have. The functions in question are not rep-

resented. The vehicles simply *have* those functions and they operate in context according to these functions. The referential content of the vehicle depends upon that operation' (Recanati 2012b: 248)

On this view, primary content must be cashed out in terms of functions or roles. The functions are not represented or thought about by the users, yet (as Lawlor points out) they are transparent to them in the sense that they 'know how' to operate according to them. Now, there is no function or role unless it is the function/role of *something*. That something is the vehicle. The mental file account completes the story by adding the vehicles and interpreting primary content in terms of their functional roles.

In the last chapter of *Mental Files* I offer a critical assessment of token-reflexivism, which Lawlor finds too harsh. But she misinterprets me. My goal is not to argue against token-reflexivism, but to show where it leads. I argue that, if you embrace token-reflexivism and try to meet the objections it raises as they come up, you end up with something like the theory of mental files. The argument proceeds in three steps. I show first that token-reflexivism, properly understood, reduces to a view very similar to Lewis's. Then I show that this view (Lewisian token-reflexivism, as we may call it) itself raises objections — the same which Lewis's original framework raises — but that these objections can be met by shifting to a multi-centred variant. Finally I show that (suitably elaborated in order to meet a new set of objections) the multi-centred variant leads us to the theory of mental files.

As we have seen already, García-Carpintero holds that token-reflexive propositions can usefully replace the kaplanian characters which Perry initially appealed to to model the primary content of doxastic vehicles.<sup>4</sup> García-Carpintero defends a version of the Perry view on which the doxastic vehicle has both a referential content (a singular proposition) and a reflexive content which captures the significance of the state (its primary content). In this framework, the mode of presentation under which the object a singular belief is about is thought of can be rendered by a token-reflexive description.

<sup>4</sup> García-Carpintero, following Stalnaker, argues that token-reflexive propositions are better suited than characters or centered contents to explain communication.

So if I think ‘I am tired’, the primary content of my thought occurrence (call it *u*) is the token-reflexive proposition that the thinker of *u* is tired at the time of *u* (in the world of *u*). Similar views have been argued for by John Searle, James Higginbotham, and John Perry.

This view raises a *prima facie* problem. Under which mode of presentation is the occurrence itself, *u*, thought about when we think the thought? The mode of presentation of *u* can’t be a token-reflexive description, on pains of circularity. The solution consists in arguing that *u* itself is not ‘thought about’ in the way the objects in the subject-matter content are thought about. Ordinary objects are thought of under modes of presentation which (according to the view) can be cashed out in token-reflexive terms; but the mental occurrences which feature in the token-reflexive descriptions (‘thinker of *u*’, ‘time of *u*’, etc.) are not themselves thought of under modes of presentation. They are directly given, in the flesh. This is the old Russellian idea of (strong) acquaintance or ‘super-direct reference’ (as I call it in the book), an idea which Perry endorses. Now this idea can be elegantly expressed in a variant of Lewis’s framework, by centering the content on the mental occurrence of which it is the content:

‘This idea can be couched in Lewis’s framework, by externalizing the occurrence *u* and letting it be directly provided by the context. Everything is then described relative to *u*, but *u* itself is *given*, it is not represented. On this mixture of the two frameworks (centered worlds and reflexivism), the content of a mental occurrence is a *property of occurrences*, and that content is evaluated with respect to a contextual index containing the occurrence itself. On this Lewis-inspired view, to judge something by assertively tokening a certain representation is to ascribe to the token the property that is its content. Here reflexivity is guaranteed by the pragmatic architecture of the act of judgment. So when you think ‘I am tired’, the content of the thought is the property an occurrence has just in case the thinker of that occurrence is tired at the time of the occurrence in the world of the occurrence. To think the thought (or to think it assertively) is to ascribe that property to the current occurrence *u* you are producing.’ (Recanati 2012b: 253)

However, both Lewis’s original theory and the token-reflexive variant I have just presented raise the ‘Cartesian Asymmetry’ objection:

‘the main problem (...) is the asymmetry between different objects of thought. Everything is thought of descriptively, except for a single element which is externalized and serves as *universal anchor* for all the content. Although I have no knock down argument against this approach, I find it insufficiently motivated and too much in the grip of a rather

extreme Cartesian picture. Why not appeal instead to *multiple* anchors, corresponding to all the acquaintance relations in which we stand to objects of thought?' (Recanati 2012b: 253)

On the mental file picture, there is no asymmetry. Singular thoughts are about objects that are all represented under nondescriptive modes of presentation based on acquaintance relations. There is no privileged subset of objects (the subject-at-a-time, or his/her mental occurrences) which can be thought of 'super-directly' and in terms of which all the other objects are described.

Among the Lewisians, some have tried to get rid of the Cartesian asymmetry by substituting multi-centred worlds for Lewis's centred worlds. *All* the objects of thought can be externalized and fed into the index of evaluation, in a multi-centred framework. I have much sympathy for this framework, but in the book I introduce a friendly amendment: instead of including a sequence of objects (Ninan's 'res-sequence') in the 'base world' serving as index of evaluation, I propose to include a sequence of files. This makes it possible to account for Frege cases and empty cases.<sup>5</sup> (The objects themselves can be easily retrieved: the objects of thought are the referents of the files in the base world, i.e. those objects which, as a matter of contingent fact, stand in the right relations to the files.) This is a 'Lewisian' version of the mental file framework. The main insight behind token-reflexivism is not lost, however. What fixes the reference of our files are certain relations between the files (tokens) and objects in the external environment, relations to which thinkers are 'attuned' and which are presupposed when the files are deployed.

Coliva and Belleri worry that my friendly amendment to the multi-centred world framework may be too drastic:

'Sequences of individuals are expunged from centred worlds, and only mental files are kept (256, 258). If this is so, then the files seem to acquire a strange status. On the one hand, they are mental, 'internal' objects, which act as vehicles of thought or 'mental singular terms' (viii, 35, 182, 244-5); on the other hand, they are the 'anchors' of our *de re* thoughts (253). These two features, however, seem difficult to reconcile: for one would think that the objects of our *de re* thoughts are external to the mind, and that they do not coincide with the vehicles we

<sup>5</sup> Ninan himself introduces acquaintance relations, in additions to the objects in the *res*-sequence, to account for Frege cases. But to deal with the empty case and other cases in which there is no acquaintance, you need the files.



use to refer to things in the world. Recanati could reply that the proper objects of our *de re* thoughts are really the referents of the mental files at issue — not the files themselves. This, however, just suggests that mental files alone are not enough in order to capture *de re* thought: individuals matter as well, and they should find their place in a suitable semantics for this kind of phenomenon.’ (Coliva and Belleri: 115-6)

Of course, individuals matter, since individuals are what singular thoughts are about. But real individuals only feature in the thought’s *secondary* content. The thought’s secondary content depends upon the environment. In the world in which the subject thinks the thought (the base world) the subject’s files are suitably related to individuals who, in virtue of these relations, count as the referents of the files. These referents feature in the thought’s secondary content, and have a place in the semantics. So singularity and world-involvingness are not lost, in that framework. But if we are concerned with the thought’s *primary* content, we can capture it without bringing real individuals into the picture. The thought’s primary content is a *property* of a sequence of objects, representable as a set of multi-centred worlds. These worlds are the subject’s doxastic alternatives. In each of the subject’s doxastic alternatives, there will be a sequence of objects (possibly different objects in different worlds) corresponding to the mental files tokened in the base-world. Which objects the subject’s thought actually is about will be determined by objective features of the base-world: they will be the objects which the files refer to in that world (in virtue of the ER-relations holding at that world). So: mental files are, indeed, not sufficient to capture (the secondary content of) *de re* thought: the world has to play its part. But they are sufficient to capture the thought’s primary content.

## 6 IEM and the *de se*

García-Carpintero detects a tension between my ‘Lewisian’ account of *de se* content in *Perspectival Thought* and the theory of mental files. He takes the latter to be compatible with his own token-reflexive approach, which uses only classical propositions (both at the primary and the secondary level). I agree that they are compatible, but I don’t think the token-reflexive view has to be seen as competing with the centred-content approach. As I pointed out in section 5, the token-

reflexive view *can* be formulated in Lewis's framework, by centering the contents on the occurrences of which they are the content.

In *Perspectival Thought* I presented my own take on the primary/secondary distinction. I distinguished two levels. The first one is that of 'explicit' content. I call that primary content the *lekton*. The *lekton* is a centred content (a 'relativized proposition'): it can only be evaluated as true or false against an appropriate circumstance of evaluation involving not only a possible world, but also an additional component corresponding to that on which the content is 'centred': the subject at a time in Lewis's original framework, the occurrence in Lewisian token-reflexivism, the topic situation in situation semantics, or whatever. That component is not explicitly represented in the *lekton* because it is contextually given or taken for granted. Thus the perception-based thought 'it is raining' has a content that is a property of situations (the property a situation has just in case it is raining in that situation). The situation the thought is about is not explicitly represented (as it would be if the thought were 'it is raining *here*'), but it is determined as the relevant situation of evaluation by the perceptual nature of the experience which grounds the thought: perception is perception of the local situation, so the judgment 'it is raining', based on perception, is bound to concern the local situation (even though the latter is not explicitly represented in the content). The judgment is true iff *it is raining in that local situation*. The truth-conditions in the right-hand-side of the biconditional correspond to the secondary content of the thought. The secondary content is classical (uncentered) and results from the interaction of the explicit content, which is centred, and the relevant circumstance of evaluation. (This interaction is what the notion of 'Austinian proposition' is meant to capture.)

The central insight here comes from Perry's 'Thought without Representation', where he argues that sometimes, 'architectural or external constraints make internal representation unnecessary' (Perry 1993: 221). I use that feature to account for immunity to error through misidentification. When you detect the position of your legs through proprioception, the fact that it is *your* legs whose position is represented in the content of the proprioceptive experience transparently follows from the fact that the experience is proprioceptive. Proprioceptive experience is bound to concern the experi-

encer's own body. Still, the content of the experience does not have to represent the subject whose body is in question; it does not have to *identify* the subject whose bodily condition is represented. It is the (proprioceptive) *mode* of the experience which determines that its content (a bodily property) concerns the subject who is having the experience, and not some other subject. There is, as Perry puts it, an 'architectural constraint' that the body which a proprioceptive experience concerns is the subject's own body. In virtue of that constraint, the issue of whose legs are crossed simply does not arise. Misidentification is impossible because there is no identification in the first place.

To be sure, the proprioceptive experience is veridical if and only if *the subject's* legs are crossed. This corresponds to the secondary content of the state — its truth-conditions. But the subject is an 'unarticulated' constituent of that secondary content. It is unarticulated because it is not explicitly represented in the primary content of the state, but contributed by the proprioceptive mode (through the circumstantial component it determines).

García-Carpintero contrasts this account with the so-called 'Simple Account', according to which immunity to error through misidentification is a negative property: there is IEM whenever the first person judgment 'I am *F*' does not include, among its epistemic grounds, an identity premise 'I = *a*' (where '*a*' refers to an individual independently thought to be *F*). He says that I offer my account 'instead of' the Simple Account,<sup>6</sup> and adjudicates in favor of the latter. But these accounts do not compete. My account explains *why*, in proprioceptive cases and other cases like it, there is no need for an identity premise in the grounds: it is the mode of the experience which determines what it's about (or more precisely: what it 'concerns').<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 'The explanation that the Simple Account affords appeals to the absence of an identity claim in the justificational structure; Recanati's explanation appeals instead to the absence of a conception of the self in the content of the IEM judgments' (García-Carpintero: 201).

<sup>7</sup> See Wright (2012: 273): 'Recanati's core proposal is, in a way, perfectly consistent with the Simple Account. (...) [It] can be viewed as... an attempt to characterize the distinctive justificational architecture of those I-thoughts that are IEM in a fashion that does indeed explain why the Simple Account applies'.

Following other authors, García-Carpintero distinguishes two senses of ‘identification’: ‘identification<sub>c</sub>’ means that the subject is explicitly represented in the content of the judgment; ‘identification<sub>p</sub>’ means that there is an identity premise ‘ $I = a$ ’ in the judgment’s grounds. He rightly points out that there can be identification<sub>c</sub> without identification<sub>p</sub>, and that in such cases the judgment is still IEM. (I will discuss these cases in a minute.) But I don’t think this supports the Simple Account as opposed to mine. What my account says is simply this: sometimes, there is no identification<sub>c</sub> of the subject in the *lekton* because an ‘architectural’ mechanism ensures that the content of the state is about the subject’s own body. Using Searle’s mode/content distinction: in the relevant cases it is the mode of the experience, not its content, which is responsible for its first personal character, by fixing the self as the relevant point of evaluation for the content. Since, in such cases, the mode dictates that the content can only be self-ascribed, no identity premise (no identification<sub>p</sub>) is needed to ground the first person judgment. There is no sense in which I can think ‘Someone is *F*, but is it me?’, because the mode of the experience which grounds the judgment precludes the possibility that it might not be me. This is entirely compatible with the Simple Account. Again, I explain *why*, in the relevant cases, no identity premise is involved.

García-Carpintero cites two objections which have been made to my account. The first is that there can be IEM even if the subject is explicitly represented in the content of the judgment. This corresponds to the cases in which there is identification<sub>c</sub> without identification<sub>p</sub>. As García-Carpintero points out, I acknowledge their existence, and I account for them by appealing to the process of ‘reflection’ through which an element of secondary content implicitly contributed by the mode is made explicit and gets represented in the primary content of the reflective judgment (Recanati 2012a). Reflection is, for example, the transition from ‘It is raining’ to ‘It is raining here’. This transition never involves adding anything to the grounds of the original judgment. If I am justified in believing, on the basis of my perception, ‘it is raining’, then I am justified in believing, on the same basis, ‘it is raining here’. Because the grounds of the post-reflection judgment are the same as the grounds of the original judgment, if the latter is IEM by the simple account, i.e. lacks an identity premise

among its grounds, then the former is bound to be IEM too. So I have no trouble with cases of identification<sub>c</sub> without identification<sub>p</sub>.

The other objection is this. Immunity to error through misidentification also affects judgments that are not in the first person. A demonstrative judgment ‘That is *F*’ can be (and typically is) IEM, by the lights of most authors who write about the topic. But my account, according to García-Carpintero (following Wright), fails to extend to demonstrative IEM. Now, I don’t agree that it fails, though I agree that some work has to be done to implement my proposal in the demonstrative case. But even if my account failed to extend to demonstrative IEM, that would not necessarily be a problem since the Simple Account takes IEM to be a negative property. As Wright himself suggested, different mechanisms can be at work in the first person case and in the demonstrative case; the explanation of why an identity premise is not required may be different in the two cases (Wright 2012: 274).

I now turn to the tension which García-Carpintero detects between my Lewisian account of IEM and the mental file framework. Mental files are singular terms in the language of thought, so if first person thoughts are thoughts involving the SELF file, then their content is not Lewisian: it is not selfless. I quote García-Carpintero:

‘Simply put, mental files are individual concepts, and concepts are ingredients of contents. If the account of *de se* thoughts is that they deploy the SELF mental file, then the contents of *de se* thoughts have this concept as an ingredient. (...) In the terminology used above, Recanati’s account of *de se* thoughts and their communication appears to involve an identification<sub>c</sub> — the SELF file.’ (Garcia-Carpintero: 203)

This is a good objection, and I am happy of the opportunity it provides to clarify my views on this topic (the relations between the mental file account and the Lewisian account in *Perspectival Thought*).

García-Carpintero notes that, in addition to files (which are conceptual and satisfy the Generality Constraint), I also posit ‘proto-files’ which are nonconceptual. Thus there is a proto-file SELF\*, which can *only* host information gained in the first person way (while the SELF file can host any information one gains about oneself). But this does not neatly correlate with the distinction between ‘explicit’ *de se* thoughts, in which the self is represented, and ‘implicit’ *de se* thoughts whose content is selfless. It’s OK to say that explicit *de se*

thoughts involve the SELF file, but what about implicit *de se* thoughts? Carpintero hypothesises that ‘it is the SELF\* proto-file that figures in basic, “implicit” *de se* contents’, but objects that ‘contentful states involving the SELF\* proto-file still appear to involve an identification<sub>c</sub>’ (p. 10). Indeed, if the SELF\* proto-file contributes to the primary content of first person experience at the nonconceptual level, then the primary content in question is *not* selfless. Hence García-Carpintero’s doubts regarding ‘the compatibility of [my] Lewisian account of *de se* contents and the mental files approach’ (192).

Yet, I maintain, they *are* compatible. My Lewisian account is an account of the (selfless) content of first person *experience*. Based on the experience, there is a first person *thought* involving the SELF file. That thought is explicitly first personal. It involves identification<sub>c</sub> but no identification<sub>p</sub> because, through ‘reflection’, the thought inherits the grounds of the underlying experience.

What about the proto-file? In virtue of its mode, the experience feeds its selfless content into the SELF\* proto-file, but I do not regard the proto-file as an aspect of the experience itself. The experience I analyse into (selfless) content and mode. Nor is the self\* proto-file used in thought; rather, it is used in the guidance of action. So I maintain that the Lewisian account applies to first person experience, while the mental file account applies to reflective thought in which the self is explicitly represented. The transition from first person experience to explicit first person thought is only possible if the subject possesses a first-person concept, i.e. a SELF file.

In closing, let me address another worry, voiced by Coliva and Belleri, regarding my account of IEM:

‘The identity between oneself and the person whose body is responsible for the proprioceptive/self-locating information one is receiving, or between oneself and the person whose memories one is storing, is only contingent. But if our SELF file should guarantee knowledge of its referent in all possible circumstances, for otherwise it would no longer be a SELF file, it cannot be based on those epistemically rewarding relations. For, in some circumstances, they would not deliver information about oneself... Hence, we need a relation which secures the knowledgeable identity of the subject to himself *in all possible circumstances*. That relation, we take it, would rather be the one between the subject and the thinker of a given occurrent thought. What this shows is that not all singular modes of presentation of a given entity, in this case the subject himself, are on a par with respect to a given file. Some

would seem to be constitutive of it, like ‘the thinker of this occurrent thought’ for SELF.’ (Coliva and Belleri: 113-4)

But the reference of a file is not the object one is gaining information from through the relevant information channel. In the deviant cases Coliva and Belleri allude to (quasi-memory, quasi-perception, quasi-proprioception, etc.), the information channel delivers information whose (deviant) source turns out to be another individual. But *the file still refers to the subject under those circumstances*: the subject still refers to himself or herself by deploying the SELF file. The file refers to the object one stands in the right ER-relation to, and in the case of the SELF file, that relation is identity.

The information channels correspond to ways of gaining information about an object  $x$  that are normally available to the subject when, and only when,  $s/he$  stands in the right relation to  $x$ . The relation is said to be ‘epistemically rewarding’ because, when that relation holds, one is in a position to gain information about  $x$  in a special way, e.g. (in the first person case) ‘from inside’.<sup>8</sup> That special information channel normally delivers information about the object  $x$  one stands in the corresponding ER relation to, but in the deviant cases it does not: in quasi-proprioception, for example, information gained from inside (through proprioception) has its source in another individual than the individual we are. Still, the SELF file refers to oneself, even in these circumstances, because it refers to the object one stands in the right relation to — not to the object we are gaining information from.

Be that as it may, Coliva’s and Belleri’s search for a relation that guarantees self-knowledge in all possible circumstances sounds suspiciously Cartesian and seems to fall prey to Wright’s objection:

‘Those of my thoughts that are immune to error through misidentification are not so because they involve super-sure identification of myself, conceived on the model of knowledge of an identity ‘I am  $a$ ’ [e.g. : I am

<sup>8</sup> The ER relation, in the first person case, is *not* the relation of ‘gaining information about  $x$  from inside’. The ER relation is identity. The ER relation is one thing, and the information channel corresponding to it is another. Normally, they go together: one can gain information about  $x$  from inside just in case one is  $x$ . Yet the ‘internal’ information channel can fail to deliver information about oneself, while the SELF file, based upon the ER relation (identity), can’t fail to refer to oneself.

the thinker of this thought — FR], but because no such judgment... features in their justificational architecture.' (Wright 2012: 253)

This — the Simple Account — applies to all IEM thoughts. Now there is an important distinction (emphasized by Coliva in her work) between logical IEM and contingent or *de facto* IEM. The mechanism I posit to explain IEM is meant to account for contingent first person IEM. I have tried to extend it to another kind of contingent IEM, namely demonstrative IEM — without being able to convince either Wright or García-Carpintero that this is the right way to go. I suspect that the underlying mechanism is different in the case of logical IEM, a property exhibited by self-ascription of one's occurrent thoughts. Given that (i) the SELF file refers to the subject in whose thought the file is deployed, and (ii) the subject is 'attuned' to that fact, it would be incoherent for a reflective subject to deny ownership of his or her own occurrent thoughts. In this case, perhaps, García-Carpintero's analysis of IEM applies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'A thought of the form *A is P* is IEM when the ascribed property *P* [e.g. being the thinker of this thought] is already ascribed to the referent of the concept *A* as part of its background reference-fixing information' (García-Carpintero: 203). In the case of the the SELF file, the reference-fixing rule is that it refers to the thinker in whose thought the file is deployed.



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