

Consulting *The Reference Book*

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The Reference Book debunks two widely held views, one about singular thought and one about singular reference. It throws cold water over the common view, stemming from Russell but usually endorsed in forms weaker than Russell's, that thinking about an object requires some sort of acquaintance with it. And it thoroughly undermines the popular view that proper names and demonstratives, in contrast to definite and indefinite descriptions, are essentially or "paradigmatically" referring expressions. Although John Hawthorne and David Manley do not develop a positive view on singular thought beyond a few scattered suggestions about "mental object-representations," they do offer a detailed, systematic, and unified semantic account of these four types of noun phrases that covers their respective uses, referential and otherwise, in surprisingly similar ways.

With *The Reference Book* the delight is in the details, to be found in hundreds of substantive footnotes as well as in the main text. A blog about it could elicit copious posts and lengthy threads. I can't begin to do justice to this book and will confine myself to a critical look at its main theses. As one might predict from the fact that I've written things with such titles as *Thought and Reference*, "Getting a thing into a thought," and "What does it take to refer?", this book hits home to me. So, in a friendly way, I'll try to hit back.

H&M's "liberalism" about singular thought is a negative thesis: "there is no general acquaintance restriction on reference or singular thought" (p. 24). Unfortunately, they do not propose an alternative restriction. Assuming they think there is one, in section 1 I will suggest that their discussion needs to be rounded out with some version of the distinction suggested by Russell's famous Bismarck passage, which I will call the Bismarck distinction and which can be respected without incorporating Russell's intolerably strict notion of acquaintance. Singular thought is not achieved merely by thinking of an object under a description, but that leaves open what is required. H&M motivate their liberalism by presenting a series of eight kinds of cases of singular thought that do not involve acquaintance, but in section 2 I will argue that none of them qualifies as a genuine case of singular thought.

H&M then develop a unified account of the semantics of four kinds of expressions that are often but not always used to refer: expressions of all four kinds are existential quantifier phrases, "alike in their truth-conditional contributions, differing only in their presuppositional profiles"

(p. 91).¹ When their descriptive contents are not uniquely satisfied, these phrases include covert “domain-restricting elements,” a “singleton restrictor” if the phrase is grammatically singular. When the phrase is used referentially, its singleton restrictor is “singular”: it does not merely delimit the extension to one uniquely determined object, it specifies which object that is. In section 3 I will argue on several grounds that positing syntactically real but covert domain restrictors is unwarranted. Not only that, it fails to capture what is distinctive about referential uses of these expressions and misconstrues the role of their descriptive contents. There is also the question of what counts as reference, illustrated vividly in connection with H&M’s treatment of specific indefinites. Their liberalism about reference allows them to count specific (as opposed to merely existential) uses of indefinite descriptions as referential, despite being “coy” rather than “candid.” I will argue that these are really cases of what I call *allusion* (in a sense to be explained), not reference.

H&M finish with some fascinating conjectures about the nature of singular restrictors, whether or not construed as covertly present in the syntax. In section 4 I will point out that the question remains of how to cash in, not just label, the distinction between singular and merely singleton restrictors. H&M gingerly toy with a notion of mental object-representations but do not say much about what it takes to be one. I will suggest that in order to clarify the difference between an object-representation and the mental equivalent of a definite description, they need to formulate and adopt some version of the Bismarck distinction.

1. If not acquaintance, what?

Philosophers who invoke some notion of acquaintance in giving an account of singular thought are motivated by the consideration that if we could think of things in the world only under descriptions, our view of the world would be entirely qualitative. We would never be related in thought to anything in particular. From our perspective at any particular time, we could think that there exists a unique thing of a certain sort at a certain place, but the particular thing of that sort would not enter into the picture. Our knowledge of physical things would be, as Russell would say, only by description, or, as a psychiatrist might say, only by proxy. Being acquainted with something, whatever this is exactly, has seemed to many the only alternative to thinking of it merely under a description (and the latter doesn’t really count as thinking of *it*).

Russell, with his notoriously stringent conception of acquaintance, held that we can’t think of physical objects except under descriptions, and the only particulars we can be acquainted with are

¹ All page references, unless otherwise indicated, are to (what else?) *The Reference Book*.

sense-data and perhaps ourselves. Others have proposed much looser notions that do allow acquaintance with physical objects, at least via perception if not via memory and communication as well. H&M distinguish two generic notions of acquaintance, causal and epistemic. In Part I of their book, “Against acquaintance,” they debunk them both. Their arguments against the causal notion (in Ch. 2) are directed against theorists whose arguments rely on certain assumptions about belief reports, most notably (“Harmony”) that any belief report with a content clause containing a singular term can be true only if the subject believes a singular proposition (p. 38). Having long rejected that assumption, I agree with H&M that appealing to the semantics of belief reports or, for that matter, to their (pragmatic) acceptability conditions does not much help the acquaintance theorist’s case.² And I have never been sympathetic to epistemic notions of acquaintance.³ Still, if thinking of something under a description does not qualify as having a singular thought about it, then what does?

H&M offer no specific answer to this question. Even assuming that singular thought comprises a “cognitive natural kind,” they doubt that there is a neatly specifiable alternative constraint on it and suggest that “the primary ideas associated with ‘singular thought’ are parasitic on the notion of reference” (p. 243n). However, they also doubt that there is a determinate constraint on reference either. They think that philosophical definitions of ‘refer’ are stipulative and ultimately arbitrary, even if reference as viewed by philosophers comprises a “semantic natural kind,” and they note that the ordinary use of ‘refers’ is “much more inclusive than the term of art is intended to be” (p. 245n.).⁴ Still, unless one denies that we have singular thoughts about physical things or allows that thinking of them under descriptions counts as having singular thoughts, one needs to say something about how they differ from *descriptive* thoughts, as we may call them. Since H&M don’t seem to be either eliminativists or reductionists about singular thought, presumably they would agree that there is something to the distinction between descriptive thoughts and singular thoughts.

Most would agree with Russell that thinking of an object under a description does not count as singular thought, since the content of the thought is independent of which object, if any,

² One source of trouble is the structural ambiguity of phrases like ‘*de re* belief ascription’. In particular, a [*de re*] [belief ascription] need not be a [*de re* belief] ascription. See Bach 1987/1994: 16-17.

³ See Bach 1987/1994: 39-45, where I critically examine Evans’ endorsement of what he dubs Russell’s Principle: “In order to have a thought about a particular object, you must know which object it is about which you are thinking” (1982: 74). H&M take up Evans on Russell’s Principle in the first section of Chapter 3.

⁴ I confess to having used ‘reference’ as a term of art in Bach 2006, where I restricted it to objectual reference and used ‘singling out’ as a term of art for what I am here calling descriptive reference.

satisfies the description.⁵ This content is general, not singular, what Strawson called a “uniquely existential” proposition (1950: 322). Russell illustrated the difference with his well-known example of Bismarck. Just for a moment ignore his highly restrictive notion of acquaintance and go along with his assumption that whereas Bismarck was acquainted with himself, we can know him only “by description.”⁶ Given that assumption, Russell contrasts the situation of Bismarck himself, who “might have used his name directly to designate the person with whom he was acquainted ... [and could] ma[k]e a judgement about himself” that includes himself as a constituent (1912: 54), with *our* situation in respect to him:

[W]hen we make a statement about something known only by description, we often *intend* to make our statement, not in the form involving the description, but about the actual thing described. That is, when we say anything about Bismarck, we should like, if we could, to make the judgement which Bismarck alone can make, namely, the judgement of which he himself is a constituent. In this we are necessarily defeated.
(1912: 56-57)

That proposition is a singular proposition, but we are not in a position to entertain it.⁷ The best we can do is entertain a general, descriptive proposition. This general proposition, though if true is made true by a fact involving Bismarck, does not itself involve Bismarck, and would be thinkable even if Bismarck never existed.⁸

The important thing here is not what Russell says about the example but the distinction he intends it to illustrate. Call this the *Bismarck distinction*, however liberally it should ultimately be drawn.⁹ H&M seem to accept some such distinction, but they do not offer an account of it. In the

⁵ This reflects the most important feature of Russell’s theory of descriptions, that the proposition semantically expressed by a sentence containing a definite description does not depend on what, if anything, satisfies the description.

⁶ Interestingly, Russell remarks that “there are various stages in the removal from acquaintance with particulars: there is Bismarck to people who knew him, Bismarck to those who only know of him through history,” and so on (1912: 57), but these ways of knowing (of) him are for Russell only ways of knowing of him by description, not acquaintance.

⁷ Russell had occasion to call propositions that contain particulars “particular” propositions, but nowadays it is common to call them “singular,” as opposed to “general” propositions. ‘Particular’ is actually the better term, since it more naturally contrasts with ‘general’, whereas ‘singular’ more naturally contrasts with ‘plural’. Not only that, reference can be made to pluralities, and propositions involving particular pluralities can be entertained and communicated.

⁸ This is so even if the description is rigid – being rigid is not sufficient for being referential. Also, uniqueness is no substitute for particularity.

⁹ It should be noted that liberalizing Russell’s conception of acquaintance requires changing its character. And that requires giving it character (in something like Kaplan’s sense). On Russell’s conception the only alternative to thinking of an object under a description is to think of it directly, in an unmediated way. No wonder that on his conception acquaintance with an object requires being guaranteed that it exists and has just the properties it appears to have, no more and no less. But this dichotomy misrepresents the relevant

next section I will suggest that their discussion of eight counterexamples to acquaintance theories of singular thought does not do justice to the Bismarck distinction. Here I wish to suggest that although no notion of acquaintance, even one much weaker than Russell's, is needed to sustain this distinction, there is still an intuitively plausible way of understanding it, as well as the corresponding distinction between strong and weak notions of reference ('objectual' and 'descriptive', as I call them).

We need a way to contrast singular thinking of an object with thinking "of" it under a description. For example, the thought that the first Chancellor of a united Germany was a man does not count as singular thought because its content is independent of the fact that Bismarck was the first Chancellor of a united Germany (it is, of course, made true by a fact about Bismarck because he in fact fits that description). To paraphrase Donnellan, this element of generality ought to be absent if what we are doing is thinking of some particular thing.¹⁰ This "lack of particularity," to use Donnellan's phrase, keeps the thought from being about Bismarck, except in "a very weak sense," because the object is whoever satisfies the description. It could have been someone else or no one at all without the content of the thought being affected. What is lacking, I suggest, is a *representational connection* between thought and object (Bach 2010). Whether the connection is direct, via perception, or indirect via memory and/or communication, the object of thought is determined *relationally* rather than *satisfactionally*.¹¹ Relational determination requires a representation connection, but this often does not involve perception of or even acquaintance with the object.¹² Bearing a representational connection to something that one has never perceived is not a weak form of acquaintance. As Kaplan explains, "apprehension through

contrast. The relevant contrast is not between mediated and unmediated thinking, but between two different kinds of ways of thinking of things, one singular, where the object is determined relationally, and the other descriptive, where the object is determined satisfactionally. Importantly, on a more liberalized conception of singular thought, one can have a thought that is singular in character even if it has no object, in which case its content fails to amount to a proposition.

¹⁰ This is a direct quote from Donnellan (1966: 303), except that I have replaced 'referring to' with 'thinking of'. Donnellan distinguishes reference in a strong sense and reference in a weak sense, and this mirrors his referential-attributive distinction and my objectual-descriptive distinction.

¹¹ Recanati adopted the relational/satisfactional distinction in his 1993 (Ch. 6) and recently has developed it further in his 2012.

¹² On the account that I sketched in earlier work (Bach 1987/1994: Part One), the difference between uniquely existential and singular thoughts comes down to the difference between descriptonal and *de re* representations. There are different sorts of *de re* representational relations, based on perception, memory, or communication, but however remote and many-linked they are, they must be grounded in someone's perception of the represented object. I have my doubts about certain aspects of this view (see Bach 2010), as do H&M, but I will not go into them here. Here I am stressing the Bismarck distinction, however it is best drawn.

language,” his main case of this, “is not a very indirect form of perception that yields a very indirect form of acquaintance” (1989: 604).¹³

H&M briefly take up my relational/satisfactional distinction, which they seem to find unmotivated, and they object that I characterize representational connections as causal (pp. 17-19). However, their main basis for this complaint is the fact that one can’t bear such relations to times and places. Leaving aside the fact that I wasn’t considering singular thoughts about times and places (assuming we can have singular thoughts about them), nothing that H&M say undercuts the need for *some* sort of representational connection. For example, they suggest that perhaps “our primary internal representations of here and now are anchored by spatio-temporal rather than causal-historical relations” (p. 18). And, they suggest, “we might imagine that an internal representation can be of a particular place by disposing its bearer to move to that place given various conative attitudes.” They do not elaborate, but it seems that this suggestion is compatible with a representational connection requirement, at least if the connection does not have to be causal in all cases. Interestingly, at one point H&M themselves suggest that in referring to an individual a speaker can put an audience in a position of “exploiting the speaker’s *connection* to that individual” (p. 138; my emphasis). However, neither here nor anywhere else do they indicate what this connection amounts to or what the constraints on it might be. Yet they employ here a notion that, for all the reader (or at least this reader) can tell, is a version of the idea of representational connection.

2. Problematic problem cases

H&M grant that many central cases of singular thought do involve acquaintance (on one conception or another), but object to generalizing from them. Before directly challenging arguments for causal conceptions (in Ch. 2) or for epistemic ones (in Ch. 3) of acquaintance, they present a series of eight examples of what they claim to be cases of singular thought, in each of which causal acquaintance is lacking. Here we will look at these eight problem cases to see if they spell trouble for accounts that require a causal or a representational connection.

H&M invite readers, in order “to detect the presence or absence of singular thought in the following cases,” to employ “their own preferred heuristics, as long as these heuristics do not

¹³ One major issue here is how to assess what Kaplan calls the “Instrumental Thesis,” according to which “our connection with a linguistic community in which names and other meaning-bearing elements are passed down to us enable us to entertain thoughts through the language that would not otherwise be accessible to us” (1989: 603). “Contrary to Russell,” Kaplan holds that “we succeed in thinking about things in the world not only through the mental residue of that which we ourselves experience, but also vicariously, through the symbolic resources that come to us through language” (1989: 604).

import an assumption of causal acquaintance” (p. 27). Otherwise, H&M are very permissive:

Some will proceed via judgments about the truth of exported belief reports, or reports with referential terms in their complement clauses, [and others] via judgments about whether subjects can succeed in using a referential expression and grasping the propositions they express with it. ... And others still will ask themselves whether tags or files are present in the subject’s psychology, and whether these succeed in referring. (p. 27)

Readers’ intuitions are permitted to be tainted by theory, so long as they are not stained by any bias toward causal acquaintance.¹⁴ H&M indicate that they themselves will allow their intuitions to be guided by the first two considerations they mention, exportability and referentiality. As they say early on, “referential terms give us a window into a certain kind of content, and attitude reports that use them give us a window into a distinctive kind of mental state” (p. 2), and later, “We shall, for now, assume with semantic orthodoxy that names, demonstratives, and simple indexicals are referential terms” (p. 27), an orthodoxy they reject in Part II.¹⁵

I will run through H&M’s eight cases, all of which they claim to be positive instances of singular thought. They do not present contrasting examples of what they take *not* to be cases of singular thought.¹⁶ This omission is unfortunate, since we are left to guess just how liberal they are about singular thought and to wonder if they are even prepared to count some sorts of descriptive thoughts as singular.¹⁷

1. *Reverse causal chains*. Whereas causal acquaintance accounts say that “the object of thought must in some way causally impact the subject” (pp. 27-28), in the first counterexample the causal connection goes in the opposite direction. Henry VIII orders the construction of a ship, to be christened *Henry Grace à Dieu*, and knows that it will be completed by a certain date. According to H&M, “Surely he succeeds in referring to the ship if [after that date] he says ‘I plan to see *Henry Grace à Dieu*’.” Well, perhaps he succeeds in referring to the ship, but it does not

¹⁴ H&M also “recommend against diagnosing the presence or absence of singular thought by asking if the speaker ‘knows who x is’ or ‘believes of x that she is F’ or ‘has x in mind’,” for reasons they explain later, in §§2.5 and 3.1.

¹⁵ I too reject it, as well as their principle of Harmony (p. 38). As they note, I deny that the presence or absence of singular thought “line[s] up with the truth or falsity of belief reports where a referential device to that object occurs in that that-clause” (p. 17n). I also reject exportability as a conclusive test. See Bach 1987/1994: pp. 16-17 and ch. 10.

¹⁶ Robin Jeshion (2009), in her effort to debunk any acquaintance constraint on singular thought, wisely presents pairs of minimally different examples for her readers to consider. She claims that one member of each pair is a genuine instance of singular thought and that the other is not. Although I do not agree with her assessment (I don’t think she does justice to the Bismarck distinction), I appreciate her methodology. See Sawyer 2012 for a critique of Jeshion’s account.

¹⁷ An extremely permissive version of this view, known in the ‘70s as “latitudinarianism,” is that *de re* (i.e. singular) thoughts are just a subclass of *de dicto* (i.e. descriptive) thoughts. See, e.g., Sosa 1970 and Chisholm 1976.

follow that he is in a position to have singular thoughts about it.¹⁸ Perhaps that isn't necessary for being in a position to refer to it, especially if this includes referring to it descriptively. H&M observe that "we would not withhold an exported ascription: there is a warship such that King Henry believes he will see it" (p. 28). But it hardly follows that the ascription can be made true only by a singular thought on Henry's part. That requires the principle of Harmony (see note 15), which H&M use to defend liberalism, a principle they acknowledge some acquaintance theorists won't accept.

2. *Reference by decomposition.* Noting that "one can surely perceive an object even if parts of it are hidden," H&M suggest that "it often seems that one can name — and have singular thoughts about — both the parts that are perceived and the parts that are not. For example, suppose a mechanic points at a car and says, 'Let me see that engine'. We would not want to deny that there is a particular engine such that the mechanic wants to see it. And yet there may be no causal relation here to speak of" (p. 28). H&M do not explain why being able to name something requires being in a position to have singular thoughts about it, and they do not explain how it is that the mechanic really could have singular thoughts about the car's engine rather than merely descriptive thoughts about it. They give no reason for supposing that this is entailed by the truth of the wide scope descriptive ascription they mention.

Before taking up the remaining six cases, I should note that H&M's discussion of each has a heading of the form 'Reference by ...'. They seem content to claim that singular reference is present, as if reference to something guarantees singular thought about it. Since they recognize that this is debatable, it is surprising that they do not try to induce intuitions that singular thought is present too. It is especially problematic because the term 'reference' covers descriptive as well as objectual reference.

3. *Reference by character.* Suppose we accept "a roughly Kaplanian account of indexicals," on which "there is a linguistic rule for every indexical—its 'character'—that determines its reference with respect to a context" (p. 28).¹⁹ H&M point out that such rules do not advert to causal relations between the user of an indexical and its reference. So even if we are not causally acquainted with the referent, such as the present time or our current location, we are not "barred from properly using these terms as vehicles expressing singular thoughts in cases where we are

¹⁸ It should be noted that the presence of a "reverse" causal chain from the king to the ship is not really essential to the case. Henry's butler and perhaps even his wife at the time could be in just as good a position as Henry to refer to the ship. Nor does it matter that the ship had been christened or even that it had a name at all. It may not even matter whether it had already been completed. Such reference as Henry could have made to it was merely descriptive.

¹⁹ This is a big supposition, except in the special cases of pure indexicals like 'I' and 'today'. I have argued that demonstratives and most indexicals suffer from a "character deficiency" (Bach 2005: sec. 10).

not causally connected to the object determined by the character.” But there is no argument here that we automatically manage to express singular thoughts in such cases. Rather, there is a hidden assumption that asserting a singular proposition requires having a singular thought. Even if “some indexicals refer to objects that have no causal effect on us” (p. 29), it doesn’t follow that a speaker using those indexicals has singular thoughts about their referents.²⁰

4. *Reference by convention.* Here H&M imagine a world in which each person’s name takes the form of a unique number. They ask us to “suppose a member of such a community is discussing a distant relative with whom she has no direct causal contact. Instead of exploiting a causal chain of name-uses—as we would—this individual attempts to exploit a convention involving an algorithm. Does she succeed?” (p. 30). H&M deem it “implausible to insist that she cannot have a singular thought about that individual.” But why? The mere fact that a unique individual is determined by the number that is their name, say 314,159,265, does not put one in a position to think of that individual – except under a description, such as ‘the person with number 314,159,265’. Thinking that the person with number 314,159,265 is a pastry chef doesn’t count as a singular thought, even though one can express it with ‘314,159,265 is a pastry chef’. As Russell would say, one can know that there is such a singular thought even though one is unable to entertain it oneself. One’s thought that the person with number 314,159,265 is a pastry chef is merely a general, descriptive thought, one that is only weakly about person 314,159,265. One can use ‘314,159,265’ to refer to person 314,159,265, but this is merely descriptive reference, reference in the weak sense (see note 10).

5. *Reference by conspicuity.* Here H&M are concerned with “whether the mechanisms by which the reference of a demonstrative expression is fixed must involve a special *causal* relation to the object” (p. 30), and of course they think that no such relation is required. They point out that a speaker can refer to something by exploiting the fact that the addressee knows that it is “foremost on his mind” at the time (p. 31). The hearer need not be in cognitive contact, e.g. be “within sight” of it “to have referred to it, or to grasp what [the speaker] is saying” (p. 31). This is all well and good, but it has no evident connection to the conditions on singular thought. If we count descriptive reference as reference, at least in a weak sense, then we can grant everything H&M say here without giving up the anti-liberal claim that singular thought about an object requires acquaintance with it or at least a representational connection to it.

6. *Reference by proxy.* The same point applies to H&M’s discussion of so-called deferred

²⁰ H&M give examples like ‘here’, ‘today’, and ‘tomorrow’ to underscore their point: places and times can’t be objects of causal acquaintance, and this poses a problem for opponents of liberalism. However, it is not obvious that we can have singular thoughts about places and times, except perhaps our present place and time (by virtue of occupying them), and H&M do not explain how we can.

demonstratives, “whereby one refers to an object absent from the perceptual scene by exploiting some salient prop” (p. 31). They consider deferred demonstratives “every bit as referential as ordinary demonstratives,” but how referential is that? Only enough to require descriptive reference, reference in the weak sense that does not require the speaker to be in a position to have singular thoughts about the referent. Yes, “prima facie, there seems no reason to deny the semantic well-functioning of referential terms and intentions in these cases” (p. 31), but semantic well-functioning does not require objectual reference and the expression of singular thought.

H&M plausibly claim that in cases of deferred reference a “speaker expresses the same proposition when she says, ‘That is my friend’, whether she is pointing at Bob, pointing at a door through which Bob has just left, or pointing at a photograph of Bob” (p. 31). Even so, this leaves open which proposition that is, whether the addressee has to grasp that proposition in order to understand the speaker, and whether it is a singular proposition. H&M may find that “it remains natural—by the lights of standard heuristics—to think that there are associated singular thoughts directed at Bob that are being communicated,” but they haven’t made clear what these theory-neutral heuristics are or what sorts of cases they exclude. And they haven’t shown that successful communication requires grasping the proposition that the speaker expressed.

7. *Reference by postulation.* The example here is the well-known case of Leverrier bestowing the name ‘Neptune’ on the planet he postulated as perturbing the orbit of Uranus and seemingly using that name to refer to that planet. H&M claim that he “stipulated that the name ‘Neptune’ would refer to that planet” (p. 32), but it’s not clear that that is quite what he did. Naming is one thing and referring is another (Bach 1987/1994: 159-161 and 2002: 83-85). I could bestow the name ‘Shorty’ on the tallest tree in Canada, but that would not enable me to refer to it, except in the weak, descriptive sense. As for Leverrier, “There seems no prima facie reason to deny that Leverrier succeeds in referring to the planet with ‘Neptune’ or ‘that’, despite the lack of perceptual contact” (p. 32), but again this is only in the weak, descriptive sense. He can’t refer objectually to Neptune, much less have singular thoughts about it. At least H&M haven’t shown that he can.

8. *Reference by depiction.* Here we need to distinguish photographs and films, which obviously do involve a causal connection originating with the object, from drawings (or paintings) and maps, which do not (except indirectly in some cases). As H&M see it, “With the right intentions, these portrayals will all count as depictions of their intended subjects. And we see no reason to deny that the representational contents of these images—assuming they have contents—will involve the objects that are depicted, or that they can be used as props for deferred demonstratives” (p. 34). Once again, however, they do not make a case that this is reference in

the strong sense and not merely descriptive reference, which is not in dispute. Nor do they show that the painter's or the cartographer's intention, even if it involves a singular thought about the represented scene or area, somehow imparts objectual referential properties to the painting or the map and enables the viewer to have singular thoughts about the intended objects.

None of H&M's eight cases is convincing, at least to me. They do not make it plausible that these really are cases of objectual reference, much less of singular thought.²¹ Their appeal to intuitions, with or without the help of considerations about the appropriateness or exportability of referential terms, does not discriminate between objectual and descriptive reference and is not sensitive to the Bismarck distinction. And even if objectual reference is possible in a given case, it is not obvious that being in a position to have singular thoughts about the referent is necessary for that. Admittedly, I am assuming that there is a genuine distinction between objectual and descriptive reference and a corresponding distinction between singular thoughts and general, descriptive thoughts, but H&M do not seem to reject this assumption. They give no indication that they are eliminativists or reductionists about objectual reference or singular thought.

3. Semantic Existentialism

It is not clear how Part II, despite its title "Beyond acquaintance," depends on liberalism about singular thought and reference. So far as I can tell, its main thesis is independent of whether singular reference requires acquaintance with the referent. Anyway, Part II explores diverse views on the semantics of the main types of noun phrases that can be used to refer. In the course of their investigation, H&M identify numerous theoretical "choice points" that arise along the way and single out the virtues and shortcomings of the different options. Their own main claim is that there is no fundamental difference in semantic kind between proper names and demonstratives, reputedly "paradigmatically referential" expressions, and definite descriptions and specific indefinite descriptions, which are generally treated as quantifier phrases (H&M devote surprisingly little attention to indexicals). All four types can be used, and used literally, both to refer and in other, non-referring ways, but this does not mean that they are semantically ambiguous. Rather, each type of expression admits of a unitary semantic account. I agree with H&M on this and, indeed, I have argued similarly myself.²² But they go much further. Their

²¹ Recall the possibility raised in connection with several cases: perhaps being able to make objectual reference in a given case does not imply, at least not obviously, that one is in a position to have singular thoughts about the referent.

²² This is the gist of the "Embarrassingly Simple Argument" I used to show, making an exception for pure indexicals, that "virtually any expression that can be used to refer is not inherently referential," because it can also be used literally without being used to refer (Bach 2006: 542). I contended this is not due to any

account “offers not only a unified treatment of the various uses of each expression type, but a surprising degree of semantic uniformity among the various expression-types themselves” (p. 91). Instead of invoking rampant ambiguity, they opt for context sensitivity.

H&M draw from different theoretical sources, a debt they graciously acknowledge (p. 92n), but this does not detract from the originality of their unified approach. As they see it, expressions of all four types are “specific existentials,” whose differences “are to be cashed out in terms of their respective presuppositions rather than truth-conditionally” (p. 218). The presuppositions in question are conditions on felicitous use. Whether or not used to refer, the four types share “a presupposition of specificity.” This is marked, covertly if necessary, by an accompanying context-sensitive domain restrictor that narrows down a phrase’s extension to exactly one object or, if the phrase is plural, to one plurality (we will not take up the plural case, although H&M do have some very interesting things to say about it). When the noun phrase is grammatically singular, a “singleton restrictor” is present, restricting the domain to one thing, and when reference occurs, this is a “singular restrictor.” Specific uses of singular indefinites are distinctive in that their singular restrictors can be “coy,” whereas the others’ must be “candid,” something H&M claim is “meaning-triggered.” Demonstratives differ from definite descriptions in that they require “supplementation,” and proper names, when used to refer, exploit “appropriate naming practices.”

When an expression of any sort is used to refer, according to H&M its singular restrictor doesn’t just narrow down the required property, it takes the form ‘= *o*’. That is, the referent is that which has the property given by the expression’s descriptive content and is identical to object *o* (the letter ‘*o*’ here is schematic for what H&M call “object-representations”). Notice how this view takes us full circle: singular restrictors contain object-representations, which, though not overt linguistic expressions (perhaps they are not linguistic at all, as we will see later), are paradigmatically referential. In section 4 I will raise a question about the status of these object-representations and return to the issue of the Bismarck distinction, that is, of how to do justice to the difference between singular thoughts and descriptive ones.

Although I applaud H&M’s objective of taking a broadly unified approach to the semantics of the four types of expressions, I have doubts about the claims just mentioned. First, there is reason to doubt that domain restriction involves covert but syntactically real domain restrictors, whose semantic values are somehow “supplied by context.” This is too much to ask context to do. It is preferable to construe domain restrictions pragmatically, as a matter of speakers’ intentions.

kind of shiftiness in linguistic meaning, be it semantic ambiguity, underspecification, indexicality, or vagueness.

Also, viewing reference as involving assigning values to singular covert restrictors misconstrues the role of the descriptive contents of the expressions used to make reference. A separate point is that there is reason to deny that specific uses of indefinites, with their coy restrictions, qualify as genuine cases of reference, even descriptive (never mind objectual). Moreover, if coyness precludes reference, that takes the steam out of the claim that the requirement of candidness on referential uses of definites, demonstratives, and names are “meaning-triggered.” I will expand on these doubts in what follows.

The linguistic status of covert domain restrictions

Since H&M distinguish the meanings of the noun phrases they consider in terms of presuppositions regarding their associated domain restrictions, they need to maintain that these restrictions are marked by covert elements, whose values are determined somehow by the context of utterance. H&M see “nothing revolutionary about positing covert elements in restrictors. They are frequently posited to explain the truth conditions of utterances that intuitively involve quantifier domain restriction” (p. 133).²³ However, they do acknowledge that some philosophers are “averse to hidden semantic structure frequently postulated by semanticists (p. 110), and allow that “much of what we say could be adapted” to frameworks “requiring extra pragmatic supplementation” instead of extra syntax (p. 35). That is fortunate, for there are several problems with positing covert domain restrictors.

Rather than argue directly for their syntactic presence and semantic significance, H&M rely on an undefended assumption about the probative value of “intuitive truth-conditions”:²⁴

[We] assume that intuitions about the truth and falsity of sentences at contexts are a reasonable guide to their semantic content. We thus will be setting aside views that utterly divorce the truth conditions of sentences at contexts from ordinary judgments of truth and falsity—for example, views on which ‘There is nothing in the fridge’ is always false when there are atoms in the fridge. (p. 35)

This assumption is plausible only on the supposition that the intuitions people have pertain to what H&M claim they pertain to, namely the semantic contents of sentences at contexts.²⁵ But

²³ To this they add, “it has become standard to posit them to solve the problem of incomplete definite descriptions,” as on one version of Neale’s account (1990: 93-102). As for me, I have offered a pragmatic solution to the problem of incomplete definite descriptions without resorting to covert domain restrictors (Bach 1987/1994: 103-8 & 124-6; 2004: 220-3).

²⁴ The only argument I am aware of, beyond a credulous appeal to “intuitive truth-conditions,” is the so-called Binding Argument, as promoted by Stanley and Szabo (2000). H&M mention it (p. 119n and p. 122n) but do not rely on it. I have rebutted it (Bach 2000: 277-82), as have others, most recently Carmichael (2012: 311-314). See Sennett 2008 for a survey of earlier literature on this argument.

there is good reason to believe that these intuitions are actually responsive to what speakers are likely to mean, in typical or likely contexts (see Bach 2000: 265-273). In H&M's example, the reason it seems false that there is nothing in the fridge when there are atoms in the fridge is that the speaker is likely to mean something rather narrower than the content of the sentence actually uttered. What H&M describe as being "happy to posit bizarre semantic truth conditions" (p. 118) is really being averse to positing a covert element of syntax solely in order to have the truth-condition of the sentence coincide with the truth-condition of what a speaker would mean even when not making that fully explicit. In relying on intuitions of truth-conditions without worrying about what these are the truth-conditions of, one is in effect working backwards from what the speaker means to the semantic content of the sentence used to convey it. Insisting that one's intuition pertains solely to the semantic content of the sentence (as used in the stipulated context) leaves one no choice but to posit a hidden element, neither heard nor seen, whose semantic value is the implicit component of what the speaker means. Opting for "pragmatic supplementation" over "extra syntax" recasts so-called domain restrictions as determined by the speaker's communicative intention rather than contextually determined values of covert syntactic elements.

There are several problems with the syntactic-semantic approach to domain restriction. I will just mention two, and then discuss a third. Moreover, there is a positive reason for preferring a pragmatic approach: in a way to be explained, singular restrictions are not coordinate with the descriptive contents they restrict.

One problem is that positing covert domain restrictors leads to undue syntactic complexity – whatever rationale there is for positing them at all leads to implausible proliferation of them. Another reason for not positing them is that domain restriction is better viewed as just one not very special case of a pervasive phenomenon in everyday speech: implicit qualification.²⁶ We commonly speak loosely, not making fully explicit what we mean and leaving it to our listeners to fill in the gaps. A third problem is the lack of an explanation for how covert domain restrictors acquire their semantic values. I will expand on this one.

Following formal semantic tradition, H&M often characterize these values as "supplied," "provided," "assigned," or "determined" by context. In line with the venerable semantic tradition they continue, they give no indication of how context manages to perform this remarkable feat.

²⁵ H&M also "assume for the most part that declarative sentences, as uttered at contexts, are typically assessable for truth and falsity." Accordingly, they "do not in any systematic way explore views that claim that the semantic contents of such utterances are fragmentary or skeletal, requiring extra pragmatic supplementation in order for questions of truth-value to arise" (p. 35; see also p. 118). This is a popular view nowadays (see Bach 1994 for my version of it), but it is only marginally relevant here, mainly in connection with demonstratives.

²⁶ See Bach 2000: 262-269, and for a general discussion of this and similar phenomena see Bach 1994.

Fortunately, there is no need to assume that variation in the use of an expression from one context to another shows that the expression, or some element associated with it, is context-sensitive, since facts about the context are not what accounts for the variation and the expressions' meanings do not dictate that it should. On the alternative, pragmatic account, according to which domain restrictions are determined by speakers' communicative intentions, facts about the context play a very different role. In accordance with speakers' intentions, they provide listeners with evidence to help them ascertain (determine in a different sense) what speakers refer to. Context plays merely an evidential role, while speakers' intentions are what determine the references.²⁷ As we will see next, this has several implications regarding the role of the descriptive contents of noun phrases when used to refer and the relation of these contents to singular restrictions.

When a speaker with an intention to refer to a certain object uses a singular noun phrase whose descriptive content is not uniquely satisfied, the hearer has to infer what object is being referred to. He may presume, in Gricean fashion, that the speaker is talking about a certain object and intends him to think of that object as the one being talked about, partly on the basis of being so intended. Suppose a speaker utters 'The cat chewed a hat'. Since 'the cat' is incomplete (not uniquely satisfied), presumably the speaker intends to refer to the cat that is identical to *o*, where *o* is the speaker's only pet cat. Here I am following H&M, but I think this intention is more realistically characterized as the intention to use 'the cat' to refer to *o*. The speaker means that *o* chewed a hat (or, à la H&M, that the cat that is identical to *o* chewed a hat). The speaker's intention narrows the domain down to one object, but that information is not transparent to the hearer. Lacking telepathic powers, the hearer must identify the speaker's intention and figure out that it is to refer to *o*. No singular restrictor covertly present in the sentence figures in this process. That is not where the needed information resides – the hearer is trying to identify the referent the speaker intends, not the semantic value of a covert syntactic element.

Sticking with the case of a definite description, compare the role of the descriptive content when delimited by a singular restrictor to that of a non-singular one. If not singular, the singleton restriction implicitly turns an incomplete definite description 'the F' into a complete one, of the form 'the F that is R', where there is only one F that is R. The singular case is different. Intending to narrow the domain of Fs down to *o* makes *o*'s being F inessential to the reference. As Donnellan observed when elucidating the referential/attributive distinction (1966: 286-8), the

²⁷ For much more thoroughgoing discussion of problems with common claims of context dependence regarding a wide range of expressions, see Bach 2005 and 2012. Some of these problems arise from crediting things that speakers do to the linguistic expressions with which they do them (Bach 2013). Positing covert domain restrictors is but one case of this.

speaker can refer to *o* even if *o* is not F (an ostensible martini drinker, say, even if *o* is not drinking a martini), and the hearer can ascertain this even when it is obvious that the intended referent is not actually F but merely seems to be (or is F-like, is mistakenly thought by the speaker to be F, is thought by the speaker to be thought by the hearer to be F, or whatever). The description does not have to be satisfied by *o* in order to be used to refer to *o*. Its use is merely a cue for supposing that the speaker is referring to a certain object and a clue as to which object that is. As Donnellan put it, “we are concerned with the thing itself and not just the thing under a certain description” (1966: 303). His contrast here is in effect a version of the Bismarck distinction, in its linguistic guise.

This point suggests a basic distinction between singular and other singleton restrictions, whether or not they are marked syntactically. Recall how Donnellan contrasts referential with attributive uses of definite descriptions. Whereas with an attributive use the speaker “states something about whoever or whatever is the so-and-so,” with a referential use the speaker “uses the description to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about” (1966: 285). Interestingly, Russell said much the same thing about names, when he contrasted using a name “directly,” or “as a name,” rather than “indirectly,” or “as a description.” When used as a name, it serves “merely to indicate what we are speaking about; [the name] “is no part of the fact asserted ...: it is merely part of the symbolism by which we express our thought” (1919: 175).²⁸ And, as Donnellan says of definite descriptions used referentially, “any other device for doing the same job, another description or a name, would do as well” (1966: 285). Generalizing, when a noun phrase of any sort is used to refer, the properties expressed by its constituents are not included in what the speaker means. This does not keep a sentence in which the phrase occurs from having a semantic content that includes that property, but that semantic content includes something that is not part of what the speaker means. In other words, only the domain being restricted, not the singular restriction on it, is part of semantic content.

Summing up, even if we suppose that singleton restrictions are values of covert syntactic elements, thinking of singular restrictions as special cases of singleton restrictions misconstrues the role of the expression used to refer and the speaker’s intention in using it. The role of the expression is not to determine an object by being satisfied (when singularly restricted) by a certain object. Rather, its role is to make evident the speaker’s intention to refer to a certain

²⁸ Russell added that “there is nothing in the phraseology to show” which way a name is being used, just as Donnellan observed that “a definite description occurring in one and the same sentence may, on different occasions of its use, function in either way” (1966: 281), i.e. referentially or attributively.

object. Moreover, the speaker's intention is to refer to a certain object, not to refer to whatever has a certain property and is identical to that object.

Referring and being coy

H&M claim that specific indefinites are distinctive in that the singular restrictions on them are "coy," making them good only for making "parasitic" reference. Leaving aside the question of the syntactic-semantic status of these restrictions, I agree that their restrictions are coy, but I don't think specific uses are even descriptively referential.

Suppose I warn my wife, "A philosopher is coming over this afternoon." Assume that I am not merely telling her to expect some philosopher or other but have a particular philosopher in mind (I could have made this explicit by using 'certain', 'particular', or 'specific', but the specific use need not be explicitly marked). Even so, I am not specifying the philosopher I have in mind. I do not intend or expect her to identify that philosopher. So this is not a "candid" case. Even though my wife's grasp on the restriction on the domain of 'a philosopher' is "cognitively parasitic on [my] use of the expression" (p. 139), for H&M that qualifies as a case of reference. I am referring to someone, they would say, and intend to convey that reference, even though my wife is in a position to think of the referent only in some such way as the philosopher I am talking about. H&M thus dispute the received view that specific uses are distinct from referential uses, not a special case of them.²⁹

Is this really a case of reference? It seems to me that it is not even a case of descriptive reference. Even if a word like 'certain' is included to mark a specific use, it has the force merely of 'specifiable', not 'specified'. In the example, I do not intend my wife to think of the philosopher I have in mind as the philosopher I have in mind or in any similar way. I am merely indicating that I have a certain unspecified philosopher in mind; although I give her reason to believe that I am entertaining a specifiable singular proposition, I am not trying to convey it. I am not referring, even coyly, because she can understand my utterance even if I have no one in mind. I am using 'a (certain) philosopher' to indicate (even if misleadingly, if I have no one in mind), that I am in a position to refer to a certain philosopher, but I am not actually doing so. I am not identifying or intending her to identify that philosopher. I am merely *alluding* to that philosopher.³⁰ That's what's coy about a specific use of an indefinite.

²⁹ There is no disputing that indefinites have merely existential (purely quantificational) uses and, for that matter, generic uses.

³⁰ For more on alluding see Bach 2006: 533-4.

If the coy restrictions on specific uses of indefinites go with alluding rather than referring, there is no need to claim that the candidness associated with referential uses of definite descriptions, demonstratives, and proper names is meaning-triggered.³¹ It is simply a consequence of the fact that communicating reference requires candidness. Candidness is a rational requirement that the speaker make the identity of the referent evident to the hearer. A referential use of the expression is infelicitous if it doesn't do that, as happens when someone uses an unfamiliar proper name completely out of the blue.

Demonstratives: The status of supplementation

Singular definite descriptions, demonstratives, and proper names can be used to refer even when their descriptive contents are not uniquely satisfied.³² That's nothing new. However, the case of demonstratives is special in one respect. As H&M point out, for a demonstrative to be used felicitously, the 'F' in 'that F' must *not* be uniquely satisfied. A sentence like 'I saw that tallest man in the world' is "unacceptable," they explain, because "the restrictor property is saliently provided by the noun phrase itself." (p. 209). It needs to be supplemented: "to grasp how the demonstrative is being restricted, the audience is intended to look beyond whatever information is supplied by the head noun (however preminally modified)." However, there is no need to suppose that "the use of a demonstrative *conventionally* relies on *salient* supplemental information to identify the object" (p. 209; my emphasis). The meaning of 'that car', for example, requires the speaker to refer to a car, but it does not require the car to be contextually salient. What demands salience is not the meaning of 'that car' but success in using it to convey reference to a certain car. It is not reasonable for the speaker to use 'that car' to refer to a particular car without having good reason to expect the hearer to identify that car as the one intended. So that car had better be salient, indeed uniquely so, whether by being the only one in view, the especially conspicuous one, the one being demonstrated, or the one just mentioned.³³ Salience is

³¹ Regarding definite descriptions, there is a longstanding debate among linguists on whether they presuppose uniqueness or familiarity. H&M convincingly "treat familiarity as derived and specificity as basic" (p. 167). Their discussion (pp. 163-7) is nicely complemented by the many astute observations, based on a wealth of data, made by Horn and Abbott (2012).

³² So, for example, the felicitous use of an incomplete singular definite description, such as 'the cat', requires that there is only one cat at issue (the one that the speaker has in mind or the one that meets the condition the speaker has in mind). For the speaker to make evident his intention in using the description, there must be, depending on whether the reference is objectual or descriptive, either an obviously distinguished F or (in the attributive case) an obvious way of distinguishing one.

³³ In general, considerations of salience constrain what a speaker can reasonably intend, and reasonably expect to be taken to intend, to refer to, given the demonstrative phrase being used. Of course, one does not select a noun phrase to utter and then figure out what to use it to refer to. Rather, one forms an intention to refer to something and comes up with a linguistic way of making that intention evident.

not a conventional requirement imposed by the meaning of a demonstrative but is, rather, a rational requirement on its use.

4. Coming Full Circle

H&M's saga ends (in the Postscript) with speculation about the mental object-representations they think figure in singular domain restrictions. When an insufficiently restricted noun phrase is used to refer, such a restriction narrows its domain to a single individual by combining a condition of identity with the phrase's descriptive content. Such a restriction takes the form '= *o*'. But what makes a particular case of '*o*' an object-representation rather than the equivalent of a definite description?

As we have seen, H&M maintain that the noun phrases they consider are all quantificational and admit of referential uses only because of "the presence of a singular restrictor on the existentially quantified domain" (p. 244). While allowing for the possible exception of a few indexicals (p. 245), H&M ask, "Are there any voiced elements that are paradigmatically referential?" (p. 244), a question that brings to mind the scarcity of Russell's logically proper names. H&M consider the possibility that there are not even unvoiced ones, namely the object-representations in their covert singular restrictors, and that "referential vehicles of thought ... are simply never lexicalized" (p. 246). In that case we could, following Strawson, "think of reference as something that a speaker does on an occasion using a noun phrase" (p. 245).³⁴ Then it would be "the mental object-representations themselves ... that best deserve to be considered referential" (p. 247). Here H&M mention "tags, files, or terms of Mentalese," but all we have to go on about the nature of these representations is the schematic '*o*'.

What makes a given case of '*o*' a referential term rather than the mental equivalent of a definite description? Surely the answer cannot reside in its orthography. Informatively telling the story of '*o*' would require giving more than a notional formulation of H&M's distinction between singular restrictions and merely singleton ones. It would take us full circle back to the problem of how to explain the difference between singular thought and descriptive thought, between thinking of a certain object in particular and thinking of a unique object of a certain sort. What we need here is an illuminating explication of some version of the Bismarck distinction.

³⁴ Strawson: "Referring is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do" (1950: 326).

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