Robin Jeshion, ed.
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Start with a definite description: 'the man with the longest beard'. Engage in some semantic stipulation: let 'Beardo' designate the unique individual that satisfies 'the man with the longest beard'. Now put 'Beardo' to use: Beardo is a mammal.

According to Semantic Instrumentalism, you have now done all that's required to think a singular thought about Beardo. This singular thought, 'Beardo is a mammal', differs from any general thought like 'The man with the longest beard is a mammal'. This is because singular thought involves a direct cognitive-semantic relation between you and Beardo. In contrast, general thoughts are indirect in nature. They are about Beardo only by virtue of including descriptions that are satisfied by Beardo rather than someone else.

For the Semantic Instrumentalist, singular thought can be had on the cheap. We can put ourselves in the position to think singular thoughts simply by manipulating the semantic machinery of descriptive reference-fixing as we did above. This is a minority view. The majority view, Acquaintance Theory, holds that singular thought cannot be had on the cheap, since it requires a special epistemic pedigree. According to Acquaintance Theory, singular thought about a particular individual requires one to be acquainted with that individual. In turn, acquaintance with a particular individual requires perception of, memories about, or participation in a successful chain of communication about that very individual.

Unsurprisingly, issues about singular thought and acquaintance are bound up with issues about singular content. This is because the standard way of distinguishing singular and general thought is in terms of their propositional content. Singular thoughts have singular propositions like <Beardo, *being a mammal*> as their content; general thoughts have only general propositions like <the man with the longest beard, *being a mammal*> as their content. Propositions of the former kind are structured abstract entities that contain the individuals they are about; propositions of the latter kind are also structured abstract entities but contain only general or qualitative properties. (This distinction is, at best, tentative. For example, it immediately rules out singular thought about properties, but, taken at face value, the thought that 'Grey is my favorite color' is no less singular than 'MacDonald is my favorite Prime Minister'.)

New Essays on Singular Thought includes ten original essays and a worthy introduction. Together, these essays do an admirable job of mapping and navigating the difficult philosophical terrain surrounding singular thought. For those interested in on-going debates about *de re* attitudes, the semantics of singular terms or attitude ascriptions, and the nature of acquaintance, this volume will be a welcome and profitable resource. Here, I'll provide only a cursory overview of the collection and then turn to a

foundational matter left largely undiscussed in this volume: the case against purely general views of thought and language.

Jeshion's substantial introduction helpfully locates the volume's papers within a broader context. This proves especially useful for those papers that issue from on-going research programs and presume some familiarity with commitments defended elsewhere. Paired with Jeshion's introduction, Kent Bach's contribution supplies both a nice overview of the puzzles raised by acquaintance and a brief history of the views of Quine and Russell. Quine's views also take center-stage in Nathan Salmon's essay, which revisits Kaplan's engagement with Quine's controversial views regarding *de re* and *de dicto* belief reports. Kenneth Taylor's essay then aims to clarify the various notions of singular thought and defends a view of singularity of form (as opposed to singularity of content) that turns on the unique role of certain representations within thought and language.

The contributions by Jeshion and François Recanati focus directly on the preconditions for singular thought. Jeshion's essay develops and defends Cognitivism, an alternative to both Semantic Instrumentalism and Acquaintance Theory, which takes significance in cognition (e.g., with regards to one's plans or aims) to be a necessary condition on singular thought. Recanati's contribution, which aims to defend Acquaintance Theory from the perils of both Semantic Instrumentalism and the stringent Russellian view of acquaintance, identifies singular thought with thought via mental files. By defending acquaintance as a *de jure* rather than *de facto* constraint, he also aims to accommodate the possibility of singular thought in the absence of acquaintance by allowing that singular thought of this kind might nevertheless lack singular content.

For Imogen Dickie, theorizing about acquaintance is properly informed by visual-processing data, which points towards a view of acquaintance-based thought that requires a fairly immediate perceptual link between agents and the objects of thought. Dickie also defends a second, less conventional constraint: that acquaintance-based thought requires a kind of concordance between how an object is represented in thought and its genuine modal properties.

Arthur Sullivan's contribution teases apart a number of distinctions in the neighbourhood of Millianism and externalism, setting the stage for more careful scrutiny of intensionalist externalisms—views likely to appeal to *de re* senses as contents of thought. John Campbell, responding to objections by Burge, mounts a defense of his view of perceptual demonstratives and a clarification of the role acquaintance plays within this view. Manuel Garcia-Carpíntero puts the apparatus of two-dimensionalism to work in addressing the puzzles raised by non-referring singular terms and our putative *de re* thought about them. Finally, Mark Sainsbury ably extends and elaborates upon his commitment to 'reference without referents' to address concerns about the semantics of transitive intensional verbs like 'worships' as they relate to fictional or mythical entities.

Given the relative diversity of topics taken up in this volume, it is somewhat difficult to draw any general morals about the prevailing philosophical trends. It is safe to

say, however, that the 'extreme' views of singular thought—Russellian versions of Acquaintance Theory and Semantic Instrumentalism—are out of favor, and that moderate versions of Acquaintance Theory and Cognitivism, as developed in Jeshion's essay, emerge as the favored views of singular thought. But, since these views are in only nascent stages, more needs to be said about them before passing judgment on their merits. It is worthwhile, then, to reflect upon a foundational issue that receives surprisingly little attention here: the poverty of Generalism, the view that thought is, by its very nature, general (alternatively, 'descriptive' or 'purely qualitative').

According to Generalism, our thought about the world is purely descriptive. It manages to latch onto individuals in the world only insofar as individuals satisfy the descriptions we bear in mind. In opposition to Generalism, most philosophers now accept that at least some thought is singular in nature. This presumption against Generalism arises largely because most philosophers accept an anti-descriptivist semantics for demonstratives, singular terms, or at least some kind of expression. And, while a number of contributors (e.g., Jeshion and Bach) note that such a view falls short of accommodating intuitions of singularity and delivers a 'purely qualitative' view of thought, it is worth considering what line of argument might be used to argue directly against Generalism. In concluding, let me now consider how one line of argument might go.

Our world is qualitatively diverse. So diverse, in fact, that it is likely that any actual object has a unique qualitative profile that distinguishes it from every other actual object. If we suppose ourselves to have knowledge of all the world's qualitative properties, the qualitative diversity of our world ensures our descriptive thoughts furnish us the capacity to think uniquely, albeit indirectly, of any actual object. Furthermore, if we help ourselves to rigidified descriptions (e.g., 'the man who actually has the longest beard'), we can go some distance towards accommodating intuitions of *de re* thought. Granted the resources of rigidification and the thinkability of any actual object, the scope of general thought seems to have no obvious limits. What, then, might convince a Generalist of the need for singular thoughts?

The best argument for the indispensability of singular thought requires us to look beyond the actual world. Recall, first, that Generalism posits purely qualitative descriptions as the contents of thought. (If the Generalist admits non-qualitative descriptions as the contents of thought—e.g., 'the tallest man Saul Kripke ever saw'—the project of analyzing thought in qualitative or general terms must be abandoned. That said, this constraint raises difficult questions about rigidification, since the property of *being actual* is likely non-qualitative in kind.) Consider, however, that the qualitative diversity of our world is a contingent matter. Within logical space, there is a plurality of worlds that are homogenous or perfectly symmetric in nature. Within these worlds, there is a plurality of qualitatively indiscernible individuals.

By way of illustration, imagine a possible world that exhibits perfect bilateral symmetry. With this world, you are a perfectly symmetric being. Furthermore, you straddle the lateral division of this world and find yourself staring out at two perfectly

symmetric globes. *Ex hypothesi*, no qualitative difference distinguishes these globes, so none of your general thoughts will divide them. In such a world, the Generalist must therefore deny that you are capable of thinking of either of the globes uniquely. What to do?

The options for the descriptivist are threefold. First, she can abandon Generalism and admit singular thought as the cognitive relation that divides our thought between the symmetric globes. Second, she can deny that any object can be uniquely thought about and thereby place limits on the scope of our cognitive access to the world. Third, she can take issue with the underlying metaphysics and deny the possibility of qualitatively indiscernible individuals.

Neither the second nor the third options are attractive. There is good reason to reject the Identity of Indiscernibles and little appeal in endorsing a controversial piece of metaphysics to avoid the problem at hand. In the second case, denying that we can think uniquely of any object requires an immodest constraint on the content of thought that, other things being equal, we are well served to avoid. Not only does it flout the intuition that, in the case just considered, we do have the cognitive wherewithal to think of one and only one of the globes. It also holds the nature of our cognitive access to the world to track a distinction—the distinction between qualitative and non-qualitative properties—that is a metaphysical rather than cognitive-semantic one. Such a commitment incurs the unattractive burden of explaining why the nature of thought would square perfectly with the metaphysical structure of the world. So, with these costs in view, reflection on merely possible scenarios seems to provide strong evidence for the indispensability of singular thought and the inadequacy of the Generalist's purely qualitative view of thought.

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