

Singular Beliefs and their Ascriptions

1. Preliminaries

This essay defends three interlocking claims about singular beliefs and their ascriptions. The first is a claim about the nature of such beliefs; the second is a claim about the semantic contents of ascriptions of such beliefs; the third is a claim about the pragmatic significance of such ascriptions. With respect to the nature of singular belief, I claim that the contents of our singular beliefs are a joint product of mind and world, with neither mind nor world enjoying any peculiar priority over the other in the constitution of content. This view amounts to a rejection of the priority of so-called narrow or notional content over wide or referential content for singular beliefs. About the semantics of ascriptions of singular belief, I claim that such ascriptions ascribe what I call predicative doxastic commitments and nothing more. In particular, I will argue that to ascribe a predicative commitment is merely to say what property is being predicated by she who undertakes the relevant commitment to what object. My view has the consequence that ascriptions of singular beliefs typically do not either semantically specify or pragmatically implicate the modes of presentations, notions, or conceptions via which the ascribee cognizes the objects and properties relative to which she undertakes predicative commitments. To be sure, many maintain that at least one class of belief ascriptions -- so called *de dicto* ascriptions -- do specify either directly or indirectly both *what* the ascribee believes and *how* she believes it by putting at semantic issue, via the mechanism of embedding, the notions, conceptions, modes of presentation or the like, via which the ascribee cognizes doxastically relevant objects and properties. I argue, to the contrary, that in the general case embedding functions neither directly nor indirectly to put notions and their ilk at semantic issue. Indeed, I shall argue that the primary mechanism for putting notions and their ilk at semantic issue is a certain variety of *de re* ascriptions.

2. Belief Content as the Joint Product of Mind and World

I take singular believing to be the undertaking of singular predicative commitments. A cognizer undertakes a singular predicative commitment by taking an object to have a certain property or to stand in certain relations. To believe that George W. Bush is the current U.S. President, on this approach, is to

undertake a commitment to the effect that George Bush has the property of being the current U.S. President. Now the undertaking of a predicative commitment is an inner occurrence, involving a play of inner mental representations, of such a nature as to ultimately constitute the deployment of a structure of concepts in an episode of (singular) believing.¹ To characterize a state of mind as the undertaking of a predicative *commitment* is to speak in quasi-normative terms and is not yet to speak in brutally causal cum psychological terms. One who undertakes a predicative commitment thereby becomes liable to normative evaluation as, for example, rational or irrational, correct or incorrect. To be sure, if naturalism is true then the normative story about belief qua undertaking of a commitment and the consequent liability to normative assessment must ultimately mesh with a causal cum psychological story about the inner play of representations. But only confusion and error results if we move prematurely from the normative story about content and commitment to the causal cum psychological story about the play of inner representations. Both the functionalist and the psychologized Fregean from Essay IV exhibit such hastiness. In effect, each attempts to reconstruct similarities and differences of content as similarities and differences of causal role or power. The functionalist about content quite explicitly appeals to fine-grained differences in syndromes of typical causes and effects. The psychologized Fregean, on the other hand, appeals to fine-grained sameness and difference of modes of presentation and the role of these in the cognitive dynamics of rational mental life. The psychologized Fregean approach ends up positing an intractable plethora of belief contents while functionalism about content leads, almost inevitably, to an unsustainable holism.

Sameness and difference of commitments undertaken do not map neatly onto sameness and differences of causal role or power. One who undertakes a commitment may fail to live up to the consequences of that undertaking. A cognizer who undertakes a predicative commitment to George Bush's being the current U.S. President may, for example, commit herself to certain further inferences and beliefs without ever actually *drawing* the relevant inferences or *adopting* the relevant beliefs. If one undertakes a predicative commitment to George W. Bush's being the current President and one also undertakes a commitment to George W. Bush's being the eldest child of George H.W. and Barbara Bush one is arguably committed to believing that the eldest child of George H. W. and Barbara Bush is the current U.S.

¹ See Essays II - IV for further discussion of the nature of concepts.

president. One may, however, be rationally committed to such a belief and yet fail to adopt that belief. The failure to adopt what one is rationally committed to believing is plausibly seen as a form of less than perfect rationality, if not outright irrationality. Since, however, imperfect rationality is an ever present psychological reality for creatures like ourselves, we cannot straight-forwardly map sameness and difference of commitments undertaken to sameness and difference of causal role.

A second and arguably more fundamental reason why sameness and difference of commitment undertaken does not map neatly onto sameness and difference of causal role rests on the fact that even a fully rational cognizer may undertake what I call metaphysically conflicting or incompatible commitments.² Smith may simultaneously believe that Hesperus is rising and that Phosphorus is not rising. In so believing, Smith has undertaken simultaneous commitments to one and the same object both having and lacking one and the same property. Since there is no metaphysically possible world in which one and the same object can both have and lack the same property, there is no metaphysically possible world in which Smith's commitments can be made good simultaneously.

There are those who take the very possibility that a rational cognizer can simultaneously believe that Hesperus is rising and disbelieve that Phosphorus is rising as sufficient reason to distinguish the potential thought content *that Hesperus is rising* from the potential thought content *that Phosphorus is rising*. In making such a distinction, even while conceding that it is metaphysically necessary that the rising of Hesperus is the rising of Phosphorus again, such thinkers tacitly endorse a distinction between what we might call worldly, metaphysical, referential or wide content, on the one hand, and what we might call rational, epistemic, notional, or narrow content, on the other. To a first approximation, the worldly or referential content of a belief is supposed to be a matter of what predicative commitments are undertaken with respect to which actual existents in the world. Rational or notional content, on the other hand, is supposed to be a matter only of how things are by the cognizing subject's own inner lights. It is widely assumed that rational or notional content does, but metaphysical or referential content need not satisfy the following difference principle:

If a rational cognizer simultaneously believes thought content C and either disbelieves C' or believes not C', then C and C' are distinct thought contents.

Many thinkers, especially those who have been deeply influenced by Frege, take something akin to rational or notional content to be prior to or more fundamental than metaphysical or referential content in a number of different ways. Rational or notional contents have been claimed, for example, to be intrinsic and causally relevant, where metaphysical contents have been said to be extrinsic and epiphenomenal. Moreover, rational belief contents are sometimes thought to stand between the believer, on the one side, and the objects that the believer somehow cognizes via them, on the other. It as if the believer manages to have *de re* beliefs about the objects only by having *de dicto* beliefs not intrinsically and directly bound up with the objects. On this way of looking at matters, rational contents are not directly constituted out of the objects, but at best out of the cognizing subject's means of apprehending the objects.³ Though this Frege-inspired approach to belief content is as venerable as it is ancient, it could not be more mistaken. At least in the case of singular beliefs, the Fregean tradition has gotten its priorities mostly wrong. For singular beliefs, if not for beliefs in general, referential or worldly content is in no sense posterior to rational content. Indeed, there are good, though perhaps not conclusive reasons for doubting the very existence of an inner realm of intrinsic rational contents that somehow intervene between the cognizer and the objects with respect to which she undertakes predicative commitments. Belief content is a joint product of mind and world, with neither that which lies on the side of the subject nor that which lies on the side of the objects enjoying any peculiar priority over the other.

² See Essays II and XIV for further discussion of external coherence.

³ See, for example, Fodor (1987) and Fodor (1991). For an early and now classic defense of narrow content see White(1982). For a treatment of narrow content as “notional” content see Dennett (1982). For a series of daunting early attacks on the coherence of narrow content see Tyler Burge (1979, 1982a, 1982b, 1986). Fodor, once the greatest advocate of the priority of narrow content officially renounces the need for narrow content in his (1993). My own arguments against narrow content are contained in essays XI and XII. Though these articles did not receive the notice I think they deserved when they originally appeared, I flatter myself that together they still make the most thoroughgoing case available against the coherence of narrow content. It should not be thought that narrow content is a dead letter. For one thing, Aydede (1997) makes a convincing case that there may be less to Fodor's official “abandonment” of narrow content than meets the eye. Moreover, narrow content still has a number of able and ardent defenders. For a defense of a rather limited version of narrow content see Recanati(1993, 1994). For two more wholehearted recent defenses of the primacy of narrow content see Rey(1997) and Chalmers (2002). I take Frege himself to be the ultimate inspiration for the notion of narrow content, since it was he who most clearly located sense, and with it thought content, entirely on the side of the cognizing subject. There are, to be sure, early and forceful anticipations of this idea in the likes of Descartes, for example. Unlike Frege, however, Descartes really had no clue how to get mind and world back together again, once the world was stripped of any role of determining the contents of our thoughts.

To deny that there is an inner realm of intrinsic rational content that is somehow prior to an extrinsic realm of metaphysical or referential content is not to deny that there is a significant story to tell about the inner psychology of believing. Nor is it to deny that that story is best told in the idiom of inner representations.⁴ An analogy with seeing may help. Objects seen are mostly objects in the world. Nonetheless, there is a rich computational cum psychological story to tell about how we accomplish that feat. That inner computational cum psychological story is well told in representational and not in merely brutally causal terms. But for all that, it does not follow that every episode of successful seeing has an intrinsic “narrow” content and an extrinsic “wide” content such that the narrow content somehow intervenes between the seer and the thing seen.

There are such things as hallucinations in which we seem to see what we are not actually seeing. The standing (epistemic) possibility that we are always hallucinating lends a certain lure to a kind of open question argument for the primacy of narrow content. If we never can be *certain* that we actually see what we seem to see, it would seem to follow that we can never know by mere introspection whether an apparent episode of seeing is a mere hallucination or a successful act of seeing. If we add the premise that we can know the contents of our perceptions by mere introspection, then it may seem to follow that such contents as we do know by mere introspection must leave it an open question whether we are seeing or merely seeming to see. But it is precisely narrow contents that would leave the question open. If some form of perceptual content is knowable through introspection alone, it must be narrow contents that are so knowable. By parity of reasoning, it might be thought, the same must hold for the contents of our beliefs. Presumably, introspective awareness gives us access to the contents of our beliefs. Since introspective awareness alone is powerless to reveal whether our thoughts make contact with any actual existents, introspective awareness must leave it an open question whether those contents are object-involving. But that question can remain open only if the thought contents that are introspectively accessible to us are narrow rather than wide.⁵

⁴ Concluding that there is no inner representational story to tell about the psychology of thought on the basis of the non-existence of narrow content is certainly a fallacy of some sort. I wish I had a name for it. One prominent philosopher who seems to me to flirt with such a fallacy is Baker (1987, 1995). Another, more ambiguous case is Millikan (1993, 2000).

⁵ There is by now an enormous industry devoted to hashing out the question whether privileged (introspective) self-knowledge is compatible with externalism. See, for example, Burge (1985a, 1985b,

I am prepared to bite a bullet here because I do not think it is a very explosive one. I need only deny that we are aware of the contents of our thoughts through introspection alone, at least if by introspection one means a direct inward gaze that yields immediate and incorrigible access to the contents of our thought. There is no positive reason to suppose that there is any such cognitive faculty. Nor is there any reason to suppose that either awareness of thought content or awareness of the self in general is the achievement of such a faculty.⁶ Knowledge of self and knowledge of the contents of our thoughts are both mostly mediate and corrigible rather than immediate and incorrigible. At least from a phenomenological perspective, awareness of oneself is evidently simultaneous with and not prior to awareness of oneself as a being in the world, as one being among others. Similarly, awareness of the contents of one's inner representings is simultaneous with awareness of those representings as bound down to external existents. Mere phenomenology does not settle the issue, to be sure. There is, I grant, a substantive story yet to be told about the conditions of the very possibility of the simultaneous awareness of self and world. I do not pretend to offer the details of such a story here.⁷ My present point is only that we should not be moved by

1988, 1996) for arguments in favor of and Boghossian (1989, 1992, 1997) for arguments against the compatibility of externalism and privileged self-knowledge.

⁶ Indeed, there are very good reasons to suppose that awareness of the self is neither immediate nor incorrigible. In fact, I take it to be an indirect epistemological consequence of the metaphysical doctrine of externalism that knowledge of self and the contents of one's thoughts is very likely to be a complex cognitive achievement, inextricably bound up with our cognition of the world. Indeed, that achievement is likely to be simultaneous with the achievement of cognition of the external world. To be aware of oneself as a thinker of thoughts is to be aware of one's thoughts as bound down to an external world. To be aware of an external world is to be aware of that very world as the world of one's own cognizing. This anti-Cartesian lesson of externalism still leaves open a question about 1st person - 3rd person asymmetries. That is, an externalist need not deny that a thinker knows the contents of his own thoughts in a different way from the way in which she knows another's mind. Nor need the externalist deny that the thinker's means of acquiring self-knowledge are, in some sense, more reliable than the thinker's means of acquiring knowledge of the minds of others. I lack the space to spell any of this out in detail in the current essay, however.

⁷ Here is the rough outlines of a story that needs fuller articulation and defense. I hold that our epistemic authority with respect to our own mental states is not a foundational epistemic authority, rooted in either direct introspection of a Lockean sort, nor a kind immediate Cartesian self-awareness, rooted in the power of reason to, as it were, think itself. Rather, our authority with respect to our own mental contents is a social-dialectical authority. As one rational interlocutor among others, each agent functions as both as what we might call a *source* of reasons and as what we might call a *target* of reasons. That is, each rational interlocutor both addresses rational demands to others and is the addressee of rational demands from others. With one's standing as a one rational interlocutor among others, as both source and target of reasons, comes a two-fold responsibility – a responsibility of responsiveness to the rational demands emanating from others and responsibility for the management of the rational demands one addresses to others. With such responsibility comes, I claim, a certain kind of dialectical authority. And it is just this limited, non-foundationalist authority that constitutes all the first-person authority that we enjoy. Qua rational manager of the rational demands that I address to others, I thereby count as the authoritative owner of those

open question arguments to deny the coherence and plausibility of a story along the suggested lines. If such a story is coherent and plausible, open question arguments are insufficient to support the bifurcation of content into intrinsic rational or notional content and extrinsic referential or metaphysical content.

Though I do not pretend to tell the full story here of the joint constitution of content by mind and world, I hasten to stress that I do not side with anti-representationalists of various stripes, who afford no role to the supposed subconscious and subdoxastic representational innards of the cognitive and conscious mind in explaining the achievement of thought content.⁸ Indeed, crucial to the psychological story I endorse about believing is a commitment to a version of the language of thought hypothesis about the nature of the inner play of representation that makes singular believing possible. Here I follow Jerry Fodor, as well as a host of others -- including, arguably, Frege himself -- in holding that the language of thought hypothesis best explains the productivity and systematicity of our thought.⁹ Thought episodes are

demands. In virtue of that standing, it is I and I alone who enjoys a peculiar sort of entitlement to declare the contents of those demands. I am thereby entitled to represent this claim, rather than any other, as my claim, this belief as my belief, this demand as my demand. No other rational interlocutor is in a position to challenge that claim of ownership. To be sure, since I am simultaneously both the source of rational demands that flow outward and the target of rational demands that flow me-ward, I have a simultaneous responsibility of responsiveness. But the very fact that I am responsible for my responses to inward flowing reasons reveals the depth of my peculiar authority with respect to the standing of my claims as my very own. Because I am uniquely responsible for the rational management of my beliefs I am uniquely responsible for making my beliefs responsive to rational pressures directed me-ward, but emanating from others. Only I can rationally adjust my cognitive landscape in ways that are, by my lights, responsive to such me-ward directed rational pressures. So the rough idea is that first person authority is ultimately grounded in nothing but the dialectical-social responsibility that each rational interlocutor has for the management of her own rational states. I do not pretend that I have told you enough to convince you of either the truth or the ultimate coherence of this approach.

⁸ A chief example is John Searle (1992). Though Searle is willing enough to countenance representations, he thinks there are no such things as “deep unconscious representations.” Only conscious states are representational, on his view.

⁹ See Fodor (1975, 1987) and elsewhere. Frege comes closest to explicitly endorsing the language of thought in the following quotation from “Sources of Knowledge of Mathematics and natural Sciences” in Frege (1979) p 269 -- repeated from footnote 6 of Essay IV. There he says:

To be sure, we must distinguish the sentence as the expression of thought from the thought itself. We know we can have various expressions for the same thought. The connection of a thought with one particular sentence is not a necessary one; *but that a thought of which we are conscious is connected in our mind with some sentence or other is for us men necessary. But that does not lie in the nature of thought but in our own nature.* There is no contradiction in supposing there to exist beings that can grasp the same thought as we do without it needing to be clad in a form that can be perceived by the senses. But still, for us men there is this necessity.

constituted by tokenings of inner mental representations with sentence-like structures and roles. In particular, episodes of singular believing involve the deployment of name-like, indexical-like, or demonstrative-like mental representations in syntactic construction with predicate and verb-like inner representations. When I say that an inner mental representation is “name-like” I mean that it has, in the realm of thinking, syntactic and semantic roles similar in kind to the semantic and syntactic roles that are definitive of the public language category **NAME**.¹⁰ For example, I argued in Essay I that at the lexical-syntactic level the linguistic category **NAME** is partially defined by the twin properties of referential independence of type-distinct name tokens and explicit co-referentiality of co-typical names tokens. Correlatively, I claim, there must be a class of mental representations that function in thought as devices of explicit co-reference in the de facto private language of thought. Without such devices, another kind of question would always be open. In particular, it would always be an open question for the individual cognizer whether, in thinking of now a particular *o* and now a particular *o'*, she has thought of two distinct objects or has thought of the same object twice. Though it may sometimes, perhaps even often, be an open question for a cognizer whether two of her thought episodes share a (putative) subject matter, it is surely not always an open question. I can think of Kiyoshi today and think of Kiyoshi again tomorrow with a kind of inner assurance that I at least purport to think of the same person twice. Indeed, the ability to think token distinct thoughts that bear what I will call the same-purport relation to each other is arguably fundamental to the objective character of our thought. If no two thoughts purported to be about the same object, then in thinking any new thought, it would be as if one were thinking about an object never previously cognized. The cognizing subject would have, at best, a fleeting cognitive hold on the objects. She could not, for example, *remember* today what she *believed* yesterday.¹¹ She could not anticipate in thought future encounters with a currently perceptually salient object, as least not *as* encounters with that

¹⁰ I do not mean to suggest that *all* natural language expressions types have language of thought correlates. For example, Richard Heck(2002) has argued persuasively that the second-person pronoun has no language of thought correlate, since, roughly, our thoughts are never addressed to another. Addressing another, that is, is essentially a communicative act. So it is unsurprising that public languages, which are instruments of communication does, but the language of thought, which is not such an instrument does not, contain a second person pronoun.

¹¹ For a suggestive and helpful discussion of mental anaphora and its role in identity thinking and content-preservation, see Lawlor (2002)

very object again. Indeed, it is arguable that a mind in which no two thoughts same-purport altogether lacks any cognitive hold on *objects*.

I claim that our ability to deploy in thought various devices of explicit co-reference, devices such that to think *with* them again is to *purport to think of* the same object again, is a central source of our capacity for same-purporting thought. Name-like mental representations are but one such device. There are no doubt others -- including an internal correlate of linguistic anaphora and dedicated representations of the self such that to think with them again is ipso facto to purport to think of oneself again.¹²

Kant was perhaps the first to maintain that there is a constitutive connection between the objective character of our thought and our capacity for thinking with purport of sameness. He famously held that our cognitive hold on objects rests on two fundamental powers of mind: what he called receptivity and what he called spontaneity. Receptivity he took to be a merely passive power to be “affected” -- presumably causally (though Kant’s official doctrine makes this something of a mystery) -- both by that which is “external” to the mind and by the mind’s own operations. Spontaneity, on the other hand, he took to be an active mental power for “combining” lower (sensible) representations under “higher” conceptual representations. Now Kant took the given of sensation to be a punctate manifold of disunited qualities. That is, he held that in the mere succession of sensible qualities there are no intrinsic marks of same-purport. No element of the manifold is given, for example, as belonging together with any other element of the manifold in any cognition of any object. In particular, there are no intrinsic marks that relates any given sensible contents together as representations of co-existent states of a single underlying substance, nothing that marks any two qualities as being connected as cause and effect. The given stream is, rather, an ever-evolving and inexhaustible array of disunited qualities, rushing in upon sensibility one after another, without intrinsically demanding to be combined, conceptualized and categorized in this way rather than that. As he put it:

¹² Millikan (2000) explicitly rejects language of thought base approaches to same-purport. To be sure, she rightly holds that it is a *sine qua non* of thought about objects that we be able to think of them with purport of sameness and she argues, again rightly, that Fregean modes of presentation and their ilk play no role in explaining the character of our sameness thinking. Her arguments for this claim apparently turn on the view that no merely “internal” linguistic mark, relation, or property could guarantee that two inner representations co-refer. Though Millikan may have a point against Frege, her arguments can get no foothold here. The Fregean mistake was not so much to think that there must be some internal marker of

“...the combination of a manifold [of qualities] in general can never come to us through the senses...” (Kant (1958) p. 151).

Now Kant denied that the mere inward rush of sensation upon the shores of receptivity already amounts to cognition of an objective order. On his view, only by conceptualizing the world, that is, by taking the deliverances of sensibility up into a unified consciousness -- and that by “running through” and “synthesizing” them in accordance with the categories of the understanding -- do we achieve cognition of an objective order. Kant’s dark, but suggestive notion of synthesis is central to his views about same-purport. Synthesis is precisely, for Kant, that combinatorial power of the understanding by which it gives rise to representations that same-purport with one another. On this picture, the understanding takes as input disconnected elements of a punctate sensory stream and “unites” them via synthesis under categorially grounded conceptual representations in such a way that they are marked as belonging together. It is precisely by deploying synthetically unified conceptual representations that we are able to think in same-purporting ways about substances and their properties. As he puts it:

...insofar as they are to relate to an object our cognitions must ... have that unity that constitutes the concept of an object. (Kant (1958), p.)

About “that unity which constitutes the concept of any object” he says:

...we cognize the object if we have effected synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition. But this is impossible if the intuition could not have been produced through a function of synthesis in accordance with a rule that makes the reproduction of the manifold necessary a priori and a concept in which this manifold is united possible. (Kant (1958), p.)

Kant is surely correct to maintain that the capacity to think in same-purporting ways is partly determinative of the objective character of our thought, but to accept this claim is not to accept Kant’s peculiar account of the source and nature of that capacity. Indeed, the doctrine of synthesis introduces nearly as many problems as it purports to solve. Kant plausibly believed, for example, that same-purporting is inextricably tied up with the deployment of *concepts*. At the same time, he held that concepts

same-purport at all, but to think that inner assurance that one is thinking of the same again ipso facto guarantees that one is, in fact, unambiguously thinking of the same again.

are always *general* and never *singular*. This bundle of views promises to deliver an explanation of the possibility of judgments to the effect that one is presented with an instance of horse again, say, but it does not obviously promise an explanation of our capacity to think with same-purport about *individuals*. Indeed, since *singular* representations are one and all sensible and/or intuitive and, therefore, by his lights, non-conceptual and non-discursive, it would seem to follow that singularity is the business of perception and experience not of judgment and thought. If that is right, it is at least puzzling how, on Kant's view, singular thoughts are even possible.¹³

Moreover, Kant *seemed* to believe that thoughts that same-purport are *guaranteed* to actually be about the same object. Such a view seems a nearly inevitable outgrowth of Kant's misguided transcendental idealism, according to which the objects of our (empirical) cognition lack any mind-independent existence. It would not be too far a stretch to say that transcendental idealism just is, or at least strongly entails, the view that objects as such are nothing but either constructions out of or projections from relations of same-purport among some epistemically privileged class of judgments -- roughly those judgements we would arrive at upon the completion, were it possible, of the ideal system of nature.

As long, however, as we have not attained omniscience, the view that thoughts that same-purport with one another are guaranteed to be about the same object cannot be entirely and unambiguously correct. For one thing, same-purporting thoughts need not be about *any* object at all. Santa Claus-thoughts, as we might call them, one and all same-purport with one another, but they are about no object.¹⁴ More fundamentally, a cognizer may encounter a particular object but mistake it for another. I may, for example, encounter Joelle but mistake her for her twin sister Marie. In such a context, I may deploy an inner token of 'Marie' in thinking about the girl I encounter. In that case, my thought will same-purport with many earlier thoughts about Marie. But there is also an intuitively clear sense in which my thought can be said to

¹³ See Manley Thompson (1972) for the classic discussion of this issue.

¹⁴ In complete fairness, I should say Kant can plausibly be credited with some recognition of this fact. Witness in this connection his distinction between merely *thinking* an object and *cognizing* an object. In full blown cognition of an object, there must be both a given intuitive element and a formal conceptual element. In bare thought, devoid of intuitive content, we have, he claims, merely "empty concepts of objects, through which we cannot even judge whether the latter are possible or not -- mere forms of thought without objective validity." Here Kant anticipate the possibility of same-purport in the absence of

be about Joelle -- even if it is and purports to be about Marie as well. Despite the fact that there is a sense in which my thought is about Joelle, it clearly does not same-purport with my earlier thoughts about Joelle. Rather, I am in what we might call a divided mental state. I am confusedly thinking, via a tokening of an inner 'Marie,' with respect to that very person now in front of me, who happens to be Joelle, that she is a promising young tennis player. I am, in effect, thinking *of Joelle as Marie*, thinking of Joelle with Marie-purport. If my confused thought has at least as much claim to be about Joelle as it does to be about Marie, it follows that it is not necessarily and unambiguously the case that inwardly same-purporting thoughts succeed in being purely and simply about one and the same external object.¹⁵

The very fact that an internal assurance of same-purport does not yet constitute an external guarantee of actual co-reference lends, I think, additional credence to the view that the contents of our singular thoughts are joint products of mind and world. The inner relations of same-purport among our thoughts is arguably an entirely one-sided affair, lying solely on the side of the cognizing subject, but the mind cannot, on its own, guarantee that its representations are coherently bound down to outer objects. What can be guaranteed on the side of the subject alone is that the subject's inner representations be the objectual or referentially fit, as I called it in Essay VI, not that those representations be what I call objective or referentially successful. Recall that a representation is *objectual* or referentially fit if it is (syntactically) fit for the job of standing for an object. To a first approximation, expressions that are fit for the job of standing for an object, are those that can well-formedly flank the identity sign, that can well-formedly occupy the argument places of verbs, and that can well-formedly serve as links of various sorts in anaphoric chains of various sorts. Names, demonstratives, indexicals, variables, and pronouns are the paradigmatic examples. Referential *fitness* must be sharply distinguished from referential *success*. A representation can be referentially fit without *actually* standing for an object, without, that is, being

reference to any object at all. Same purport in the absence of reference amounts to what I have called objectuality without objectivity, referential fitness without referential success.

¹⁵ That inwardly same-purporting thoughts are not guaranteed to be about the same object is a sort of minimal anti-Fregean point. With enough inner confusion of this sort, our thoughts might fail to be about anything determinate at all, even if the relations of same-purport were as determinate as could be. Imagine that entirely unbeknownst to me, Joelle is one of a quintuplet. Each time I encounter one of her sisters, I token 'Joelle' and that I, as it were, agglomerate all of the information I have about any of the sisters into one huge 'Joelle' conception. I think to myself, "My that Joelle gets around?" Of who am I thinking? Each time I think with 'Joelle' I inwardly purport to think of the same again. But is it really

referentially successful. Representations that are referentially fit, but not referentially successful, are *objectual* without being *objective*.

Now an adequate theory of referential content must show how that gap between the merely objectual or referentially fit and the fully objective or referentially successful is bridged. Elsewhere, I defend at some length a two-factor theory of the constitution of referential content. (Taylor, forthcoming) According to that theory, on the side of the representations themselves, there are the quasi-syntactic factors that make for referential fitness. But there is also a contribution to be made by extra-representational causal factors. A fully successful theory will explain just how and why referential fitness and causation *jointly* suffice to constitute referential content.

Frege (1960, 1977), like Kant before him, also believed that the capacity to think in same-purporting ways is central to our capacity to make cognitive contact with objects. He offered two different theories of same-purport. In the *Foundations of Arithmetic* in the course of trying to spell out what the epistemic givenness of number consists in he claims that:

If we are to use the sign *a* to signify an object, we must have a criterion for deciding in all cases whether *b* is the same as *a*, even if it is not always in our power to apply this criterion.

The central thought seems to be that an identity statement expresses what is contained in a recognition judgment -- a judgment to the effect that one has been given the same object again. Frege's further thought is apparently that we have succeeded in using a sign to designate a determinate object just in case we have fixed a significance for each identity statement in which a given singular term may occur. We thereby specify, according to Frege, what it is for any two terms to (correctly) purport to stand for the same object. This approach promises to allow for the epistemic givenness of numbers, despite the fact that we have, as Frege says, neither "ideas" nor (sensory) "intuitions" of them. Numbers are given to us through the use of singular terms. Indeed, Frege seems to endorse the perfectly general claim that the concept of an object in general, as Kant might have put it, is nothing but the concept of that which is given through the use of a singular term. Just as Kant believed that objects are nothing but constructions out of or

determinate whether I am thinking of Joelle or one of her four sisters? Perhaps I think of Joelle now as one sister, now as another, now as yet another. Perhaps there is simply no fact of the matter.

projections from relations of same-purport among our thoughts, so Frege seems to believe that objects are nothing but the shadows cast by the uses of singular terms, paradigmatically in identity statements.

In its mere recognition that distinctively *singular* representations have a central role in our cognition of objects, even Frege's early views already represent a distinctive advance over Kant.¹⁶ Strikingly, though, the early Frege evidently failed to grasp the need to distinguish the mere purport of sameness from success at referring to the same again. He denied even the possibility of same-purporting singular representations that entirely lack any reference. Though he explicitly admits that there are *concepts* under which no object falls and admits that there are perfectly meaningful general or concept terms and phrases that express such empty concept, he claims that a (complex) *singular* term formed from an "empty" phrase by adjoining the definite article -- as in, 'the largest proper fraction' -- is "without content" and "senseless." But terms that are "senseless" and "without content" would seem to be entirely devoid of referential purport.

To be sure, with the eventual emergence of the distinction between sense and reference, Frege does acquire the resources to make something like the distinction I am after. Armed with that distinction, he can allow that there are fully "contentful" singular terms that, nonetheless, stand for no objects. He can allow, that is to say, that expressions that fail to refer can have, nonetheless, fully determinate referential purport. More importantly, Frege can now say both that expressions that share a sense, share referential purport, even if they entirely lack a reference, and that expressions that differ in sense differ in referential purport, even if they do share a reference. Sharing referential purport is not yet sharing a reference -- because of the possibility of sense-having, non-referring names. Sharing reference is not yet sharing referential purport -- because of the possibility of co-referring names that differ in sense.

Frege's doctrine of sense is not without its problems. One particularly unfortunate ingredient of Frege's view was his apparent commitment to the view that there is an interesting and robust sense in which sense "determines" reference. Because of that commitment, Frege lacks a straight-forward way to accommodate the fact that same-purporting thoughts need not necessarily and unambiguously succeed in being about one and the same object. Frege was no transcendental idealist. Indeed, his view that the same

¹⁶ It is fair to point out, however, that in apparently elevating the singular to a distinctive category, Frege may merely be harkening back to philosophical wisdom of an earlier day, pre-Cartesian day.

object can be thought and cognized again in independent ways -- that is, in ways that do not purport to present the same object again -- is deeply at odds with the very spirit of transcendental idealism. Still, on at least one way of reading Frege's views about the relation between sense and reference, there remains a faint whiff of an idealism of a more modest sort. Suppose that sense determines reference by determining what something has to be in order to count as a certain thing. Suppose for example that there is a sense or mode of presentation <HES> such that as a matter of a priori necessity all and only that which "satisfies" or answers to <HES> is Hesperus. To say that it is matter of a priori necessity that all and only that which answers to <HES> is Hesperus is just to say that <HES> determines what we might call a constitutive nature or essence.

Frege is no idealist about the existence of objects. Nor is he an idealist about the actual having of determinate constitutive natures by existent objects. Nothing in Frege's views prevents these from being entirely mind-independent matters, at least not in the general case. What is arguably not an entirely mind-independent matter from Frege's perspective is the standing of constitutive natures as constitutive natures. If we are asked in virtue of what the alleged a priori necessities obtain, there seem to be two options -- both unattractive -- available to the Fregean. On the one hand, he can say that the standing of a constitutive nature as a constitutive nature depends on mind-independent facts about a realm of Platonic ideas or the like. This option leaves our ability to know which are the constitutive natures an utter and irreducible mystery. Alternatively, he can attempt to tie standing as a constitutive nature to facts about the cognitive role of modes of presentation in a rational mental life. Though Frege did explicitly locate senses in a third quasi-Platonic realm, he also ties senses directly to our cognitive cum rational powers. Indeed given his endorsement of a Cognitive Criterion of Difference for senses, there can be little doubt that at least the *individuation* of senses is tied up, in Frege's mind, with sameness and difference of role in the cognitive dynamics of the rational mind. This makes it a short and not entirely implausible step to the conclusion that the standing of senses as determiners of constitutive natures must itself ultimately rest on facts about the role senses play as cognitive instruments in the minds of rational cognizers.

Now it is not my aim to conclusively establish that Frege was an idealist about the standing of constitutive natures as constitutive natures. He is silent on too many important questions to permit a conclusive argument on this score. For example, he never spells out in detail just what the "determining"

relation between sense and reference could be. Indeed, he *seems* hardly to be troubled by the question of just how possibly that which lies entirely on the side of the cognizing subject (as, on one construal a mode of presentation must) determines that which lies on the side of the world. Teasing out of his writings a determinate doctrine of just what it is for sense to determine reference is, to say the least, a challenge. Fortunately, since I appeal to the views herein tentatively attributed to Frege mainly as a foil with which to compare and contrast my own views, it doesn't much matter for my purposes if I have gotten Frege entirely right. Though I do take my reading of Frege to have a high degree of plausibility, nothing much turns on the exact degree. The crucial point is that the approach to singular beliefs and their ascriptions on offer in this essay is radically at odds with the approach that I discern -- rightly or wrongly -- in Frege. My approach affords no role to anything like Fregean modes of presentations of particulars as either constituents of singular beliefs, reference determiners, or the referents of embedded singular terms. Where Frege takes thought content to be, in a sense, a one-sided affair, determined entirely on the side of the thinking subject and the modes of presentation via which the thinker makes cognitive contact with the world, I take thought content to be a joint product of mind and world. It is only by being already related to objects in the world that the mind's inner representations come to be contentful at all.

Despite the thoroughly anti-Fregean cast of my central claims, I hasten to acknowledge that I follow Frege, and Kant before him, in taking the capacity to think in same-purporting ways to be central to the objective character of our thoughts, especially of our singular thoughts. Though neither Kantian synthesis nor Fregean senses play any role in explaining the ultimate source of that capacity, I share Frege's view that any adequate theory of the objective representational content of our thought must explain the difference between merely thinking of the same object again, without any inner purport of sameness, and thinking of the same object again with inner purport of sameness. What Frege sought to explain by appeal to semantic notions, like the distinction between sense and reference, I explain by appeal to the logical-syntax of the language of thought. It is not, as Frege imagined, that each name is associated with a determinate and independent mode of presentation of its referent such that names that co-refer may, nonetheless, present that referent to the thinking subject in two different ways such that it cannot be determined a priori that the names share a reference. Rather, it is just that distinct names are *ispo facto* referentially independent, even if they are coincidentally co-referential. Names are quite distinctive

linguistic devices. To repeat a name is *ipso facto* to purport to repeat a reference. To refer again to the same object, but using a different name is, in effect, to refer *de novo* to the relevant object, that is, in a way not “anaphorically” linked with the previous act of reference. And this is so both for shared public languages and for the de facto private language of thought.

3. On the Incredibility of Merely Notional Contents

I have argued that singular belief content is worldly or referential rather than merely notional or rational and as such is the joint product of mind and world. But it must be admitted that we do at least *seem* to have beliefs with singular purport even in the absence of cognitive commerce with any actual existent. It may seem to follow that at least some singular beliefs – those which we may have in the absence of cognitive commerce with any actual existent -- have merely notional or rational content. In this section, I take issue with that conclusion. In particular, though I allow that there are attitudes whose contents are merely notional, I shall argue that strictly speaking full-fledge *belief* is not one among such attitudes. My argument for this claim turns on the intuition that beliefs are essentially individuated by their truth conditions. Where there are not yet truth conditions, there is not yet belief. Now the truth conditions of a singular belief derive from the singular predicative commitments undertaken in the having of that belief. An episode of singular believing is thus essentially a matter of taking a particular -- an actual existent -- to have a certain property. It is of the very essence of singular believing, that is, that the believer takes some actual existent to have some property or other. In the absence of an actual existent with respect to which the believer undertakes a predicative commitment there is no yet anything that can be properly characterized as a belief at all.

Now I concede up front that just as there are apparent acts of seeing that are not actual acts of seeing so there are *apparent* episodes of believing that enjoy a certain illusory feel of successful believing, though they fail to stake out any claim about any actual existent. Consider, for example, the apparent belief that Pegasus can fly. It has a certain felt singularity. One who apparently believes that Pegasus can fly undertakes a commitment, it may appear, not merely to the existence of some flying horse or other. Rather, in apparently believing that Pegasus can fly it is *as if* one has staked out a claim about a *particular* horse and *its* capacities. If Secretariat could fly that would not suffice to make it true that *Pegasus* can fly. This

fact shows that in apparently believing that Pegasus can fly one is not merely believing that some horse or other can fly. There is, of course, no such horse as Pegasus. Arguably, there could be no such horse. That is, if one enumerates all the horses that actually exist and, perhaps, all the horses there could be, one will not find Pegasus among them. So in apparently believing that Pegasus can fly, there is no actual horse and perhaps not even any possible horse about which the believer stakes out a claim. Precisely because no real existent need be doxastically implicated in apparent beliefs to the effect that Pegasus can fly, I shall argue that strictly literally speaking there really is no such belief. That Pegasus can fly is strictly speaking *incredible*.

To deny the credibility of that Pegasus can fly is not to say that 'Pegasus can fly' expresses no content at all. Indeed, it plausibly expresses a merely notional content, a content that is not yet fully truth-evaluable, because of the emptiness of 'Pegasus.'¹⁷ Nor is it to deny that such notional contents may be used to characterize certain attitudes and states of mind. Fantasy and imagination are two such attitudes. One can engage in what we might call Pegasus-imaginings merely by ordering one's Pegasus-notions or conceptions in certain ways. But if the singular representations with which one fantasizes or imagines are not already bound down to worldly existents, then the inner deployment of those representations does not yet amount to an undertaking of worldly commitments at all and hence does not yet give rise to truth-evaluability.¹⁸ Moreover, when singular representations are embedded in a rich network of notions and conceptions via mythic and/or fictive practices, for example, their deployment in thoughts episodes do not as such give rise to fully truth-conditional contents. It is precisely this that separates genuine believing from mere imaginings and the like. Unlike imagining, believing is essentially an attitude in the having of which we thereby stake out a claim on the world. Now the worldly character of believing to rest ultimately on facts about the functional character of believing as opposed to imagining or fantasizing. That is, it is, I

¹⁷ See Essay VI for a further argument to this effect.

¹⁸ Of course, dreams, fantasies, and even one's wildest imaginings come true. Does that mean that merely notional attitudes are, after all, truth evaluable? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that we can sometimes compare notional contents with the world and ask whether there is or is not a match between world and content. So, for example, if I fantasize about marrying a lovely woman on earth and do marry a lovely woman, we may say that my fantasy has come true. But a failure to come true of a mere fantasy is no cognitive defect of either the fantasy or the fantasizer. Nor is the coming true of a fantasy a cognitive virtue of either the relevant state or the relevant cognizer. Notional states are not as such "aimed" at the world. In contrast with beliefs and desires, for example, there is no characteristic direction of fit between

claim, because believing has the functional character that it has that in believing we stake out a claim on how things are in the world. And because this is so, inner representations deployed in episodes of believing are never deployed, as it were, merely notionally. Nor can any inner representation whose content is merely notional be straightforwardly deployed in an episode of believing. It is not my aim, however, to spell out the precise functional role that distinguishes believing from mere imagining in this essay.

Now I have appealed at various points in these essays to what I call notional truth. Where merely notional truth is at stake, there can still be a right and wrong of the matter, -- even in games played with empty, merely objectual representations. Notional truth is the governing concern in many non-veridical language games. For example, when we engage in the construction, consumption, and criticism of fiction, we play dialogic language games governed by a concern for getting things right, as things go in appropriate stories. Getting things right as things go in a story is not a matter of getting at a peculiar species of truth -- truth in a fiction. Granted, we use such expressions as “It is true in the Holmes stories that...” or “It is true according to the Santa myth that...” But truth in a story and truth in a myth are species of merely notional truth, not species of literal truth. Though notional truth is not a species of literal truth, still it is right to think of notional truth and literal truth as distinct species of a common genus. Notional truth predicates like ‘true in the story’ play, for example, a dialogic role similar to the dialogic role of genuine truth talk. The predicate ‘...is true’ functions in discourse as a device for claiming entitlement to make assertoric moves in dialogic games of inquiry, argument, and deliberation. One who asserts that **p** is true, for example, thereby claims an entitlement to put forth **p** as a candidate for mutual acceptance in a dialogic game of inquiry, argument or deliberation. Expressions like “true in the story” may also function as entitlement claiming devices in dialogic games played among producers and consumers of fiction. Entitlements to make moves in non-veridical games arise from sources rather different from the sources from which arise entitlements to make moves in veridical games.

Now someone disposed to defend the credibility of *that Pegasus can fly* while accepting my claim that beliefs are essentially truth evaluable may insist that there is, after all, at least one real existent

content and world for merely notional attitudes. Consequently any worldly evaluation of a merely notional attitude is normatively otiose.

about which one who apparently believes that Pegasus can fly stakes out a claim – the universe itself. One who apparently believes that Pegasus can fly stakes out a claim about *the universe at large* that it contains a horse of a certain description that can fly. It is false that Pegasus can fly, on this view, just because the universe at large contains no flying horse of the relevant description. Unfortunately, this line ignores the singular purport of *that Pegasus can fly*. To adopt it, is really to repeat Russell’s mistake of thinking that empty singular terms are really quantificational expressions terms in disguise.

It is true enough that any genuine belief, general or singular, stakes out a claim ultimately about the universe at large. But a singular belief stakes out such in a quite peculiar way. It stakes out a claim about the universe at large *by* staking out a claim about a *particular* inhabitant of the universe. Just because there is no particular *x* such that one who apparently believes that Pegasus can fly thereby stakes out a claim about that very *x*, we might say that despite the attempted singularity of *that Pegasus can fly* it doesn’t *succeed* in being singular. Still, the singular purport of *that Pegasus can fly* needs explaining, not eliminating. To say that the attempted singularity of *that Pegasus can fly* fails is not to claim that *that Pegasus can fly* is really existentially general. After all, even if some horse or other could fly, that would not suffice for the truth of *that Pegasus can fly*. Similarly, if more controversially, even though no horse can fly, that does not, I think, suffice for the falsity of *that Pegasus can fly*. It is more apt to say that *that Pegasus can fly* is neither strictly literally true nor strictly literally false. *that Pegasus can fly* is not, in short, the sort of thing for which the question of literal truth or falsity even arises. Just because *that Pegasus can fly* doesn’t rise at all to the level of truth evaluability it is strictly speaking incredible.¹⁹

It bears stressing that there are many strictly believable contents in what we might call the doxastic neighborhood of *that Pegasus can fly*. One can strictly and falsely believe that there exists some winged horse or other who can fly. One can strictly and falsely believe that there once was a winged horse named

¹⁹ Consider the following remark by Burge, *op. cit.*:

If *A* gullibly believes that Pegasus was a (real) horse, the demonstrative implicit in the name occurs anaphorically, perhaps without *A*’s realizing it, taking as antecedent some description, definite or not, in the repertoire of *A* or someone else. The name thus has the flavor of ‘that Pegasus (whichever one they are talking about)’.

Though I reject Burge’s claim that names contain implicit indexicals that can be anaphorically dominated by some antecedent, he has, I think, grasped part of the truth about names. A name which occurs within a purely notional frame will have a purely notional significance. It is tempting to say that such a name is used as if it refers to a particular object, without actually so doing. But again, I do not find saying this deeply linguistically illuminating.

'Pegasus'. And one can strictly and truly believe that the sentence 'Pegasus can fly' fails to express anything fully truth-evaluable. In effect, an incomplete, merely notional content such as *that Pegasus can fly* may be, as it were, surrounded by a neighborhood of fully-truth conditional, and therefore credible contents. Though it would be a worthy enterprise to characterize precisely how doxastic neighborhoods of merely notional contents are "generated," I will not undertake that task in detail here. The principles of generation are likely to be various and largely pragmatic. John Perry's (2001) approach to what he calls reflexive content quickly comes to mind as one model for generating doxastic neighborhoods. One can also imagine less "metarepresentational" approaches to the generation of doxastic neighborhoods based on my own distinction between concepts and conceptions. For example, I argued in essay VI that it is a fundamental fact about the role of names -- empty and non-empty alike -- in our psychological organization that they serve as labels for and access points to conceptions of putative individuals. Cognizers like us are such that she who acquires a name opens a file, a file ready for writing in, that is labeled with the relevant name and sometimes accessed via the relevant name. Name-linked conceptions are storehouses of information, and misinformation, potentially about the referent of the relevant name. Via the one and half stage pragmatic mechanism of pseudo-saturation outlined in Essay VI, conceptions provide another means for generating a doxastic neighborhood for a not fully propositional content. For pseudo-saturation happens where saturation fails to come off. When saturation fails to come off, no *object* is contextually provided to serve as the referent of an inner representation with singular referential purport. But where no object has been provided, we have the purport of singularity without the reality of singularity. Where saturation misfires, mind and world have, in effect, failed to constitute a believable content. Still, where saturation falters, pseudo-saturation may step in to provide one or more "alternative" contents, sometimes vague and indeterminate, sometimes quite precise. Often, but not necessarily those alternative contents will themselves be believable, though they will not in general be singular.

The central point here, however, is not so much to define *how* doxastic neighborhoods are generated, but merely to distinguish the often merely notional, and therefore incredible contents, that may lie at the center of such a neighborhood and the possibly fully truth-conditional contents that occupy such a neighborhood. It should not be thought that in believing some such content under, as it were, the banner of

a sentence like ‘Pegasus can fly’ one thereby strictly, literally believes the content *that Pegasus can fly*. For strictly speaking, that “content” is not a possible content of any belief. Nonetheless it is important to acknowledge that the temptation to misidentify the truth-conditionally incomplete and therefore at least partially notional *that Pegasus can fly* with some fully truth conditional content or other in its neighborhood has afflicted many a philosopher. That temptation is a major source of something like what Perry (2001) has come to call subject matter fallacies. One commits a subject matter fallacy, according to Perry, when one supposes that:

...the content of a statement or belief is wholly constituted by the conditions its truth puts on the subject matter of the statement or belief; that is, the conditions it puts on the objects the words designate or the ideas are of. (p.)

Now since I *do* think that all there is to the content of a (singular) statement or belief are “the conditions it puts on the objects the words designate or that its inner representations are of” I wouldn’t put matters in quite the way that Perry does. But I do insist, in the same general spirit, that one should always be careful not to misidentify belief in that which lies in a mere doxastic neighborhood of a failed content with belief in that failed content itself. Though failed contents are not strictly speaking believable, we can get “close” to believing them by believing their doxastic neighbors instead. From our perspective, Perry’s subject matter fallacies amount to mistaking belief in a doxastic neighbor for belief in the real thing. That mistake is, I suspect, widespread. It begins with the descriptivism explicit in Russell and plausibly implicit in Frege, and continues to the present day with those who take narrow content to be the prior and fundamental form of belief content.

4. On the Notional Primacy of Fulsomely De Re Ascriptions.

In this section, I offer an indirect argument for the central claim of this essay, an argument that turns on certain under-appreciated facts about belief ascriptions. It is widely supposed that at least some attitude ascriptions specify either directly or indirectly both what the ascriber believes and how she believes it by putting at semantic issue the notions, conceptions, modes of presentation or the like, via which the ascriber cognizes doxastically relevant objects and properties. And it is widely assumed that the more or less standard form for specifying the how of a belief is the apparatus of embedding. This is

supposed to be the distinguishing feature of so-called de dicto ascriptions. In this section, I shall take issue with this more or less widely endorsed conventional wisdom. In the general case, I shall argue, embedding functions neither directly nor indirectly to put notions and their ilk at semantic issue. The primary form of belief attribution, at least for singular beliefs, turns out not to be the de dicto at all, but the de re. Indeed, even in conversational contexts in which a de dicto ascription is permissible, it typically merely partially characterizes a reality that can be more fully and informatively characterized by a certain variety of de re ascription -- what I call a fulsomely de re ascription. A fulsomely de re ascription specifies what objects are thought about, what is thought about those objects, and, at least indirectly, the notions or modes of presentation via which those objects are thought about. Such ascriptions specify the “how” of belief, not via an embedded clause, but via unembedded modifying clauses of a sort explained more fully below. The claim that it takes a de re ascription of a certain sort to make explicit the how of a belief runs against the grain of the conventional wisdom.²⁰ De re ascriptions are widely taken to be those which do not put the ascriber’s notions and conceptions at semantic issue.²¹ But this bit of conventional wisdom correctly

²⁰ Brandom (1994) has endorsed something like the thesis I defend in this essay, but in the context of defending inferentialism in semantics. Defending Inferentialism is no part of my design. See also Burge (77). Burge suggests that de re belief “is in important ways more fundamental than the de dicto variety.” Though I do not think the distinction between de re and de dicto beliefs as contrasted with de re and de dicto ascriptions of beliefs makes any sense, I endorse the spirit of Burge’s remark if it is taken to be a remark about ascriptions rather than about beliefs. Indeed, I shall be arguing that at least as far as beliefs about particulars are concerned either there is almost nothing to be said for a de re/de dicto distinction or de dicto ascriptions should really be viewed as a quite special case of the de re.

²¹ Consider Crimmins (1995). There Crimmins claims that one way to understand the “muddled” concept of a de re belief report is as a report which is “notionally open” to use his phrase and he argues that such notionally open reports are rare indeed. In Crimmins (92), we find the following:

....We very rarely say merely what someone thinks or believes; almost always we add tacit provisos about how they think about the alleged objects of thought or belief. And the rules for adding and discerning these tacit provisos are driven by all the subtleties of conversational pragmatics.

Reimer (95), by contrast, argues that notionally neutral or open -- and therefore de re -- reports are prevalent. Crimmins and Reimer both talk as if the class of de re reports included only notionally neutral or open reports -- though neither need be logically committed to this claim. Since my fulsomely de re reports are both notionally sensitive and de re, I reject the identification of the de re and the notionally neutral. Brandom op. cit. seems explicitly to recognize that going fulsomely de re is, in fact, a way of being simultaneously de re and notionally sensitive.

characterizes only what I call truncated de re ascriptions and it does so precisely because truncated de re description lack modifying clauses of the sort I have in mind.²²

My argument focuses on cases involving ascriptions across what I call a doxastic divide between ascriber and ascribee. In such cases, the ascriber neither shares nor endorses the ascribee's ways of cognizing doxastically relevant objects. Now if the truth value of a (de dicto) ascription is supposed to depend on the ascribee's and not the ascriber's notions, conceptions, or modes, it follows that de dicto

²² I am not the first to reject some or all ingredients of what I am calling the conventional wisdom. Soames (1985, 1987a, 1987b), Salmon (1986) and Braun (1998) are clear cases. See also Bach (1997a, 1997b). Bach denies that that clauses (or their ingredients) semantically specify, refer to, or in any other way invoke notions, conceptions or modes of presentation. Unlike those thinkers, however, Bach holds that ascriptions which differ only by the occurrence of embedded co-referring expressions in what Quineans would call "opaque" position, may differ in truth value. Strikingly Bach thinks that there can be differences of truth value in such cases even where no syntactic/pragmatic/semantic mechanism serves to put notions at semantic issue. That itself represents a large departure from the conventional wisdom since those who endorse the conventional wisdom tend, by and large, to maintain that substitution failures are traceable to notional differences somehow due to the presence of the distinct, but co-referring embedded referring expressions.

It is important to acknowledge that many counted here as accepting the core commitments of the conventional wisdom have taken important steps away from the prevailing wisdom of an earlier day. Those like Crimmins (1992, 1998), Crimmins and Perry (1989), Recanati (1993), Richard (1990) who appeal to pragmatic mechanisms of one sort or another to explain how notions and their ilk are put at semantic issue in the ascription of beliefs generally agree that there is little, if anything, in either the logical syntax of the sentences with which we typically make belief ascriptions or in the lexical semantics of the verb 'believes' to distinguish the notionally sensitive from the notionally neutral. These thinkers might reasonably be interpreted not so much as offering alternative analyses of the de re/de dicto distinction but as replacing it with something else. For example, Richard (1990), who appeals to contextually variable correlation functions between RAMS to explain what we might call the notional variability of attitude ascriptions, is quite explicit in denying that there is anything about the sentences with which we make de re/de dicto ascription which supports the existence of either a logical-syntactic or lexical-semantic de re/de dicto distinction.

On the purely negative point that nothing in either logical syntax or lexical semantics distinguishes the de re from the de dicto, the notionally sensitive from the notionally neutral, these thinkers are, I think, entirely right. I advocate going one step further. Not only is there nothing in either logical syntax or lexical semantics on which to found a semantic distinction between notionally neutral and notionally sensitive belief ascriptions, there is also nothing in the pragmatics of communication to found such a distinction. So with Soames, Salmon, and Braun my rejection of the conventional wisdom is quite thoroughgoing. To be sure, Soames and Salmon believe that we do somehow pragmatically convey, without semantically specifying information about notions and their ilk. For a recent and intriguing account see Soames (2001). Braun (1998) has defended an error-theoretic account of our intuitions about notional sensitivity. These fellow travelers may for all I know wish to part company with my claim that by going fulsomely de re we can, after all, achieve semantically relevant notional sensitivity. It may also be that once the notion of a fulsomely de re ascription is on the table, the likes of Crimmins, Perry, and Recanati will find themselves in agreement with me. That would not be deeply troubling. Indeed, one can read my arguments as defending the claim that what Recanati (1993), following Schiffer (1977), would call a "complete thought content" is, in fact, ascribable, but not via the use of a simple belief sentence. If we want to ascribe a complete content explicitly, there is no alternative to the use of either a more fulsome sentence or an extended chunk of discourse that will, admittedly, have the feel of circumlocution.

ascriptions should be possible even when there is a certain notional or doxastic distance between potential ascribers and potential ascribees. But this prediction is not supported by the facts. At least for beliefs about particulars, the preferred device for putting the ascriber's notions and conceptions at semantic issue turns out not to be anything like the diverse machinery widely on offer as accounts of the workings of de dicto/notional/notionally sensitive ascriptions. When an ascriber intends to ascribe to another a belief about a particular in a notionally sensitive, ascriber-centered way, where the ascriber neither shares nor endorses the ascriber's notions of the relevant particular or particulars, the ascriber must mount a fulsomely de re ascription.²³

Consider what I call the case of the inebriated reveler. Suppose that Smith, Jones, and Black are working a party as bartenders. They are instructed not to serve anyone who has had too much to drink. There is a man in the corner drinking martinis who has clearly had a great deal to drink. Jones, however, takes the man to be a woman and she takes him to be drinking gimlets rather than martinis. With evident intent of alerting Smith to the man's state, Jones utters:

(1) The woman in the corner drinking gimlets has had too much to drink.

Smith recognizes who Jones has in mind, but she does not realize that Jones has made a mistake until she is about to report Jones's belief to Black. Because Jones thinks of the man in the corner drinking martinis under the description 'the woman in the corner drinking gimlets,' this description may be reasonably thought to partially characterize Jones's notions of the person in the corner. So the conventional wisdom would seem to entail that Smith can put Jones's notions of the man in the corner at semantic issue by embedding the description 'the woman in the corner drinking gimlets.' But this prediction is not borne out by the facts.

Suppose that it is common ground between Smith and Black that there is no woman in the corner drinking gimlets. Now consider:

(2) Jones believes that the woman in the corner drinking gimlets has had too much to drink.

as potentially uttered by Smith to Black. Smith would naturally be taken not merely to ascribe to Jones a commitment to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman in the corner, but also thereby to impute that she

²³ For a more detailed version of the current argument see Taylor (2002).

herself accepts or endorses the ascribed commitment. Because the existential commitment that she would thereby impute to herself conflicts with what is already common ground between Smith and Black, uttering (2) is a conversationally inappropriate way for Smith to report Jones's belief to Black.

Despite the widely endorsed view that descriptions are the paradigm of the embeddable, embedding a description within a that clause appears not to render its use "wholly notional." That is, embedding a description does not free the speaker from the existential commitments normally conveyed by the use of that description.²⁴ If not, then the mechanism of embedding does not, after all, provide an

²⁴ I suspect, but will not argue in detail here that the reason that an ascriber who uses an embedded description thereby expresses a certain existential commitment has partly to do with the semantics of 'believes that' and partly to do with the phenomenon of presupposition. Partly as a consequence of the semantics of 'believes,' the use of a description within belief contexts presupposes the existence of a unique satisfier of the relevant description. A number of writers have examined the presuppositional character of attitude contexts. Karttunen (1974), for example, claims that propositional attitude verbs exhibit the following projection profile for presuppositions:

x ATT that f presupposes x believes the presupposition of f .

from which it follows that

- (a) x believes the king of France is bald
- presupposes
- (b) x believes there is a king of France.

Heim (92) and Chierchia (1995) offer discourse-theoretic accounts of the semantics of 'believes' which have this generalization as a consequence. Though this generalization may seem, at first glance, exactly correct for de dicto belief ascriptions, the examples considered in this section tend to undermine its correctness. For an account somewhat sensitive to the data like those on which my arguments turn, see Guerts (1998). Guerts distinguishes what he calls the e-principle from what he calls the I-principle:

(e-principle):

If V is a propositional attitude and $S\{\square\}$ is a simple sentence n which the presupposition is triggered that \square , then (a speaker who utters) a V 's that $S\{\square\}$ presupposes that \square .

(i-principle)

If \underline{V} is a propositional attitude and $S\{\square\}$ is a simple sentence n which the presupposition is triggered that \square , then (a speaker who utters) \underline{a} \underline{V} 's that $S\{\square\}$ presupposes that \underline{a} believes that \square .

Guerts argues, contra Heim, that the e-principle rather than the I-principle is correct. But in an attempt to explain what he calls the two-sided character of attitude contexts, Guerts defends an account which allows, in certain context, for the inference from a believes that $S\{\square\}$ to a believes that \square , where $S\{\square\}$ presupposes \square . See also Zeevat (1992) in which it is argued, in effect, the e-principle and the I-principle apply simultaneously. It is hard to see how we could ever make ascriptions across notional divides, however, if Zeevat's proposal was true.

ascriber the wherewithal to use a description to ascribe to another an existential commitment that she herself does not accept.²⁵

Consider an alternative scenario. Suppose that there is a woman in the corner drinking gimlets. And suppose that Smith and Black both accept, and mutually know that they both accept the existential commitment normally expressed by the use of the description ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets’. Moreover suppose, as above, that the person Jones intends to pick out by her use of ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets’ is not a gimlet drinking woman, but a martini drinking man – though she does not, again, recognize that he is a man. If Smith realizes that Jones intends to pick out the martini drinking man rather than the gimlet drinking woman by her use of ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets,’ (2) will again be an inappropriate way of reporting what Jones believes about the relevant man. In the currently imagined setting, an utterance of (2) would invite the inference that it is the woman in the corner drinking gimlets who is believed by Jones to have had too much to drink. Smith intends to invite no such inference.

Once again, embedding does not enable Smith to put the description ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets’ on display as a representation or specification of Jones’s way of thinking about the man in the corner drinking martinis. That description does capture an ingredient of Jones’s notion of the man in the corner drinking martinis. By Smith’s lights, however, Jones thinks of the man in the corner in an

²⁵ Anthony Everett, in correspondence, has suggested that examples like the following are prima facie counter-examples to my claims here. Suppose that one says:

- (a) Zac believes that the sun god will visit him someday.

There would appear to be a reading of (a) on which no commitment to the existence of a sun god expressed by an utterance of (a). But I want to suggest that this will happen only in a very special sort of dialectical situation, in particular one in which it is mutually believed by the speaker and her interlocutors that there is no sun god. This is so, I suggest, for purely pragmatic reasons. When it is mutually believed by speaker and hearer that there is no sun god, the speaker’s use of the description ‘the sun god’ would be uncooperative if it were not meant to convey some existential commitment on the part of some conversationally relevant person. Since what is already mutually known rules out that it is either speaker or hearer who are subject to the relevant existential commitment, only the ascriber is left. Again, this has nothing at all to do with the semantics of embedding. When a description is used some existential commitment is signaled. Defeasibly it is the speaker’s own commitment that is conveyed. When, and perhaps only when, it is already settled that speaker is not so committed, are conversational partners sent searching for some further agent with which to associate the relevant commitment.

As further evidence for this view, suppose that it is mutually manifest to speaker and hearer that either the speaker or the hearer believes that there exists a sun god. In such a setting, an utterance of (a) would not, I suggest, impute any commitment, at least not on its own and without further stage setting, to the existence of a sun god to Zac.

illegitimate manner. The manifest illegitimacy, from Smith's point of view, of thinking of the martini drinking man in the corner under the description 'the woman in the corner drinking gimlets' appears to undercut the permissibility of deploying that description in an embedded position as either referring, describing or tacitly specifying the notional contents of Jones's belief.

There are settings in which it would be permissible for Smith to report Jones's belief via an utterance of (2). Suppose, for example, that Black and Smith are in doxastic agreement with Jones. Suppose that, like Jones, Black and Smith mistakenly take the man in the corner drinking martinis to be a woman drinking gimlets. If Smith and Black mutually know that they, like Jones, take the person in the corner to be a gimlet drinking woman, then an utterance of (2) would seem to be fully permissible. In such a conversational setting, an utterance of (2) by Smith would serve to convey to Black, partly as a consequence of the doxastic agreement between Smith and Black, information to the effect that Jones believes of the man in the corner, whom Jones, Smith and Black all take -- they think rightly -- to be a woman drinking gimlets, that he has had too much to drink.

It would be wrong to conclude that by uttering (2) in the setting just imagined, Smith imputes to Jones a commitment to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman. Varying the case ever so slightly shows decisively that Smith has imputed no such commitment to Jones at all. Imagine a scenario in which the person Jones has in mind and to whom she intends to refer via the description 'the woman in the corner drinking gimlets' is, in fact, a woman drinking gimlets. Now suppose that although it is mutually manifest to Smith and Black who Jones has in mind, they, nonetheless, mistakenly take Jones to be mistaken. Though Smith and Black mutually recognize that Jones takes the person in the corner to be a gimlet drinking woman, they take that person to be a martini drinking man. Jones is right; they are wrong; but they are unaware of these facts. Now suppose that Jones utters (1) intending to alert Smith to the drunken reveler. From our better informed perspective, it seems evident that Smith would speak truly if she were to report Jones's belief to Black via an utterance of (2). That, in fact, is just how we, who are in the know, would report Jones's belief. (2) is, however, unavailable to Smith as way of reporting Jones's belief. An utterance of (2) by Smith would quite clearly impute to Smith an existential commitment that she manifestly does not have. The preferred way for Smith to report to Black what Jones believes in the imagined setting is the false (3) rather than the true (2):

(3) Jones believes that the man in the corner drinking martinis has had too much to drink.

By Smith's use of the description 'the man in the corner drinking martinis' in the utterance of (3), she commits herself to the existence of a martini drinking man. She does not thereby ascribe such a commitment to Jones. Indeed, it is common ground between Smith and Black in the imagined setting that Jones mistakenly takes the relevant person not to be a martini drinking man but a gimlet drinking woman. We can even stipulate that it is part of the common ground that Jones takes there to be no martini drinking man in the room at all. Now Smith does, to be sure, ascribe to Jones a predicative commitment to the effect that a certain person -- the person whom Smith and Black take to be a gimlet drinking woman -- has had too much to drink. But in so ascribing, Smith appears neither to refer to nor to specify nor to describe Jones's notions of the relevant person.

By parity of reasoning, it follows that even where there is doxastic agreement between ascriber and ascribee, the ascribee's notions of those objects are often simply not at semantic issue and cannot be put at semantic issue merely by the mechanism of embedding. When Smith utters (2) as a way of reporting Jones's belief to Black in a context in which Smith, Black, and Jones one and all take the martini drinking man to be a gimlet drinking woman, Smith expresses her own commitment to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman, but she does not thereby succeed in ascribing such a commitment to Jones by that utterance. If the proposition that Jones is committed to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman were not already part of the common ground in the imagined context of doxastic agreement, the mere utterance of (2) by Smith would not increment the common ground to include such a proposition. What Smith ascribes to Jones by an utterance of (2) is singular predicative commitment to the effect that a certain person has had too much to drink. She does not thereby purport to specify how Jones thinks of the relevant person. By using the embedded description, Smith presents only *herself* to Black as cognizing the relevant object under the description 'the woman in the corner drinking gimlets.' In addition, she offers up that description to Black as a vehicle for Black and Smith to achieve mutual recognition of the object that Jones's belief is about. But she does not thereby use the embedded description to either represent, indirectly specify or refer to Jones's notion of the relevant person. It is not Jones's notions that are at semantic issue in Smith's ascription but only Jones's predicative commitments.

I want now to show that the machinery of fulsomely de re ascriptions enables us to ascribe existential commitments across such divides. A fulsomely de re ascription is one that specifies what objects are thought about, what is thought about those objects, and, at least indirectly, the notions or modes of presentation via which those objects are thought about.²⁶ Fulsomely de re ascriptions take many forms. The following is one such form:

(4) *a* believes of $n_1 \dots n_n$, of which/whom he thinks \square_1 'ly ... \square_n 'ly that $\square(x_1 \dots x_n)$.

where each n_j is a name and each \square_j (partially) characterizes, either directly or indirectly, some conception or notion of an object, and each x_j is anaphorically linked to n_j . We get fulsomely de ascriptions from truncated de re ascriptions by adding certain modifying clauses. These modifying clauses are adjuncts rather than arguments, however. The claim is not that the sentences with which we make garden variety de re ascriptions are in any way syntactically or semantically incomplete or that such sentences are in some way syntactically or semantically ambiguous.

Consider again the case of the drunken reveler. Suppose, as above, that Smith intends to report Jones's belief about the martini drinking man in the corner to Black. Suppose that Smith intends via her report to, as it were, arm Black for interaction with Jones by making it explicit just how Jones thinks of the martini drinking man. It is, of course, commonly thought that it is via so-called de dicto ascriptions that we arm one another for interaction with the ascribee. But recall that Jones mistakenly takes the martini drinking man to be a gimlet drinking woman. Smith is aware that Jones is confused, but Black is not aware of Jones's confusion. If Smith were to report Jones belief by an utterance of (3), she would correctly and successfully ascribe to Jones a commitment to the effect that a certain person has had too much to drink, but her utterance would convey no information about Jones's confused notions of the relevant person. She would not thereby arm Black for interacting with Jones. Smith needs a way both to ascribe the commitment just mentioned and to convey information about Jones's confused notions, without thereby

²⁶ It is not quite right to say that the specified notions will in general be the notions "via" which the ascribee cognizes doxastically relevant objects. For it will often be the case that the relevant notions will be "illegitimate" in various ways and will not serve to connect the cognizer to the relevant objects. In such cases, we can view the ascribed notions as further cognitively relevant material somehow involved in the cognizing of the relevant objects, but not as the vehicles by which the relevant objects are cognized.

committing herself to Jones's confusions. She can do no better, I suggest, than to go fulsomely *de re*. She might, for example, utter something like the following:

(5) Jones believes of the martini drinking man in the corner, whom she mistakes for a gimlet drinking woman, that he has had too much to drink.

In uttering (5), Smith undertakes, and manifestly so, a commitment of her own to the existence of a martini drinking man; she ascribes to Jones a commitment to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman, without herself thereby undertaking any such commitment; and she ascribes to Jones, also without herself undertaking, a predicative commitment to the effect that a certain person has had too much to drink. In so doing, Smith not only informs Black of Jones's doxastic commitments, but she does so in a manner that arms Black for interaction with Jones by explicitly conveying information about Jones's notions of doxastically relevant objects.

To mount a fulsomely *de re* ascription, an ascriber offers up certain doxastically relevant actual existents for the cognizing to her interlocutors via descriptions such that it is mutually manifest that doxastically relevant existents satisfy the relevant descriptions. Once doxastically relevant existents are made salient in this way, the ascriber can then go on to specify, however indirectly, the ascriber's ways of cognizing those existents. And she can do so without thereby owning the ascribed predicative commitments and notional contents as her own. But what happens when no actual existents are apparently implicated in the apparent belief. Can no ascription be made at all? Or is it simply that the inoculating circumlocution cannot be deployed? If so, does this fact not give the lie to claims of the priority of the *de re*?

To answer such questions, consider a case of a different kind. Suppose that Jones utters the following:

(6) The man in the doorway has a frightening look on his face.

Suppose, however, that there is no man with a frightening look and that there is no actual doorway implicated in Jones's apparent belief. Suppose that Smith realizes that there is no man x and no doorway y such that Jones takes x to be in y , that Smith intends to inform Black of the belief that Jones apparently expresses in uttering (6), and that she intends to do so while explicitly distancing herself from Jones's bizarre existential commitments. Since no man and no doorway are implicated in what appears to be

Jones's belief, it is not open to Smith to offer up such a man and such a doorway to Black for the cognizing preparatory to mounting a fulsomely de re ascription. As the following shows, nor will a straight-forward embedding of the relevant description achieve the intended communicative effect:

(7) Jones believes that the man in the doorway has a frightening look on his face.

A strict literal utterance of (7) would express a commitment on Smith's part to the existence of a man in a doorway, contrary to her own communicative intentions.

It is worth pointing out that if Smith uses indefinites rather than definites to characterize the belief apparently expressed by Jones in uttering (6), she would not thereby express a commitment to the existence of a doorway containing a man. Consider:

(8) Jones believes that there is a man in a doorway who has a frightening look on his face.

Indefinites give rise to puzzles of their own. Although an indefinite like 'a man' is not itself a referring expression, it can nonetheless serve to introduce a novel subject into a discourse. Moreover, in keeping with its subject introducing role, an indefinite can anchor an anaphoric chain all of whose links make reference to the newly introduced subject as in:

(9) A man just came into the room. He is tall and handsome. His name is John.

A speaker who produces a discourse like (9) would normally thereby express a commitment to the existence of a tall, handsome man named John. However, no such existential commitment is expressed by the ascriber who uses an embedded indefinite in the manner of (8). Moreover, an unembedded pronoun cannot have an embedded indefinite as its antecedent. And this fact suggests that an embedded indefinite does not serve a subject introducing role.²⁷ Consider:

(10) ?Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door. He has a frightening look on his face.

There is no reading of (10) in which the pronoun 'he' has the embedded indefinite 'a man in a blue hat' as its antecedent. Interpreted anaphorically rather than deictically, the unembedded 'he' must inherit its

²⁷ See Chierchia (1995), for a discussion.

reference and/or existential import from elsewhere. But the would be antecedent -- the embedded indefinite -- has neither reference nor existential import to pass on.

There is a charitable reading of (10) roughly equivalent to:

(11) Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door and she believes that he has a frightening look on his face.²⁸

So construed, the indefinite 'a man in a blue hat' does appear to function as the antecedent of the embedded 'he'. The ability of an indefinite in one that clause to function as the antecedent of a pronoun in a distinct that clause is a mystery worthy of serious theorizing. I suspect, but will not argue, that this ability is the notional correlate of the subject introducing role played by unembedded indefinites. That is to say, an indefinite that anchors an anaphoric chain within or across that clauses serves, in effect, to introduce a purely notional discourse subject. Each link in such an anaphoric chain will itself have a merely notional significance -- a notional significance shared with every other member of the relevant anaphoric chain.

Thus in:

(12) Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door. Smith thinks that he has a frightening look on his face.

the notional significance of the embedded 'he' is evidently inherited from its antecedent 'a man in a blue hat.'

Call a linguistic context within which indefinites serve to introduce merely notional subjects a notional frame. That clauses appear at least sometimes to function as notional frames. Nor are they the only sorts of notional frames. Fictional narratives are another and paradigmatic sort. Consider:

(13) Once upon a time in a land far away, there lived a King. He was wise and benevolent. His name was Philo. King Philo had a beautiful daughter. Her name was Jasmine.

One who produces such a narrative characterizes a merely notional world in which a benevolent king named Philo has a beautiful daughter named Jasmine. In characterizing this merely notional world, one has not undertaken a commitment to the existence of a such a king and such a princess. It is tempting to talk

²⁸ Compare this to so-called Hob-Nob cases first discussed in Geach (1967). See also Chierchia (1995), Guerts (1998).

here of pretend existential commitments and pretend reference to particulars. Such talk is unobjectionable, but it does not add anything deeply illuminating to our understanding of the peculiar linguistic character and function of notional frames. Indeed, the direction of illumination is more likely to be the reverse. It is only by achieving an antecedent understanding of the peculiar linguistic character and function of notional frames that we are likely to achieve an understanding of what we are doing when we deploy the apparatus of singular reference in episodes of pretense.

Though the use of the apparatus of singular reference within notional frames to characterize merely notional worlds is a subject worthy much further inquiry, it will suffice for current purposes to note that one who ascribes a belief to Jones using (11) does not thereby commit herself to the existence of a man in a blue hat with a frightening look. Both the embedded indefinite and its embedded anaphoric dependent function wholly notionally -- that is, solely to specify how things are in the notional world defined by Jones's beliefs. They do so without thereby expressing existential commitments of the ascriber's own. It is worth contrasting (11) with (14):

(14) Jones believes that the man in the blue hat is at her door. He has a frightening look on his face.

There is no reading of (14) in which either the definite description 'the man in the blue hat' or the pronoun anaphorically linked to it function wholly notionally. An ascriber who ascribed a belief to Jones via an utterance of (14) would thereby express only her own commitment to the existence of a man in a blue hat with a frightening look on her face.

These last examples show that even when an ascriber uses a definite description attributively with reference to no particular object, a would be ascriber cannot, via mere embedding of the relevant description, escape expressing as her own the existential commitments normally conveyed by the use of that description. It may so far appear that where no actual existent is doxastically implicated in the ascriber's belief, the would be ascriber cannot resort to the circumlocution of a fulsomely *de re* ascription to inoculate herself from the ascriber's commitments. There is, however, another sort of inoculation available to the ascriber. She can inoculate herself from the ascribed commitments by deploying embedded indefinites, thereby going wholly notional in her ascriptions. By doing so, however, she represent the

ascribed belief as entirely lacking in singular purport. It is as if the cost of representing the relevant mental state as a genuine and not merely apparent belief is that it must be represented as altogether lacking in singular purport.

A qualification is in order, however. It turns out that when an embedded definite is anaphorically linked to an embedded indefinite with wholly notional significance, the definite may indeed have wholly notional significance. Consider, for example, (15):

(15) Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door and she believes that the man in the blue hat has a frightening look on her face.

With the definite anaphorically linked to the indefinite, (15) is awkward. (11), in which the definite is replaced by a pronoun, is the preferred way of expressing what (15) struggles to express. The awkwardness of (15) results entirely from a “nearness” effect. Consider a discourse in which the indefinite that serves to introduce a notional subject is more distant from the anaphorically dependent definite as in:

(16) Smith: Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door.

Black: Is that why she looks so afraid?

Smith: Yes. She believes that the man in the blue hat is about to beat her up.

The embedded definite is perfectly acceptable here. Smith does not commit herself to the existence of a man in a blue by her use of the embedded definite. Her use of the embedded definite is, rather, wholly notional.

Such examples suggest that when a definite occupies the right sort of place in a chunk of discourse, it may enjoy *inherited*, as opposed to *original* notional significance. It may even be that a standard way to make a so-called de dicto ascription is by employing an embedded definite whose notional significance is wholly inherited from some explicit or implied embedded indefinite antecedent. If so, perhaps the de re/de dicto distinction should really be viewed not as a distinction at the level of individual sentences, but as a distinction at the level of ordered chunks of discourse. Though there is much to be said for this thought, it does not, I shall argue, undercut the notional primacy of fulsomely de re ascriptions. The use of an anaphorically dominated embedded definite description with wholly notional significance turns out to be permissible in only a limited range of conversational settings. Moreover, even when such a

construction is permissible, the relevant ascription will typically only partially characterizes a reality more fully and informatively characterized via a fulsomely de re ascription.

I call the move of going wholly notional by deploying embedded indefinites, possibly together with anaphorically linked definites, within a (sequence of) belief ascription(s) indefinitization. Now recall our earlier scenario in which Jones mistakes the martini drinking man for a gimlet drinking woman. Suppose that Smith intends to inform Black of Jones's beliefs. Consider the following:

(17) Jones believes that a woman in a corner drinking gimlets has had too much to drink.

With the indefinite noun phrase read as having narrow scope, (17) is arguably true. An utterance of (17) would clearly correctly partially specify the notional world defined by Jones's belief. The ascriber also avoids committing herself to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman by indefinitizing in this manner. Notice, however, that one who characterizes Jones's belief by an utterance of (17) and leaves it at that in the imagined conversational setting clearly violates something like the Gricean maxim of informativeness. (17) omits the crucial information that Jones believes what she believes on the basis of (mis)taking a certain man for a woman. This information is not ancillary or irrelevant but is of the very essence of Jones's state of mind, a state of mind better and more informatively represented by the fulsomely de re ascription (5) than the indefinitized ascription (17). To see this, imagine that Smith utters (17) as a way of characterizing Jones's belief and that Black attempts to *act* on the information conveyed by Smith's utterance. We can imagine, for example, that as a consequence of Smith's utterance Black is on the look-out for an inebriated woman ordering gimlets. Clearly, were Black to learn more about the facts of the matter -- that there is no woman drinking gimlets, that Jones has mistaken a martini drinking man for a gimlet drinking woman, and that Smith is herself entirely aware of these facts -- she could, with some justice, accuse Smith of misleading her.

It is fair to say, therefore, that (17) is misleading in the imagined setting. It is misleading because an indefinitized ascription is a merely partial characterization of Jones's episode of singular believing, a characterization that leaves out the crucial thing, viz., the truth-relevant aspects of that episode of believing. The truth of Jones's episode of singular believing depends on how things are by a certain man in a certain corner and not on whether there is some gimlet drinking woman or other in some corner or other. (17) is simply silent on these aspects of Jones's belief episode. In effect, Smith has represented Jones's episode

of believing as a mere array of notions, not as such bound down to any actual existent. And because she has left out the actual existent to which those notions are bound down, she has not fully represented the worldly content of Jones's belief.

Finally, consider again the belief Jones expresses in uttering (6) above. Since there would appear to be no real existents implicated in Jones's belief, it may appear that an indefinitized ascription is really our only option. But even here, I want to insist that despite appearances there is a real existent implicated in Jones's belief. Moreover, I claim that it is only in virtue of the fact that some real existent is so-implicated that Jones's state of mind counts as an episode of *believing* rather than an episode of *fantasizing* or *imagining*. For although there is no man and no doorway implicated in Jones's belief, there is, I submit, a more or less determinate region of space that is so implicated. And it is in virtue of this fact that Jones's episode of believing has precisely the truth conditions that it does. For consider just what the truth or falsity of Jones's belief hangs on. First, notice that it is not the case that any old man and any old doorway are even relevant to the truth or falsity of Jones's belief. Even if there does exist a doorway containing a man with a frightening look in some region of space or other, that would not suffice for the truth of Jones's belief unless that very doorway and that very man are implicated in Jones's belief in the peculiar way that renders them truth-conditionally relevant to Jones's belief. On the other hand, unless there is some region or other of space that is truth-conditionally implicated in Jones's belief, even the fact that no region of space contains a man in a doorway would seem utterly powerless to render Jones's belief false. Jones's belief will be determinately true or false - and true or false of the world -- just in case there is *some more or less determinate region of space* that Jones *takes to* contain a doorway with a frightening looking man in it. Her belief is true just in case *that very region* does contain such a doorway and such a man and is false otherwise. Moreover, just as in our earlier example, it appears that if we wish to display Jones's belief under its truth-evaluable aspect, we cannot rest with the ascription of merely notional contents. We must ascribe referential content, that is, content that is already bound down to doxastically implicated existents. We must, in effect, "de-indefinitize" our indefinitized ascription by going fulsomely *de re*. In the present case, if there is a region of space with respect to which Jones does have a *de re* belief the following fulsomely *de re* ascription adequately captures both the referential and notional contents of Jones's belief:

(18) Jones believes of region R, which she takes to contain a doorway, that it contains a man with a frightening look on his face.

V. Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued for a number of interlocking claims. Though these claims do not logically stand or fall together as a single piece, they are mutually supporting and reinforcing. For example, if I am right about the *nature* of singular beliefs, then it is, I think, unsurprising that belief ascriptions work as they do. If singular beliefs are essentially undertakings of singular predicative commitments toward real existents, then neither the primacy of fulsomely de re ascriptions nor the incredibility of merely notional contents with singular purport should be unexpected. Correlatively, the primacy of the fulsomely de re and the strict incredibility of the merely notional are important clues to the object-involving nature of singular beliefs. The deeper point is that from whatever perspective we look at singular belief we see the same phenomenon – the centrality of the objects. In having a singular belief a cognizer takes an object to be a certain way. In ascribing such an attitude, we specify what object and what property or properties the ascriber takes the object to have. To say this is not to deny that the cognition of an object requires the mediation of something inner. Indeed, I have taken pains in this essay to specify in some detail the nature of that inner something. But it does not follow that that inner something, whatever it is, is the focus of either belief or belief ascriptions. Nor does it follow that we have fully characterized the nature of belief when we have specified that inner something without reference to the objects. Singular belief is a janus faced thing, with both an internal psychological nature and an outer significance.

Notice too, that although I have conceded that notions and their ilk may indeed be put at semantic issue in fulsomely de re ascriptions, it is not quite right to say that fulsomely de re ascriptions indirectly specify or characterize the supposed notions or modes of presentation “via” which doxastically implicated existents are doxastically implicated. Often, the relevant notions will be “illegitimate” in various ways and, therefore, will not serve to connect the cognizer to the relevant objects at all. The specified notions are, rather, simply further cognitively significant material somehow involved in the cognizing of the relevant objects. I suspect, but have not argued here, that this fact reflects a quite general phenomenon. Whenever notions and their ilk are explicitly put at semantic issue via a fulsomely de re ascription the

specified notions and conceptions are not thereby represented as the vehicles *via* which the relevant objects are first rendered doxastically relevant. The mechanism, whatever it is, that serves to first render an actual existent doxastically relevant, that which, as it were, fixes the reference of our inner singular representations is never, I suspect, separately in view as the subject matter of any singular belief ascription, not even of a fulsomely de re ascription and certainly not in so-called de dicto ascriptions of such beliefs. Just as the focus of a singular belief is the object itself, so the focus of a singular belief ascription is the object itself and the predicative commitments the ascriber undertakes with respect to that object. What has blinded philosophers to this fact is the inordinate focus on situations of doxastic agreement between ascriber and ascribee. By feeding ourselves a richer diet of examples, we see that what we took to be the general case is really nothing of the sort.