

THOUGHT AND OBJECTIVITY: EVANS GAMBIT¹

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Abstract

Evans' attempt at making sense of modes of thinking about—and referring to—objects that do not involve the intermediation of a general description uniquely true of the object but which, nevertheless, are not direct in the sense of the Direct Theory of Reference (that is, they are not thoughts with bare objects as their constituents, nor expressions with referent but without sense), opens up an unexplored option for the philosophy of mind and language. This paper explores the consequences of such novel account for epistemology and the metaphysics of thought, and argues against the possibility of any principled separation between the subject's and the world's contribution to content and meaning.

Keywords: Objective thought, Gareth Evans, de re senses, content and context

Resumen

El intento de Evans de reconocer formas de pensar acerca de—y de referir a—objetos que no involucran a descripciones generales únicamente verdaderas del objeto pero que, sin embargo, no son directas en el sentido de la Teoría de la Referencia Directa (esto es, no son pensamientos con objetos desnudos como constituyentes ni expresiones con referente pero sin sentido) abre una opción novedosa para la filosofía de la mente y del lenguaje. Este trabajo explora las consecuencias de esta opción para la epistemología y la metafísica del pensamiento y argumenta contra la posibilidad de una separación de principio entre la contribución del sujeto y la del mundo al contenido y al significado.

Palabras clave: Pensamiento objetivo, Gareth Evans, sentidos de re, contenido y contexto

1. Descartes inaugurated Modern philosophy by bringing subjectivity into the centre of the picture. There are many facets to this move: the incorpora-

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tion of sensations and experiences into the realm of the mental; the special, privileged, relation that the mind has with the content and character of its thoughts and experiences; the immaterialism of the thinking subject; the idea of that subject as a unique kind of object, unique because of the above, but still an object in need to be explanatorily linked to conventional, material ones (no less dramatically, to its own body). However, out of all of Descartes' commitments, the one with the deepest, and longest lasting, influence on the history of philosophy is the idea that thought can be understood in complete detachment from how things are, from the nature of the rest of reality. Ultimately, nothing in the character of thought can determine its adequacy to the world. Both for Descartes and for contemporary Cartesianism, one needs to appeal to something external to thought to account for its relationship to the world. Descartes, as it is well known, appeals to God. Modern Cartesianism, influenced by the emergence of natural science and its impressive achievements in the postulation and confirmation of laws, appeals instead to nomological causal links. Of course, the differences between Descartes' philosophy and what I take to be his contemporary heirs seem to outnumber the similarities. Descartes is a dualist: for him the mind is an entity separate from the body, a substance of radically distinct constitution. It is not subject to natural laws and, hence, it is free. Its interaction with the natural world is at best mysterious and its capacity to represent it ends up being a matter of faith. Contemporary Cartesians, who can roughly be called representationalists, have fought hard to avoid any traces of dualism. But such a fight may also have been their misgiving. The mind retains the capacity to represent states of affairs of the world, but it does so solely in virtue of physical properties. There is no mind and body, as distinct substances. Instead, there are two different ways to describe the body, one in physical (physiological) terms, the other intentional. An intentional state is a functional state of the internal structure of the body (of the brain, of the nervous system, etc.), but it can be described without mentioning such an internal structure and often without mentioning the world that it aims at representing.

Ironically, the leading philosophical tradition in the rejection of Cartesianism was founded by one of the last great Cartesians, Edmund Husserl. This is ironic because the remnants of Cartesianism are felt today much more strongly in the analytic tradition than in the continental one, despite the fact that Frege, one of the founders of the analytic approach to philosophy, was a radically anti-Cartesian thinker. However, the price paid by Frege was high: instead of isolating the realm of thought within the subject, he explained its objectivity in terms of thoughts (i.e., the propositions that constitute the contents of acts of thinking) belonging to a separate realm, neither physical

nor mental, but of a rather Platonic nature. It is against this Platonism that Russell's philosophy as well as much of analytic thinking reacted. But, here too, the price was high: the realist, anti-Platonic reaction unwittingly reverted to Cartesian (even if not substance dualist nor necessarily representationalist) ways of thinking. (A parallel, often transcendence-searching, reaction can be spotted in some continental philosophers, but this is no place to dwell on it.)

In this paper I will argue that the most radical departure from this oscillation, and the most thorough attempt at offering an alternative, can be found in the work of such "neo-Fregean" philosophers as Gareth Evans and John McDowell. The novelty of Evans' thought, as of neo-Fregean philosophy in general, is to retain Frege's basically non-Cartesian insights without losing sight of what Russell called the "instinct of reality". This is Evans gambit, to highlight the centrality of object-dependent thoughts and to reject the idea, considered self-evident by Cartesian philosophers, that there can be thought in the absence of objects. To glue thought to objects in this manner is to recognize, with Frege, that thought is objective, without conceding to him that thoughts must lie in some Platonic surrogate of reality. The difficulties of a Cartesian conception of the mind are made more apparent by its tendency to fall prey to sceptical arguments. Evans explored, in his groundbreaking book *The Varieties of Reference*, certain ways of thinking, which he considered a condition of possibility for thought and agency in general, that cannot be understood independently of the agent's situatedness in the world. It will be argued that even the most moderate kinds of global scepticism must make use of some of those ways of thinking and, hence, make such sceptical positions circular and self-defeating.

I will do so by making use of McDowell's notion of *de re* sense, a notion that was greatly influential for Evans' work. I will maintain that with this notion, and the sister notion of object-dependent sense, Evans and McDowell open up a hitherto unexplored possibility within the theory of reference and, in general, the philosophy of language and thought, one neither covered by Frege or Russell nor by the recent and popular theories of direct reference.

2. Evans sets out to explain his task in *The Varieties of Reference* in characteristically modest style: according to him the book is an examination of the role of singular terms or referring expressions in a developed semantic theory for natural language. Nevertheless, I will argue that the real aim is much more ambitious; by establishing that the reference relation behaves differently in *saying* and in *thinking*, he challenges a deep-rooted prejudice in contemporary philosophy, and at the same time achieves insights on our relationship to the world which go much further than a semantic theory for

singular terms is expected to offer². The problems traditionally treated within the domain of the philosophy of mind can be divided into two sets (excluding the increasingly popular topic of qualia and consciousness): the problem of intentionality (how can minds be *about* the world?) and the mind/body problem, paradigmatically Cartesian (how can minds be *in* the world?)³. The first of these problems is the closest in subject matter and method to the philosophy of language, to the point of deserving an autonomous label that highlights its special character: philosophy of thought. Evans' contribution to philosophy, even if it reaches aspects of epistemology, the philosophy of language or the philosophy of logic, is better understood as philosophy of thought, an old-fashioned label, I agree, and one not embarrassed of its Kantian and Fregean heritage. The philosophy of thought deals with the problem of relating thinking with what is thought about: reality and the thinker herself (part of reality, of course)⁴.

A way to bring in the import that Evans' work has for the metaphysics of thought and its relevance for the very idea of objective reality is to appeal, as he does in the first chapter of his book, to Russell, one of the most influential thinkers in the theory of reference and one not metaphysically shy. Russell's take on the difficulty has been influential: thought is related to reality because sometimes (the most important ones) thought includes, incorporates, elements of that reality. Unfortunately, those elements turned out to be sense-data, selves or universals, and all of them have proved to be extremely slippery. Russell defines the notion of singular thoughts or singular propositions as those that could not be expressed or entertained were their objects not to exist. If there are at least some singular thoughts, then there are at least some objects. Russell, famously, went on to define those kinds of thoughts as thoughts expressed by using names (logically proper names) whose only contribution to the propositions expressed was the object referred to. So, the subject part of a Russellian, singular, proposition is not occupied by the sense of a name, as Frege would have it, but by an object. This way,

² You may have listen to this story before, but I believe it deserves to be told once more, as an amazing amount of work in philosophy seems to proceed as if it never happened. I have avoided, as far as it has been possible, loading this paper with bibliographical references within the text or in footnotes. However, it will be clear to anyone familiar with recent literature on reference the debt that it owes to the work of, amongst others, John McDowell (1977, 1984, 1986), Michael Luntley (1984, 1999) and Gregory McCulloch (1989).

³ I owe the charming phrasing of these questions to Tom Beament.

⁴ It can be argued, but I will not do it here, that a proper philosophy of thought would also preclude many a conundrum within the mind/body family as well as dissolve some of the apparent mysteries regarding the phenomenological character of thought.

if we could be certain that some of the propositions that are the contents of our thoughts are singular, then we would also be certain that some things are the case, that some objects are, as it were, “out there”. But we have, according to Russell, such certainty because the objects that constitute singular thoughts are what we could call internal accusatives, mostly sense-data that are undoubtedly present to our minds, private and yet directly perceived objects. It would appear that a wide variety of sceptical challenges would be dismissed if we hold Russell’s views about singular thoughts and their objects. And this would mean both rejecting Frege’s theorizing about reference and the cognitive significance of propositions (i.e., rejecting Frege’s claim that senses, and only senses, can constitute thoughts) and accepting Russell’s doubly dubious epistemology (i.e., accepting both the idea that there are such things as sense-data and that they play an epistemological role, and the idea that thoughts containing sense-data are infallible).

The special relation that thinkers maintain with their objects guarantees the infallibility of singular thoughts: a thinker knows the objects of singular thoughts by acquaintance, not by description. And, again, we are acquainted only (more or less) with sense-data. Everything else we know by description. Every other object is available to our thought only inasmuch as we can subsume it under general terms, under predicates. We can be sure of knowing only one kind of particulars, the direct objects, the accusatives, of our perceptual experiences, which unfortunately are not available to anyone else. To all other objects, to all public objects, we are connected only through the mediation of predicates, and as far as we are concerned, there may well be nothing that satisfied such predicates. Except for the names of our sense-data, there are no real names. Ordinary names do nothing for our thought but abbreviating general descriptions of objects: they are not names at all. On the other hand, if we accepted ordinary objects to be knowable by acquaintance, this would lead us, both to accept fallibilism (and the idea that some apparent singular thoughts are no more than illusions of a thought) and to rethink our ideas about the separation between our thinking and reality: if object-dependent senses are allowed to replace internal, subjective, objects as the constituents of thoughts, the image of our mind reaching reality starts to appear more attractive. This will be Evans’ strategy to retain Russell’s basically well-motivated instinct of reality without embracing his disastrous metaphysical and epistemological doctrines.

3. Evans concentrates his attention on referential expressions, traditionally considered crucial for an understanding of the relationship between thought, language and the world. The first two chapters of *The Varieties of Reference* establish a distinction between referential and non referential expressions. A

referential expression is one whose contribution to the truth conditions of the sentences where it appears is expressed merely by the relation of reference:

(...) it seems to me to be correct to regard as a referring expression any expression whose contribution to the truth-conditions of sentences containing it is stated exclusively by means of the relation of reference which is found in (P) [If S is an atomic sentence in which the n -place concept expression R is combined with n singular terms $t_1 \dots t_n$, then S is true iff <the referent of $t_1 \dots$ the referent of t_n > satisfies R .] (p.49; all references are to Evans' *The Varieties of Reference* (1982) unless otherwise noted).

This way, we can state the semantic value⁵ of referential expressions by using axioms of the form:

(1) The referent of "Kripke" = Kripke

(2) (x) (The referent of "Julius" = x iff x was the inventor of the zip), and, following Dummett, Evans holds that (1) and (2) give us the referent and, by doing so, the semantic value, in a way that shows the sense (p. 35; see Dummett 1973, pp. 273-5 and Luntley 1999, pp. 252-4). (1) and (2) are axioms for two kinds of referential expressions, proper names and descriptive names (Evans does not introduce other kinds of referential expressions, such as indexicals, demonstratives or pronouns until the central chapters of the book).

Within the category of referential expressions, proper names, but not descriptive names, are 'Russellian singular terms', that is, if they lack a referent they cannot contribute to the expression of a thought⁶:

⁵ Evans translates *Bedeutung* for 'Meaning' or 'semantic value'. This allows him to separate reference from semantic value, i.e. to allow for empty singular names to have semantic value. This can be done by regarding "(...) the semantic value of each singular term as a *set*, which would be either the singleton of the referent or the empty set, according to whether or not the term has a referent" (p. 32).

⁶ Evans introduces the notion of descriptive names to show the complexity of the task of classifying ways of referring both in language and in thought, and the existence of differences between both classifications. A descriptive name, such as "Julius" (for which we have given the axiom stating its semantic value in (2) above), is a name whose reference is fixed by means of a definite description: "Let us call whoever invented the zip 'Julius'". According to the view that sees senses as definite descriptions, rejected by Evans, all names would be descriptive. It could be of interest to test his proposal by introducing other categories. For instance, we could speak of nominal descriptions: think of the superstition within the theatre world of not calling the play "Macbeth" by its name, but calling it instead "The Scottish Play". This category is complementary to that of descriptive names, the difference being that here the superficial description does not fix the reference, which is already fixed by the name of the play, but rather the practice of talking about it. This would be, I believe, both a referential expression and a Russellian one, such as they have been defined above. By

(...) Frege was perfectly familiar with (...) a view of singular terms which is commonly regarded as much more Russellian than Fregean: namely, the view that someone who uttered a sentence containing an empty singular term would fail to say anything, in the sense that he would fail to express a thought (p. 12).

Evans' surprising way to bring to light an option within the theory of reference and meaning which is neither fully Fregean nor fully Russellian is to defend, in the first two chapters of his book, a Russellian thesis in the context of a discussion of Frege's work and Fregean theses in the context of a discussion of Russell's. In the first chapter, "Frege", Evans embraces a Russellian conception of referential expressions, according to which sentences containing empty Russellian expressions fail to express a thought. In other words, we can distinguish two kinds of thoughts in virtue of the way in which they can fail. On the one hand, thoughts expressed by means of sentences without Russellian expressions can fail both by being false and by there not being a unique object that is the referent of the referential expression. On the other hand, thoughts conveyed by using Russellian expressions can only fail by being false: if the Russellian term lacks a referent the thought is merely an apparent thought or the appearance of a thought.

In chapter 2, "Russell", Evans defends two Fregean theses: (1) not all referential expressions are Russellian (i.e., there can be thinkable thoughts without there being objects that satisfy the referential terms that appear in their expression), and (2) all referential expressions (Russellian or not) have a sense. Furthermore, senses do not have to be understood as mediations between the term and its referent, but rather as ways of knowing the referent: we could call this an adverbial conception of sense, opposed to the substantive conception that identifies senses with definite descriptions known by the speaker, or with mental, internal, entities such as concepts in the language of thought⁷. The combination of Fregean and Russellian themes

calling attention to these kinds of expressions it is easy to see to what extent the superficial linguistic appearance ("Julius" seems like a proper name, "The Scottish Play" like a definite description) does not need to correspond with the role played by the expressions ("Julius" is not a Russellian expression, "The Scottish Play" is).

⁷ Allow me to quote at length from Evans' rebuttal of the accusation of indirectness: "(...) when we realize that the possession by a singular term of a Fregean sense can depend on nothing more than its being associated with a proprietary way of thinking about an object, the idea that thought about an object which depends upon grasp of a Fregean sense must somehow be indirect will seem absurd. The fact that someone is thinking about an object in a particular way can no more warrant the conclusion that one is not thinking of the object in the most direct possible fashion, than the fact that one is giving something *in a particular way* warrants the view that one's giving is somehow indirect" (p.62). This rejection of a substantiation of senses is perfectly in line with Davidson's idea that we can have a theory of meaning without "meanings" (an idea articulated by Davidson through his thesis that

is nicely summarized in what Evans calls ‘Russell’s principle’: “(...) in order to be thinking about an object or to make a judgement about an object, one must *know which* object is in question—one must *know which* object it is that one is thinking about” (p. 65, Evans refers to Russell’s *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 58). Russell reads this principle as implying his ideas about acquaintance: given that we only have genuine knowledge of our sense-data, the only objects we can think about (other than by subsuming them under general, descriptive, predicates) are sense-data. But such implication is a non sequitur, independently of our attitude towards Russell’s epistemology. For this equation depends on reading the requisite of “knowing which object” as equivalent to “knowing the object which” (see McDowell 1990, p. 257). Even if we can only have singular knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance, of private objects, it does not follow that we cannot think of other objects and know which objects we are thinking about: there is certainly room for other ways of knowing which object we are thinking about, even if such ways do not depend on our having “direct” knowledge of the object (a way of reading the demand that names have senses and that knowing an object is always knowing it under a—often non-descriptive—mode of presentation is to say that there is not such a thing as bare acquaintance with particulars; see M. Luntley 1984, pp. 83-4)⁸.

Evans’ aim is to extend Russell’s principle beyond the scope of Russell’s own strictures. For Russell, to think of an object one needs either to be im-

a Tarskian theory of truth would give us the meaning of statements by giving their truth-conditions, parallel to the above mentioned thesis by Evans according to which in *stating* the referent of an expression we *show* its sense). Later on we will see how Evans’ ‘generality constraint’ takes on board Davidson’s claim that the meaning of an expression is its systematic contribution to the truth-conditions of the sentences where it appears.

⁸ A perhaps clearer way to see what is at stake here is to notice that Russell’s proposal for a theory of meaning takes advantage of an ambiguity of the English verb “to know”, to give centrality to the concept of knowing things, rather than to that of knowing propositions (being this second kind of knowledge only privileged when the proposition contains a thing immediately known, see McDowell 1977, pp. 174-6). If one wishes to retain Frege’s insistence on the intimate link between a theory of sense (of meaning) and a theory of understanding (of thought), as Russell does, it emerges as the most attractive option that senses should be ways of knowing things; in some cases, but not always, ways of recognizing them or ways of describing them. For Frege, but not for Russell, knowing a thing is something that only happens within the scope of a fact, of a true proposition. The recently popular alternative of giving up the idea that meaning and knowledge are related (which will be discussed later) surrenders the notion of meaning to an account of bare causal relations, one that the speaker or thinker need not have knowledge of (and, ultimately, surrenders the very notion of meaning and abandons the project of explaining how thought and language can correctly take in how things are).

mediately acquainted with it or to know some distinctive characteristic of it. It is Evans' claim that there are other ways of thinking about objects that do not fall under any of these categories. Chapters 6 and 7 are dedicated to thoughts that square nicely within a Russellian conception of what we have called Russell's principle (ignoring his epistemology): demonstrative thoughts and self-identification. However, in chapter 8, Evans discusses what he calls 'recognition-based identification' and refuses to identify it with the descriptive paradigm:

(...) if a subject is disposed to identify a particular object as the object of his thought, and in so doing is exercising a genuine recognitional capacity stemming from the encounter or encounters from which the memory-information that saturates his thought derives, then, it seems to me, that object is the object of his thought, irrespective of whether or not it can be identified by means of any descriptions which the subject may otherwise use (p. 268).

There is no particular reason why, in order to ascribe to a thinker the capacity to think about an object she can recognize, the thinker must have access to a description uniquely true of the object. In fact, more often than not, the attempts made by the subject to produce such a description will fail to uniquely identify an object (otherwise, police identification line-ups would be strictly unnecessary: it would suffice with looking around for a suspect that fits the attempted description by the witness)⁹.

4. We have not considered yet a possibility that could extend beyond Russell's two options (immediate acquaintance or descriptive knowledge) without invoking Fregean senses. This line, inaugurated by Kripke (see 1972), shares with Evans the idea that there can be non-descriptive thought about objects other than the ones accepted by Russell but understands such a possibility not in terms of a novel way of explaining the nature of Fregean senses, but in terms of the subject being in a proper causal connection with the object. Such connection need not be, and quite often it is not, part of the cognitive economy of the subject and, hence, it is not a candidate to replace senses in an explanation of the possibility of thought about the objective world. Kripke showed that a term could succeed in referring to an object without the object being present or the subject associating a description with the term that is uniquely satisfied by the object. Evans accepts, in chapter 3, the importance of such causal (informational, he calls them) links between terms (and con-

⁹ Evans accepts that there must be some structure or another in the subject's brain where information about the object is stored and which enables such recognitional capacities: however, "(...) this is not information which the *subject* has, or in any sense *uses* to effect an identification" (p. 288).

cepts) and objects. He also accepts that, in the case of linguistic terms, it may well be all that is needed: granting a role to the linguistic community in the fixation of meaning opens up an option that Russell, given his essentially individualistic conception of language, could not contemplate.

For Russell language was not an intrinsically social phenomenon. But contemporary work in the philosophy of language has quite abandoned Russell's egocentric viewpoint. Once one's interest is in the phenomenon of language itself, one must be concerned with the way in which it functions as a means of communication among members of a community. (...) There immediately opens up the possibility of a gap between what a speaker means to say by uttering certain words—what thought he wishes to express—on the one hand, and what he strictly and literally says, according to the conventional meanings of the words he utters, on the other (67). [It could be held that] (...) the thought in the mind of the speaker can be specified by mentioning some individuating property true of the referent; but that that is certainly not what he *says*, since he may be understood by someone who makes no association between the name and that property (70).

Criticisms, such as Kripke's, of Frege's ideas on reference under a descriptivist reading, start with the plausible assumption that there are ways of referring to things which do not fall within the scope of a subject's possessing a description uniquely true of the object referred. The motivation for this line of work deserves applause inasmuch as it questions the idea that all thought must be general in character, an idea with some backing from the Cartesian view that the mind is enclosed, its contents transparent to itself and independent of how the world may be. However, these criticisms are often accompanied by an explanation of non-descriptive forms of reference in terms of objects lying outside the scope of thought (understood as the scope of Fregean senses, or cognitive significance). The authors committed to this view tend to explain referential relations in causal terms, hence joining Descartes in conceiving of the mind as epistemically enclosed with respect to the world. Their advance with respect to Descartes is insufficient: they accept, unlike the French philosopher, that objects in reality make a difference for thought by brutally imposing themselves to the mind through causal connections. But they retain the idea that the connection between objects and thoughts is itself inaccessible to the thinker, a connection only subject to purely theoretical enquiry, not one of epistemic relevance. Direct reference is direct insofar as it does not involve Fregean senses. But Fregean senses do not need to be cashed out in terms of entities that mediate between thinkers and objects. If a Fregean sense is a way of thinking about an object, the apparent indirectness of a Fregean explanation of reference disappears.¹⁰ And it

¹⁰ See footnote 7 above.

rather puts the direct or causal theories under an uglier light: brutally causal explanations of reference actually make referential relations desperately indirect, as the object lies completely outside the dynamics of referring. And, as a consequence, referents completely dissolve from view when it comes to understanding thoughts.

Even if the individuation of *linguistic* reference is atomistic (a term refers to whatever object is its causal antecedent), such atomism is not possible for concepts. Evans warns us: we should be sceptical of the influence that Kripke's work has had in the study of mental representations. The first reason is that it has been wrongly supposed that Kripke has shown Russell's principle to be false, when Kripke just shows that the principle fails at the level of *saying*, not at the level of *thinking*. The second is that Kripke has provided a theory of direct or causal reference for linguistic terms but not for mental representations. The problem with Russell's principle is what it is to have the knowledge that it talks about. Evans supposes that the knowledge in question is *discriminating knowledge*, i.e., the capacity of the subject to distinguish the object of her judgement from all other things. He thinks that we need to give a theoretical defence of the principle in order to use it to give an account of what is common between descriptive, demonstrative and recognition-based identification. The requirements for *understanding* are more demanding than for *saying*. So, for instance, to say something *about* an elm we do not need to be able to recognize it, but we do in order to think *of* it (of course, one can have general thoughts about elms even if one cannot tell elms apart from other trees, but the issue is whether one can have singular thoughts only in virtue of enjoying the right casual links).

5. Evans' response to the atomistic proposal about thought that could seem to follow from Kripke's ideas is expressed through another important principle, the 'generality constraint': "(...) if a subject can be credited with the thought that *a* is *F*, then he must have the conceptual resources for entertaining the thought that *a* is *G*, for every property of being *G* of which he has a conception" (p. 104). From the acceptance of this principle it follows that establishing reference in the case of thoughts involves a semantic element (besides an informational link). In other words, both the Russellian idea of bare acquaintance with objects and the Platonistic possibility of bare knowledge of properties fail to recognize that the contribution of names and concepts is an abstraction of their role in the thoughts where they appear¹¹. Thought is structured if it is to follow the generality constraint.

¹¹ It can be objected that the generality constraint cannot be correct if it implies that one must be capable of thinking such things as "the square root of three is a beautiful colour"

This might seem to lead immediately to the idea of a language of thought (...). However, I certainly do not wish to be committed to the idea that having thoughts involves the subject's using, manipulating, or apprehending *symbols*—which would be entities with non-semantic as well as semantic properties. (...) I should prefer to explain the sense in which thoughts are structured, not in terms of their being composed of several distinct *elements*, but in terms of their being a complex of the exercise of several distinct conceptual *abilities* (see p. 101).

Evans calls our attention towards two of them: knowledge of what it is for something to have a property *F* (the ability to apply concepts to more than one object), and the ability to think about particular objects. It is this second ability the one that depends on Russell's principle. Those abilities can only be exercised in the context of whole thoughts, as understanding of words only happens in the context of sentences, and hence, of other words.

The need for these two abilities strikes at the root of any argument that goes from accepting the existence of thought to either scepticism about the external world or doubts about the possibility of other minds. Evans' argument runs like this: thought is essentially structured and this is something captured by the generality constraint. If we want to credit someone with the thought *that a is F*, we must credit her with the ability to think both *that a is G* and *that b is F*, for every concept *G* and singular term *b* that she possesses. The generality constraint wants to do justice to two sets of ideas:

[a] Complete thoughts, i.e., entities with a truth-value, are basic: "each of the abilities involved in the thought that *a is F*, though they are separable, can be exercised only in a (whole) thought (...) the understanding of a word is manifested only in the understanding of (...) sentences, and hence always together with the understanding of other words" (p. 102). The capacity to be acquainted with an object cannot be exercised independently of the capacity to think something or other about the object, but thinking something of an object cannot be done without, Evans would say, *discriminating* knowledge of the object.

[b] Conversely, in order to have a whole thought one needs (i) "the ability to think of a particular object" (p. 103), and (ii) the ability to apply a predicate to a range of distinguishable individuals (p. 103; see also Strawson 1959, p. 99). I take this to be the main consequence of the structured nature

if one is to be attributed the thoughts that "the square root of three is a number" and "lilac is a beautiful colour". To modify the principle in such a manner as to avoid conflating concepts not suited for each other is surely a hard task. However, it is difficult to see whether such a modification could be even conceived in terms other than semantic, i.e., in terms not assuming one or other form of the constraint. Thanks to Fernando Martínez Manrique for pressing me on this point.

of thought and of the generality constraint. But these two abilities imply that [I] there is no thought if there are no objects (this follows from (i)) and that [II] there cannot be thoughts where a predicate applies to an object and it cannot apply to any other (this follows from (ii)). [I] goes against radical scepticism and will be fleshed out with the notion of *de re* sense. [II] goes against scepticism about other minds (one cannot be said to possess the concept of, e.g., “being in pain” if one can only apply it to oneself).

6. A very interesting gloss of Evans’ polemic against the consequences for the philosophy of thought of causal theories of reference can be found at the end of Lecture V of McDowell’s *Mind and World* (1994, pp. 104-7). One of the earlier attempts at incorporating Kripke’s insights to the theory of content was offered by Putnam (1975) by means of his famous Twin-Earth thought experiment. Putnam asks us to imagine two identical, physically indistinguishable, twins each placed in one of two physically identical environments. However, in one of the worlds, what English speakers call water is “H₂O” while in the other it is another substance, let’s call it “XYZ”. The upshot of the experiment is that the meanings of both twins’ utterances about water and the contents of their thoughts about water cannot be determined by their internal states: these are identical, but one twin will be speaking and thinking about H₂O, the other will be actually referring to XYZ. Meaning, so, is not in the head. (This is a brief and partially inaccurate description of Putnam’s experiment, but my purpose is not to question it, but to question the alternative conception of meaning offered by Putnam. And, in any case, chances are that the reader will have come across it innumerable times.) The outcome of the experiment is, according to Putnam, that meaning includes the actual extension of the concepts. In the case at hand, “water”, here on Earth but not on Twin-Earth, includes H₂O. This, as we have seen, is a rejection of the Fregean requisite that thoughts are composed of senses, not of objects, but of modes of presentation of objects, and a roundabout way to go back to Russellian propositions, ordered pairs of properties and objects (where the objects enter the propositions not by privileged epistemological acquaintance, as Russell would have it, but by brute causal force). This strategy is common to all causal theories of reference or theories of direct reference.

McDowell offers the following diagnosis: these theories could seem to be Kantian in the following sense: if we follow Strawson (1966, p.20) in explaining the relation of concepts to intuitions in terms of the relation of predicates to subjects (of generality to particularity), and reject Russell’s view on reference as a consequence of the realization that some thoughts (for instance, perceptual demonstrative or self-identificatory thoughts) cannot obtain their content through a specification in general terms (i.e., in

terms of a hidden definite description which uniquely points to the object of the thought), it could be argued (as Kripke and the other theorists of direct reference do) that the link between concepts and objects rests on an extra-conceptual relation between thinkers and things (see McDowell 1986, pp. 252-9; McDowell 1994, pp. 104-7). But, McDowell points out, this picture is not Kantian at all, because in Kant there is no outside to the conceptual realm other than the noumenal. What we need is an account of sense and thought that is object-dependent (as the theories of direct reference have it) while avoiding the idea that objects lie outside the conceptual sphere.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the label 'externalism' has been hijacked by positions such as Putnam's (described above), leaving 'internalism' to refer to positions claiming that meaning is, effectively, in the head, supervening on brain states, or whatever (Fodor's theory of content up to *The Elm and the Expert* (1994), or Searle's descriptivist understanding of senses (Searle 1953, would be examples of this kind of internalism). Being forced into this dilemma is having to choose amongst two versions of the Cartesian mental solitude: either the mind only deals with its own contents (the world having nothing to do with meaning) or the mind has no access to content at all (it just deals with a surrogate of content, narrow content or internalised linguistic predicates) other than a causal, non intentional, one. The position propounded by Evans precludes the internalist/externalist debate even from arising: it is not that psychological states have either general predicative contents (internal and independent of any object fitting them or not) or are related to contents only externally. The crucial choice is not between contents being in the head or being outside the head. Both options presuppose that psychological states themselves are in the head. But once that the possibility of (and the need for) certain ways of thinking being object-dependent in more than a merely causal manner comes to the fore, what gets questioned is the presupposition behind the dilemma. If singular thoughts are not merely thoughts that depend on a causal, informational, link with their objects, but rather thoughts whose existence and identity depends on the existence and identity of their objects, and such dependence is itself a feature of the psychological life of the subject, Putnam's catchy slogan, "meanings ain't in the head" (where the head is identified with the mind) should be replaced with something on the lines of "the mind is all over the place" (where the mind cannot now be identified with the head, which is not all over the place). This is not merely a competing variety of externalism, for meanings are not external to the mind. But it is not a variety of internalism either, for meanings are not autonomous with respect to how things are.

According to McDowell's argument the mistake lies in identifying the conceptual with the predicative, rather than, as Evans does, with "that belonging to the realm of Fregean sense" (McDowell 1994, p. 107). It is this sort of identification the one that leads to the idea that thought is fundamentally descriptive and, hence, general. According to McDowell this is Evans' main achievement, to introduce the Fregean sense, or mode of presentation, to accommodate the connections between thinkers and the world which cause problems to a Russellian theory, without appealing to connections outside the boundaries of the conceptual realm, while at the same time giving an account of the identity conditions of those senses in terms of the identity conditions of their objects. But, crucially, the objects are not related to the senses merely in terms of an informational, extra-conceptual link, but also in terms of, e.g., the subject's capacity to locate them in space (pp. 145-51), i.e., her capacity to place them within a framework (Strawson 1959, p.37) or cognitive map (pp. 151-2). The practical ability to locate objects is not conditional upon the subject's needing a description that allows her to reach out to the objects (p.172), but, conversely, it is a precondition for such descriptions.

Evans' point is double: for there to be thought, there must be, at least some, singular thoughts and for there to be a singular thought two things, amongst others, are necessary: (a) the existence of the object of the thought (otherwise, it would only be the appearance of a thought) and (b) the thought must be *of* that object (i.e., there must be an informational/causal link between object and thought). These necessary conditions for singular thought, (b) in particular, absorb Kripke's insight. However, any illusion of agreement disappears once that the central discussion of chapter 6, "Demonstrative Identification", is taken on board. Here Evans argues that the informational link can only play its role if the object is located within an "objective conception of the world", i.e., if the subject is capable of integrating egocentric space and objective, public, world, and she can discriminate the object (which implies the capacity to have other thoughts about the object, as requested by the generality constraint; see McDowell 1990). Causal links are, hence, necessary but not sufficient: there must be a link, but the subject has to be able to locate the object in space on the basis of that link (and so the object cannot be external to the sphere of cognitive significance of the subject, as direct reference theorists would have it). Without that ability a descriptive element will be needed and the thought will cease to be singular.

It is worth pointing out that Evans objected to the sufficiency of causal links for referential relations as early as 1973. He argued then that the connection between a name and an object does not depend only on the causal chain that connects them, but on the object that has been the 'dominant

source of the information' related to the name. So, for example, even though "Madagascar" was originally the name of the oriental coast of Africa, the fact that Marco Polo thought that it was the name of the island has resulted in most of the information related to the name "Madagascar" coming from the island (see Evans 1973, pp. 197-200). A cognitive element must be taken into account to distinguish between the causal source and the dominant source of information.

7. The classic objection to such a strong externalist and object-dependent conception of thoughts (the one expressed by the idea that singular thoughts demand both the existence of their object and that they are thoughts of that object) is that it cannot do justice to the possibility of illusions or to the possibility of thoughts about what does not exist. The role of '*de re* senses', senses whose existence and identity conditions depend on the existence and identity conditions of their objects, seems to be jeopardized by the possibility, both in experience and in thought, that all may seem the same from the subject's point of view, but in some cases the perception (or thought) has an object while in other cases it fails to have one. After all, this is supposed to be the issue behind the introduction of the notion of intentionality in contemporary philosophy, starting with Brentano: thought is intentional because its objects may well not exist. And, the objection continues, ignoring the worries produced by that possibility means ignoring the motivation behind, amongst others, positions such as Descartes' dualism or Russell's phenomenalism. The worry, in its usual reading, amounts to arguing that, given that as far as the subject is concerned there is nothing to tell apart cases of genuine perception from illusory or hallucinatory cases, perception must be accounted for in a dual manner: the direct object of perception, both in veridical and in illusory cases, is an appearance, and the former, but not the latter, case is accompanied by an external fact, i.e., a fact which is independent of that which has cognitive significance for the subject. Cognitive significance is limited to the proximal appearance. This invites a model for perception that parallels the reified model of sense: something must mediate between our experience and the facts (an appearance), between our thoughts and what they are about (a description, for instance).

The objection is tempting, but it depends on an assumption that precludes the possibility of *de re* senses from coming to view (or leads to an unsatisfying conception of *de re* senses, as it will be argued at the end of this paper). The assumption is no other than the one criticized in the first sections of this paper: that thought, experience and action can be understood on their own, from a perspective fully neutral with respect to the reality that they

are meant to understand, incorporate or transform.¹² And that assumption, though originally forced by the Cartesian idea that the subject has privileged and incorrigible access to the contents of its own thought, survives the acceptance of fallibility by insisting on the need of something external to the mind to provide what is lacking (by the representations, or the descriptive senses, or the appearances). This separation of something internal and accessible to the subject and an external, worldly element, is at the core of the half-baked externalism at which Putnam arrives after his thought experiment discussed above, but also at the core of both internalist and externalist representational theories of mind (and, it will be argued, of the very idea of a principled separation between content and context).

8. An interesting corollary to Evans' considerations about thought, the idea that singular thoughts, like all thoughts, are composed of senses, but that senses are object-dependent, is that the philosophy of thought should not merely reproduce the findings of traditional philosophy of language. It was an achievement of what has been called the linguistic turn to move away from a conception of language as a mere instrument for the expression of private, somehow mysterious, entities called thoughts. It is an equal achievement of most contemporary philosophy to move away from individualistic ways of accounting for thought and to incorporate the social, intersubjective, dimension that the study of language so clearly exemplifies. But the fact that the study of language and the study of thought must go hand in hand should not lead us to take for granted that all there is to say about the contents of intentional states can be said with the tools of a theory of language that centres on the characteristics of written language (or, what may come to the same, of sentence-types of which particular utterances are mere tokens). It is a perfectly respectable task, interesting in itself, to *isolate* what there is in common between different uses of the same word or chain of words, say "I", or "this", or "red", or "the president is an evil man", written or spoken.

¹² The temptation can be blamed on the assumption, but also on an underlying general need to reify, a need that could explain the popularity of representational theories of mind: it is one thing to recognize that there is something in common between both cases, namely that it seems, it appears, to one that something is the case, and quite another to say that what there is in common between both cases is a seeming, an appearance. An antidote to that need, as good as any other, is Sellars' discussion of phenomenalism and, in general, of what he calls the myth of the given, in his classic "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1963). Those familiar with the literature will recognize in these paragraphs gestures towards a "disjunctive theory of perception" (for details, see Snowdon's classic statement, 1980-1, and McDowell 1982). My suggestion is that such a disjunctive account can be generalized to thought.

But often, if not always, philosophers of language have assumed that such common features are the central features of language and, hence, that the central task of their discipline was to study them, there in beautiful isolation, and to blame everything else on pragmatics, or context or whatever. But, if Evans is right regarding the character of singular thoughts (and their linguistic expression!), a study of what different singular thoughts of the same type (thoughts such as “I am thirsty now” had by different people, or in different occasions) have in common cannot be all there is to their content. Only assuming that the content of each of these thoughts can be factored out from their context, only assuming that content and context are separable entities which, externally brought together, make up meaning, can lead to maintaining that “I am thirsty now” means “The person who is thinking is thirsty at the moment of the thought”. This is the descriptivist view which I have criticized above by rejecting the equation of the conceptual with the predicative and inviting to think of the former as belonging to the realm of Fregean senses. This is not to say that there are inexpressible thoughts, or that language (language use, mainly) is irrelevant for the possibility of thought. It is merely to say that a study of language in separation from when, where, how and by whom it is used cannot tell us much about the nature of thoughts, about the possibility of understanding each other and of knowing what there is around us¹³.

Such focus on ‘linguistic meaning’ is not even uncommon amongst philosophers that have shown interest on the notion of *de re*, or object-dependent, senses. As I have already defended, the notion of *de re* sense has played a central role in recent metaphysical attempts to close the apparent gap between thinking and what thought is about. Under one view (that defended by philosophers such as Kent Bach, John Perry or François Recanati) one *de re* thought is object-dependent in a manner that allows for a separation between subjective or narrow (mode of presentation) and objective factors. A *de re* thought is one with at least one *de re* sense. In order for it to be object-dependent, a tokening of such a thought must succeed in having a

¹³ Authors within the continental tradition are far from immune to this fixation with written language. Derrida, 1967, for instance, airs the opposite complaint to mine, that excessive concentration on sense leaves out what he takes to be the intrinsic iterability of meaning, paradigmatically represented by the written sign (thanks to Luis Sáez for calling my attention towards this text). If I am right, he could also benefit from the idea of singular senses. Sometimes one fears that we philosophers have a tendency to forget that not every rational being spends most of its life surrounded by (written) words and, hence, a tendency to explain all forms of rationality on the model of language and, often, descriptive language alone.

contextually corresponding object which is the referent determined by the sense. This tradition allows for a distinction between types and tokens of *de re* thoughts, where a token of the type is *de re* if there is an appropriate object. The narrow factor or mental indexical, however, remains unchanged no matter whether there is or not such an object, or whether the object is or not the appropriate one (see Recanati 1993, pp. 98-103).

In contrast, neo-Fregeans such as Evans and McDowell explicitly disallow for this separation of context from content. There is room, of course, for a distinction between type and token (or between “sorts of” *de re* senses and *de re* senses proper): one could not be neo-Fregean if she argued that thoughts are not repeatable. However, a sort of *de re* thoughts is defined in terms of tokens of successful singular thoughts and not the other way around. There cannot be unsuccessful (*res*-less) members of a type of *de re* thoughts because for something to be *de re* there must be a *res*. This is not so for the heirs of the direct reference tradition mentioned in the previous paragraph: tokens are here defined in terms of types, and a token thought may be not *de re* even if it belongs to a *de re* type. A *token* being *de re* depends on something envisaged as independent and external to the thought, namely, the world’s contribution. Whether the world collaborates or not makes no difference to the nature of the thought (type). Despite Recanati’s protestations, this is to a large extent a Cartesian picture of thought (as it has been argued above regarding the appeal to something common between veridical perception and illusions).

In consonance with this, we can establish a distinction between theorists that give pride of place to particular instances of singular thoughts and theorists that explain singular thoughts in terms of the types to which they belong, plus context. I have argued that the former group is in a better position to discard some metaphysical problems concerning the relationship between mind and world than the latter. Giving priority to tokens means, amongst other things, respecting the commonsensical assumption that we are in touch with the world, involved with the world, in particular instances of perception and action. The world’s collaboration, in this view, is not a factor that kindly accompanies (or follows) the rehearsal of a *de re* thought. Rather, it is an essential part of the thought itself, and its failure disqualifies the thought and relegates it to the category of appearance of a thought, rather than to the category of thought about an appearance.

9. In this paper I have discussed Evans’ work within the context of a preoccupation with epistemological issues arising from semantic theories. I have argued that Evans’ position offers a novel way of treating referential expressions, Fregean in its explicit acceptance of the intimate connection

between meaning and understanding, but also sensible to Russell's realist insights. Furthermore, I have contrasted it with a variety of positions that either reject any role for the notion of Fregean sense, or understand this notion in a descriptivist manner or in one that allows for a principled separation between content and context. I have tried to show that Evans' account is superior in rejecting some Cartesian, deep-seated, assumptions, in offering a richer and more radical form of externalism, and in precluding certain forms of scepticism from arising.

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