1. Introduction

The Reference Book (2012)[1] by John Hawthorne and David Manley ('H&M') is about 'singular thought' and 'reference'. It is a rich and well-informed work with a great range of examples and many nice arguments. With one exception, it is balanced and generous in its handling of other theories.

The exception is H&M's discussion of 'acquaintance' theories. These are theories that explain thought about, or reference to, an object in causal or epistemic terms. Early in the book, H&M pose a witty question: 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot?' (p. 25). They answer with a resounding 'Yes'. Indeed, H&M have something close to contempt for acquaintance theories: 'Acquaintance…is a dispensable relic of a bygone era in the philosophy of language and mind' (p. 25); they talk of 'the acquaintance-theoretic superstition' (p. 202); and they conclude the book by warning against theories 'driven by muddled ideas about acquaintance' (p. 248).

I have no truck with *epistemic* acquaintance theories (1981: 221-4; 1985) but I have urged *causal* ones (1974, 1981, 2004). In this short paper, I shall defend causal ones from H&M.[2]

H&M name their critical view, 'liberalism': 'there is no general acquaintance restriction on reference or singular thought' (p. 24). Now, it is clear enough what H&M mean by 'acquaintance', but what do they mean by the terms of art 'reference' and 'singular thought'? H&M obviously intend to take over the meanings of the philosophers they are criticizing. But what do *they* mean?

The answer is far from clear. And we should not suppose that those philosophers all mean the same thing. H&M are sensitive to this problem. They deal with it by describing some 'interconnected themes' in the philosophers' talk of 'reference' and 'singular thought' (pp. 4-19) and by looking for 'what (if anything) best answers' to the themes (p. 4). I don't think that this is a satisfactory way to identify the meanings but will not argue the matter. We can count on two features of the meanings. First, 'reference' picks out a relation that is thought to hold only between a *singular* representation of certain types – for example, proper names and demonstratives - and one semantically significant object.[3] Second, '*singular* contents [the contents of *singular* thoughts] are those that are expressed by sentences containing referential

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[1] All unidentified page references are to this book.

[2] I have never before used the Russellian expression 'acquaintance' in presenting causal theories. Given that the major breakthrough of such theories is their emphasis on the way people can 'borrow' the reference of a term to an object with which they are certainly not acquainted in any ordinary sense (e.g. Aristotle), the expression is rather infelicitous. Still, it has become popular – see several papers in Jeshion 2010, for example – and so I am going along with it.

[3] At one point, however, H&M talk of the 'reference' of the mass noun 'eka-aluminum' (p. 32).

terms' (p. 3). So, 'singular thoughts' and 'reference' go together. I shall here express these philosophers', hence H&M's, somewhat uncertain meaning(s) by putting 'refer' and cognates, and 'singular thought', between double quotation marks.

Whatever "reference" is, we should be discussing its nature only if it is *theoretically interesting*. Why should we care about "reference"? The deep problem with the debate that engages H&M is that this question is not adequately addressed. Instead the debate is dominated by appeals to intuitions, often ones involving other terms of art.[4] I think that this reliance on intuitions is very mistaken (2012). And I think that an answer to the question about theoretical interest should keep firmly in mind that thought and language are parts of the natural spatio-temporal world that are of interest *because they play important causal roles in that world*. Any property that we ascribe to a mental or linguistic representation, including "reference", is theoretically interesting only to the extent that it is in virtue of having that property that the representation plays its causal roles, particularly those of causing intentional behavior and informing conspecifics about the world. I cannot argue for this naturalistic view here but have done so elsewhere (1981, 1996, 2013). This view, sadly not common in the philosophy of language, raises serious doubts about the interest of H&M's debate.

A final verbal point. I favor a generic use of 'refer'. In semantics generally, and in discussing H&M in particular, we need some term to cover the *many different* semantically significant relations that words bear to the world. 'Refer' seems as good a choice as any for this role. So, on this usage, not only proper names and demonstratives but count nouns, mass nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so on, all refer. Naturally, this usage creates a need to use other terms like 'designate', 'denote', 'apply', 'true of', and 'satisfy' to pick out *species* of the genus reference. This generic use of 'refer' is of course very different from the use of H&M and the philosophers they criticize. I shall here capture my generic use by inscribing 'refer' and cognates in bold. It follows then that H&M's "reference", whatever it may be, is a species of **reference**.

2. The Case for Causal Acquaintance

On a truth-**referential** view, the semantic properties of representations are explained in terms of syntactic and **referential** properties.[5] This generates a need for *theories* of **reference**, theories that explain in virtue of what a representation *E* has its **reference**. Three general types of theory seem possible. (1) According to 'description' theories, the **reference** of *E* is fixed by certain descriptions that competent speakers associate with *E*; *E* **refers** to whatever those descriptions, or a weighted most of them, uniquely describe. The received view for decades was that the **reference** of proper names was to be explained by a description theory. But then came the revolution, led by Saul Kripke (1980).[6] Description theories of names were seen to have serious problems, particularly the problem of 'ignorance and error': speakers who seem perfectly competent with a name are too ignorant to provide the appropriate descriptions of its **referent**; worse, speakers are often so wrong

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[4] H&M's discussion gives rise to this methodological concern in many places; e.g., pp. 23 n. 74, 30, 35, 51, 117, 143, 155, 212.
[5] This does not entail a 'direct reference' view of the meaning of any of these representations. I argue that the meaning of a proper name is its causal mode of **reference** (1974; 1981; 1996).
[6] Devitt and Sterelny 1999, chs. 3-5, is an account of the revolution.

about the **referent** that the descriptions they would provide apply not to the **referent** but to other entities or to nothing at all. There were similar problems for description theories of some other terms. (2) These problems with description theories stimulated interest in theories that took the **reference** of *E* to be explained not indirectly via associated descriptions but rather by some direct relation between *E* and the world. (3) Finally, there is the possibility of theories that explain **reference** partly in terms of the associated descriptions of (1) and partly in terms of the direct relations of (2).

Theories (1) to (3) ascribe different kinds of *mechanisms (or modes) of **reference*** to representations.

I have often made a point that is crucial in assessing H&M: *description theories are essentially incomplete* (1996: 159). A theory of type (1) explains the **reference** of *E* by appealing to the **referential** properties of descriptions associated with *E*: *E* **refers** to whatever those other representations jointly **refer** to. How then are the **references** of those other representations to be explained? Perhaps we can use description theories to explain their **references** too. This process cannot, however, go on forever: there must be some representations whose **referential** properties are not parasitic on those of others, else language as a whole is cut loose from the world. Description theories pass the **referential** buck, but the buck must stop somewhere. It stops with theories of type (2) that explain **reference** in terms of direct relations to reality.[7] Those theories offer, we might say, *ultimate* explanations of **reference**.

*If any representations **refer** then some representations must be amenable to ultimate explanations.* So theorists of **reference** should always be on the lookout for likely candidates for ultimate explanations (and theorists should not have needed problems with description theories to stimulate interest in other theories). The central flaw of *The Reference Book*, in my view, is that H&M are not on the lookout at all.

Granted the need for ultimate explanations, it remains to be argued, of course, *which* representations are amenable to them and which are not. And it remains to be argued whether *any* syntactically singular representations are among the ones that are amenable. Perhaps thought and language are hooked to the world only by kind terms like 'cat' and 'water', adjectives like 'red', and so on. But this is prima facie unlikely and, I have argued (1974, 1981), it is not so. The view that a person's thought may be about *a particular object that she has in mind*, regardless of what descriptions she may have of the object, is very attractive. If this is right, the mental representation of that object must receive an ultimate explanation. Turning to language, the revolution in the theory of **reference** made the following seem promising linguistic candidates for ultimate explanations: a pure indexical like 'I', a deictic simple demonstrative like 'that', and a proper name like 'Aristotle'. For, the revolution made it seem unlikely that these representations are covered by description theories. Furthermore, if some singular mental representations have ultimate explanations, it would be very odd indeed if there were not some conventional linguistic expressions of those representations (c.f. p. 218). Pure indexicals, simple demonstratives, and proper names, seem the most likely linguistic representations to perform this role. If they do perform it, they must have

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[7] To simplify discussion, I am ignoring the unlikely possibility that the buck might stop with theories of type (3).

ultimate explanations too. In sum, I think that we should embrace the thesis that many singular representations in language and thought are to be given ultimate explanations of type (2).

This thesis provides a sound theoretical reason for introducing a word for the **reference** of these ultimately-explained singular representations. Let's use '*u*-reference' (analogously, for cognates). So, the thesis is that many singular representations are *u*-referential.

I have suggested (2004) that some singular representations – for example, deictic complex demonstratives and 'referential' definite descriptions – may have *semi*-ultimate explanations of type (3): their **reference** is partly determined indirectly by descriptions and partly directly. Suppose so. Then it is appropriate to introduce a word for that sort of **reference** too. Let's use '*su*-reference' (analogously, for cognates). So the suggestion is that many singular representations are *su*-referential.

Finally, let us use 'singular thought' for thoughts that have *u*- or *su*-referential representations in subject position. So, many thoughts are singular.

What relation do the meanings of my introduced terms have to the meanings of 'reference' and 'singular thought' as used by H&M and the philosophers that they criticize? What is the relation between "reference" and *u-/su*-reference, and between "singular thought" and singular thought? It is hard to say, and this is important, as we shall see in the next section.

So far I have claimed that the **reference** of many representations must be explained by direct (nondescriptive) relations to reality but have said nothing about the nature of those relations. If we were concerned with those relations for thought and language in general, then I think that promising theories appeal to one or more of three types of causal relations: historical, reliabilist, and teleological (1996: 161). But when we turn to singular representations in particular, and hence to *u-/su*-reference, I have argued (1974, 1981, 2004) that historical-causal ones appealing to causal-perceptual links to the **referent** are promising. This is my causal acquaintance theory. To be a little more precise, the thesis is:

> (CA) Historical-causal relations explain, or largely explain, the **reference** of deictic demonstratives and pronouns, 'referential' definite and indefinite descriptions, and most proper names. So the singularity of some thoughts is explained by those relations.

It is easy to slip into the more sweeping thesis that the direct relation in *all* cases of *u-/su*-reference is of this historical-causal sort.[8] But this would be a mistake. H&M bring out very nicely how the mechanisms of **reference** for pure indexicals do not fit the causal model (pp. 18, 29, 244 -7). A token indexical is directly related to reality in virtue of its producer ('I'), its time ('now'), or its place ('here'). We might say that indexicals depend for their **reference** on 'indexical relations' not causal ones.[9]

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[8] I did slip, although I sort of acknowledged that 'I' does not fit the causal model (1974: 197 n. 28).
[9] The indexical relation seems as deserving, perhaps more deserving, of being called 'acquaintance' as the causal one; c.f. note 2.

(CA) is very plausible. Indeed, apart from indexical relations, *what else* could explain the direct **referential** relations for singular representations? What's the alternative?

In section 3 I consider H&M's critical position, 'liberalism': 'there is no general acquaintance restriction on reference or singular thought' (p. 24). In section 4, I briefly consider their positive theory. (CA) is important to both discussions.

3. 'Liberalism' Against Acquaintance

I begin my discussion with the following striking 'caveat' that accompanies H&M's presentation of liberalism:

> (a) We are not denying that…linguistic reference often exploits a causal or epistemic connection. (b) We are not denying that there are any acquaintance constraints when it comes to various subclasses of object-representation, delineated by a taxonomy of mechanisms or modules….We have no desire to argue with claims made at this level of specificity. (c) We are not rejecting anyone's right to announce that they will reserve the term 'singular thought' for cases where an appropriate causal or epistemic connection is at work. We would simply point out that such a stipulation would trivialize the claim that singular thought requires acquaintance and we see no reason to think that the stipulated term would delineate an interesting kind from the point of view of general theory of meaning and representation. (pp. 25-6).

H&M think that a notion of 'singular thought' 'not burdened with a causal condition' 'better cuts psychological reality at the joints' (p. 26 n. 81).

This caveat provokes two deep questions about *theoretical interest*:

(Q1) Do causally-explained kinds of representations form a theoretically interesting kind?

(Q2) Do "referential" representations form a theoretically interesting kind?

And we should note immediately that if the answer to (Q2) is 'No', then acquaintance theories of "referential" kinds, and H&M's liberalism which rejects such theories, are of no theoretical interest either.

In the caveat, H&M answer (Q1) "No". That is the wrong answer. According to truth-**referentialism**, the semantic properties of representations are explained in terms of syntactic and **referential** properties. So, we are theoretically interested in identifying kinds syntactically and **referentially**. Thus our interest in syntax leads us to distinguish singular representations from adjectives and verbs, count nouns from mass nouns, actives from passives, and so on. And our interest in **reference** should lead us to distinguish representations *according to their mechanisms of reference*. Most generally of all, we should be interested in distinguishing them by the mechanisms described by theories of types (1) to (3). So we are interested in '*u*-referential' representations that have direct mechanisms and '*su*-referential' representations that have partly direct and partly descriptive mechanisms. And we are interested in representations *within* each

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type that are distinguished by the *sorts* of direct mechanisms that they have. We have noted that the direct mechanisms for some are indexical. So, we should be interested in that kind. According to (CA), the direct mechanisms for the other singular representations are causal. So we should be interested in that kind. H&M's caveat allows that the mechanisms for *some* representations are causal. Perhaps they have in mind a smaller kind than that identified by (CA) but, *whatever the size, the causally-explained kind is theoretically interesting*, at least as interesting as the indexically-explained kind. For, the kind is picked out by an ultimate explanation. So, the answer to (Q1) is a resounding 'Yes': H&M are wrong to think that representations 'burdened with a causal condition' do not form a theoretically interesting kind in a 'theory of meaning and representation'. We could go further: within the causally-explained kind, we are interested in sub-kinds that have different causal mechanisms of *u-/su*-reference; for example, proper names and demonstratives.

The answer to (Q2) is far from clear, for two reasons. First, as noted, it is not clear what "reference" is. Second, whatever it is, it is not clear why it is theoretically interesting. A great deal of the blame for this situation lies with philosophers that H&M are criticizing. "Reference" needs to be identified by its role in some explanatory theory, not simply by intuitions. Yet this need is seldom adequately fulfilled. H&M themselves seem rather ambivalent about (Q2). Their 'working hypothesis' is that "reference" is 'a semantic natural kind' (p. 15). Yet, so far as I can see, they never tell us what would *make it* a 'natural' kind and hence, one supposes, theoretically interesting. In the end, they entertain something very close to eliminativism about "reference": 'perhaps there are only a few expressions like 'I' that are truly referential' (p. 245). One wonders what might make 'I', but not the representations that they allow to have 'acquaintance constraints' (p. 26), 'truly referential'. Hence, one wonders about the theoretical interest of liberalism.

What relation *might* "reference" be that would make liberalism theoretically interesting? H&M mostly seem to have in mind a quite broad relation, reflecting their working hypothesis (see, e.g. pp. 3, 24-5, 91, 142, 218). They deny that this broad relation has a causal constraint (whilst allowing that a subclass, at 'a level of specificity' that they wrongly deem uninteresting, may have that constraint). But what could this broad relation be? A possible answer would be that it was a relation explained, in part at least, by direct (non-descriptive) mechanisms; i.e. a relation that is the combination of *u-* and *su*-reference. If that answer was right, "reference" would certainly be theoretically interesting. And, given our earlier concession that some direct mechanisms are indexical not causal, liberalism would be true and interesting (though not, it should be said, *very* interesting). So, with the concession, can we conclude that H&M and the causal acquaintance theorist are in agreement? I think not.

The problem with this irenic conclusion is that it seems most unlikely that *u-/su*-reference *is* the broad relation that H&M think of as "reference". H&M show little or no interest in direct mechanisms of **reference**. So it is not plausible to suppose that their "reference" is identified by the directness of its mechanisms. Yet it is important to see that *there is no other theoretically interesting relation that "reference" might plausibly be*. (a) Sub-classes of *u-/su*-reference are interesting but not broad enough to be what concern H&M (and are also picked out by direct mechanisms of **reference**). (b) "Reference" cannot be so broad that it includes the **reference** relations of *all* syntactically singular representations, on pain of trivializing liberalism. Not even

the most ardent acquaintance theorist would claim that all singular representations have mechanisms of **reference** of types (2) or (3). Thus, just about everyone accepts that some definite descriptions are quantifiers. So everyone thinks that singular representations can **refer** to an object without "referring" to it. (c) There is no relation of theoretical interest 'in between' the very broad relation of (b) and *u-/su*-reference. The 'level of specificity' of *u-/su*-reference is *as general as semantic interest goes* for singular representations. A taxonomy of singular representations according to the mechanisms of **reference** described by theories of types (1) to (3) cuts the semantic reality of singular representations at its *main* joints.

I don't suppose for a moment that H&M, or most of the philosophers they criticize, take "reference" to be *u-/su*-reference. But that is the only way to take "reference" that makes acquaintance theories and liberalism theoretically interesting.[10] Taken that way, I grant that indexical relations explain the "reference" of some singular representations but I insist on the causal acquaintance theory (CA) for the rest.

H&M have many criticisms of causal theories of reference. These are not aimed at (CA) in particular. I conclude my discussion of liberalism by noting, too briefly, that these criticisms do not, as a matter of fact, count against (CA).

H&M's criticisms of causal theories are of two sorts. First, H&M seem to presume that causal theorists claim that *all* proper names, indexicals, and demonstratives *must* "refer" and be causally constrained. H&M then give a number of examples which, they allege, show that this claim is false (pp. 18, 26-35). (CA), manifestly, does not make this modal claim. Indeed, I wonder if any causal theorist ever did; I certainly didn't (cf. p. 28 n. 89, p. 30 n. 100). I hold rather that, *as a matter of fact*, the **reference** relation for *many* of these syntactically singular representations is *u-/su*-reference and subject to a causal constraint. It is of no consequence that some representations are not of this sort. To take just one of their examples, consider 'descriptive' names (pp. 32-3), favorite examples of which are 'Jack the Ripper' and Evans' 'Julius'. Descriptive names are like standard names in being covered by a causal theory of **reference** *borrowing* but unlike them in being covered by a description theory of **reference** *fixing* (1974: 195-6; 1981: 40-1).[11] I do not claim, and surely no causal theorist does, that associated descriptions never have a role in determining the **reference** of singular representations. My claim is rather that there are causal or indexical constraints on the **reference** of many singular representations, the ones subject to ultimate or semi-ultimate explanations.

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[10] At one point, H&M claim to be "setting aside certain questions in foundational semantics" including "how must the metaphysical ground floor of reality be configured for a binary reference relation to arise between an object and an occurrence of a term?" (p. 36). Yet any causal acquaintance restriction on "reference" must *be* (part of) an answer to just such a foundational question. So how can this setting aside be reconciled with urging a liberalism that rejects the restriction?

[11] H&M's other examples include the names of planned objects that do not yet exist (pp. 27-8), names that are bestowed by convention (p. 30), and 'reference by proxy' (p. 31); for discussion, see Devitt 1974: 199-200; 1981: 57-60. H&M also briefly mention Evans' nice example of 'Ibn Kahn' (p. 21 n. 70); for discussion, see Devitt 1981: 157-60.

H&M's second criticism is, in effect, that the causal theory is incomplete, failing to show how "reference" is fixed in one rather than another part of the causally relevant environment.[12] They are right about this. And the most serious incompleteness concerns processes of language acquisition and use for which we must look to future psycholinguistics for enlightenment. But what matters to the issue at hand is that the causal theory is *good so far as it goes*. I do not think that H&M show that it is not. More importantly, *what alternative is there* to this admittedly incomplete causal theory of the direct relations that must ultimately determine all **reference**? H&M do not offer one.

My diagnosis of H&M's liberalism is that it rests on a mistaken view of what is theoretically interesting about **reference**, a mistake arising particularly from a failure to see the significance of ultimate explanations. This is demonstrated also in their positive view.

4. H&M's Positive View

Consider what H&M have to say about singular representations that I have suggested are promising candidates for ultimate explanations. These are ones where, intuitively, the speaker has a particular object in mind:

> specific indefinites, definite descriptions, and demonstratives are all specific existentials – existentially quantified expressions presupposed to be restricted in such a way that they have exactly one object/plurality in their extension. (p. 218)

How is that restriction to just one object achieved? Take the specific indefinite 'a man' as our example. The restriction is provided by the 'overt predicate' 'man' together with some 'covert material' that the speaker could provide (p. 123). So, this is a description theory, a theory of type (1). How could this theory work in the many cases where the speaker is too ignorant or wrong about the extension to provide covert material that would identify the extension?

> the covert contribution to a singleton restrictor picking out an object *o* is frequently, in effect, the property of being identical to *o*. (p. 135; see also p. 204)

Suppose I use 'a man' ('the man', or 'that man') meaning to talk about *o* in particular. H&M's idea is that my **reference** to *o* may be achieved by my covertly contributing the description 'is identical to *o*'.[13] But this contribution is worthless as an explanation of my **reference**! In virtue of what does '*o*' in my covert description **refer** to *o*? In virtue of what is the thought behind my use of 'a man' about *o* rather than anything else? This cries out for an ultimate explanation. And that is what the despised causal theories are trying to provide. H&M appear not to notice the problem and the place of causal theories of acquaintance in solving it.

5. Conclusion

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[12] The incompleteness (pp. 19, 28) concerns particularly what I call 'the *qua* problem' (1981: 61-64. Devitt and Sterelny 1999: 79-80).

[13] This is similar to Neale's idea of 'Gödelian completions' (2004: 171-3); for discussion, see Devitt 2007:28-31.

H&M's liberalism is a sweeping rejection of a causal acquaintance restriction on "reference". Yet it is unclear what theoretically interesting relation "reference" might be. If the relation were *u-/su*-reference then it would be interesting. Hence liberalism would be interesting. And acquaintance theorists must concede to H&M that the restriction on "reference" should be causal *or indexical*. But the evidence suggests that "reference" is not *u-/su*-reference. Assuming it is not, then neither it nor liberalism are theoretically interesting. In my view, the central flaw of H&M's rich discussion, demonstrated also in their positive view, is a failure to see the theoretical significance of ultimate explanations of **reference**.

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