

The Myth of the Problematic *De Se*

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1. Introduction

There is a lot that we don't know about the metaphysics of thoughts (propositional attitudes) and about the semantics of their ascriptions. But the received view is that there is something *particularly* problematic about first person thoughts, commonly known as '*de se*'. These are thoughts we express in a special way, using first-person pronouns; thus, I now have a *de se* thought that I might express, 'I am in New York'. Furthermore, the received view is that there is something *particularly* problematic about the ascription of *de se* thoughts. These are ascriptions we often make in a special way, using a reflexive pronoun; thus, someone might ascribe that *de se* thought to me, 'You believe that you yourself are in New York'. I think that the received view is a myth, an artifact of misguided philosophical approaches to the mind and semantics. I have implied this before (1981a, 1984, 1990, 1996), to sadly little effect. The myth lives on, as many papers in this volume, indeed the very conception of this volume, attest. I shall take this opportunity to deflate the myth a bit differently and more pointedly.

My main aim is to offer an approach that shows that the *de se* is *not* especially problematic (particularly in secs. 6, 9). Still, along the way, I will look critically at some aspects of other approaches that have helped create the myth that the *de se* is especially problematic. (i) It is common to think that the alleged problem of the *de se* has its roots in the talk of propositions that dominates theories of thoughts and their ascriptions (sec. 2). Yet that talk is unnecessary and mistaken. I shall harp on this often (but particularly in secs. 5, 8). (ii) I think that this mistake is encouraged by a failure to give appropriate priority to the theory of thought over the semantics of thought ascriptions (sec. 3). For, it is wrongly taken for granted that we need to posit propositions to explain the semantics of ascriptions (sec. 8). (iii) Worse, there is a tendency to confuse thoughts with their ascriptions. This is most notable in the application of the unclear terms '*de dicto*' and '*de re*' to both. In my view (Appendix), these two terms have brought a great deal of confusion into the debate and are best avoided altogether.

I emphasize throughout that minds and their languages are parts of the natural world, interacting causally with other parts of that world. So the study of them should be an empirical enterprise (secs. 4, 7). (This does not mean that much of it cannot be done from an armchair.) This 'naturalizing' is central to my approach. I think, but will not argue, that the approaches that have led to the myth of the problematic *de se* have been far too influenced by formal semantics.

2. The Alleged Problem of the *De Se*

The myth is that the *de se* poses a serious problem. Indeed, Neil Feit (2012) describes it as 'one of several great puzzles in contemporary philosophy of mind'. So, what is the problem? The problem is so well-accepted that I shall be brief in describing it. I shall follow the custom and mostly use beliefs as examples of thoughts. And I shall use John Perry's delightful supermarket story to illustrate the alleged problem:

I once followed a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, pushing my cart down the aisle on one side of a tall counter and back the aisle on the other, seeking the shopper with the torn sack to tell him he was making a mess. With each trip around the counter, the trail became thicker. But I seemed unable to catch up. Finally it dawned on me. I was the shopper I was trying to catch.

I believed at the outset that the shopper with a torn sack was making a mess. And I was right. But I did not believe that I was making a mess. That seems to be something I came to believe. And when I came to believe that, I stopped following the trail around the counter and rearranged the torn sack in my cart. My change in beliefs seems to explain my change in behavior. (1993: 33)

1. The first difficulty that this allegedly raises is that of identifying/expressing the belief that makes the difference in Perry's behavior. Perry puts the worry like this:

all we have to identify the belief is the sentence 'I am making a mess'. But that sentence by itself does not seem to identify the crucial belief, for if [p.34] someone else had said it, they would have expressed a different belief, a false one. (33-4)

William Lycan makes a similar point, claiming that there 'seems to be no way for us to express the content' of a belief like Perry's 'outside a belief operator' (1988: 84-5). We can't express it by saying, as Perry did, 'I am making a mess'; we can only identify it by saying that Perry believed that *he himself* was making a mess. Now it is far from obvious where the problem is here. Why, for example, is Perry's belief not adequately identified/expressed by Perry saying 'I am making a mess', irrespective of what any other person would identify/express by uttering that sentence?

2. The real difficulties seem to start with talk of propositions. The standard view is that 'the objects' of beliefs are 'propositions', thought of as 'abstract mind- and language-independent objects' (Schiffer 1992: 506-7). And these Platonic entities are commonly identified with the sets of possible worlds in which they are true. So the propositional object of the belief Perry expresses, 'I am making a mess', is the set of all the possible worlds in which Perry is making a mess. But if we return to the supermarket again, we can immediately see a problem. Suppose that Perry sees himself in a mirror without realizing that he is seeing himself. He comes to believe a proposition he would express, 'That man is making a mess'. And the problem is that this proposition is *also* the set of all the possible worlds in which Perry is making a mess. So this account of propositions fails to capture the dramatic *change* in Perry's beliefs when he realizes, 'I am making a mess', a realization that leads him to stop following the trail and rearrange the torn sack. Lycan discusses a similar example in which Smith changes from believing a singular proposition he would express using a demonstrative to believing one he would express using the first person:

Yet what he does come to believe ... has exactly the same truth conditions as that singular proposition and is true in just the same possible worlds ... there is no clear sense in which the new belief differs in content from what Smith believed all along. (p. 85)

3. Lycan's talk of 'truth conditions' brings out that the problem goes beyond the possible-worlds view of Platonic propositions. A 'singular proposition' is often identified with a set of objects like Perry and properties like *making a mess*. But then, once again, the proposition that Perry believed when looking in the mirror would have to be the same one that he came to believe when he changed his behavior. But it clearly isn't.

Perry sums up the problem: "'I am making a mess" does not identify a proposition ... something is badly wrong with the traditional doctrine of propositions' (1993: 37-8), a doctrine that he finds 'otherwise plausible' (p. 34). His solution is to 'make a sharp distinction between objects of belief and belief states' (p. 34). David Lewis' solution in his classic 1979 paper, 'Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se*' (in Lewis 1983), is to abandon propositions in favor of properties as the objects of beliefs. This is characteristically ingenious but nonetheless implausible, as Wayne Davis nicely shows (2012; see also Recanati 2009: 262-6). My solution is very different. We don't need a sharp distinction between belief states and the traditional propositional objects of beliefs because we don't need those objects at all: We should get by, in effect, with just belief states. The apparent problem is an artifact of traditional doctrines of propositions.

To see what has gone wrong, we need to consider how we should approach theorizing about thoughts and their ascriptions. In the next section I shall argue that we should give priority to the theory of thoughts. In Sections 4-6, I shall make some suggestions for the theory of thoughts that seem sufficient to show that various 'puzzle' cases, including the *de se*, are not puzzling at the level of thoughts. These suggestions eschew all talk of propositions. In Sections 7-9, I shall do likewise for the theory of thought ascriptions.

3. 'Put Metaphysics First'

A theory of thoughts (propositional attitudes) and a theory of their ascriptions are different, but they are clearly related. On the one hand, thoughts have semantic properties, 'contents', as they are usually called. So we cannot give a theory of thoughts without commitment to a semantic theory, which will have implications for a theory of thought ascriptions. On the other hand, we cannot give a theory of thought ascriptions without implying some view of the thoughts ascribed.

Some time back, Lycan pointed out that

until recently, semanticists investigating belief sentences, particularly those semanticists working within the possible-worlds format, have paid no attention to the question of what psychological reality it is that makes such sentences true (1988: 8).

He rightly thinks that such attention is necessary for our theory of belief ascriptions. I took a similar line in ‘Thoughts and Their Ascriptions’ (1984) but went further in criticizing the traditional approach to the semantics of thought ascriptions. After emphasizing the distinction between a theory of thought ascriptions and a theory of thoughts, I continued:

The question arises: Which theory should one start with? It is common for philosophers to start with the theory of thought ascription, leaving the theory of thought pretty much to look after itself. I think this is a mistake. (p. 385)

Now, my impression is that things have improved since Lycan and I made these criticisms (see, for example, Feit 2012). But I don’t think that they have improved enough. In the rest of this section, I shall summarize an argument for the importance of giving priority to the theory of thought.

The case for the priority of a theory of thought rests on an argument for the *general* view that our semantic theories should be guided by our theories of the world rather than vice versa. In doing semantics, we should follow the slogan ‘Put metaphysics first’.

Why? First, *because we know much more about the way the world is than we do about the semantics of our thought and talk about that world*. I have argued for this, and the methodology it supports, in the course of arguing against the linguistic turn in contemporary philosophy. Similarly, I have argued that we should reject the epistemological turn in modern philosophy, that so threatened ‘realism about the external world’, because we know much more about the way the world is than we do about how we know about that world. We should approach semantics and epistemology from a metaphysical perspective rather than vice versa because experience has taught us a great deal about the world but rather little about how we refer to and know about this world. We know much more about physics than about the language of physics, much more about biology than about the language of biology, much more about morals than about the language of morals, and, to take a recent issue, much more about knowing how than about the ascription of knowing how.¹ My argument for this position reflects a somewhat Moorean approach. More importantly, it reflects Quinean naturalism: The metaphysics that we should put first is a naturalized one (1996, 1997a, 2010).

Second, in semantics, as in any science, *we should be guided by Occam*, positing objects only when they do explanatory work. Now, in doing semantics we obviously need to posit the mental and linguistic objects that *have* the semantic properties that interested us in the first place (secs. 4, 7). The mental objects, thoughts, are concrete physical states. The linguistic objects are concrete physical sounds, inscriptions, and the like. But we should doubt that there could be any explanatory need in semantics to posit any *other* ‘new’ objects. Rather, we should expect to be able to explain the semantic properties of thoughts and the language that expresses them in terms of their relations to ‘old’ objects, objects we already suppose to exist for reasons quite independent of semantics. Thus, we should expect to explain the semantic properties of biological thoughts and language in terms of their relations to the objects that constitute *biological reality*. Thus, Occamist considerations count against other ‘new’ objects. Why? Because it is hard to see how any other specially semantic entity can help explain what needs to be explained: the roles that thoughts and language play in people’s dealings with nonsemantic reality, for example, with biological reality (roles to be discussed in sections 4 and 7, respectively). These expectations might be wrong, of course. Still, before doing the semantics of thought and language that concerns a certain area of reality we should determine, as best we can, what makes up that reality, determine what are the relevant ‘old’ objects: we should do the metaphysics first. For, if the thought and language seems to be yielding a more or less successful account of that reality, its relations to those ‘old’ objects are likely to constitute its meanings.²

¹ See Devitt 2011, a response to Stanley and Williamson 2001.

² Even if there is no reality that the language purports to concern – for example, there are no gods or witches – so the language does not seem to yield a successful account, our semantics should start from the fact of that nonreality.

Putting metaphysics first has the claimed immediate consequence that we should tackle the theory of thoughts before the theory of thought ascriptions. For, before doing the semantics of thought ascriptions we need to get as clear as we can about the area of reality that concerns those ascriptions. And that reality is, of course, thoughts.

Putting metaphysics first also provides the first step in the case against propositions. For, as we shall see, propositions are not among the ‘old’ objects for either the theory of thoughts or the theory of their ascriptions.

It is time to turn to the theory of thoughts.

4. Thoughts in General

The first thing to ask is why we should go along with the folk in believing that there are thoughts (propositional attitudes) in the first place. Why be ‘intentional realists’? Now if there are thoughts, they are parts of the natural world that we posit because they play some causal role. From that naturalistic perspective, the case for intentional realism is very strong (2006a: 125-7). We need to posit thoughts to people for at least two reasons: to explain people’s behaviors; and to explain the way people use others as a guide to a largely external reality. Thus, ascribing to Mark a belief that he would express, ‘It is raining’, explains both Mark’s picking up an umbrella and how those present gain information about the weather (by assuming that he is reliable about such matters). We clearly have a great theoretical interest in the details of this process of explaining behavior and learning from each other.

So, what is a thought? Lewis begins his article by noting that despite the apparent ‘diversity of objects’ that beliefs concern – ‘a particular cat, ... no particular cat, ... a season, a phenomenon, an activity, a state, ... a state of affairs’ -, there has been an interest in finding uniformity: The consensus is that ‘the objects of belief are uniform in category We mostly think that the attitudes uniformly have propositions as their objects’ (1983: 133). Lewis is surely right: People do mostly think that. Yet if we turn to the theory of the mind, often neglected by semanticists as Lycan pointed out, we find an appealing alternative: The uniform category is not that of propositions but that of *mental representations*. We should embrace the popular ‘Representational Theory of the Mind’ (‘RTM’), according to which any thought involves standing in a certain functional relation to a mental representation. So, propositional attitudes can be seen as uniformly having mental representations as ‘their objects’.³ Believing is distinguished from other propositional attitudes like desiring by the distinctive functional role of its representations. And one belief is distinguished from another by its representation. A thought has its role of causing behavior and providing information about the world in virtue of both its functional relation and the semantic properties of its mental representation.

We are committed to belief states. According to RTM, these include mental representations. These representations serve as ‘objects’ of belief and we need no others (except, perhaps, any objects *referred to by* those representations). Hence there is no need for Perry’s sharp distinction between such objects and belief states.

RTM is the only robust assumption about the mind that I shall make. However, it is worth mentioning another more controversial assumption: the ‘Language of Thought Hypothesis’ (‘LOTH’). RTM raises a question about the nature of the representations that partly constitute thoughts. According to LOTH, these representations have syntactic structures like a natural language: They are language-like rather than, say, map-like. So, a thought’s representation is a mental *sentence* made up of mental *words*. It follows that expressing a thought is a translation process from a mental sentence to a linguistic sentence; and understanding a sentence is translation from the linguistic to the mental. I favor this view (1981a: 75-80; 1996: 154-8; 2006a: 145-7) and it is a helpful one to keep in mind in discussing mental representations. Still, my argument does not depend on LOTH.

We need a way of identifying thoughts. Consider an example, adapted from one of Quine’s. Ralph has observed a man in questionable circumstances whom he recognizes as Bernard J. Ortcutt. He is led to a belief which he expresses, ‘Ortcutt is a spy’. We would ordinarily describe this belief by saying, ‘Ralph believes that Ortcutt is a spy’. But describing it this way has implications about the meanings of such ordinary belief ascriptions. I want to avoid any such implications until we start discussing those ascriptions in Section 8. So I shall not use those ascriptions until then.

³ This view is not strictly right because people have ‘tacit’ thoughts, ones that they would readily admit to but have never entertained. This requires a modification that can be ignored for the purposes of this paper. There is also an interesting problem with what RTM tells us about believing (2006a: 142-4).

Instead, I shall simply identify a person's belief with the help of the sentence that she would use to explicitly express it (if an English speaker). So, I identify Ralph's belief as one *he would explicitly express by the sentence*, 'Ortcutt is a spy'. We can abbreviate. According to RTM, that belief contains a certain mental representation. Let us use '*Ortcutt is a spy*' to refer to that representation and then 'B*Ortcutt is a spy*' to refer to the belief containing it. So B*Ortcutt is a spy* is the belief that Ralph would explicitly express, 'Ortcutt is a spy'.⁴ And let us use '*Ortcutt*' to refer to the part (or aspect) of *Ortcutt is a spy* that refers to Ortcutt.

We have noted that it is partly in virtue of the semantic properties of mental representations, their contents, that thoughts have their causal roles. So just as the person Ortcutt has his causal role in virtue of being, say, intelligent and sly, so does the representation *Ortcutt* have its causal role in virtue of its content.⁵ Clearly, then, we have to explain the nature of these contents that play such an important role. What is it about *Ortcutt is a spy* that explains why Ralph behaves as he does toward Ortcutt. Why does he *say* 'Ortcutt is a spy', stalk Ortcutt, and so on? And what is it about *Oscar is a spy* that might enable Ralph's acquaintances to learn from it about Ortcutt and spies? These are not easy questions, of course, but, if the Occamist considerations of the last section are correct, we should expect answers in terms of the relations that this mental representation has to Ortcutt, to spies (and, perhaps, to other thoughts). So, we do not expect explanations in terms of relations to 'new' objects posited especially for semantics but rather in terms of relations to 'old' objects like Ortcutt and spies that we already had good reasons for believing in, reasons having nothing to do with semantics.

5. Thoughts Without Propositions

This idea that semantics can get by with such 'old' objects is at odds with the consensus. The semantic investigation of thought ascriptions is dominated by philosophers who think that the reality consists also of 'propositions', objects introduced simply to do semantics. Now, if talk of propositions was just a technical device, or model, for throwing light on the actual properties of concrete thoughts and utterances but not to be taken seriously when the ontological chips are down, then we should have only the minor objection that it seems to be unnecessary and misleading. But the talk usually involves a serious commitment to Platonic objects of some sort, perhaps sets of possible worlds, that are separate from the concrete spatio-temporal world of meaningful thoughts.

A commitment to such Platonic propositions would be appropriate, Occam advises us, only if these propositions do real explanatory work. And it is hard to see how entities that are outside space-time could do any such work. Thoughts and the utterances that express them are parts of the natural physical world. How, then, *could* they be related to entities outside space-time? Even if they could, how *could* their being so related do any work? Our task is to ascribe properties to thoughts and utterances that can explain their causal role in the spatio-temporal world. Relations to objects outside the causal order surely could not do this. How could a relation to a Platonic object help explain the way *Ortcutt is a spy* causes Ralph's behavior and informs us about the world? If there are no nonsemantic reasons for believing in nonactual possible worlds, how could positing sets of them explain the role of thoughts in the actual world?

Apart from being explanatorily idle entities, Platonic propositions have another problem: They are deeply mysterious.

Now it might be objected that if these considerations against Platonic propositions were good, they should count equally against talk of numbers in physics. Yet physics is committed to numbers. I think that this commitment should be much more a source of discomfort about physics than it should be a source of comfort about propositions. We should seek some way of understanding physics that is not committed to Platonic objects, perhaps following Field (1980) in eliminating numbers altogether.

⁴ So, '*Ortcutt is a spy*' is implicitly indexed to the person whose mind contains the mental representation it refers to, in this case, to Ralph. This needs to be kept particularly in mind when the notation is used to identify indexical beliefs. (Thanks to Hong Chen.)

⁵ My talk of 'properties' here and elsewhere is just a convenience. To say that Ortcutt or *Ortcutt* has a causal role in virtue of its property *F-hood* is just to say that it has that role because it is *F*. So there is no commitment to an *entity F-hood*.

I am arguing that we should start semantics with a prejudice against Platonic propositions. But perhaps we will discover that they do explanatory work after all. I aim to show that they don't.

6. Some Particular Thoughts

6.1 Quine's Orcutt

Let us start with Quine's actual Orcutt case in his classic discussions of thought ascriptions.⁶ Ralph has observed a man in a brown hat lurking suspiciously in the campus bushes and comes to a belief he would express 'The man in the brown hat is a spy':

(1) B*The man in the brown hat is a spy*.

On another occasion, Ralph has observed someone at the beach who he thinks of as a pillar of society and who, unbeknownst to Ralph, is that same man, namely Orcutt. So, Ralph does *not* hold a belief he would express 'The man in the brown hat is the man seen at the beach':

(2) B*The man in the brown hat is the man seen at the beach*.

When we want to explain Ralph's behavior, we have an obvious interest in distinguishing (1), the belief that he has, from another one he does not,

(3) B*The man seen at the beach is a spy*,

even though both beliefs concern the same man. For, (1) explains some of Ralph's campus behavior but is irrelevant to his beach behavior whereas (3) would be irrelevant to his campus behavior and quite at odds with his beach behavior. Similarly, it is easy to see that an interest in explaining Ralph's behavior will want to distinguish both (1) and (3) from other beliefs that Ralph might have had,

(4) B*Orcutt is a spy*,

(5) B*You are a spy* (where Orcutt is the person addressed).

Although all these beliefs contain representations that refer to Orcutt, the different ways in which they refer to him, their different 'modes of reference', are obviously relevant to an explanation of Ralph's behavior, even an explanation by someone who knows that all these representations refer to Orcutt. And were Ralph to come to hold (2), its different modes would be relevant to explaining his behavior in a way that the trivial belief,

(6) B*The man in the brown hat is the man in the brown hat,

would not.⁷

Far from having belief (3), Ralph in fact has the following belief,

(7) B*The man seen at the beach is not a spy*,

But there is nothing in the least irrational about Ralph having both (1) and (7) and there is nothing in the least puzzling that he does have both. Even though *the man in the brown hat* and *the man seen at the beach* refer to the same man, they do so in different ways and the beliefs containing them play different roles in Ralph's mental life.

⁶ Quine 1953: 139-59; 1960: 141-51, 166-9; 1966: 183-94. My references to Quine are all to these discussions. My views reflect the influence of Quine but are in many respects quite unQuinean. My discussion of Orcutt draws on more detailed earlier discussions, particularly 1996: 141-54.

⁷ I have discussed identity beliefs in some detail elsewhere, particularly 1984: 403-7; 1996: 171-9; 1997b: 382-6.

Given the importance of a thought's mode of reference to the explanation of behavior, we should expect there to be a conventional way of conveying that mode in our ordinary ascriptions of thoughts. And, when we get to our discussion of thought ascriptions, we shall see that there is: We have what Quine calls 'opaque' thought ascriptions (sec. 9.1).

Modes matter when our interest in a person's beliefs are to explain her behavior. But they don't matter when our interest in her beliefs is to gather information about the world. Thus, we would of course all be concerned if any of our acquaintances were a spy. Now, suppose we think that Ralph is a good judge of spies. Then we would be interested in any belief that Ralph had of the form, B*a is a spy*, where 'a' refers to one of our acquaintances, *whatever Ralph's mode of referring to that individual*. Should the individual be Orcutt, it would not matter to us whether Ralph represented him by *Orcutt*, *the man in the brown hat*, or whatever. We need to be able to identify the subject of Ralph's suspicions ourselves, of course, but it doesn't matter to us how *Ralph* identifies him. When our concern is to gather pertinent information about the entities in our world from the beliefs of another, her modes of representing those entities are not important.⁸

Given that the modes of reference of beliefs are not important to our gathering information from beliefs, we should expect there to be a conventional way of conveying the information in our ordinary ascriptions of thoughts without specifying a mode. And when we get to our discussion of thought ascriptions, we shall see that there is: We have what Quine calls 'transparent' thought ascriptions (9.1).

The above mental representations, *the man in the brown hat*, *the man seen at the beach*, *Orcutt*, and *you* have 'fine-grained' contents referring to Orcutt in various different ways, contents that are important to the representations' roles in explaining behaviors. But, of course, if they have those contents, they must *also* have the 'coarse-grained' content of simply referring to Orcutt, a content that is important to their role of conveying information: To refer to him in a certain way is to refer to him. And there is no theoretical point in insisting that one of these layers of content is the *only true* content.⁹ Lapsing into proposition-speak for a moment, there is no theoretical point in insisting that the object of a thought containing one of these representations is either a fine-grained or coarse-grained proposition: It has both objects.

6.2 Kripke's Paderewski

The same points can be made about a famous case of Saul Kripke's:¹⁰

Peter . . . may learn the name 'Paderewski' with an identification of the person named as a famous pianist. Naturally, having learned this, Peter will assent to 'Paderewski had musical talent'. . . . Later, in a different circle, Peter learns of someone called 'Paderewski' who was a Polish nationalist leader and Prime Minister. Peter is skeptical of the musical abilities of politicians. . . . Using 'Paderewski' as a name for the *statesman*, Peter assents to, 'Paderewski had no musical talent'. (1979: 265)

Now clearly Peter has two different mental representations of Paderewski, two modes of referring to Paderewski, one he associates with *famous pianist*, the other with *Prime Minister*, and both of which he expresses using 'Paderewski'. If we name both representations '*Paderewski*' we will fail to distinguish them. So, let us name them, '*Paderewski₁*' and '*Paderewski₂*', respectively. Then we can say that Peter has the following two beliefs:

⁸ This is a bit of an overstatement (1996: 152). Modes do not matter to the informational content we want from the beliefs of another but they may do to our assessment of the reliability of the information. Thus, we may think that Ralph is reliable about Orcutt under the mode of *the man in the brown hat* but not under the mode of *the man seen at the beach*.

⁹ Similarly, I argue, there is no theoretical point to insisting that the linguistic tokens that express these mental representations have only one layer of 'meaning' or 'semantic value' (1996: 140-54). The idea that a name like 'Orcutt' has a fine-grained meaning is, of course, rejected by 'direct reference'. In arguing against direct reference, I have claimed that names have meanings that are *causal* modes of referring rather than Fregean descriptive modes (1989; 1996: 179-86, 240-4; 2012).

¹⁰ My discussion of this case draws on more detailed earlier discussions, particularly 1984: 407-12; 1996: 228-40. The latter discussion also concerns Kripke's case of Pierre and London.

- (8) B*Paderewski₁ has musical talent*
- (9) B*Paderewski₂ has no musical talent*.

Peter has made a mistake in failing to hold,

- (10) B*Paderewski₁ is Paderewski₂*.

But this is no more a sign of irrationality in Peter than is Ralph failing to hold (2) a sign of irrationality in Ralph. However, whereas there is no problem using ordinary thought ascriptions to describe Ralph's beliefs, Kripke pointed out that there is such a problem with Peter's beliefs (9.2).

6.3 Richard's Phone Booth

Next consider a nice case invented by Mark Richard:¹¹

A ... both sees a woman, across the street, in a phone booth, and is speaking to a woman through a phone. He does not realize that the woman to whom he is speaking - *B*, to give her a name - is the woman he sees. He perceives her to be in some danger - a run-away steamroller, say, is bearing down upon her phone booth. *A* waves at the woman; he says nothing into the phone. (1983: 439)

A has the following false belief,

- (11) B*She is not you*,

where *she* is prompted by his seeing the woman across the street and *you*, by his conversation with the woman over the phone. He is led to wave by his belief,

- (12) B*She is in danger*.

However, he says nothing into the phone because he believes

- (13) B*You are not in danger*.

Even though *A* wrongly holds (11), he is not in the least irrational. He has two distinct mental representations of *B*, just as Ralph did of Orcutt and Peter did of Paderewski. These two representations have different modes of referring to *B*, reflecting different observational perspectives. And these differences are crucial in explaining *A*'s behavior. But, once again, there is an ascription problem (9.3).

6.4 De Se Thoughts

Finally, we consider *de se* thoughts. When Perry first notices the trail of sugar he comes to the belief,

- (14) B*The shopper with a torn sack is making a mess*.¹²

Later, when he observes himself in the mirror without realizing that it is himself, he comes to believe,

- (15) B*That man is making a mess*.

But this doesn't cause him to stop following the trail and rearrange the torn sack. For that, he needed the belief,

- (16) B*I am making a mess*.

¹¹ My discussion of this case draws on a more detailed earlier discussion, 1996: 218-23.

¹² My discussion of this case draws on more detailed earlier discussions, particularly 1984: 397-400; 1996: 218-23

This story vividly demonstrates the importance of beliefs under the first-person mode of reference to the explanation of behavior. Perry's earlier failure to form the belief,

(17) B*I am the shopper with a torn sack*,

was a mistake, of course, but not a sign of any irrationality. He has three distinct mental representations, *the shopper with a torn sack*, *that man*, and *I*, all referring to Perry himself but all playing distinct roles in his cognitive life.

Given the importance of *de se* thoughts to the explanation of behavior we should expect there to be a conventional way of conveying that mode in our ordinary ascriptions of thoughts. And when we get to our discussion of thought ascriptions, we shall see that there is (9.4).

6.5 General Comments

Now this discussion of thoughts leaves much work to be done. In particular, it rests heavily on modes of referring. We would like to know much more about them. And there are, of course, many proposals on that score. First, it has long been noted that the representation 'in subject position' may have a 'singular' mode like *Ortcutt* or *you* or it may have a 'general' or 'quantificational' mode like *all spies*, *few shoppers*, or Perry's *the shopper with a torn sack*. When we have a representation under a singular mode, we have, as the folk say, some particular object 'in mind'; we are, as David Kaplan (1968) says, 'en rapport' with the object. So, one challenge is to say what this amounts to. Influenced by Kripke (1980), some have proposed causal modes of referring for singular representations like *Ortcutt*. Some hold that a certain sort of causal-perceptual link to an object is central to the modes of referring of other singular representations like *that man*, *she*, and *you*. And some, influenced by Keith Donnellan, go against the Russellian tradition and hold much the same for the likes of the 'referential' *the man in the brown hat* in (1). All of these views amount to explaining having-an-object-in-mind, being *en rapport* with it, in terms of an appropriate direct causal link to the object¹³ What about the mode of *I*? In a way, this singular mode seems simpler than the others. It is a special way that *I* has of referring to a person that is explained solely in terms of *I*'s functional role in the very mind containing it. And because the mode for *I* is so explained, a *de se* thought in one person's mind must differ from such a thought in any other person's mind. And because of this, no other person can *express* a person's *de se* thought. Given the nature of an *I* representation, this is not puzzling but just what we should expect.

So there is plenty to be done on modes of referring. But, *there is nothing essentially puzzling about modes of referring in general nor about that for *I* in particular*. With acceptance of RTM goes an acceptance of mental representations of the world. For each such representation, there must *be* some way in which it refers to that world, for it doesn't refer by magic. So, it must *have* a mode of referring. And it is not surprising that modes will *differ* from representation to representation. Indeed, given the differing causal roles of thoughts we have very good evidence of certain differences; for example, of the difference between the general ('attributive') *the shopper with a torn sack* and the singular *that man*; of the difference between the two singulars, *that man* and *I*. None of these modes of co-referential representations can be 'reduced' to another.¹⁴ That should really go without saying.

In sum, far from being a 'great puzzle' in contemporary philosophy, the *de se* should not be a puzzle at all. At least, it should not be a puzzle at the level of thoughts. Perhaps the situation is different at the level of ascriptions of thoughts. In Section 9, we shall see that it is not.

We have found no need to talk of propositions. I suggest that this is *why* we have found nothing particularly problematic about *de se* thoughts.¹⁵

¹³ I have made proposals along these lines; see, e.g. 1974; 1981a,b; 2004; 2007.

¹⁴ Cf. Boer and Lycan 1980: 432.

¹⁵ Mind you, we could talk of propositions without harm by conceiving of them as sets of modes of reference, many of them nondescriptive and causal modes. We could then capture the differences between, say, thoughts about Perry that include *Perry*, *the shopper with the torn sack*, *that man*, and *I* by taking these thoughts to be related to propositions containing different modes of referring to Perry. But these are not the way propositions are usually conceived. And there is no point in this maneuver.

It is time to turn from thoughts to language.

7. Languages in General

Languages are as much part of the natural world as are thoughts. What are they and why do we posit them?

It is helpful to look at nonhuman animals to answer these questions. Cognitive ethologists posit languages to explain communication in some species. The honey bee provides a famous example: Karl von Frisch won a Nobel Prize for discovering a language in the bee's 'waggle dance', a dance used to communicate the direction and distance of a food source. Prairie dogs provide another example: They have a language of 'barks' that convey information about which sort of predator is threatening and about the characteristics of a particular predator of that sort (Slobodchikoff 2002).¹⁶ So what are these languages of dances and barks? They are *representational, or symbolic, systems*. And they are clearly of great use: Getting reliable information about food or predators is very beneficial.

Now consider humans. It is a truism that they have languages which they use to communicate 'messages': As the folk say, 'language expresses thought'. This idea seems irresistible once one has accepted intentional realism, accepted that humans have thoughts (Devitt 2006a: 127-8). As Fodor, Bever, and Garrett say, 'there is much to be said for the old-fashioned view that speech expresses thought, and very little to be said against it' (1974: 375). So, just as the bees and the prairie dogs have representational systems used for communicating with each other, so do we.¹⁷ Return to our example of Mark and the ascription to him of B*It is raining*. Suppose that the people present ascribe this belief because Mark uttered the sound, /It is raining/. This sound means that it is raining. If the people assume that Mark is being literal and straightforward, they will take that meaning to be the message the speaker intentionally communicates, his 'speaker meaning'. As a result, they have evidence of his thoughts. Taking him to be sincere in his expression, they conclude that he has a belief with that meaning (content), ascribing B*It is raining*. In this way, language is an extraordinarily effective way of making the thoughts of others accessible to us, thoughts that otherwise would be largely inaccessible; and of making our thoughts accessible to others, often in the hope of changing their thoughts and hence their behavior. Even though the thoughts of others are sometimes accessible to us without language, they mostly are not.

The language of the bee is very likely entirely innate, that of humans is largely conventional.¹⁸ As Lewis points out at the beginning of his classic, *Convention*, it is a 'platitude that language is ruled by convention' (1969: 1).¹⁹ In any case, whatever the source of a language that is used for communication, we have a powerful theoretical interest in that language and its rules. Serious scientists work to discover the natures of the representations in these systems.

In sum, human languages, like all other natural languages, are parts of the causal world posited to explain behavior. And the properties in virtue of which they play their causal roles are natural ones, which should be explained accordingly.

8. Thought Ascriptions Without Propositions

¹⁶ And it is worth noting that sometimes we posit an animal language because we have *taught* it; think of some dolphins and primates that have been taught surprisingly complex languages.

¹⁷ Strangely, this view of human language is rejected by Chomskians; see, e.g. Chomsky 1986 and 1996; Dwyer and Pietroski 1996; Laurence 2003; Collins 2008a,b; Antony 2008. They see a human language as an internal state not a system of external symbols that represent the world. I have argued against this view: 2003; 2006a: chs 2 and 10; 2006b; 2008a,b,c; 2009.

¹⁸ I say 'largely' because I do not reject the Chomskian view that some syntax is innate. The qualification should be taken as read in future.

¹⁹ A platitude that is, nonetheless, rejected by Chomsky (1996: 47-8) and Laurence (1996). See also Collins 2006, 2008a,b, and Devitt 2008a,b, for an exchange on the issue.

The semantic task is to explain the nature of those natural properties, to explain their ‘meanings’. According to the Occamist methodological proposal in Section 3, we should expect to do this for a language that concerns a certain reality in terms of the objects we already suppose constitute that reality, ‘old’ objects. Thoughts are, of course, the reality that concerns thought ascriptions. So, the semantics of thought ascriptions should be explained in terms of their relations to the reality described in Sections 4-6 (assuming, of course, that we have gotten that reality more or less right). This reality does not include propositions. So we should not expect the semantics of thought ascriptions to posit them. Yet the standard view does posit them.

Mark Richard provides an argument for the standard view. He starts his book, *Propositional Attitudes*,

from the assumption that attitude ascriptions are what they appear to be: . . . two-place predicat[ions] . . . This assumption - that at a certain level of generality

Iago hopes that Desdemona will betray Othello

is on a syntactic and semantic par with

Iago kissed Desdemona

- saddles us immediately with t-clauses as names of entities of some sort. That is, it saddles us immediately with propositions. (1990: 5)

So, Richard’s implicit response to my Occamist objection to positing propositions is that semanticists do need to posit them because the meanings of ordinary thought ascriptions require them. And Richard surely speaks for many here.

We should note first that positing propositions solely to give meaning to ordinary thought ascriptions smacks of the Meinongian procedure of positing golden mountains solely to give meaning to ‘the golden mountain’. We found no need for propositions in the psychological reality that is the concern of thought ascriptions and so we should be very reluctant to posit them to give meaning to those ascriptions.

Are ordinary thought ascriptions really committed to propositions anyway? The apparent commitment arose from taking the ‘logical form’ of the above hope ascription to be on a par with ‘Iago kissed Desdemona’, which has the *definite* singular term ‘Desdemona’ in object position. But there is an attractive alternative: taking the ascription to be on a par with ‘Iago kissed a woman’, which has the *indefinite* singular term, or quantifier, ‘a woman’ in object position. So, just as this sentence commits us to a token object with the property specified by ‘woman’, the hope ascription commits us to a token mental state with the property specified by ‘that Desdemona will betray Othello’. The ascription does not commit us to propositions. Indeed, it commits us to just the sort of reality we are already committed to by our discussion of thoughts: mental states with representational properties. And, despite what Richard says, an attitude ascription no more appears to have the logical form of ‘Iago kissed Desdemona’ than it appears to have that of ‘Iago kissed a woman’.²⁰

The case for propositions is stronger when we consider general thought ascriptions that seem to *quantify over* propositions. But I think this case can be met too (1996: 212-14).

I have been arguing that putting metaphysics first spares us propositions in semantics. It has another advantage: Propositions are sometimes largely responsible for *generating* puzzles about belief ascriptions. This seems to be the case with *de se* ascriptions.

9. Some Particular Thought Ascriptions

We shall consider the ascription of the thoughts discussed in Section 6.

9.1 Quine’s Ortcutt

²⁰ 1996: 56-7, 211-2. I took this alternative view in my 1981a, unaware that it goes back at least to Sellars 1963; see also Davidson 1984: 93-108; Lycan 1988: 7-9.

We noted there (6.1) that a belief's mode of reference matters to its role in causing behavior. So, in Quine's Ortcutt story,²¹ the fact that Ralph has the singular belief

(1) B*The man in the brown hat is a spy*

explains his campus behavior in a way that his having

(3) B*The man seen at the beach is a spy*

would not. So we would expect to have a conventional way in our language of specifying the mode in ascribing a belief. And we have:

(18) Ralph believes that the man in the brown hat is a spy.

Given its logical form, (18) attributes to Ralph a belief state with a property specified by 'that the man in the brown hat is a spy'. According to one conventional reading of (18), that property includes the mode of *the man in the brown hat* but not the mode of *the man seen at the beach*: (18) is made true by Ralph having (1) but would not be made true by his having (3). In contrast, the similar reading of

(19) Ralph believes that the man seen at the beach is a spy

specifies the mode of *the man seen at the beach* and would not be made true by Ralph having (1). Quine calls this reading 'opaque', pointing out that on this reading of (18) 'the man in the brown hat' is not used as a means simply of specifying its object and is not subject to 'the law of substitutivity of identity'.

Quine notes further that ordinary thought ascriptions of this form are *ambiguous*, having another conventional reading that he calls 'transparent'. For these, the law of substitutivity does hold. Transparently construed, Ralph's mode of referring to Ortcutt does not matter to the truth of (18): (18) simply specifies that Ralph's belief state includes a representation that does refer to Ortcutt. This reference must of course be under some mode, but it does not matter to the truth of (18) which mode.

Suppose that Ralph has told me of the experiences that led him to (1) but, unlike Ralph, I know that his suspect is Ortcutt. I am concerned to pass on to others this information about a possible spy (not to explain Ralph's behavior). I might well convey this information to an acquaintance of Ortcutt by saying,

(20) Ralph believes that Ortcutt is a spy,

even though I am well aware that Ralph does not hold

(4) B*Ortcutt is a spy*,

he does not have a singular belief he would express, 'Ortcutt is a spy'. Indeed, after a day at the beach where a certain man I recognize as Ortcutt was particularly salient, I might use (19) to convey that same information to a companion who does not know Ortcutt, even though I am aware that Ralph does not have belief (3) but rather

(7), B*The man seen at the beach is not a spy*.

In sum, we can replace 'Ortcutt' in the transparently construed (20) with any co-referential term and the resulting ascription will still be true on the strength of Ralph holding (1).

Just as Ralph's holding (1) licenses the transparently construed (20), so too does Ralph's holding (7) license the transparently construed

²¹ See notes 5-6 and 9-11 for references to more detailed discussions of this case and the ones that follow.

(21) Ralph believes that Ortcutt is not a spy.

We should follow Quine in noting that (20) and (21) do not convict Ralph of irrationality, for he has the beliefs in question under different modes of referring to Ortcutt.

Ralph's mental state, B*The man in the brown hat is a spy*, has (at least) two contents of theoretical interest: the fine-grained content of referring to Ortcutt in a certain way, the way of *the man in the brown hat*; and the coarse-grained content of simply referring to Ortcutt (sec. 6.1). Construed opaquely, (18) specifies that fine-grained content. Construed transparently, it specifies that coarse-grained content, as do (19) and (20).²² There is no theoretical basis for claiming that one of these is the *only true* content.

Finally, it is worth noting that the distinction between transparent ascriptions and opaque ascriptions *has nothing to do with* the distinction between singular (en rapport) thoughts and general (quantificational) thoughts described in Section 6.5. (This bears on the problems of 'de re' and 'de dicto', discussed in Appendix.)

Consider opaque ascriptions. Some obviously ascribe general thoughts, but *many ascribe singular ones*. The Donnellan-influenced should see the opaquely construed (18) and (19) as examples. But if those examples are unacceptable, consider (20), now *opaquely* construed. It ascribes B*Ortcutt is a spy* to Ralph which requires for its truth that Ralph refer to Ortcutt under the singular mode of *Ortcutt*. To do this Ralph must have Ortcutt particularly in mind; he must be en rapport with him.

Consider transparent ascriptions. Some are obviously made true by singular thoughts. The *transparently* construed (20) being made true by (1) is an example for the Donnellan-influenced, but it is easy to come up with others. What is really interesting is that *general thoughts* can also make the transparently construed (20) true. Thus, suppose that a copy of the University's secret admissions policy is left on a library table and then leaked to the press. Ralph is very suspicious of whoever left that copy but does not know his identity: He holds the general belief, B*The person who left the copy on the table is a spy*. Unlike Ralph, I know that Ortcutt is the culprit. I might well convey Ralph's suspicions to someone who knows nothing about the leak by using the transparently construed (20). (20) would be true even though Ralph is not en rapport with Ortcutt.²³

In sum, some opaque ascriptions ascribe singular beliefs, some, general. Transparent ascriptions are not specific on that score: They can be made true by either a singular or general beliefs.

So far then, there is no puzzle at the level of thought ascriptions. There is a nice match between what we earlier saw was explanatorily interesting about thought contents and what we find ordinary thought ascriptions conventionally ascribing. Still there are puzzles at the level of ascriptions.

9.2 Kripke's Paderewski

Consider Kripke's ingenious case of Peter and Paderewski. We saw (6.2) that Peter has the following two singular beliefs:

- (8) B*Paderewski₁ has musical talent*
- (9) B*Paderewski₂ has no musical talent*.

²² The view that thought ascriptions have a transparent-opaque ambiguity, well-supported by Quine, plays strangely little role in discussions. Those who are struck by the way interpretations of these ascriptions can vary in context prefer rather to think of them as containing 'hidden indexicals'. I argue that there is no evidence for this more extreme context-dependency view of thought ascriptions: The Quinean ambiguity view can accommodate all cases (1996: 196-208).

²³ This example is inspired by Schiffer's nice one of Big Felix (1979: 67), which I have discussed in some detail (1996: 145-154). My discussion is at odds with another of Quine's suggestions (which I once accepted: 1981a; 1984): that the transparently construed (20) is equivalent to the *unambiguously* transparent 'Ortcutt is such that Ralph believes him to be a spy'. With this suggestion went the vexed idea of the 'exportation' of 'Ortcutt' from the opaque to the explicitly transparent forms.

Peter has made a mistake, of course, but there is no puzzle about his cognitive life. Still, there is a puzzle about our ordinary descriptions of that life. The fact that Peter holds (8) seems sufficient for the truth of the opaquely construed

(22) Peter believes that Paderewski has musical talent.

Yet the fact that Peter holds (9) seems sufficient for the truth of the opaquely construed

(23) Peter believes that Paderewski has no musical talent.

These conventional opaque ascriptions seem to ascribe irrationality to Peter by failing to distinguish his representation *Paderewski₁* from his representation *Paderewski₂*. As a result, neither ascription is adequate to explain the very different behaviors caused by these two representations. It is not hard to distinguish these representations – indeed I have done so using subscripts – but it is not something that we, who have not made Peter’s mistake, can do using conventional ascriptions. For we, unlike Peter, have only one mode of referring to Paderewski by ‘Paderewski’. To convey the very fine-grained contents that are relevant to explaining Peter, we would likely resort to something unconventional like

(25) Peter believes that Paderewski, *qua pianist*, has musical talent.

With Kripke’s example there is a breakdown in the nice match between what we earlier saw was explanatorily significant about thought contents and what we find ordinary thought ascriptions conventionally ascribing.

9.3 Richard’s Phone Booth

There is a breakdown in the match again with Richard’s example (6.3). *A* has two singular beliefs about the one person:

(12) *B**She is in danger* (as a result of seeing a woman across the street)

(13) *B**You are not in danger* (as a result of talking to a woman on a phone)

There is no more puzzle about *A*’s cognitive life than about Ralph’s or Peter’s but there is, once again, a puzzle about our ordinary descriptions.

Suppose that *C* is with *B* in the phone booth. Before observing *A* waving, *C* had already figured out that *B* is talking to *A* on the phone. On the strength of the waving, he concludes that *A* holds (12), which is sufficient for saying to *B*:

(26) *A* believes that you are in danger.

At the same time, on the basis of information supplied to him by *B*, he concludes that *A* holds (13), which is sufficient for saying to *B*:

(27) *A* believes that you are not in danger.

Yet, manifestly, neither of these conventional ascriptions is adequate to explain *A*’s behavior. The problem here is not that ascriptions like these – ones with a deictic pronoun or demonstrative in the subject position of the content clause – lack an opaque construal.²⁴ We have as much reason to believe in an opaque construal of these ascriptions as in those involving names or definite descriptions. The problem is that, in their opaque construal, they ascribe to the belief state the property of referring to *B* under some ‘demonstrative’ mode or other but not under any *particular* one; thus the mode might be that of *she*, *you*, or even *that woman*. So neither (26) nor (27) specifies under which demonstrative mode *A* has his belief. And asserting both of them no more convicts *A* of irrationality than did asserting both of the transparent (21) and (22) convict Ralph of it. Yet the modes of *she* and *you* cause very

²⁴ Although I once thought otherwise (1981a: 245).

different behaviors in *A*. To convey the very fine-grained contents that are relevant to explaining *A*, we would likely resort to something unconventional like

(28) *A* believes that you, *qua person he is waving at*, are in danger.

With Richard's example, as with Kripke's, there is a breakdown in the nice match between what we earlier saw was explanatorily significant about thought contents and what we find ordinary thought ascriptions conventionally ascribing. But a mismatch in these cases is not surprising. The situations described by Kripke and Richard are not normal: It took ingenuity to invent them. It is not surprising that our standard ways of ascribing thoughts are not adequate to explain behavior in these abnormal situations.

9.4 De Se Thoughts

Finally, we consider the ascription of *de se* thoughts, a special sort of singular thought. In the version of Perry's story that we adopted (6.4), he starts with belief (14), gains (15) when he sees himself in the mirror, then finally comes to (16), having realized (17):

(14) B*The shopper with a torn sack is making a mess*

(15) B*That man is making a mess*

(16) B*I am making a mess*

(17) B*I am the shopper with a torn sack*,

The striking thing about the story is that the change from simply holding (14) and (15) to holding the *de se* (16) dramatically changes Perry's behavior: He stops following the sugar trail and rearranges the torn sack. Situations like this are not rare, as the literature shows. So we should expect there to be a conventional way of ascribing *de se* thoughts. Hector-Neri Castaneda (1966; 1967; 1968) argued convincingly that there is such a way, using pronouns that are explicitly or implicitly reflexive. Thus we can explicitly ascribe (16) with

(29) Perry believes that he himself is making a mess

or implicitly ascribe it by replacing 'he himself' with 'he'. (Other explicit examples use 'I myself', 'you yourself', and so on.) None of the other forms of ascription that we have been considering can be used to ascribe this *de se* belief.

I am here construing (29) as opaque: The position of 'he himself' is not open to substitutivity. (29) is, of course, a special sort of opaque, ascribing a first-person belief. But then (26) is a special sort of opaque too, ascribing a demonstrative belief. And (20) is a special sort, ascribing an *Orcutt* belief. It should go without saying that none of these can be 'reduced' to another: They are ascribing different sorts of thoughts playing different causal roles.

Is there a transparent construal of the likes of (29)? Ernest Sosa produced an ingenious example that suggests that there is (1970: 893). If so, it should also go without saying that the opaquely construed (29) cannot be reduced to this transparent construal any more than any opaque construal can be reduced to its corresponding transparent one.

Attention has recently been drawn to another conventional way of ascribing *de se* thoughts where, as James Higginbotham says, 'the subject of the complement clause is understood'; the subject is, in Chomskian terms, the element PRO, a pronoun that has 'no phonetic realization' (2003: 497). Consider this example:

(30) John expects to win.

(30) ascribes to John a *de se* expectation involving the representation *I will win*.

We noted above that although there is a standard form for ascribing a thought under some demonstrative mode or other, illustrated by the opaquely construed (26) and (27), there is not one for ascribing a thought under the particular mode of *she* or *you*. Yet there are ones, illustrated by (29) and (30), for ascribing a thought under the

mode of *I*. And the reason for the difference is clear. Only in rather rare cases like Richard's do we need to distinguish among demonstrative modes to explain a person's behavior, whereas we frequently have to distinguish the mode of *I* from all other modes of referring to a person in order to explain her behavior.

9.5 General Comments

I concluded my discussion of thoughts by stating the obvious: That discussion leaves plenty to be done (6.5). And it is just as obvious that the discussion of thought ascriptions in this section leaves plenty to be done. But the issue that concerns this paper is whether there is anything *particularly* problematic and puzzling about the *de se*. I concluded that, so far as *de se* thoughts are concerned, there is not. I take this section to have shown that just the same is true of the ascription of *de se* thoughts. Indeed, if there is anything puzzling about ascriptions, rather than simply work to be done, it is to be found in Kripke's and Richard's examples not the *de se*. In those examples there is a mismatch between what is theoretically significant about thought contents for the explanation of behavior and what conventional thought ascriptions ascribe. With the *de se* there is no mismatch: Ascriptions like (29) and (30) conventionally ascribe precisely what we are theoretically interested in, namely *de se* beliefs like (16).

So, we have found nothing particularly problematic about the *de se*, neither with the thoughts nor their ascriptions. We have also found no need to talk of propositions. In my view, such talk generates the alleged problem of the *de se*.

10. Conclusion

The received wisdom is that *de se* thoughts and their ascriptions are particularly problematic. My aim in this paper has been to show that this is a myth.

A theory of thoughts and a theory of their ascriptions must be related. Appealing to Quinean naturalism and Occam, I argued in Section 3 for the explanatory priority of the theory of thoughts. So I started with that theory in Sections 4 to 6. Assuming RTM, I take mental representations to be the 'objects of thoughts'. From this basis, I offered suggestions about thoughts in standard and 'puzzle' situations. These suggestions are far from a complete theory of thoughts, of course, but they are sufficient, I argue, to show that there is nothing particularly problematic about *de se* thoughts. In light of this, I considered ascriptions of thoughts in Sections 7 to 9. I concluded that there is nothing particularly problematic about the ascription of *de se* thoughts either.

Throughout I have emphasized that languages and minds are parts of the natural world, interacting causally with other parts of that world. It is hard to see how Platonic propositions, the root of the myth, could be a part of that world. In any case, I found no need to posit them.

Appendix. 'De Dicto' and 'De Re'

In discussing thoughts and their ascriptions, use of the terms '*de dicto*' and '*de re*' is ubiquitous. I have argued elsewhere that this talk is (i) confusing, (ii) often confused, and (iii) unnecessary (1984: 388-90, 392-4). My argument, briefly, is as follows.²⁵

(i) The talk is confusing for several reasons. First, '*de dicto*' and '*de re*' are often unexplained. This would not matter if the terms were unambiguous and had clear and generally accepted meanings. But, second, this is far from the case, as I shall now indicate. Third, the terms have misleading associations from their uses in discussing modalities.

(ii) The talk is often confused. First, authors slip back and forth between applying the terms to ascriptions of thoughts and applying them to the thoughts themselves. This reflects a general tendency to confuse thoughts with their ascriptions. Thus, one famous article has the title 'A Puzzle about Belief' (Kripke 1979), and another, the subtitle 'Re-

²⁵ I earlier found evidence for the problems described here in: Sosa 1970: 883-5; Pastin 1974; Chisholm 1976: 1-4, 9-10; Burge 1977: 340; Donnellan 1979: 54; Kripke 1979: 242; Lewis 1983: 151-6; Schiffer 1979: 62-6; Boer and Lycan 1980: 427-31, 447-9; Fitch 1981: 25; Perry 1993: 39-42. For some more recent evidence, see: Maier 2009, Ninan 2010, and several papers in the present volume.

porting Puzzling Beliefs' (Crimmins and Perry 1989), and yet neither show *beliefs* to be puzzling; they show some *ascriptions* of beliefs to be.²⁶ There seems to be an assumption that the application of 'de dicto' and 'de re' to thoughts is an obvious consequence of their application to thought ascriptions. Yet it clearly is not. Consider, for example, love ascriptions: Particular ones like 'Tom loves Dick' differ from general ones like 'Tom loves someone', but this does not entail that there are particular lovers and general lovers.

The talk is confused, second, because the application of 'de dicto' and 'de re' to both thoughts and their ascriptions conflates two distinctions that, as noted (9.1), have nothing to do with each other: (a) the distinction between transparent ascriptions and opaque ascriptions; and, (b) the distinction between singular (en rapport) thoughts and general (quantificational) thoughts. In particular, on the one hand, en rapport thoughts can be ascribed by opaque ascriptions; for example, by the opaquely construed

(20) Ralph believes that Ortcutt is a spy

(26) A believes that you are in danger.

(27) A believes that you are not in danger

and, for the Donnellan-influenced,

(18) Ralph believes that the man in the brown hat is a spy

(19) Ralph believes that the man seen at the beach is a spy.

On the other hand, transparent ascriptions do not ascribe en rapport thoughts: They can be made true by general thoughts; for example, the transparently construed (20) was made true by Ralph's holding B*The person who left the copy on the table is a spy*. One pair of terms cannot capture the two important distinctions that have emerged in this area: distinction (a), which is about ascriptions of thoughts, and distinction (b), which is, in the first instance, about the thoughts themselves.

Talk of *de dicto*, *de re*, and *de se* has generated issues about whether one can be 'reduced' to another. Yet there is no issue here worthy of attention, whether the concern is with thoughts or their ascriptions. There are singular and general thoughts, and there are different sorts of each, and they all play different causal roles. No sense can be made of reducing any one to any other (6.5). There are transparent and opaque ascriptions of these different thoughts and no sense can be made of reducing one sort of ascription to another (9.4).

(iii) Finally, the talk is unnecessary because we have other, relatively clear, terminology to mark the distinctions, as we have seen: Thus we have the Quinean terms 'transparent' and 'opaque' to distinguish ascriptions; and the terms 'singular' ('en rapport') and 'general' ('quantificational') to distinguish the modes of reference of thoughts.²⁷

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²⁶ See also my discussion (1996: 118-20) of Stephen Stich's argument for holism (1983).

²⁷ A version of this paper was delivered at Arché, St. Andrews in July 2011. I am indebted to the lively comments of the audience for several improvements.

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